

indignation she felt at his strange conduct overpowered all other feelings. Unless he had been indulging too freely in wine, she could not account for it; but she had never known him to indulge—never heard that he was in the habit of indulging in drink. In vain she sought to conceive any motive that he could have had for his unseasonable visit, unless he had come, as she had at first anticipated, to bring her some news of her brother; and yet he had gone away almost without referring to Henry, except in connection with the keepsake which had so completely absorbed his attention.

She felt annoyed—grievously hurt at his singular behaviour, but it was utterly unaccountable to her; and after a while the anxiety she felt respecting her brother, which Mr. Aston's visit had temporarily banished from her mind, returned with redoubled intensity. She could not help thinking that Mr. Aston knew something respecting Henry that he had not told her. She wondered, again and again, why her brother had not written to her, or whether the ship had been really delayed on her passage. She tried to hope that the latter was the case, and that the *next* mail packet would surely bring her the expected letter and relieve her of her doubts and fears.

At length she rose, and replaced the locket and chain and the precious lock of hair which it contained in the secret drawer of her writing-desk, where she had hitherto kept it; and, having read a chapter from her Bible, and knelt longer than usual at her devotions, and prayed earnestly for support, through whatever trials might be impending over her, she too sought rest.

Neither she nor Mr. Aston, however, found the forgetfulness they sought in sleep come readily to weigh their eyelids down. Painful thoughts long occupied the minds of each, and when slumber came at length, it came laden with troubled dreams, and morning dawned and found them little refreshed.

Some days elapsed before Mr. Aston and Mary Talbot met again. Mr. Aston then came to the schoolroom with the rector and Mr. Sharpe; but though he returned her salute, Mary could not help remarking that he sought to avoid her. His manner was evidently constrained; and yet at times—and this was still more painful and inexplicable to her—she caught his eyes turned towards her with an expression in which—as she fancied—aversion and compassion were singularly blended.

As is too frequently the case in this world, a misconception of the feelings they each entertained towards the other, was to both a source of annoyance, pain, and anxiety. A few words of explanation on either side would not only have sufficed to remove their mutual estrangement, but would have bound them together in the closest bonds of friendship and affection.

The words were not spoken, until one, at least, had endured much suffering which might well have been spared to her.

How often, among those whom we ourselves have known, has a misconception of feelings, or a misconstruction of motives, separated for years, and sometimes for life, persons and families, who, had they known each other's secret hearts, would have lived in the mutual interchange of the kindest feelings!

STREET TUMBLERS.

In most of the suburbs and outskirts of London, the street tumblers, athletes, acrobats, and performers of feats, both muscular and sleight-of-hand, make their

appearance soon after the spring showers, when warm weather is about setting in. They announce themselves, as Punch and Judy do, by banging a big drum with remarkable emphasis, and accompanying it with just a few bars of an improvised air on the Pandean pipes, intended to wake up the neighbourhood. The appeal is recognised far and wide, and is no sooner heard by that section of humanity who delight in gratuitous amusements, and are always on the look-out for "stray gifts to be seized by whoever shall find," than they are surrounded by a flock of interested spectators, quite ready to appreciate their activity and skill. The performance invariably begins by the ceremonious spreading of a small remnant of stair-carpeting in the centre of the road or open space, an operation which takes up a great deal of time, and seems to be regarded, both by the operator and the lookers-on, as an important and mysterious affair. At the same time, another and far less ceremonious member of the company is engaged in clearing a ring, which he does by swinging a stout rope armed at either end with a heavy ball of brass, with which balls he makes play at the heads and toes of the crowd, and compels them to occupy the position assigned to them. What takes place when the carpet is duly spread and the ring is cleared, will of course depend upon the accomplishments of the members of the company, and their willingness to exhibit them in return for the encouragement they receive. The exhibition proceeds on the excelsior principle, beginning with small things, and going on with greater and still greater as the coppers pour in, until the grand climax of all is reached, and the performance is at an end. But you may note that, as a general rule, the climax never is reached, because the coppery shower never is profuse enough to meet the expectations of the performers, so that an abrupt conclusion is what usually takes place, and the sudden migration of the company to some other spot. Ill-natured spectators, especially those who contribute nothing, are apt to say that the grand climax is all a hoax—that the sword three-quarters of a yard long, which lies on the carpet ready to be swallowed when the coppers amount to three-and-nine, never *is* swallowed at all; or that the small donkey who waits there so quietly ready to go up the ladder, and be balanced on Signor Mokoni's hairy chin, never did go up the ladder in his life, and never will. We don't know anything about that, having ourselves never witnessed a completed performance, owing to the lamentable want of generosity on the part of the populace.

