

The Summer in the Old Land.

BY J. W. BENGOUGH.



CHRISTMAS NUMBER is, of course, expected to be characterized by the frosty and Christmassy spirit of the season of mid-winter, but that season is also notably hospitable, and, therefore, your pages may be open to an article which may be called summery, in both meanings of the word. I purpose setting down briefly some impressions of the Home Land, obtained on a recent visit. It was early in the month of July, after one of the most auspicious voyages on record, that we—by which pronoun I mean a large party of Canadians—landed in "Merry England." It was no part of our plan to tour the kingdom in a body, though many were going over to the Continent as a "personally-conducted" party. Not being of this mind, I separated from my fellow passengers at Liverpool, and decided to move more leisurely and make observation of English life and affairs.

To begin with, I found Liverpool well worthy of a better compliment than that which the average tourist pays it in scampering across from the Landing Stage to the Lime Street Station to catch the train for London. One is amply repaid for the time and effort it requires to take in the city—to visit its magnificent parks, its splendid museum and art gallery, its grand St. George's Hall, with "the largest organ in the world," and its many other attractive public buildings; to listen to the crack military band, which plays every noon-hour on the principal square; to ride hither and thither through wonderfully well-kept streets on the publicly-owned and efficiently-managed electric cars, all provided with upper-deck seats; to make the trip by elevated railway up and down the marvellous eight miles of docks, and enjoy the panorama of shipping from all the ends of the earth; and, as a finishing touch, to take four o'clock tea in the study of Ian Maclaren, and hear that gifted man's talk. Then the quaint squares and market-places in Liverpool's business districts, as well as



Rush Through Liverpool.



Tea with Ian Maclaren.

the more fashionable promenade, are of profound interest to unaccustomed eyes, as are also the slums. For Liverpool, in common with every large town on the British side of the water, has its Inferno regions—a perpetual heart-break to the lover of humanity. Needless to say, "Merry England" is a cruel sarcasm in these quarters, though I believe Liverpool really does more to enforce sanitary regulations upon the wretched denizens than any of its sister cities. Nor, of course, is it merely in the slums that one has what Carlyle called the "Condition of the people question" thrust upon one's attention. At many points the curb of the handsome Lord Street is fringed with weebegone creatures who are desperately struggling to keep body and soul together by means of their commerce in knickknacks: "Matches, a penny a box"; "Laatest suns, words and penny a box"; "Watches, a penny each"; mechanical mice, shoe laces, jewellery, and an infinity of other odds and ends. And, of course, the appeals

are generally unheeded by the miscellaneous crowd of prosperous, semi-prosperous, good, bad and indifferent, streaming up and down, day and night. Here one sees in the concrete the riddle which



Street Peddlers.

burned itself into Henry George's heart and brain—Why does Poverty persist with Progress?—a query which he not merely confronted, but, as I believe, answered.

After several days on the waste of waters, and others in the midst of city life, a change to the country was gratefully anticipated, and I next moved southward into Staffordshire. This countryside is not usually mentioned among the beautiful parts of England, being, indeed, a portion of the so-called Black Country, but I certainly saw little to surpass it for loveliness in more famous districts. In referring to its beauty, however, I am recalling walks and drives through the rural roads and lanes, and rambles about the gardens and grottoes of the great houses of the country—Keele Hall, and such places—spots whose ideal charm has been the growth of centuries, and which are fitted to ravish the heart that has the smallest touch of poetry in it. I am emphatically excluding from view the towns with which the district is thickly sprinkled, for the most part crowded, cobble-stoned, brick-walled—ugly to the point of horror. These are the hives of industry, chiefly of the world-known pottery trade, and a leisurely visit of inspection to Doulton's, perhaps the most famous of them, while deeply interesting in itself, was also enlightening as to what Lord Rosebery and other English critics mean when they talk of the want of "efficiency" in British manufacturing methods, and British affairs generally. A more straggling, inchoate, ingeniously inconvenient concern than this Doulton factory could hardly be conceived. I was quite unable to imagine how the proprietor with a regard for economy of production—to say nothing of the comfort of his work-people—could tolerate such a series of rambling passages, crazy stairways, floors at different levels, and other absurd arrangements. But then, I suppose, his great-grandfather fashioned it so, and the question is accordingly closed. There is no doubt that these behind-the-times methods, both in factory construction and machinery, account for whatever falling off there may be in Britain's prestige as a manufacturing nation.

