

OLD COVENT GARDEN.

CURIOUS HAUNTS OF MEN FAMOUS IN HISTORY.

Scenes Around the Market Place—The People Who Frequent It—Life in an Inn—Stories of the Past Recalled by Familiar Places.

Of all the good old London taverns of bygone days those looking in upon Covent Garden, or immediately around about it, best retain that flavor which has given English fictional literature for the past 200 years one of its most winsome and lasting charms.

I used to haunt the apartment houses of London, up Bloomsbury way, and skirmish with their sad-eyed, funeral-voiced, widowed, nimble-fingered keepers in dismay and desperation, or waste my energies upon the austerities of the great hotels along the Strand. But one day of grace succor came, and good old Saint Mathews, the London actor, said: "My dear boy, don't be a cad any longer and waste your gold among the hotel bedouins of London. Live like a gentleman of the old school on half the money, and take your ease at your inn in the very heart of that precinct where all our literature worth reading was made. Go to any of the quiet old inns about Covent Garden and be always at rest, even in restless London."

I have never been so grateful for advice in all my life. Here are half a score of inns, genuine old taverns, most of them built long before the century came in, and every one of the modern make constructed and conducted on the old-fashioned plan. They are taverns at which the fireplaces are huge, cavernous, and get-at-able; the bedrooms warm and cozy; the halls low ceilinged, but broad and full of real olden settles and sofas; the smoking rooms snug and warm and with plenty of papers and books; the pictures yellow and old and dim and hung in great broad, odd frames, which show they were there long before you were born; the dining rooms ample and quiet and "richly browned;" the ports, clarets and sherries with the cobwebs of the twenties and thirties upon them; the food wholesome, fine and good; the porters friendly and "talky" when you wish to get down from your own pedestal for a little humanizing patter; and even the misses in the office and bar and rosy faced chambermaids are not averse on occasion to a bit of innocent banter, which after all anybody but a prude, a hermit or a hypocrite at times truly enjoys.

What a host of rich associations crowd within this little Covent Garden district! Thackeray called it the "joyous neighborhood of Covent Garden," though it was scarcely known at the beginning of the seventeenth century. From the middle of the seventeenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century it was the best known rendezvous of authors, actors, painters, good fellows generally and substantial country squires and gentlemen visiting the town in London. In Russell street, now chiefly given over to green-grocers and fruiterers, was the then social exchange of the English capital, the mart of its news, politics, scandal and wit.

In this one short thoroughfare stood the most noted coffee houses of the reigns of William III and Queen Anne, familiar to all conversant with the best English literature. "Will's," "Button's" and "Tom's" were "sacred to polite letters." All the English Sir Rogers de Coverley also made these places their London address. Pepys and Evelyn, the historians, visited and lodged here. The entire neighborhood, including the shady thoroughfares of Wyck street, Great and Little Queen streets, Lincoln's Inn Fields, Portugal street, and on the south, Bedford, York, Tavistock, Henrietta, King and the present Garrick and Catherine streets were occupied by the houses of the gentry.

"Will's" which stood at the west side of Bow street and the north side of Russell street, was the most ancient and noted of these resorts. Dryden's patronage and frequent appearance there made the reputation of the house. After the play the cream of those who knew London and whom London knew gathered here for coffee, a pipe and their nightly gossip. Macaulay says, "Under no roof was a greater variety of figures to be seen; earls, stars and garters, clergymen in cassocks and bands, port templars, sheepish lads from the universities, translators and index makers in ragged coats of frieze. The great push was to get near the chair where John Dryden sat." London is vastly greater now, and the fine London clubs often separate congenial men and interests; but another Macaulay could describe quite as interesting groupings and scenes in the Covent Garden inns, public houses and cobwebbed old resorts of today.

"Tom's" stood at the corner of the Piazza. It was on the north side, over against "Button's." It was started in 1764 by subscription. Its most famous frequenters were Garrick, Goldsmith, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Moody, Foote, Sir Philip Francis and Dr. Johnson. Near "Tom's" at 8 Russell street, was the bookshop of Tom Davies, in whose tiny back parlor Boswell first met Dr. Johnson.