Meanwhile there is no denying that, climax or no climax, a good deal is done. The signor squats like a Turk, and lets fly a number of golden balls which he takes one after another from the pocket of his tinselled jacket, until his head is seen bobbing about beneath an ever-changing dome of the glittering globes, which, as fast as they fall into one open palm, are propelled to the other and sent circling again. Then the balls are changed for a set of gleaming bowie-knives, which are sent on the same rapid circuit, and whose shining points come in fearful proximity to the operator's temples. Then the signor folds his arms and takes breath a little, while a comrade goes through a series of peg-top manoeuvres—spinning the top, whirling it in the air, catching it on his back, on his head, on the nape of his neck, on the sole of his shoe, or wherever else he chooses, and finally, ere it has ceased to spin, balancing it at the end of a long reed, upon his nose. Then you have gymnastics by a couple of youths who, joining hands and feet, roll round the circle so rapidly that one is not to be distinguished from the other; then they separate and turn no end of

somersaults, and walk and run and frolic indifferently on their heels or their heads, or embrace their own necks with their legs, while they hop about like fabulous birds upon the palms of their hands. When the signor has breathed awhile, he lies down on his back, turning the soles of his feet to the sky, and upon them is laid a long pole which he sends flying aloft and catches again as it comes down, keeping up the game to the tune of the big drum and pipes until you have had enough of it. Then the pole is flung off and one of the youths springs upon the upturned sole, where for a time he is pleasantly kicked from one foot to the other, rising higher and higher in the air at each succeeding kick, and finally performing a double somersault in his passage to terra firma. The signor now chooses to get up, but of course he does not do it as an ordinary mortal would; keeping his arms still folded, he prefers to pick himself up without the use of his hands, and he does it by sheer force of muscle. Then you shall see him planted firm on his feet, while a comrade as tall as himself leaps upon his shoulders, where he also stands erect and firm, while one of the youths swarms up the bodies of the two, and, standing on the shoulders of the second man, looks down from a height of some fifteen feet. Thus loaded, the signor walks about with a grand air to a martial tune, indulging his upper storey with a private view into the attics of the surrounding dwellings. After this, if the coppers are forthcoming, you may see some conjuring tricks; and, if you like to participate, you may even assist in their performance. You may have, for instance, a huge padlock taken out of your waistcoat pocket and firmly fastened in your jaw; or, objecting to that sort of dentistry, may see a quart of ale pumped from your elbow; or you may lend your handkerchief to the signor, who, unfolding it before your eyes, will show you that it contains half-a-dozen new-laid eggs. Various other tricks are performed, none of a very recondite kind, such as go to make the reputation of the far-famed wizards who astonish the world of fashion, but clever enough to startle and amuse the populace.

What is the origin of these amusing vagabonds? Where do they all come from when the season for their annual appearance sets in? How do they live? and where do they live in the winter? and what becomes of them when years steal upon them, and feats of activity and strength are out of the question? We shall endeavour to answer these questions *seriatim*. There is no question but that the most accomplished of these out-of-door professors have been trained to the business from infancy, and do but follow the vocation of their sires. This is shown to be the case by the extraordinary pliancy of limb and suppleness of joint which many of them possess and will retain up to middle age. They could never acquire the capability of twisting themselves into the shapes we sometimes see them assume, if they did not begin young, and they only learn it as children by constant and often very painful practice under the direction of their parents, or proprietors—by which latter term we mean to intimate the unpleasant fact that promising children are not unfrequently surrendered by their parents, for a consideration, to trainers who speculate upon making a profit out of them. On the other hand, there are numbers who take to this sort of industry—if industry it can be called—from a real liking to it; while there are also not a few who are driven to it by necessity. Of this last class are the poor street outcasts of London and other great cities, who begin by running and tumbling for halfpence after omnibuses, and end by joining, in the humblest capacity, some wandering

gang of street-strollers, with whom they work their way upwards as they best can.

