

## CHAPTER V.

## OLD LONDON LIFE AND MANNERS.

I CAN remember when there were neither cabs nor omnibuses in London, and when the worn-out, shabby, discarded, and disused carriages of the nobility and the wealthy, with the coronets and armorial bearings uneffaced upon the panels, did duty in the streets, drawn each by two horses, driven by elderly coachmen called "Jarvies." I can remember the sensation created when cabs were first introduced. In those early days they were always called *cabriolets*, and the word "cab" was considered vulgar in the extreme. A caricature appeared in the shop windows, of a gentleman directing a villainous-looking "cabbie" to drive him to the Old Bailey, and cabbie asking him, with a look of well-feigned astonishment, "Where is the Old Bailey, your honour? I never heard of such a place!" I also remember the watermen that plied in their wherries on the Thames. They were

all dressed in uniforms peculiar to the companies to which they were severally affiliated, and wore pewter and sometimes silver badges on their breasts in sign of their calling. They jealously excluded from the privilege of rowing for hire upon the river all persons not duly authorised by the rules and usages of the fraternity. Their livery was a relic of the olden times, when the great English nobles had their palatial mansions on the banks of the Thames from the City to Westminster, the last of which (Northumberland House) was only recently demolished; and when each noble retained his own watermen in his own liveries to row him on the river, for business or pleasure; to visit, perhaps, the Globe Theatre on Bankside, to see a play written by "the ingenious Mr. Shakspeare." These men were proud of their vocation, maintained a strict monopoly or trades union, and managed, in the absence of competition—steam vessels on the river above London Bridge being non-existent, and possibly unimagined—to earn a comfortable subsistence.

Charles Dibdin celebrated a member of the fraternity in the once popular song "Tom Tug."

Then farewell, my trim-built wherry,  
Oars and coat and badge, farewell.  
Never more at Chelsea ferry  
Shall your Thomas take a spell.

He also commemorated another who plied lower down the as yet unpolluted river, in a song often

sung by John Braham, and still sung, I believe, by Mr. Sims Reeves.

And did you not hear of a jolly young waterman  
Who at Blackfriars Bridge used for to ply ?

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What sights of fine folks he rowed in his wherry.  
'Twas cleaned out so nice, and so painted without ;  
He was always first oar when the fine city ladies  
In a party to Ranelagh went or Vauxhall.

I remember once being rowed, when a child of eight or nine, down the river from Wapping to Woolwich, and of being struck with the sight of the rotting corpses of the pirates hanging in chains, as a warning to evil-doers, on the river bank, either on the Greenwich or the Blackwall side, I forget which ; and on another occasion of seeing no less than five men hanging in front of Newgate, for forgery, for horse-stealing, for sheep-stealing, for burglary, or shop-lifting, or other offences far short of the crime of murder.

I remember old London Bridge, and the commencement as well as the opening of the new, the old Houses of Parliament and the old Royal Exchange, to the musical chimes of which I have often listened, and that rung out in its tower, when the building perished by fire, the mournfully appropriate Scottish melody "There's nae luck about the house." I also remember the old Royal Mews that stood on the site of the present trumpery

National Gallery, with its too suggestive pepper-boxes ; when there was no such place as Trafalgar Square, the Nelson monument, the fountains, or the Lions ; when the palatial clubs of Pall Mall, Carlton House Terrace, the York steps into St. James's Park, and the Duke of York's column were non-existent ; when the Haymarket justified its name by its business, and when the roadway in the early morning was blocked up by heavily-laden wains of sweet-smelling hay, and the public-houses in the street drove a thriving trade, for early purl and other drinks, among the buyers and sellers of the provender.

I remember when the servants and the women of the labouring classes wore pattens instead of the clogs that afterwards came into fashion, when they paddled in the rain or braved the mire of the crossings—contrivances better than the clogs that superseded them, but neither so serviceable as, but possibly more graceful than, the wooden shoes of the Continent. In those days lucifer matches had not been invented, and the only mode of procuring a light, unless borrowed from a light previously burning, was by the aid of flint, steel, and tinder-box. On the first introduction of the new system—quite a godsend to the growing multitude of pipe and cigar smokers—a small phial filled with acid was carried in the waistcoat pocket, into which the match was dipped to produce the light. The rapid

increase of smoking consequent upon the facilities afforded by Congreve matches, as they were first called, gradually led to the abandonment of the practice of snuff-taking, except among the male and female lovers of tobacco who were too old to desist from a habit which had become their second nature.

