

soil the tracks (which at the time I thought very large) of a cheetah and two cubs. A female cheetah with cubs is often a very dangerous beast to meddle with, and I was for allowing her to pass away quietly, but I was overruled by the shikarees.

I was young in the country in those days, and prone to rely too much upon what a native said of himself and of his courage, and I now credited what the shikarees said of their devotion to me, and of their former exploits in cheetah and tiger hunting. The beaters, under the charge of one of the shikarees, were told off about six paces from each other, thus forming a line of three or four hundred yards in length, and then after a short walk I was posted under a tree on the top of a small rising ground, but in the midst of dense bamboo jungle, so dense that I could not see more than twenty or thirty paces distant. I had a double-barrelled gun loaded with ball, and six shikarees stood behind me, so that I could with confidence rely upon having eight bullets to throw at the cheetah.

Presently, far away in the valley, we heard the first shouts of the beaters. They approached nearer, their shouts became more distinct, when suddenly, and apparently from the very midst of the beaters, we heard a most unmistakable and ominous roar—a roar that sounded to me strangely unlike any noise I had ever heard from a cheetah. The shouts of the beaters stopped at once, and I guessed that the cheetah had been roused and driven from its lair. I turned for a moment to warn the shikarees to be ready, when to my dismay I saw that all had clambered up the tree and left their matchlocks piled at the foot. For a moment I thought of following their example, but, while I yet hesitated, a rustling was heard, the bamboos shook, bent and parted, and out trotted—not the angry cheetah I had been expecting, but a magnificent tigress. I see the beast now as she came into the open space with a long quick stride, head down, and belly almost touching the ground, and then, as she caught sight of me, stop suddenly and fix her savage bright eyes on me; not a movement in her except a gentle but most ominous motion of the tail. I was so utterly astonished, so totally unprepared for meeting a tigress, that I stood apparently paralysed, my gun at the ready and my eyes almost starting out of my head. I stirred neither hand nor foot; I do not think that my eyelids even moved, for I was too startled, ay, and too much afraid to make even the slightest movement; for I knew well that had my hand trembled, had a branch of the tree overhead snapped, no earthly power could have saved me. I was conscious at the time that my unnatural quietude was due not to presence of mind so much as to an involuntary feeling that not a muscle, not a hair must so much as quiver; and yet, with all that, I remember how much I admired and envied the perfect stillness and repose of the brute before me, and how I became possessed of an insane desire to shout, or to do something to make the beast move. I know that my pulse was not quickened; but the beating of my heart seemed to me to be so unnaturally loud, that in the moment of greatest peril I feared the beast would hear it. All kinds of thoughts passed with marvellous rapidity through my brain, but one thing I remember well, and that is, I felt positively grateful to the cowardly villains in the tree above me for being so quiet. I do not suppose the tigress and I stood thus face to face for more than a minute; but it seemed an hour, and a very long one, to me, before she slowly walked off, keeping her eyes steadfastly fixed upon me until the intervening jungle hid us from each other. Then the reaction came—my gun seemed made

of lead and dropped out of my trembling hands, my pulse rose rapidly, and I broke out into such profuse perspiration that I felt as if I had been plunged into a bath. I soon recovered myself and remembered that I had escaped from a great and imminent danger, and I hope I did not forget that true thanksgivings for such an escape were due. A tigress is a fine-looking animal behind the bars of a cage in the Zoological Gardens, but she is a very different beast in her native forests, particularly when she has been partially deafened and wholly enraged by a gang of two-legged enemies, and when she suddenly comes upon one of those enemies all alone and apparently determined to intercept her. Had a finger moved while she thus stood glaring at me, she would have been upon me in a single bound, and before I could have raised my gun to my shoulder; and one stroke of her paw, or one grip of her formidable teeth, would have finished the story of my life. I can only suppose that the reason why she went off so quietly, was partly because I was so unnaturally still, and partly because her cubs must have been in the neighbourhood.

