

put him out of sight, and were now standing wide open for another such mouthful.

Said I not rightly, dear reader, that the unpromising sandbank had proved neither a blank nor a dull page to me?

LONDON IN THE GREENWOOD.

It is a fine sunshiny breezy morning on one of the Mondays of August—Saint Monday you may call it if you will—when, in the character of “one of the people,” a character, by the way, which we have no intention of repudiating, we start in one of the people’s vans, for the forest of Epping. This forest, as many of our readers know, lies eastward of London, and straggles over a vast extent of ground, comprising in its embrace many neat little villages and hamlets, associated in the memory of Londoners, and especially of East Londoners, with the charms of the greenwood and the frolic and fun of a forest holiday. For, to the dweller in Bethnal Green, Spitalfields, Whitechapel, and a wide district besides, Epping Forest is what the Bois de Boulogne is to the Parisian—the *Ultima Thule* of all his recreative rambles, and the place where he abandons himself with the least restraint and reserve to rural and innocent pursuits and recreations.

Our van, which is farmed for the occasion, and paid for by general subscription of its temporary occupants, carries in all about forty of us, reckoning the children; it is driven by its rather bulky proprietor, grand in figured belcher, spriggy waist-coat, and irreproachable top boots; and is drawn by two stout sleek-coated horses, who trot merrily along the road, whisking their long tails and flinging their manes about, as if our united weight were just nothing at all, and they scorned to think anything about it. We have not a single ounce of crinoline on board, nor even a single silk gown; but we have clean cotton dresses and well-brushed Sunday coats, and faces, both male and female, which, albeit they are some of them prematurely furrowed with the cares, anxieties, and sufferings of a struggling life, yet wear a genial smile, while all eyes are sparkling with present or anticipated enjoyment. We are prodigiously crowded at first setting out, some of the husbands and fathers being extremely broad in the shoulders, and given to stooping, and squaring their stout limbs in a way not at all convenient for close packing; but half an hour’s jumping and jolting over the stones has a grand effect in shaking and settling us down and filling up the chinks and interstices, so that by the time we are well on to the macadam, we are packed as fraternally as pilchards in a barrel, and bowling along, as Mr. Blinker, our *vis-à-vis*, observes to his assenting wife, “as jolly as sand-boys”—though what especial reason sand-boys have for being always so jolly as they proverbially are, passes our comprehension.

Blinker, as soon as he can get his hand into his breeches pocket, pulls out his tobacco-box and begins filling his short pipe, and his bad example is followed almost unanimously by the rest

of the adult males. The ladies do not dream of objecting, but push aside the awning to let the reek escape. Then, from some corner of the van, there come the preluding notes of an accordion, and the performer, a pale-faced lad of sixteen, strikes up the air of “Cheer, Boys, Cheer,” which he plays with spirit and taste, and a very tolerable notion of harmony. The ladies do not sit silent while the music plays, nor indeed the gentlemen either; yet, the moment it ceases, they demand a fresh tune, as though determined to crowd as many pleasures as possible into the holiday. Thus we trundle along, smoking, singing, laughing, and chattering over the hard smooth road; now we pass a van, and now another, and now half a dozen more, all similarly freighted to our own; and now we are passed in our turn by vans less heavily laden or more powerfully horsed than ours. Thirty vans at least we have already seen on the road; nor are the vans by any means the exclusive equipages of the forest immigrants: the vans are all club or subscription affairs; but in addition to these there are a goodly number of independent “turn-outs” always in sight, belonging to that portion of the population of Whitechapel on wheels who can contrive to make holiday on this glorious day. There is the butcher’s cart, the fishmonger’s cart, the costermonger’s ditto, in which are strapped down four or five chairs for seats; the semi-van of the furniture-broker, laden with his young family; the trap of the town traveller, who is driving out his young wife; the stableman’s dog-cart, and the holiday cab of the cabman, who, for once in a way, will drive mother and the little ones for a jaunt in the forest, instead of “putting on” at the stand. All these vehicles, and many others not so easily describable, make up a charioted host, who are setting forth to invade the forest this morning, and whom the forest will swallow up and hide in its umbrageous leafy recesses, covering them up as effectually as did little robin redbreast the babes in the wood.