I remember the poor, decrepid old men who were employed as watchmen in the London streets, who were familiarly called Charlies, and whose duty it was to perambulate the principal thoroughfares, to call out the hours and the half-hours, with such information as to the state of the weather as it pleased them to afford; and who were armed with rattles to give the alarm when necessary in case of sudden attack, either from thieves bent on serious business, or from "swells" and blackguards bent on frolic and roystering mischief. I remember the popular opposition excited by the "New Police," established under the auspices of the late Sir Robert Peel, then Mr. Peel. The unpopularity of this effective and excellent force was great, and very slow in subsiding.

In those days it was a favourite amusement of young and middle-aged scapegraces of the towns, or "bloods" or "young bloods" as they were often designated, to carry off poor old watchmen in their sentry-boxes, and pitch them, box and all, into the nearest puddle. A story sometimes told was of one of the semi-intoxicated "Charlies,"

who, seeing the reflection of the moon in a pool of water, after a heavy shower, called out "Half-past two in the morning, and more moons than usual." The "new police" soon put a stop to the escapades of the aristocratic snobs, who indulged in their gambols at the expense of these poor, decrepid old fellows. And it was high time!

The "new police" were popularly called "Bobbies," as they often are to this day, in the idea that the name of "Bobbies" was derived from Sir Robert Peel, the founder of the force. But this is an error. *Boban* simply means a boy, or a big boy, in the ancient language of our British ancestors, still spoken in Scotland and Ireland, employed as a word of affection and familiarity. The German *Bube* and the vernacular *booby* are of the same derivation. The epithet "Peelers," still applied to the force by the vulgar, is, of course, derived from the name of the great statesman.

Newspapers in those days were small and dear, as I have already recorded in a previous page of this volume, and were remarkable for the decent reticence with which they were conducted. The world was not then more moral or society better behaved than at the present time, but the newspapers were far more reticent and decent, and their editors always refused to give publicity to the filthy details of adultery cases which are now too often divulged in all their hideousness.

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Theological opinion was by no means free. Richard Carlile, a bookseller and publisher in Fleet Street, and the "Rev." Richard Taylor, commonly called the Devil's Chaplain, printed and promulgated attacks upon the Bible and the Christian religion, that brought them within the clutches of the law and subjected them to fine and imprisonment. The opinions they then expressed, to the scandal of the authorities, and a large proportion of the public, are now published with impunity, and scarcely excite either animadversion or notice. I remember being taken to visit Carlile in Giltspur Street Prison, long since pulled down, where he was confined for the expression of views on the Pentateuch that Bishop Colenso and other high ecclesiastical dignitaries, in a later day, might have adopted without reprobation, and even with assent and approval.

In my boyhood and early youth I remember to have paid several visits to Bartholomew, or "Bartlemy," Fair—that venerable nuisance which has long since been happily abolished. I also have been taken to Greenwich Fair—a nuisance even worse than Bartholomew Fair—and to Horn Fair, at Charlton, then a rural village between Greenwich and Woolwich. Any more frightful and vulgar saturnalias than the two first-mentioned it is difficult to imagine. If the palm for vulgar vice and rampant blackguardism can be awarded to one

above the other, to Greenwich Fair it ought to be given. Anyone who remembers, as I do, the scenes enacted annually at these licensed places of popular unreason, and who remembers at the same time the saying of the ancient French writer, that the English as a people amused themselves *moult tristement*, or very sadly, might feel inclined to substitute another more appropriate adjective than "sad"; for the popular amusements of these fairs were not sad, in the ordinary meaning of the word, but uproariously and vulgarly disgusting and immoral. The morality of the English people may possibly not have greatly improved in the substance; but the form of immorality, and its outside show, have certainly changed vastly for the better. Immorality is no longer nude, but decorously draped. It is no longer aggressively public on the highways, but discreetly private in the byways. So far the change has been a clear gain to society.