I had been wondering at the mutual silence of the beaters, who after the roar of the tigress appeared to have been struck dumb. I was on the point of despatching one of the boasting cowards of shikarees (who by-the-by had descended from the tree now that all danger was past) to call in the beaters, when the whole gang came in. It appeared that as one of the beaters was passing a rock and yelling like a maniac, the tigress sprang upon him from behind, clawed his back from shoulder to heel, and then, with a roar, made off into the jungle. The beaters were so terrified at this mishap, and at the unexpected sight of a tigress, that, lifting their wounded comrade, they made off as silently and rapidly as possible. I washed the poor fellow's wounds with gunpowder and water, and then sent him in to the nearest station (forty miles distant) for medical treatment. He recovered from his wounds and returned to his village, but his system had received a shock from which it never recovered, for a month afterwards he died, and literally of "tiger fear." So ended my first adventure with a tiger, and I can only say that I have never since relied upon a native shikaree in moments of danger.

THE SATURDAY HALF-HOLIDAY.

WHEN a working-man has been toiling with the regularity of a machine for weeks or months together from Monday morning till Saturday night—rising early in order to keep time at the counter, in the warehouse, or in the workshop, and often retiring late because compelled to work late—it is small wonder if he grows weary and spirit-broken and discontented with his lot. Well-meaning people are apt to call him reckless and vicious because when he does escape from his long labours he turns for refreshment and recreation to the public-house. They do not reflect that in many cases others are more to blame than the late labourer—that very often his week's wages are paid to him in the public-house, and he has to wait there on the Saturday night until he gets them; that not seldom his wife comes to wait there too for the money which is wanted for the late market where the Sunday's dinner must be bought. This system of late Saturday-night's pay is too common even now, and it is a source of degradation as well as of heart-burning to thousands; but twenty years ago it was, among an extensive class of employers in London, the rule rather than the exception. The motives that led to such a

system were sufficiently manifest to any one who sought for them. In those days Sunday work was far more common than, happily, it is now, and in busy times, during the height of the London season, men rarely knew, before their wages were paid on the Saturday night, whether they would be wanted to work on the Sunday or not. The employers themselves often did not know what work might come in of an urgent kind to necessitate Sunday labour; but as they were ready to undertake any amount of work that could possibly be done, it was their habit to wait for the last chance of the last hour of the week, and to keep the men waiting for their pay until that chance was decided—for if the men were suffered to go away before such expected order came, there would have been no means of collecting them again for the Sunday work. Over and over again have we seen hundreds of men and lads thus waiting for their wages until within a few minutes of midnight—their wives sometimes crowding the doors, and that in the bitterest weather, in the vain hope of getting hold of some portion of the husband's wage in time to avail themselves of the poor man's late market.

See what this system led to, and still leads to wherever it prevails. The weekly money not being forthcoming in time to be spent in the regular and lawful market, had to be spent in the irregular and unlawful one. Out of the late-pay system grew the Sunday morning market, to which the workers were driven to have recourse for the necessaries of life. The business of marketing, and the subsequent domestic operations, which should have got themselves done on the Saturday, having now to be done on the Sunday, there was no time for religious services, and with multitudes of workers, especially in our great towns, the day of rest became from this cause alone a day desecrated by listless inaction and self-indulgence.

Whoever it was that first commenced the crusade for a Saturday half-holiday, he must, we imagine, have gone blindly to work—for if he had looked all the obstacles in the face, it is scarcely conceivable that he would have dared to assail them. For our part, we can remember the ridicule the measure provoked when it was first proposed. Nobody boasting any practical knowledge had any faith in its success. When the assumed advantages were explained to employers "they couldn't see it," but they saw something very different, as they imagined, in the shape of certain and serious loss. Even the working-men themselves looked on the idea at first as something Utopian, and though they gladly gave in their adherence to the plan, they did so with a don't-you-wish-you-may-get-it sort of an air, and a smile, rather of incredulity than of encouragement, sufficiently expressive of their private opinions. But, nevertheless, they began to think about it, to turn it over in their minds as they stood behind the counter, or wrought at the frame or the bench, and to draw pictures in fancy of running streams, and umbrageous woods, and cricket-bats and wickets, and floats bobbing at a bite, etc., etc.; and at length, as such pictures grew familiar, they began to wonder whether there really was any reason why Saturday should always be a day and a half instead of a day, and whether it might not be just as sensible a thing to knock off five or six of its working hours in lieu of sticking as many additional ones on. By-and-by the plan grew to be discussed in the workshop and behind the counter with a larger measure of faith, and notions of its practicability began to be entertained and to spread. The chief reason of this was, that the Early Closing Association, which has always persisted in looking at obstacles through the