We have not long passed the interminable suburbs of London, when we pull up to wet the horses’ mouths at a little village, where one of the vans which preceded us has halted at the public-house, and discharged its occupants, who are all noisily engaged in a game of cricket on the common, where the grass, level as a table and smooth as a carpet, presents a capital field for the exercise. We trundle on again, however, leaving them to their sport, and we see that other parties have reached their destination and settled down at their chosen spots for the enjoyment of the day. Some stop at wayside inns, where the landlords, accommodating their charges to the means of their customers, will make them comfortable on moderate terms. Others, bringing their own provisions with them, keep clear of the landlord altogether, and, leaving the main road, will plunge into the forest towards some favourite nook, and, isolating themselves from all other parties, will enjoy a select picnic of their own. And again, others, pursuing a medium course, will put up the van and horses at the inn, and make such use of it themselves as convenience prompts.

Our equipage stops at a small settlement, where some cross-roads branch off into the forest, and

which we see plainly enough is a pretty general focus and centre of re-union among the foresters. There is a commodious wayside inn, with a congregation of empty vans guarding the approaches; there is a respectable tavern or hotel supplying superior accommodations; and there is a whole colony of neat cottages and wooden-fronted houses with plots of ground in front and rear, fitted up as tea-gardens, the fences being placarded with a plenitude of announcements offering "accommodation for tea-parties at 9d. a head," or for those who have brought their own materials, "hot water for 2d. a head." Then there is a squadron of donkeys neatly swaddled in clean white linen, for ladies or gentlemen to ride "at sixpence an hour;" and there are swing-boats poised high in air and made to revolve by machinery, in which the delectable sensations of sea-sickness may be enjoyed at the small charge of three halfpence, without the trouble of going to sea.

We plunge at once into the forest, and have not walked far ere we discover other swings in full play, where the lasses are whirled aloft by the lads, on ropes suspended from the branches of trees, their flying forms appearing for a moment above the foliage and then sinking out of sight, while the greenwood is vocal with their cries of mingled laughter and alarm, as they are forced to mount higher and higher. There are not many trees in the forest, however, which are now available for this kind of sport; the best part of the timber-growing soil has been fenced in, and now forms the private gardens and domains of the owners of capital mansions built on the spot. The people's forest is for the most part little better than a kind of scrub, extensive enough, to be sure, but picturesque only on a petty scale, and utterly wanting in woodland grandeur and sublimity. The trees are principally oaks, beeches, prickly hollies, sloes, and, outnumbering the rest, wych elms. Of these, hardly one in a thousand would be more than a dozen feet high if lopped of its crowning twigs; every one of them is stricken with a mortal though lingering disease, the symptoms of which are gouty swellings, internal rottenness, and hydrocephalus. They look like a collection of monster bludgeons or Irish shilelaghs, stuck in the ground with their knobby heads uppermost, which by some miracle of nature have burst into leaf: their value as property is literally nothing, as they would barely pay for felling and carting if doomed to the axe. Still, overgrown as they are with brambles and wild-flowers, mingled with hawthorns and honeysuckles and clematis, and penetrated everywhere by a close net-work of pathways, they form a pleasant haunt enough; and when the ground is dappled with the sunlight streaming through the waving foliage at top, one does not miss the deeper tints and shadows proper to the forest depths, or that mysterious brooding flutter, as of invisible wings, which haunts the musings of the solitary in the "mighty woods."