To account for the appearance of the tumbling fraternity with the advent of summer, we need only revert to the necessities of their lot, which controls, and must control, the routine of their life. Performing their feats, as they are compelled to do, in garments too thin and light to afford them protection against rough weather, it would be madness in them to expose themselves to it, and therefore they never do if they can help it. They have a prudent fear of rheumatism, an attack of which would put an end to their occupation; and you may observe that after their performances they are always careful to cool themselves gradually, and will don cloaks or overcoats against the slightest shower of rain. Up to the time when we see them first in the streets they have been performing under cover—in barns, in dancing-booths, in public-houses, in travelling shows and circuses of small note, in penny theatres, and in migrating caravans, where their feats are of use in supplementing the attractions of a dried crocodile, a fat boy, or a calf with two heads. They take to the road in summer with the view of making a little more money than they can do in such engagements; and they gravitate towards London in the first instance, because the races, which come off at no great distance from London during the summer months, afford the most promising field for their exertions. On the racing downs they sometimes endure enormous labours and fatigue: they have been known to walk from London to Epsom in the early morning, starting before dawn—to be active throughout the whole day, with just an interval during the running of the horses, and at night to bivouack in an extemporised tent, or under the lee of some bank or sheltering wall—and to resume their avocations with unabated vigour on the following day; and so on until the carnival of the race-ground is over.

It is a prevailing notion that this class of men are intemperate and besotted, and spend their gains chiefly in drink. As a rule, nothing can be farther from the fact. A man who was given to drinking would speedily come to the end of his career as a gymnast or tumbler: he would lose firmness of muscle and strength of nerve; would drip with perspiration under exertions which the man in good training would make with perfect coolness; and in the end would be cast off by his comrades in their own self-defence. There are exceptional drunkards, of course, among them, who by strength of constitution last for years, but they come to grief and disgrace sooner or later. The expenses of a travelling company are not, judging from observations we have made, very enormous. There is generally a managing wife among them, who looks to the preparation of breakfast and supper at their quarters for the time being—the midday refreshment of the troop being taken as opportunity may serve. They do not appear to be at all choice, when on their travels, in the matter of lodgings. Some time back, while accompanying an inspector in his survey of a crowded lodging-house, we came upon a small room in which was a single bed; the occupants were a company of street tumblers, to the number of six; two lads occupied the bed, while the other four lay on the ground amidst their properties, all of them being fast locked in slumber, which our rather noisy intrusion failed to disturb.

When autumn comes on, heralding the approach of winter, these professionals begin to look out for some cover in which to hibernate; nor, in these days of popular amusements and recreations of all kinds, have they very far to seek. Many of them return to the

travelling shows, which find their harvest in the fall of the year by attending the mops and statute hirings, and the numerous fairs for the sale of farm produce of all kinds, which then come off. Many more contract engagements with publicans and the proprietors of music halls, where their performances alternate with those of the musical soloists and public singers. Numbers not so well qualified make their appearance on the stage of the "gaffs" and penny theatres in the low districts of the metropolis; while not a few get up independent exhibitions of their own in some poor neighbourhood—their stage being, perhaps, a room in the rear of a huckster's or marine-store-dealer's shop—where a dress-box ticket costs threepence, and pit and gallery are open at proportionate prices. Now and then the street performer gets a winter engagement at one of the London theatres, where he is generally taken on with the express condition that he accepts any kind of "business" it may suit the manager's convenience to assign to him. Hence it comes to pass that playgoers may see the Signor Mokoni blown into the air by the springing of a mine in a war spectacle—swinging by his legs from the sails of the mill in the "Miller and his Men," knocked about as an ancient "Charley" in a farce, or staggering about as decrepit pantaloons in a pantomime.

