

There is something gypsyish about coffee-stalls, something very delightful. Since those days I have known many: there is one by Kensington Church, where I have often bought a cup of coffee in the morning hours, to drink on the paupers' bench along the railings; there is another by Notting Hill Gate, and another in Sloane Square, where we used to take late suppers after plays at the Court Theatre; but there is none I have loved so well as this small untidy box on the Embankment. That was a joyous night when for the first time the keeper of the stall recognised my face and honoured me with talk as a regular customer. More famous men have seldom made me prouder. It meant something, this vanity of being able to add "Evening, Bill!" to my order for coffee and cake. Coffee and cake cost a penny each and are very good. The coffee is not too hot to drink, and the cake would satisfy an ogre. I used to spend a happy twenty minutes among the loafers by the stall. There were several soldiers sometimes, and one or two untidy women, and almost every night a very small, very old man with a broad shoulder to him, and a kindly eye. The younger men chaffed him, and the women would laughingly offer to kiss him, but the older men, who knew his history, were gentler, and often paid for his cake and coffee, or gave him the luxury of a hard-boiled egg. He had once owned half the