We might have some fear of losing our way in these tortuous paths, but for the number of visitors, which in groups of tens and dozens continually cross our route. Here a family party are playing

a family game of "twos and threes" with a zest that knows no abatement, while refreshments are spread out on the grass until exercise has invigorated appetite, when they will all fall to at that meat pie, and those brown jars and black jacks. In another place, where a small rivulet trickles along under the sedge and fern, some ginger-beer bottles are placed up to their necks in water to cool, under the guardianship of a group of elders sitting at their ease and watching the youngsters, who are having a game at romps. A third party, noisy and numerous, are capering to the sound of a fiddle, and a fourth, still more numerous, are shouting and laughing at some more boisterous sport. Meanwhile, there is an ominous thwacking of donkey-backs resounding in the vicinity, and we can see the milk-white trappings of the patient beasts glancing among the trees a little further on. The donkeys, it is plain, do not enjoy the fun as much as the riders: here is one, for instance, who, having had enough of the thwacking, has prudently backed himself into a thicket so dense and compact that it has pushed the rider from his back. Nedly lies down in his leafy bed, where it is impossible to reach him with blows, and from which no blandishments of the boy with the stick will induce him to stir. This is evidently the conduct of a donkey who has seen the world, and come to conclusions—though we doubt whether it will pay his proprietor the much desiderated "sixpence an hour."

Pushing still on among the ferns and scrub, we come out on an open space, where stands a man with a stall of ginger beer, lemonade, Spanish nuts, apples, filberts, dates, Normandy pippins, etc., etc.—the very things one might expect to see, and does see, in Holborn or Leather Lane, here flourishing in the very heart of a wood. Nothing could show more strikingly how thoroughly London has appropriated Epping Forest, and made its leafy avenues part and parcel of its own highways. The stall-keeper is a thorough cockney, who mixes his v's and w's, and is ready to "toss or buy" with his various eatables and drinkables. He has established a rope swing also in the tree above his head, at a penny a ride—and in all likelihood is the proprietor of a donkey or two besides. Next comes a further assertion of London proprietorship, in the shape of a man with a basket of shrimps on his head, which he cries through these leafy lanes as though he were patrolling the Strand, and retails by the pennyworth to the pic-nic tea-parties, as he ferrets them out in their several secluded nooks.

All the parties in the forest, however, are not in a condition to become tea-parties. Some of them are poor, and are obliged to make holiday on an economical scale. Instead of tea, they content themselves with imported slices of bread and butter, and water dipped from the rivulet, or, when that is not at hand, bought at the tea-gardens at a half-penny the glass. We happen to stumble by chance upon one family, who, their appetites having outrun their provisions, are left without anything when tea-time comes round. There are father and mother and six children sitting round an empty basket, and holding a committee of ways and means. Mother would so like a cup of tea—it



STARTING FOR EPPING FOREST.

would be such a treat, now that she is tired and hot—and so would the daughters. Father, who is smoking his pipe, does not care much about it himself, but would like the rest to have it if he could afford it. “Now, Dick,” he says, “what would it cost for the lot?”

“Oh,” says Dick, “tea is ninepence a head; there’s sebn of us, father, without you, and nine times sebn is sixty-three—sixty pence is five shillings—five and threepence—it’s a sight o’ money.”

“Ah, it’s too much, I reckon,” says father. “Mother, here’s a shilling; you go and have tea, and we’ll wait here till you come back.”

“No, Jem, no—I won’t do that. I don’t care about it, not I; let’s all go and have a drink o’ milk.”

“No, no, mother—you have tea; you *shall* have it.”

In this request they all join; but mother is the most obstinate among women, and will not listen to them; and they are obliged to accept her proposition after all, and unite in a libation of milk, for which Master Dick is despatched with the shilling.

The farther we penetrate into the thicket, the fewer visitors we meet with, until, after wandering a mile or so, we attain to what seems a complete solitude. The character of the timber, if timber it can be called, is still the same, but the net-work of footpaths has disappeared; the thicket is wilder, and the fern taller and more abundant; it is in fact the only thing which really thrives here, and a stronger proof can hardly be given of the poorness of the soil. In this lone quarter we are aware of a figure, armed with a crook, who is pulling down branches of the dwarf wych elms, and searching them eagerly, as if expecting to find fruit. From some leading questions which we put to the youth, who looks one of a starving trade, and is most likely a Spitalfields weaver, we find that he is looking for nuts on the boughs of these stunted wych elms, which he cannot discriminate from hazels, of which, by the way, we do not see a single

specimen in the forest, so far as our rambles lead us. This sample of ignorance of natural objects is the only melancholy spectacle we meet with in the greenwood; but there are probably not a few of London’s well-to-do and comfortable citizens who might fall into the same blunder.

