

AMONG LONDON COSTERS.

LIFE AMONG AN INTERESTING AND CURIOUS FOLK.

There are thousands of them in the Great Metropolis—How they carry on their Vocation—An Experience by a Stranger Among Them.

LONDON, May 29, 1893.—In that most unsavory portion of London lying between Bethnal Green, Billingsgate Market and the London Docks, I have passed many strange days and strange nights among those most curious and interesting folk known as the London costermongers.

It all came about in an accidental way, as most pleasant things are sure to happen to the vagrant traveler who loiters rather than rushes through old-world scenes, and so cheap withal that when I came to figure expenditure and found that not ten pounds had been required to give me permanent status with the entire fraternity, I felt some twinges of conscience that my footing made so beggarly a showing. Two pounds ten were invested in a coster's cart and donkey; three pounds went to prevent a domestic tragedy; eighteen shillings bought a second-hand coster's barrow out-right; four shillings were paid for a "pegging" chaffinch; twelve shillings sixpence took me to the Derby as a coster in the costers' annual parade; another two pounds was lost on the suppositiously unimpeachable judgment of a coster companion who introduced me to several brilliant "pegging" contests in the Whitechapel districts; and the remaining fifteen-six was squandered without compunction in coster tea-parties, by the side of coster rat-pits, in coster "penny galls," and at coster tap-rooms—all of which, as I have taken the reader thus far into a personal confidence, should be susceptible of rigid explanation.

To begin with, that all this and these London folk may be understood, there must be something said about costers in the abstract. There are from 50,000 to 60,000 of them in the great metropolis. They are the hawkers of fish, vegetables and fruit. It is not true as with us when any one that hawks is a hawker that any one who "costers" in London would be a coster. The costers are a separate race. They are the only hawkers here. They are a distinct, characterful and integral part of this great and ever wonderful Babel of London. It is known that they have been precisely what they now are for nearly 500 years. Dr. Johnson gives the derivation of "costard-monger" as originating in the street sale of apples or costards "round and bulky like the head."

The costermongers of London form almost a little realm of their own, with ancient customs and traditions remaining inexorable laws of guidance to themselves; all to a more marked degree than is true of any equal number of people in any corner of Europe.

At his daily labors the coster will have on his head a small cloth cap well to one side, with the visor either pointed to the sky or sawing one side of his neck. He is never without his black or flashily colored silk "kingsman" or heavy, loosely gathered neckerchief, always tied in a sailor's knot and the ends tucked in the folds of his gay woolen shirt, the whole exposing a fine, well corded and often hairy neck and chest. His waistcoat is long, like a jockey's with capacious pockets and huge tabs, and always of corduroy or velvet. His trousers are half Mexican in cut, of corduroy or coarse ducking, and their wide bottoms flap over the best shoes worn by any lowly men in London. Added to this are pearl or polished metal buttons innumerable.

In the matter of buttons "best togs" for Sundays and holidays are truly startling. Whether of metal or pearl, they are from a half inch to an inch in diameter, and are set so thickly as can be placed around the cap band and visor edge, down the edge of the waistcoat from throat to point, above every pocket, and along the edges of all lapels, upon the sleeves nearly from wrists to elbow, and along the wide plush side stripes of the trousers, from just below the knees to the very edge of the trouser's leg, so that the last button clicks and patters against the pavement and the shoe.

The coster women are none the less striking in their garb and appearance. Like the men they are well shod, and wear short coarse serge petticoats showing their ankles and shapely feet. Their waists are always low at, or are left open in, the neck, and usually the latter, as with the men, is adorned with a flashy silk neckerchief, while a small woolen plaid or silk shawl covers the shoulders, its ends crossed upon the breast where it is always fastened with a brooch of huge dimensions.

But the hair and the headgear are most distinctive. From these alone a coster girl is anywhere recognizable. The hat is of straw or felt, and always as hard as a coster's cartwheel. It protrudes alarmingly in front, and above this canopy waves a forest of ostrich plumes. Coster girls belong to clubs for the purchase of these prized feathers, and there is no ordinary sacrifice they will not make to possess the largest plumes that can be bought. The hair is bestowed behind in a large braid. A "part" extends from this immediately over each ear, and a heavy, straight tab lies against either cheek. Above the forehead the hair falls straight almost to the brows, but is then frizzled and curled until it stands upward and outward like monstrous matted chevelure of frise.

The nearest approach to a home among the costers is where the coster is fairly well-to-do, and owns the donkey and cart or a couple or three. In these extremely rare instances you will often find the coster, his wife or mate, their children and the donkeys in one basement room together. But the character of the man's and the woman's work keeps them upon the street. They eat at cheap chop-houses and coffee stalls. Their evenings are passed at the tap-room, the "penny-gall" shows, the rat-pit and the cheap music halls.

