

A REMINISCENCE.

A Canadian who has only visited the cities and the more populous districts of England finds it hard to realize that there can be in that apparently and actually overpeopled land, places where one can fancy one's self hundreds of miles from civilization; nooks where one may be as absolutely alone as in the most untrodden wilds of Muskoka or the North-West. Of course, even in this there is a sense of the accessibility of human beings. Of course, there is none of that intense, awful loneliness described so graphically by Major Butler in his "Great Lone Land," yet within a very short distance of the metropolis of the world can be found spots which the march of civilization has never reached; to which that ruthless destroyer of the picturesque, the suburban builder, has never penetrated. I remember that some years ago, when the great trial for the crime known as the "Cudham murder" took place, surprise was expressed that a deed compassing the death of a human being by slow starvation could have taken place quite unknown, within so short a distance of London, when the coroner asked the lawyer, who made the remark, if he had ever visited the place. On his replying in the negative, the coroner remarked that if he had, the scene of the crime was almost as desolate as though it had been hundreds of miles from civilization. Prompted by curiosity, a friend and myself made an excursion to the spot, and found that its loneliness had not been exaggerated. In the same way, the upper reaches of the Thames have on their banks places that are unvisited from one year's end to another—primitive villages, undecorated by the Easter Monday excursions, and with shady nooks where one may camp with the certainty of being undisturbed by the presence of any human being.

I can recall many an excursion made with a very old chum of kindred tastes with myself, up little narrow streams, tributaries of the Thames, when there was hardly water enough in some places, choked up as they were with reeds, to float our light canoes, in others they would widen and deepen, flowing between banks along which the trees grew so thickly that their overarching branches formed a deep shade in the hottest glare of a summer's noon, and no sound could be heard except the splash of a fish as he rose to a fly, the soft low coo of the wood-dove, or perhaps the chime of some village church, mellowed by distance and harmonizing strangely with the hush around. The solitude was none the less intense because we knew that within perhaps an hour's paddle we could reach a busy town: to all intents and purposes we might have been in medieval England, and this feeling sometimes grew so strong that one almost expected to come across some distinctive picture of early English life; perhaps a monk sitting contemplatively on the bank and fishing, reading meanwhile Dame Juliana Berners' treatise on the Noble Art of Angling; and then we pass under a rustic stone bridge all overgrown with ivy and moss, and its stones stained in a way to delight artists' eyes by the changing weather of centuries. No, it is not necessary, in order to get solitude, to plunge into the recesses of the backwoods or explore Central America, you can get it at home if you only keep your eyes open and are not content to follow in the beaten track; and then after all it is not a drawback to feel that when one is tired of solitude, you can in an hour or so return to the centre of life and bustle, and that your dinner need not depend on the problematic chance of falling in with some game. I wish that the magazines that are ever

ready to give us some new description of foreign lands would only turn their attention to the beautiful spots that are scattered throughout the length and breadth of the mother country. But the same plaint has been raised before, and will continue to be raised until travellers begin to realize that one need not go into Switzerland or Egypt to seek beauties of scenery they can find in as great perfection in its own way at home. But I am wandering from the track. My intention was to give some imperfect account of a certain trip up the Thames which I took, and which a sunset I witnessed some few days ago brought vividly to my recollection. Its varied tints, combined with the strange hush and stillness of evening touched some almost forgotten chord in my mind, before whose vision rose up the picture of a far different scene. A sunset sky, the tranquil Thames flowing gently, and on its surface the light mist of evening; the stillness disturbed by no sound save the soft ripple and splash of the water as it stirred the pebbles on its banks. It seems curious that a scene so totally unlike this as that I looked the other evening could have suggested it. I suppose there was some subtle trait of association between the two so fine and rare that my mind could not describe it; an example of that feeling portrayed by Mallock in as picturesque words as are to be found in the English language, and which express the feeling so exactly that I cannot refrain from quoting them. "How all kinds of objects and feelings cling together in our minds. A single sense or a single memory is touched and a thrill runs through countless others. The smell of autumn woods, the colors of dying fern, may turn by a subtle transubstantiation into pleasures and faces that will never come again—a red sunset and a windy seashore into a last farewell and the regret of a lifetime."

There are certain scenes, certain occurrences, that one never forgets. They may be trivial in themselves, but still they recur time and again to one's memory with every detail as vivid as the day they happened. One of them is the trip of which I speak. Perhaps it is because it was the last my chum and myself ever took together, as it was but a short time before parting, he to go to the wilds of South Africa, under whose hot sands he now rests. I can shut my eyes, and see every feature of the scene. The long river stretches with their tree shaded banks, a lazy barge with huge brown sail making its way down the stream as though time were no object, giving a touch of life to the scene; I could point out every spot where we pulled ashore and rested during the heat of the summer's day; recall every trifling incident of that idle time. However, as to the trip itself.

It was on a hot summer's afternoon that we landed at the little village of Thames Ditton, nearly opposite the historic palace of Hampton Court. As we did not propose to start till the following day, our first care was to look out for a resting place. True there was the almost world-renowned hostel, the Swan, but as the charges of that establishment are fully commensurate with its excellence our intention was not to patronize it on this occasion. We both of us had very vivid recollections of a certain bill presented to us after a very modest repast of roast beef, cheese and beer which amounted to very nearly half a sovereign, and going on the old principle, "*ex pede Herculem*," were afraid to calculate what a night's stay there would cost. After a considerable search we discovered an old fashioned inn which seemed to promise well. If irregularity constitute picturesqueness, then it was indeed picturesque. You