wrong end of the telescope, had been "pegging away" with its characteristic pertinacity, and had succeeded in driving its half-holiday heresy into the heads of some of the London employers who were known to be anxious for the welfare of their "hands," and in persuading them to give it at least a trial. The trial was made—in a sort of fractional way at first, by releasing a few hands for a few hours earlier on the Saturday evening. It was found that no harm came of it to the employer, while to the worker the benefit was manifest and undeniable: his holiday made him the fitter for work, and he was a better man during the week for the holiday that came at the end of it. Thus that venerable implement, "the thin end of the wedge," got itself fairly into the old knotty trunk of prejudice, and ever since then the Early Closing Association, and many good people besides, have been hammering away at it to drive it home. The wedge is not driven home yet—it will take a deal more hammering to do that—but it is bound to get driven home in time, and meanwhile we may congratulate ourselves on the good that has been done.

What has been done is this: in hundreds of working establishments where not very long ago the men and lads were accustomed to labour up to the very skirts of midnight, they now leave off at six o'clock, five o'clock, four o'clock, three o'clock, two o'clock,—and in not a few, but a good round number, the working week finishes on the Saturday at the working-man's dinner-hour, and he has all the rest of the day for amusement and recreation. There is no waiting for wages, because he is either paid on the Friday, or, better still, on the following Monday, so that he can be off at once to enjoy his holiday—to "bathe his eyes in green" in the pleasant country side—to cricket, to angling, to swimming—to the museum, the picture-galleries, the gymnasium, or to anything else (except shopping, as some do!)—thus crowning the week's hard labour with a chaplet of pleasure, in preparation for the reasonable rest and improvement of the Sunday.

But the practical question arises—How does the Saturday half-holiday system pay? Well, we are in a position to affirm that, taking all things into consideration, it pays even pecuniarily better than the old system of "all work and no play." We learn from those who have long tried it that quite as much work is got through in the week on the new half-holiday plan, both by men working by the piece, and men working by time, as was got through on the old plan—that the men earn as large a wage as they earned on the old system, and the master makes as large a profit, while his expenses are to some small extent less than they were on the old plan. The explanation would seem to be—and it is a perfectly natural one—that, with the half-holiday in view, men will make increased exertions, which, indeed, the effect of their holiday upon their health and spirits enables them to make. And it should not be forgotten, in connection with this matter, that the Saturday half-holiday generally puts to death that old enemy of the employer, Saint Monday.

We do not insist here upon the moral and religious advantage derivable to the worker by giving him a clear Sunday untroubled by the cares of the week, which it was impossible for him to enjoy under the late-hour system described above; but we commend this consideration to the conscience of every employer.

The above remarks have been suggested by the timely publication, by Messrs. Kent, of Paternoster Row, of a little book entitled "The Saturday Half-holiday Guide." We are not going to swell our columns with extracts from this book. The holiday-maker can

buy it for a few pence, and we recommend him to do so, seeing that it will show him how to make a profit of his holiday, whatever may be his personal preferences. It may chance to surprise him by the very various revelations it makes as to the pleasant uses to which a man may apply his available leisure. It may save him much waste of time by enabling him to plan his excursions beforehand; and it is very certain that by accepting its guidance, even for a single season, he may see and learn a great deal of which otherwise he would probably remain ignorant.

MY FIRST CURACY.

CHAPTER V.—THE PARISH CHOIR.

I MUST commence this chapter with the description of a very important body; at least they were so in their own estimation. I allude to the parish choir. When I first went into the parish as curate they still reigned paramount, for, as I have already stated, the vicar had only just previously been inducted into his living.

I think I never met with a more conceited set of people than were the individual members of this choir. I feel sure that Mulready's celebrated picture of "The Village Choir" could or must have been painted from some actual choir such as that of the church in which I first officiated.