Boys and girls leave their parents and mate at from fourteen to sixteen years. They take furnished rooms in the coster districts of Leather Lane, Drury Lane, Shoreditch, Old Street Road, Marylebone Lane, Dockhead, Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, Camberwell and the like, and are at once full-fledged costers. Children are born to them, and are "minded" for the first year or two. Then they take their chances for life and education in the slums. At six or seven they accompany their parents, or are hired out to other costers. In a few years more, some fancied slight or too severe a beating occurs, or the coster youth or lass have met their affinity, and they are away for themselves without partings or regrets.

They are all, men and women, confirmed and hopeless gamblers in a petty way. Frequently they will back their favorite chaffinches, which are trained to fight, as well as sing, or dog, or pugilist, to the loss of everything they possess. I do not believe there is a coster in London who has not at sometime been a year's labor and thrift behind his body and the clothes upon it from ill-luck at gambling. Some go to the dogs completely from it. Then they commit suicide composedly. This very curse of their character enabled me to become one of them for so long as I liked. I had unavailingly tried all means of which I was capable to become familiar with them. While cheery and friendly enough, they would never be their real selves in my presence. But I kept among them doggedly about "the joyous neighborhood of Covent Garden" market, where from 3,000 to 4,000 may daily be seen, until opportunity at last came.

I used to saunter for hours about the famous market in the early morning. On a certain May morning of last year I found among the peas-shellers under the market colonnades, opposite the ancient Tavistock hotel, one of the women, comely enough for a wonder among these who are generally indescribable hags, shelling in a desperate sort of way and crying as though her heart would break. More tears than pennies fell in her bowl, and the old Jexzabell about her were, after quite the fashion of women, adding to her misery by taunting her with the foolishness of her marriage, which had evidently gone amiss. When these taunts became insufferable she would quietly punch one or another of their heads, when there would be a little savage scuffling and then she would resume her tears and peas. I could see she was a coster-woman; and in a few minutes waiting I gathered enough to know that the weeping peas-sheller had run away from coster father and mother, married a coster youth of "fancy" or sporting proclivities, and that the latter, possessed of a frenzy over some chaffinch or dog had stripped the pair, time after time, of donkey, cart and home belongings, as often lost all; and, worse yet, had become so infamous among his kind that in all London he could not borrow a half crown to start anew, usually an easy thing for a coster to do, nor so much as a "thrupenny bit" with which to quench his thirst and drown his despondency. That very morning Becky, the weeping peas-sheller, had tragically left her incorrigible husband "for good and all," and at that very moment the latter, known as "Slumsey Jem" for his ill-luck and incorrigibility, was turning away from gibing coster groups, one after another, the picture of irretrievable despair.

The language of these folk is simply unprintable, not because of the costers' intentional obscenity and profanity, as they have the deepest pride in their own speech and ways. "Slumsey Jem" himself quailed under the fusillade that morning. He slunk away like one pursued, and I followed him. Half way down Southampton street, he made a last effort to retrieve himself by begging a loan from "Jennie Williams, the Minder"—a minder of whips for the last thirty years for all the greengrocers' carters who crowd that thoroughfare between the Strand and the market. Jenny was "up to snuff," and beat him off with her whips. Then he plunged into the Strand at a run; squirmed among and through the thundering vehicles, St. Paul's way, to Waterloo Bridge; here halted a moment or I could not have overtaken him; and then started doggedly towards the Surrey side. He afterwards told me it was for "a header" into the Thames.

But I soon ran alongside him, and before he was half way to the middle of the bridge had him by the shoulder, and then, telling him he could attend to the little matter he had in mind just as well later in the day, marched him, a willing and wondering prisoner, to a cheap grill-house in the Strand for breakfast. Even an outcast costermonger filled with good food and in company with fellow than one just on the point of "taking a header" off Waterloo Bridge, he could do little else than budge his eyes and after much emotional effort spurt out his astonishment in, "Gor bli me, but here's a go!"

It was a still greater "go" when, a half hour later, I had him help me ransack every toul pawn-shop in the Minories and we gathered up all the poor shreds of their home-belongings, even to his own brilliant Sunday "kingsman," or neckcloth, the veritable four-shilling "pegging" chaffinch which had been his downfall, and Becky's famous ostrich plume, the erst pride and envy of Shore-ditch; and after such a charwoman's scrubbing and scouring as the place had never before known, got the broken home together again in the self-same spot before St. Paul's bells had struck the mid-day chimes.