Then followed the era of famous Covent Garden taverns. There was "Humfums," two doors from "Button's." It was started in 1764 by subscription. Its most famous frequenters were Garrick, Goldsmith, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Moody, Foote, Sir Philip Francis and Dr. Johnson. Near "Tom's" at 8 Russell street, was the bookshop of Tom Davies, in whose tiny back parlor Boswell first met Dr. Johnson.

"Slaughter's" in St. Martin's Lane, was the chief resort of military officers until supplanted by the United States Service Club. The Piazza tavern, where Macklin had his old academy of Belles Lettres, was next to the Tavistock. The "Bedford Coffee house" and tavern was the great resort of actors. Of these Garrick, Quin, Foote, Murphy, Macklin, Fawcett, Charles and John Philip Kemble will be the best remembered. And the "Shakespeare," the first tavern set up in the Garden, stood at the corner of the Piazza and Russell street. It was here the famous "Lion's Head letter box" was placed to receive extra-

ordinary inquiries, lampoons, prophecies, scandals and all the odd pasquinades of that time of free thinking and writing.

Of the more noted Covent Garden resorts of the present time perhaps the most unique, something like old time "Cobweb Hall," in New York, is "Jack Hart's," 9 Russell street. It is practically an all night house for printers, reporters, night editors and men of the town who drop in before daylight for a parting glass or a cup of coffee. The costers and market porters resort here later in the day. Around in Maiden Lane is the "Welsh House," former haunt of Dickens and the wits and epicures of his time. I have already mentioned "Rule's," just off Southampton street. It is the most famous oyster house of London, and the occasional presence of the Prince of Wales brings to the place every swell and nobleman of the great metropolis, while on the eastern side of the market is the National Sporting Club and the Pelican Club. The former was the notorious "Evans Rooms" of an earlier date. In these two clubhouses the greatest glove fights of Britain take place.

It is also the land of Covent Garden Market, it not the largest known market in area, certainly that market through which daily passes from grower to buyer greater amounts of fruits, flowers and vegetables than at any other market in the world. The constant production of more than 80,000 acres contiguous to London, much of which is forced gardening under glass, is required for its constant replenishing. There are yearly sold at this one market more than 60,000,000 cabbages, 5,000,000 cauliflower, 1,125,000 pottles of strawberries, about the same number of lettuce heads, 600,000 bushels of shelled peas and about 650,000 bushels of onions.

The rays of the morning sun bring out the vivid colors of the fruit and vegetables wonderfully. You descend to the market and risk your temper, if not your life, in forcing your way through the obstinate masses to the booths and stalls. In this effort you get somewhat acquainted with Covent Garden porters. They are huge, hairy, rum breathed lot. Everything is carried from market to waiting wagons on their heads—from 100 to 150 pounds being considered an ordinary load. Their head gear is a padded yoke encircling the forehead and resting upon the shoulders. "Carrying the pad," once the occupation of Sims Reeves, the famous tenor, is portering. "Doing a turn" is making one trip laden from market stall to wagon, often as far as the Strand. Each porter is licensed, receives twopenny per "turn" and usually does from eight to fifteen "turns" of a morning.

If you are stopping at one of the old inns overlooking the market you are certain to be awakened by the steadily increasing hum of the place, which begins shortly after midnight with the first arrivals of the carts of produce from the country. This has grown into a subdued roar, though there is never any yelling or hallooing permitted. If the sun is up and throwing its saffron light through the hazy atmosphere you will see as pretty a sight down there as eyes may look upon. Every cross street leading to the market, from Long Acre, from Drury Lane and from the Strand, which by regulation is completely given up to this traffic until 9 o'clock, is jammed and packed to house doors with four, five and sometimes six lines of carts, wagons and barrows, headed in or out, each vehicle in process of loading or unloading with every manner of fruit, flower and vegetable known to London markets, while the seven acres of the market itself, most of which is uncovered space, is apparently a solid mass of donkeys, carts, hampers, stacks of vegetables and writhing, wriggling human beings.

An interesting class which is often overlooked by visitors is the Covent Garden "whip minders." These are usually women, who for a halfpenny a wagon take charge of the drivers' whips, rugs and the like. They also keep teams in line, lit at wheels, yank refractory horses about like trainers and adjudicate all differences regarding street rights of teamsters. I saw one soundly trounce a teamster twice her size for disobedience. At the corner of Southampton street and Strand there is one that is of Amazonian size, and with a voice which may be easily heard at Charing Cross.