There were men and women and children of every age, from the toothless chorus leader to the shrieking infant, and of all conditions of life; for instruments, always an important feature in such a choir, they had the flute, the violin, the double bass, and I know not what besides. With regard to the singing itself, if so it could by the greatest stretch of the imagination be rightly termed, I must allow that the runs and shakes indulged in, and the prolonged notes sustained at the end of each verse, were most wonderful, not only to hear, but also to behold; at least the effects of these shakes were so; for the efforts to produce them upon the countenances of the actors, the contortions, the writhings made in order to keep up as long as those possessed with more powerful lungs were able to do; the red and purple faces indicative of apoplexy—all these efforts, so plainly visible from the reading-desk, produced the most painful effect upon the vicar, his wife, and myself. But the congregation themselves, from being accustomed to such exhibitions for many years, were happily totally oblivious of the impropriety of such exaltations of self in the worship of God.

Now I think my readers will agree with me, that if these were the kind of displays usually carried on every ordinary Sunday in the year, what outrageous proceedings would mark the services of the grand days on which charity sermons were preached by some local magnate. I remember, on one such occasion, soon after I had commenced my duties as curate, I was in the desk, the strange preacher and the vicar were inside the communion rails, that an anthem was sung after the third collect; there was a solo in it, which was sung by a female in the highest pitched key imaginable of a high soprano voice. As for the generality of the congregation, they looked on with silent admiration; while the members of the choir stared, as if they would have liked to have clapped their hands with delight. This expression of their feelings was evident in their countenances; but unfortunately for the lady herself, she got a little too high, and either cracked her voice, or so overstrained it, that she was only able to motion faintly for the

chorus to join in. So great was her emotion that she was gasping for breath, and had to leave the gallery. The chorus obeyed her behest, after a moment's pause; in fact, as soon as they were able to settle down after the wondrous display they had just witnessed. The whole performance was most lamentable.

As soon as the service was over, and the clergy and congregation had departed—the former to the vestry, to deplore such an exhibition, the latter to the church-porch, to applaud the vigour and talent of the singers—the leader of the band came hurrying in, in a great state of excitement; and with his face beaming with satisfaction and importance, he approached the vicar, with the words, "Was it not grand—was it not fine?"

He was quietly met by a face of utter blankness of expression, and with the words, "There certainly was a great amount of voice—the anthem must have been heard for a quarter of a mile, I should imagine."

"Thank you, thank you," quickly replied the man, taking the vicar's remark as a genuine compliment; he then hurried away, telling every one, with great glee, "that the vicar had given it as his candid opinion, that the anthem would be heard of throughout the country."

We resolved in solemn conclave that evening, that this exhibition must cease. But the difficult matter was how to arrange without giving unnecessary offence to any one. Of course, the band must at any cost be dismissed; but then the question naturally arose, what should we have in its stead?

Our unanimous answer was, an organ. Where was the money to come from to purchase one, for the farmers of the parish would be sure to fight shy of a subscription, and of course the mass of the people would follow their example. Before we broached the subject, therefore, in the parish, the vicar resolved to write to the squire upon the subject; for though, as I have shown, his personal character was bad, yet he had been liberal in matters relating to the church. We thought that if we could get him to head a subscription list with a good sum, that we might squeeze a little out of the scarcely squeezable pockets of the farmers. Accordingly the vicar wrote, and by return of post received the surprising and gratifying intelligence that the squire would undertake the entire cost of an efficient organ, and left it most generously to the vicar to state the dimensions and the price.

We kept this good piece of news an entire secret from the parishioners until the very day when the instrument began to arrive in most mysteriously packed cases. As may be easily imagined, the old choir was completely thunderstruck at the novel idea of an organ. They had considered themselves quite perfect.

Time would fail me to relate all the trouble, anxiety, and ill-will, that was incurred during the next few months; but at last the difficulties were overcome. Nor was there really any cause why the parishioners should grumble, especially as they were not asked to contribute a single shilling towards the erection of the instrument. Notwithstanding this fact, many were the openly-expressed wishes for its non-success, and for some time after its arrival it had to be most carefully guarded.

We succeeded in gaining over to our side one of the most intelligent members of the late choir, and persuaded him to go to the nearest town for lessons twice a week on the organ; and from being rather quick at learning music, and having a natural love for it, and perhaps, too, a little proud of the position the vicar meant to give him, namely, organist of the parish, he was quite able at the end of three months to play the instrument in so creditable a manner as to gain