The most serious question of all, and the saddest to answer, comes last: What becomes of the tumbling professor in his old age? There are few prizes in this department of the lottery of life. The whole of the records of muscular greatness furnish very few Blondins and Lectards, and only one Belzoni: the million failures find no record, because no man cares about them. Old age, or what is tantamount to old age, steals upon the performing athlete much earlier than it does upon ordinary men, simply because an infirmity which would be no bar to the pursuit of ordinary avocations is often fatal to his. A touch of rheumatism, a liability to cramp, the straining of a muscle, the sprain of a sinew—any one of these may lay him on the shelf for a time, and if either should occur when he is past his prime, it is more than probable that he is laid by for ever. Men of this class are never willing to admit that their powers are failing, and often bring about the evil they fear by affecting to despise it. A man who should lie by to recruit, will go on violently exercising himself to avoid the suspicion of infirmity, which would be damaging to him; by-and-by his powers fail him of a sudden; he "misses his tip," as it is termed, that is, he trips or breaks down in performing the exploit which he is advertised for, and unless he can recover himself and perform it on the spot, it is all over with him—the beginning of the end of his career has come. Careful men take all possible pains to stave off this woeful crisis as long as they can: they drink sparingly—they diet themselves—they husband all their strength for the performance of the duties required of them, and resort to bathing, friction, poulticing their joints, and anointing themselves with "nine oils," and various other medicaments and devices for retaining the forces and elasticity of youth, which, last as long as they may, will desert them but all too soon. Many a man, after he is worn out himself, will retain a position in the company to which he is attached, on account of his child or *protégé*, whose clever performances bring money to the concern. In such a case he is seen no more in the arena, but is employed in some other way, as carter, stableman, bill-sticker, or general factotum, doing whatever is to be done for the common good. It is not an unusual thing for the street athlete, when his strength fails him, to turn peripatetic tradesman. If he have saved a little capital, and can

start a horse and cart, he does not make a bad figure as costermonger; and, as such, generally thrives. Wanting the means for such an outfit, he will push at a handcart, or carry about his stock on his head. His greatest enemies in either case are his nomadic habits and love of change, which are apt to interfere with his success, and reduce him to sad straits. Under the most disastrous circumstances, however, you never find him voluntarily resorting to "the house" as a refuge. All his habits and predilections are dead against that. If he is carried thither in his hour of distress and helplessness, it is in all probability to escape from duress by a speedy death.

That the life we have been describing must have special charms for those who follow it there can be no doubt, looking to their evident freedom from care and their customary good spirits, and to the fact that the march of science and the schoolmaster does not appear to diminish their numbers. What these charms are, however, one can hardly declare with certainty. It may be that certain temperaments find their fullest gratification in such a life; and that the admiration and popular applause that follow on success are an ever-present and agreeable stimulus, outweighing its inseparable hardships. Then we must remember there is a chance of a splendid reputation and enormous gains, which any youthful aspirant may hope to attain; and that this possibility, like a hundred-thousand-pound prize in a lottery where thousands venture, though but one can win, cannot fail of its attraction. On the moral bearings of the subject we need not here touch:

THE AGRICULTURAL POPULATION OF INDIA.

BY REV. ROBERT HUNTER, M.A., LATE OF NAGPORE.

INDIA is in the main an agricultural country, and the great mass of its people are more or less directly engaged in the cultivation of the soil. "Happy peasants!" some one may be tempted to exclaim, "who draw from the unreluctant soil of fertile India abundance wherewith to satisfy their wants; who care not for politics, and never trouble themselves to inquire who rules in the imperial palace, or who ceases to rule, feeling that they are too obscure to be worth the notice of a tyrant, and that they may therefore pursue their tranquil course, whatever revolutions may rage in high places, much as the poetess describes:—

'O joyous birds, it hath still been so:
' Through the halls of kings doth the tempest go,
' But the huts of the hamlet lie still and deep,
' And the hills o'er their quiet a vigil keep.'

Happy peasants! who find life easy, who have to work for their sustenance at the utmost but a few hours each day, and who, when evening falls, take out their pastoral pipes and play simple melodies with vocal accompaniment, each wooing and winning some village maiden, and then living a happy life with her in a cottage, which he has erected on the most picturesque spot on his fields! Happy even in faith, as living far from the din of religious controversy and yet reaching the truth by a kind of simple instinct, which tells them that gratitude and love are due to the Author of their being, and the Preserver of their lives!" Yes; if all that were true, they would be happy peasants; but nearly every element in this pleasing picture is devoid of verity. Let us sketch the real life of the Indian agricultural population.

It is quite correct that they rarely trouble themselves to ask who their sovereign may happen to be, it being the exception rather than the rule for a traveller to meet