We are returning, as the day draws in, towards the haunts of men, when we are suddenly alarmed by the apparition of Mr. Blinker without his pipe, but with open mouth, and a wild questioning look in his eye betokening some secret terror.

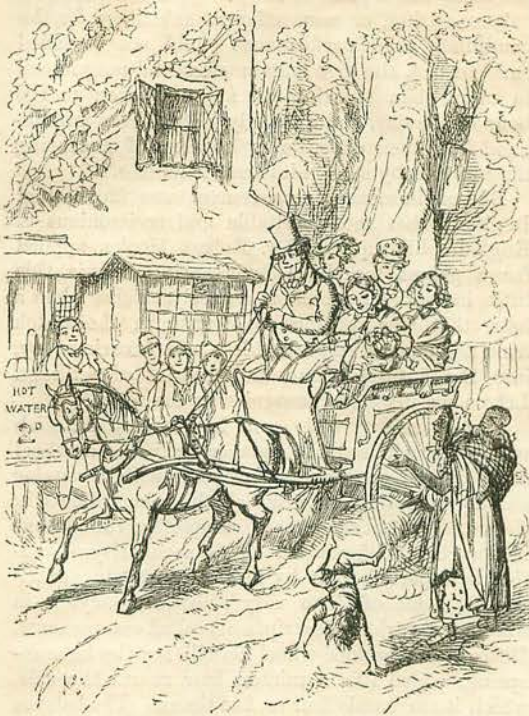
“Have you seen that young shaver of mine, sir? he’s off somewheres, and his mother’s half out of her mind, thinking as how he’s lost.”

“No, we are sorry to say;” in fact, we have not set eyes on Blinker junior since he left the van, and we can offer no information. Soon the hue and cry is raised, and a regular hunt is up. Blinker, in his agitation, offers eighteen-pence for the recovery of the fugitive, adding, “dead or alive,” by way of emphasis. A number of enterprising speculators set off in different directions in pursuit, and the reckless youngster is caught at last by one of the donkey-drivers, who takes him into custody and lugs him to the trysting-place by the collar, in spite of his bellowing, and only delivers him up “all alive and kicking,” as he elegantly observes, on receipt of the stipulated reward. Mrs. Blinker, good dame, receives her darling with a hug of affection and a shake of admonition, not to mention something very like a cuff on the ear, and marches him before her to the place where the van is waiting to take us all back to London.

The preparations for the return voyage make a very pretty sight, as one van after another receives its populous load, and draws off with songs and shouting and flying signals, and an unceasing chorus of merry excited voices. The traps, gigs, cabs, and dog-carts, etc., are filing off at the same time; and ever and anon the adjacent tea-gardens pour forth their now sated customers to fill the yawning vans. That some of them will delay their

return till darkness has set in, is evident, for numbers of the vans yet stand unhorsed; but that is no matter, for there will be a glorious harvest-moon to-

leaves and the turning convolvulus, watching the departure of the foresters, company by company, as the migration goes slowly on.



THE HALT ON THE ROAD.

night, which will get up as soon as the sun is gone to bed, and light the holiday-makers to their homes.

As for ourselves, we do not return in the van, having made the discovery that, within a few minutes' walk of this same wayside inn, there is the terminus of a railway which is worked in conjunction with the North London line, and that we can get home by that in much quicker time. So we install ourselves as a customer for tea at nine-pence a-head, and while enjoying as fragrant a cup as a weary man could desire, with the whitest bread and choicest butter, sit at a window bordered with vine



PICNIC IN THE FOREST.

We ride home in the twilight by the railway train, which skirts some half-dozen of the forest hamlets, and stops at them all to put down and take up. In less than half an hour we have left the forest far in the rear, and by the time that the red full moon is

“Rising round and broad and bright”

in the east, soot-black smoky London is rising in the west and north, and in a few more minutes we are landed almost at our own door, perfectly satisfied with our trip to Epping Forest—during which, so our good fortune would have it, we have not witnessed a single example of intemperance.



COCKNEY RECREATIONS.