Another, named "Jennie Williams," has the west half of Southampton street in charge. I became quite her favorite, and she told me in confidence that she was really not "Jenny" any longer, but genuinely Mrs. Genevieve Brown, although the marketmen must not know of it for the world. "For," said she, with a knowing look, "they 'as no pashuns a long o' missuses." Her father, Joseph Williams, "minded th' whips for more than forty years. Her mother took his place when the 'old man' gave out, and 'Jenny the minder' is still here by the right of heritance.

Of the lusciousness and variety of fruits here exposed Americans have no adequate idea. The general understanding with us is that we are far more fortunate than England in this regard. Yet I saw here scores of varieties of English and foreign grapes, peaches as large as cricket balls, glossy nectarines scarlet and brown, downy apricots freckled by the sun, monster plums, luscious green gages, Orleans plums and swan's eggs, growing magnum, bonums, pears from the Channel islands and the south of France, mulberries, melons, pineapples, apples in endless varieties, the auburne, and late strawberries, big as eggs, in tempting bouquets, bringing from temperance to a shilling apiece.

By 9 o'clock the market is drowsy and still. The surrounding streets have been swept and washed. Stallmen are busy counting up losses or gains. A few costers with carts or handbarrows are waiting in the open spaces for bargains in unsold loads. All that is left of the din of the morning are the roystering echoes of bacchanal songs in the near resorts of porters, costers and peas shellers, where, half maudlin they decry the tyranny of capital and drink "four ale" the whole day long. EDGAR L. WAKEMAN.

Noble Tradesmen.

Lord Rookwood, like the Duke of Leeds, owes his peerage, his nobility, and his fortune to successful cloth-making; his grandfather, a Leeds tradesman, founded a factory. Lord Rookwood shows his pride in the rise of the family by exhibiting in his coat of arms a blend between two wool fleeces.

JOLLY TARS ASHORE.

Some Extraordinary Exploits of English Sailors When on Leave.

Jack is an oddity. The peculiarities of his pranks when ashore are only equalled by the ingenuity he displays in getting rid of his well-earned cash. Some of our gallant tars once drank a bowl of punch on the top of Pompey's pillar, which they had ascended by means of a rope carried up on a kite-string.

Portsmouth was often the scene of British sailors' orgies and eccentricities when crews were paid off with large sums of prize-money. Jack's favorite amusement was to hire coaches and ride on the roof—his quarter-deck, for the time being. Races would be run, and much damage had to be accounted for in consequence of frequent collisions. Sometimes, at a sailor's wedding, long processions of all kinds of vehicles would be seen, filled with carousing inmates of both sexes.

In Plymouth a sailor, who had £700 prize money and a day's leave of absence, hired three four-horsed carriages: one for his hat, another for his stick, and a third for himself; and in this curious kind of state rode about the streets from one tavern to another till his leave expired.

Another man-of-war's man rode about London in a cab in company with a fiddler, who regaled Jack with music all the time. He strolled into Covent Garden Market, when he was asked by a basket woman if he wanted anything carried for him. He said he wished to be carried where he could get some breakfast. The woman agreed to take him in her basket, which was hoisted on her head, and off she went, followed by a curious crowd. She took her load to its destination, when the sailor reward her with a pint of rum and the sum of £1.

A brother tar, who had just returned from India with plenty of money, stayed at a public house in Chelsea, where he generously entertained every day a motley crowd of guests picked up at random. He gave them money besides, and kept them singing, dancing and drinking till night. This social tar never hired the same persons to be merry the second day, but had a fresh party of a dozen, besides a musician every morning.

The following actual experience of one Jack's cool exploits was recently related to me by a gentleman who witnessed it. He said: "One evening I chanced to journey from Portsmouth in company with several blue-jackets of the Royal Navy. While the others were smoking and yarning, one fine, sun-burnt specimen of a sailor took off his shoes and lay down on the seat. The train had not gone very far when all at once the lamp over our heads began to burn dimly, and then suddenly went out, leaving us in semi-darkness. No one appeared to take much notice of the circumstances, until presently up rose the stalwart form of the recumbent sailor, and without saying a word, he opened the carriage door, stepped swiftly on to the footboard, and calmly shut the door behind him.