Among the physical eye-sores of London which have been happily removed, I perfectly remember Field Lane—infamous with the reminiscences of Jonathan Wild, his contemporaries and successors. It stood at the bottom of the valley, since spanned by the handsome Holborn viaduct, and exposed to the view of every pedestrian who chose to look up it, as he passed from the corner of Hatton Garden to the church of St. Sepulchre and the prison of Newgate, long rows of stolen pocket-handkerchiefs



—"wipes" or "fogles" as they are called in the thieves' vernacular—all dangling publicly for sale at low prices to such hardy adventurers and reckless wayfarers as were rash enough to pass through on their way to Clerkenwell. It skirted the Fleet Ditch, which, in the days of Pope, as that poet records in the *Dunciad*,

With disemboguing streams  
Poured the large tribute of dead dogs to Thames,

at Blackfriars Bridge; but which, long before my time, had been covered over. I remember it, however, when I was a boy, wholly uncovered in that portion of its course further to the north towards Pentonville, black, fetid, and disgusting, and laden visibly with the similar tribute of dead dogs, and the half-solid, half-liquid contents of the cesspools.

I also remember the famous "Rookery" of St. Giles, which was partially removed when New Oxford Street was cut through it, and its foul denizens dispersed to new quarters, which they soon did their best—or their worst—to make as unsavoury as the old. Co-eval with Field Lane and the Rookery was Monmouth Street, a name of such evil omen that it was deemed expedient to change it to Dudley Street. The shopkeepers who did business on the level of the pavement dealt in cast-off garments of all kinds, from court-dresses to liveries, from worn-out ball-room

flipperies to the veriest beggar clouts ; while those in the cellars beneath, thickly inhabited as beehives, dealt in old shoes and boots, which they renovated in a poor and ineffective fashion, making them to the sight, though not to the touch, almost as good as new.

I was sometimes taken by my father to one of these miserable cellars, where dwelt a worthy old cobbler, engaged in the common business of the street, and often watched him, with curious eyes, as he sat with his lap-stone in lap, hammer in hand, plying his avocation, to observe, if I could, some of the mysteries of the craft. The old fellow, whose name was Crompton, claimed to be a brother of the famous Samuel Crompton, of Bolton-le-Moors, in Lancashire, the inventor of the spinning-jenny, by means of which the first Sir Robert Peel and many other Lancashire manufacturers had made large fortunes, though he himself had been but scantily rewarded. The cobbler, in his day of youth and strength, had served as a sailor on the *Hydra*, commanded by Admiral Sir Francis Laforey, on board of which my father was a midshipman. Crompton had rendered some service to my father on ship-board, or, in some manner or other unknown to me, had acquired his favour and regard. The poor fellow had been wounded in the leg, in some naval engagement—I forget which—and was a  
ly good seaman. He had, however, the

misfortune to incur the displeasure of Sir Francis Laforey, the hardest and sternest of all possible disciplinarians, who had gained for the *Hydra* the distinction in the naval service of being a "hell afloat." Sir Francis had ordered him to be flogged for some minor offence—or for no offence at all—a sentence which was duly inflicted, and entered in the ship's books. When Crompton retired from the service at the peace, he applied for admission to Greenwich Hospital; but the rules of that institution closed its hospitable doors against every seaman who had incurred the penalty of a flogging, either rightfully or wrongfully. My father always held that Crompton had been unjustly punished; and when the poor fellow took to shoe-mending as his only resource against beggary, my father never lost sight of him, but continued to befriend him, and occasionally visited him in his underground cellar in Monmouth Street, leaving such little benefactions as he could afford to bestow upon him. And it was in this manner I made the old sailor's, and new cobbler's, acquaintance, and that of his buxom wife.

The latter did her part to increase the earnings—I will not say of the household but of the cellarhold—by selling common crockery in the streets, or exchanging her pots and pans, her cups and saucers, milk-jugs and tea-pots, for old boots and shoes of men or women for her husband to vamp

and repair, and make a profit of. The Monmouth Street cellars were closed as human habitations when the street took its new name of Dudley. It is now in course of demolition for the construction of the new and greatly-needed thoroughfare which, piercing through the sordid, squalid, and malodorous district of the Seven Dials, will connect the filthy centre of London with the cleaner and more wholesome North.