After a refreshing dip thus into the pastoral (and let me at once say that no pen can overdo the beauty of English rural scenery, with its harmonious blending of hillside, copse, hedge and brook; with castles, cottages, walls, and other works of human creators), and contrasting dips into the adjacent towns, I went on to London—viewing a continuous strip of beauty, alternate town and country, all the way.

I will occupy none of my limited space with a description of the great capital. Its salient features are familiar to every reader, and the names of its "points of interest," whether abbeys, cathedrals, museums, institutions, parks or streets, are household words the world over. But here again—here principally—the heartbreak comes upon the visitor from Canada, for nowhere is the awful contrast between rich and poor so sharply seen. London is at once the glory and the shame of

our Empire—the glory being, I think, chiefly reflected from the past; the shame belonging in greater degree to the present. There is no excuse for this awful spectacle of contrast—the crippled beggar in rags and tatters gazing with dumb wonder at the carriage sweeping by with its high-steppers, its coachman and footmen, and its haughty occupants in gorgeous array. For this is the result of man-made conditions, stupidly persisted in. And the details of the picture are unspeakable touches of blackness in the background—hundreds of thousands of famishing and all but naked little children existing somehow in pestiferous hovels; or to come to other figures, actually official, fifteen thousand of London's boys and girls attending school in a condition bordering on starvation. I found myself constantly longing for some miraculous power by which I could lift a few millions of these fellow-creatures thus "damned into existence," and put them down amid the wholesome conditions and fair chances of our glorious West.

But don't imagine that London takes this state of things gloomily. By no means. Here you have not exactly "Merry England," but—I am tempted to say Drugged England. What strikes me above everything else, is the absence there of sober thought, or, apparently, even of the power to think. Of course, I do not mean that there are not many earnest, intelligent people profoundly conscious of the problem, and faithfully striving to solve it; but they are the few—apparently, the helpless and unconsidered few. As for the overwhelming majority, from (and inclusive of) the Government down to the humblest costermonger, there is an apathy, if not an acquiescence in things as they are, that is fairly maddening. Whoever may officially govern



To Lift the Slum People.



A Trinity Infernal.

London, it is really ruled in mind and soul by what I call the Infernal Trinity—the gin-palace, the race-track, and the theatre. There may be a legitimate place in human life for sport and drama—at least, I am not a prohibitionist as to races and theatres—but they are not so much pastimes in London as the regular and exclusive concern of the people. Speaking generally, rich and poor alike care for nothing besides drink, betting, and dramatic performances; or matters, if possible, less important and more harmful than these. As to drink, I can only suggest the figure of a giant lying in stupid contentment while he is literally covered from head to foot by insatiable leeches. Not only is every district of the city fairly swarming with bars and liquor shops, open till midnight on week days, and almost as long on Sundays, but in private circles everywhere, with few exceptions, the belief prevails that drink is wholesome, if not absolutely essential to health. Gambling is nothing short of a fever, which rages throughout the upper and lower classes, and finds many victims also in the middle class. As I heard an earnest speaker say in public, the average workingman of London is only interested in two things—getting his beer and his paper containing the report of "all the winners." But one other matter interests him as well—the theatre or music-hall. These institutions seem only less numerous than the bars, but, as a rule, they are jammed at every performance, however bad that may be, and in my experience it is frequently so bad as to be beneath critical contempt. The "early doors" are besieged by crowds, under police regulation, and extending two abreast usually for fifty or one hundred yards down the pavement, especially whenever a particularly flimsy or nasty play is announced. In view of all this, the writer of a short letter in the Daily News in October exactly stated my personal impression. He said: "Having come to London with thoughts of Johnson, Burke,



Liquor Traffic Leeches.