We were soon at Drury Lane. I knew an alehouse, hard by Long Acre where the peas-shellers drowned their woes when their work was done, and sometimes danced and fought. Sure enough Jenny was there, still weeping over a pot of four ale and a cold sausage; but the greatest "go" of all was these costers' meeting, drenched in tears, drowned in a full "gallon o' bitter" for parting cheer among the now enthusiastic peas-sheller companions, and storm-swept with "Gor bli me!" "Strike me deads, or luckeys!" and other still more uncouth coster oaths. The "poor donk's eyes" were quite "put out" on seeing her little, and loved if little, home rebuilt as by magic, and all the nautical prophecies of her nagging companions so marvelously put to naught; and to do the poor soul justice her gratitude and delight were inexpressible greater to discover that the magic, the total cost of which has been wrought on the unflinching condition that Slumsey Jem was a reformed gambler now and evermore.

EDGAR L. WAKEMAN.

A HAIFAX MIRACLE.

INTERESTING STORY OF A LADY WELL KNOWN IN THE CITY.

After Two Years Of Suffering She has Fully Regained Her Health, and Tells Her Story That Others May be Benefitted—The Testimony of a Leading Druggist.

[From the Halifax Critic.]

Camille Flammarion, the great French astronomer, in his new story "Omega; or The Last Days of the World," which is now being published in the Cosmopolitan magazine, gives the press of the future a very hard hit. Whether or not the great astronomer may be right in his view of the press of the 24th century, one thing is certain, the world of to-day is more largely indebted to the press for efforts to promote the highest civilization than to any other human agency. Great discoveries in all branches of scientific research are chronicled with a faithfulness that enables the multitudes to enjoy to the greatest extent the benefits accruing therefrom. The newspapers of our land have for many months past contained accounts of miraculous cures effected through the agency of that marvellous medicine known to the world as Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People. A large number of these stories have been published in the columns of The Critic, and have no doubt been read by the majority of our readers with full assurance of the truthfulness thereof, and yet we imagine there have been a few who have doubted, and who have not been so much interested in the experiences of people miles away from Nova Scotia as in those of their own province. Now, however, The Critic can give an account of a perfect cure, the facts of which we can guarantee as being true in every particular.

One day, some time ago, some members of The Critic's staff were discussing in the editorial sanctum the merits of Dr. Williams' Pink Pills, of which so much is being heard now-a-days, when one of the company said, "By the way, did you ever hear of a cure anyway approaching the miraculous being effected by Pink Pills in Halifax?" "No," confessed the others, "we never did." Of course there have been many cases in which the medicine has undoubtedly been very beneficial, but hardly miraculous. "Well," said the first speaker, "you know Robert Ainslie of this city, do you not? His wife was one of the sickest women in Halifax at one time, and is now hale and hearty, and gives all the credit to Dr. Williams' Pink Pills." Keeping this conversation in mind, one of our reporters having a little leisure time one afternoon last week, called upon Mrs. Robert Ainslie at her home, 26 Blowers street, and after making known his errand, was invited into the comfortable sitting room and was cordially welcomed by Mrs. Ainslie, who said she was only too happy to make known to others the wonderful properties of the medicine which had done her so much good.

"How long were you ill, Mrs. Ainslie?" asked the reporter. "I was taken with a severe attack of pneumonia, some two years ago," said the lady, "which lasted for about three months, and left me a wreck of my former self. Just seventeen weeks from the time I was first prostrated until I could put my foot on the floor, and even after I was able to walk about I was but a shadow of the woman I had been. "Death of the nerves," was the name the doctors gave the disease from which I was then suffering, and indeed it seemed at one time that I would not be long for this world. Pale, thin, weak and emaciated, I was but an object of pity to all who saw me, and a source of much anxiety to my family and friends. While in this condition I travelled throughout the province, hoping thereby to regain my health. I visited the Spa Springs at Middleton, drank the mineral water and took the baths, but all to no effect. Finally I was advised by a friend, who herself had been greatly benefited by Dr. Williams' Pink Pills, to try this wonderful remedy. Although I confess, I had little faith in this or any other medicine, I purchased a box of the celebrated Pink Pills and began taking them according to directions, and took box after box, until I had taken eight, when I found I was becoming fat, and as I was then in excellent health I took no more, and have since then been well and strong."

Mrs. Ainslie's story, although given in her own words, conveys but a faint idea of the faith she has in Dr. Williams' Pink Pills, to which she feels she owes her present excellent health. Mrs. Ainslie informed the Critic representative that she had recommended Pink Pills to some twenty-five or thirty of her friends throughout the Province, (in which she has an extensive acquaintance,) and in some cases had purchased several boxes of the pills in Halifax, for people living in country places.

"I understand, Mrs. Ainslie, that you yourself manufacture a medicine which is highly spoken of?"