I remember when Vauxhall Gardens provided the principal musical and out-of-door recreations for the Londoners, which of late years have been afforded by what vulgar people, high and low, persist in calling the "Fisheries," the "Healtheries," the "Inventories," and, more odious word than all, the "Colinderies." During the last years of the protracted and, in the main, the prosperous existence of Vauxhall Gardens, I was introduced by the Rev. Dr. Richardson—then all-powerful in literary and non-political matters in the editorial department of the *Times*—to Simpson, the Master of the Ceremonies at Vauxhall. Dr. Richardson was the first to proclaim to the world the merits and peculiarities of that eccentric personage, and to make him famous, through the columns of the *Times*, not alone to all contemporary London, but to secure him a place in the minor social annals of his age.

On this occasion I was also introduced to a son of minor, but still of great, importance in

the Gardens, a man who had acquired a high reputation for his skill in carving cooked hams into the thinnest of all possible slices—so thin, that it was popularly said of him that he could cover a whole acre with the slices of one moderately-sized Yorkshire ham. Engaged in this operation, he suddenly caught sight of a man who was clambering over the wall to evade payment for the refreshments of which he had partaken, and, without ceasing in his work of carving, called out to another waiter: “Look sharp, Joe! there’s a lobster and two glasses of brandy and water climbing over the wall!” The man was stopped, found to be wholly impecunious, and given into custody, to appear next morning before Sir Richard Birnie at Bow Street.

Before the comparatively recent opening of the Zoological Gardens in the Regent’s Park, there was a menagerie in the Tower of London, and another at Exeter Change, in the Strand. The first was of royal origin, and was an appendage to the pomp and paraphernalia of the Kings of England for many centuries. The second was a private speculation, established as a part of the attractions of a once popular bazaar, that stood on the site of the present Exeter Hall, built on the demolition of the old “Change,” or Exchange, for the widening and improvement of the Strand. The lions in the Tower, though long ago removed

to the Regent's Park, hold their place in popular tradition, and are believed by many credulous and ignorant people to be still maintained by the Crown, as irremovable as the Armoury, the Beef-eaters, or the White Tower itself.

When the *Illustrated London News* was established, in 1842, M. Guys, a very clever French artist, was invited from Paris by Messrs. Ingram, Cooke and Little, the original proprietors of that journal, to assist in the pictorial department, which he was abundantly well qualified to do. I have often heard of a practical joke played off upon him by one of the trio, who deputed him to go to the Tower and make a sketch of the washing of the lions, which was represented to him as an annual ceremony, performed with much pomp and elaboration. The unsuspecting M. Guys proceeded on his mission, and on the following day presented himself at the office with a beautiful sketch of the ceremony, with all its stately accessories, in which the Beef-eaters, in their quaint, picturesque, mediæval attire, figured very prominently. The sketch, which was exceedingly well done, had doubtless as much claim to exactitude and truth to actual fact as many hundreds of much-admired pictures by great artists that exist in the National Galleries of London, Paris, and other cities, and in the halls of the noble and wealthy in every country in Europe. The conductors of the *Illustrated London News* had their little joke, and

the artist had his, with the additional advantage, if the old French saying be true, that *rira bien qui rira le dernier*, of making the joke tell against its perpetrators, and being well paid for his time and ingenuity.

The great elephant in Exeter Change, belonging to a Mr. Cross, and purchased by him for 900 guineas, went mad in the year 1826, and it was found necessary to shoot it. The slaying of the infuriated beast—who was known to all London by his name of “Chunee”—was a matter of extreme difficulty and danger, and created a great sensation in London. It was the talk of the town for weeks, and, according to tradition, its dead body, as it lay in its cage for two or three days afterwards, was visited by thousands of people, whose payments for admission went far towards making up to the proprietor the loss incurred by his sacrifice of the animal. This statement, however, is not confirmed in the long and interesting account of the whole circumstances, which appears in Vol. II. of Hone's *Every-Day Book*, in which the writer states that the body was dissected with the least possible delay, and was *not* exhibited to the public.

I never bought a lottery-ticket, or took the slightest interest in any lottery or raffle whatever, but I perfectly remember to have seen London placarded with lottery advertisements—to have had announcements of forthcoming lotteries, with prizes

varying from £1 to £30,000, thrust into my hands by shabby touts and other agents of the lottery offices as I passed along the streets. I also remember, when I was at school, to have heard that lotteries were finally abolished in England, and hearing the celebrated Edward Irving, in the pulpit of his chapel in Hatton Garden, expressing his gratitude to Almighty God for the great blessing thus conferred upon the nation, and upon the cause of public morality.

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