"I gave a gasp of astonishment as he disappeared, but, strange to say, the others talked and smoked as if such an occurrence was nothing out of the common. We were rattling along at a great speed, and it was too dark to see anything through the windows. I gave up the poor fellow for lost, and shuddered to think of the probable fate of so gallant a sailor through what I took to be a tipsy frolic, when, to my further surprise, our lamp was presently lifted out of the aperture overhead, and a lighted one instantly thrust down in its place. I was puzzling how to account for this, when a head appeared at the window, the door was again opened, and in stepped the same adventurous Jack as unconcerned as he had gone out. Oddly enough, his companions made no remark when he calmly curled himself up again on the seat as if nothing had happened.

"I afterwards found out that he had climbed like a cat on to the roof of the next compartment, and calmly appropriated its lighted lamp, which he put in ours, and then deliberately returned the extinguished one in its place, to the astonishment and alarm of a lady and gentleman who occupied the suddenly darkened compartment. Such a cool exploit makes one feel proud of our blue-jackets, but it is horrible to think of the perils braved by this intrepid fellow in risking his life, all for a lighted lamp."

A friend of mine, who is a chief engineer, had an amusing experience of Jack's exploits when ashore.

His ship was lying in port in the north of England, and some of the sailors and firemen got leave to go ashore. One of them at once led the way to a grog shop, where he promised his mates he could get "big pints," and they proceeded to enjoy themselves.

Towards midnight my friend, who was then himself returning to the ship, observed some half-dozen of the crew, bound in the same direction, reeling along in various stages of intoxication. Knowing that they would have to cross several dock-gates before getting on board, he watched their progress with interest and amusement.

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Those who on a dark night have had occasion to cross by the narrow beam that forms the top of a dock-gate—a rather dangerous undertaking for a sober man—will easily understand how the roystering crew, muddled as they were, had a hazy recollection of the trial in store for them.

The bacchanals stumbled along, singing, shouting, shaking hands, and assisting one another to keep their balance. While yet some little distance from the dock gates, they came across several long square barks of timber lying on the quay. Uncertain of their bearings in the dark, more than "half-seas over"—as they would have expressed it—and with the dock gates evidently in their minds, the party halted, and the first two sailors, standing on a large beam right in their path, immediately concluded that they had arrived at the perilous part of their journey.

Having lost confidence in their heads and legs, the first two began at once to crawl carefully on all fours along the top of the beam. Their example was presently followed by the rest of the party, and, to the intense amusement of my friend, the ridiculous spectacle was presented of half-a-dozen men creeping on hands and knees, in single file, and with blood-curdling cautiousness, along a beam only a couple of feet above the solid ground, in the firm belief that the least slip would precipitate them into unknown and horrible depths below.

Presently, the leading sailor slipped off the log, and yelled loudly for help. To the engineer's amused astonishment, the supposed drowning man began splashing about in the rain pools, and frantically going through the motions of swimming with all his strength, under the impression that he was battling bravely to rescue himself from a watery grave. Absurd as this occurrence, it frightened them all into a state of semi-sobriety, and enabled them to reach their ship in safety.—*English Paper.*

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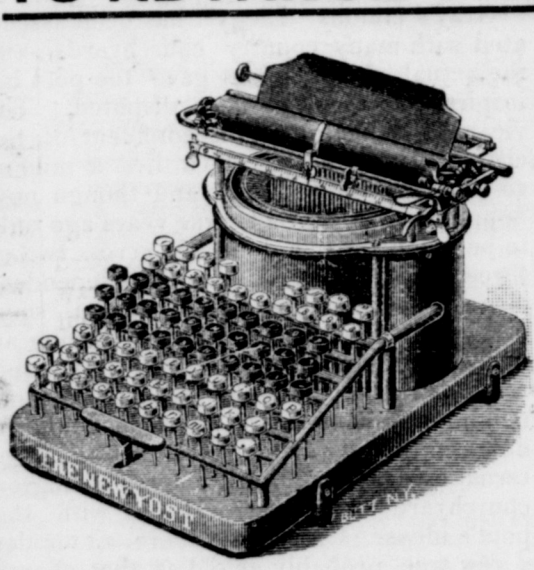
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