"Yes," said the lady, "I do. My dyspepsia cordial is well known in Nova Scotia and even further away. This struck us as a case in which 'physician heal thyself,' might have been applied, but it goes to prove that Dr. Williams' Pink Pills have a power to strike to the root of disease that other medicines, be they ever so good in their place, have not. After thanking Mrs. Ainslie for her kindness in giving the above hearty recommendation of the medicine, we proceeded to interview Mr. Hamilton, of Messrs. Brown Bros. & Co., druggists, of this city, from whom Mrs. Ainslie had purchased the Pink Pills. This course was taken not that we in the least doubted the statements made by Mrs. Ainslie, but simply to satisfy any skeptical ones among the readers of The Critic, who, not being acquainted with the lady, might feel that they would like assurance made doubly sure. Mr. Hamilton said he remembered Mrs. Ainslie when she purchased the first box of Dr. Williams' Pink Pills. She was then much debilitated and had been very ill. He also remembered her coming to him when she had taken half a dozen boxes and testifying both by her words and appearance to the good they had accomplished in her case. Mr. Hamilton stated that there were more of Dr. Williams' famous Pink Pills sold by his firm than any other medicine, and that they were very frequently hearing from their customers of the wonderful beneficial results of the treatment."

Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People are manufactured by the Dr. Williams' Medicine Co., of Brockville, Ont., and Schenectady, N. Y., a firm of unquestioned

reliability. Pink Pills are not looked on as a patent medicine but rather as a prescription. An analysis of their properties show that these pills are an unfailing specific from all diseases arising from an impoverished condition of the blood, or from an impairment of the nervous system, such as loss of appetite, depression of spirits, anemia, chlorosis or green sickness, general muscular weakness, dizziness, loss of memory, locomotor ataxia, paralysis, sciatica, rheumatism, St. Vitus' dance, the after effects of la grippe, all diseases depending upon a vitiated condition of the blood, such as scrofula, chronic erysipelas, etc. They are also a specific for the trouble peculiar to the female system, correcting irregularities, suppressing and all forms of female weakness, building anew the blood and restoring the glow of health to pale and sallow cheeks. In the case of men they effect a radical cure in all cases arising from mental worry, overwork or excesses of any nature. These pills are not a purgative medicine. They contain only life-giving properties, and nothing that could injure the most delicate system. They act directly on the blood, supplying its life-giving qualities, by assisting it to absorb oxygen, that great supporter of all organic life. In this way, the blood becoming "built up," and being supplied with its lacking constituents, becomes rich and red, nourishes the various organs, stimulating them to activity in the performance of their functions, and thus eliminates diseases from the system.

Dr. Williams' Pink Pills are sold only in boxes bearing the firm's trade mark and wrapper (printed in red ink.) Bear in mind that Dr. Williams' Pink Pills are never sold in bulk, or by the dozen or hundred, and any dealer who offers substitutes in this form is trying to defraud you and should be avoided. The public are also cautioned against all other so-called blood builders and nerve tonics, put up in similar form intended to deceive. They are all imitations, whose makers hope to reap a pecuniary advantage from the wonderful reputation achieved by Dr. Williams' Pink Pills. Ask your dealer for Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People and refuse all imitations and substitutes.

Dr. Williams' Pink Pills may be had of all druggists, or direct by mail from Dr. Williams' Medicine Company from either address, at 50 cents a box, or six boxes for \$2.50. The price at which these pills are sold makes a course of treatment comparatively inexpensive as compared with other remedies or medical treatment.

THINGS OF VALUE.

Good words do more than hard speeches, as the sunbeams without any noise will make the traveler cast off his cloak, which all the blustering winds could not do, but only make him bind it closer to him.—Leighton.

I cured a Horse of the mange with MINARD'S LINIMENT. CHRISTOPHER SAUNDERS, Dalhousie.

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ROBERT MCCUEN, St. John, N. B., writes: This will certify that for two years and four months I was afflicted with Fever Sores. Had seven holes in my leg, running sores in my breast, back, shoulder and under my arm. I tried several physicians but got no relief. After being seven months in the hospital, I returned home in a bad way. After using it a short time I began to get better; and in a few weeks was completely cured. I can highly recommend it to all persons who may be suffering as I was.

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St. John, N. B., March 30, 1893.

E. G. SCOVILL, Esq., Agent for Pelee Island Wine Co.

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I find these wines to be pure and unadulterated, and of such a composition that they may be used with safety and advantage by persons who require a mild tonic to assist digestion.

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I am, yours, etc., W. F. BEST, Government Analytical Chemist.

TO THE CITIZENS OF SAINT JOHN AND VICINITY:

THE Board of Health has this day issued its Annual Notices to Owners and Tenants of Houses to Cleanse and Purify their Premises.

The Board further requests that in the interest of the health of the city, all citizens will assist the Board, by the personal inspection of their premises, the condition of sinks, drains, traps, vents, etc. Such supervision on the part of individual citizens will do much to preserve the public health and prevent the spread of any epidemic that may unfortunately come to our city.

T. M. BURNS, JAMES REYNOLDS, Secretary, Chairman. Office of the Board of Health, Saint John, N. B., April 25th 1893.

Board of Health.