

## LONDON LETTER.

NOTES BY THE WAY: WITHIN SOUND OF THE SEA

REMEMBER a pathetic picture by Faed—that delightful painter, full of excellent, old-fashioned qualities—exhibited in the Academy, and called, I fancy, “The Exile.” It is only the portrait of an old Scotchman, who, resting awhile on a foreign shore, gazes across the water, his hands clasped on his stick, a wistful longing in his troubled eyes. Yet in that common-place, grey-plaided figure there was a story clearer to be read than the histories of kings and queens and Parliament-men crowding Faed’s little piece about. The Scotchman in his simple attitude of resignation, his furrowed face worn with the grief of losing old friends and Home, those things which alone make this life bearable, seemed as if he silenced the garish canvasses crying out for admiration, silenced them though the sorrowful lips spoke no word, and the dim eyes, fixed on the horizon, were unconscious of the looker-on. And just such another picture I saw this afternoon (confirming my opinion of Faed’s entire truthfulness) in the person of an old sailor, who, with his back to the harbour, sat on the quay looking, looking into the narrow streets of Poole with an expression it is impossible to translate into words, so full was it of sorrow and longing. I think the sun had tempted him out on to the broad, picturesque walk, edged with warehouses on the one hand, and great ships from Norway and Canada, from Hull and London, on the other, and I think some little thing had happened that reminded him of far-off days—a swift, maybe, had perched for a moment on the dial of that pillared house opposite just as a small bird had done on some memorable occasion in his life, or the crew in the rigging behind had sung a verse of that very “shanty” with which he and his mates were wont long years ago to cheer their spirits on the sea. Whatever it may have been, the town, the quay and the rippling water had faded from his side, and in the attitude of the exile brooding by the ocean the sailor sat this afternoon, gazing across the gulf of Time at the hearth of his childhood, at the fireside by which once watched his wife. . . . It was an effort to recall himself from that other world, and he answered a greeting from the highroad in the half-unconscious fashion in which one speaks when roused from dreaming. Then, the spell being broken, his expression altered, and I saw I should not disturb him if I spoke, so I asked some trivial question; he answered, and then we fell to talking, he and I.

He wandered back to the time, sixty years ago, when he was prenticed, and told me of the first boat in which he sailed, and how it took four months to reach Newfoundland. He told me of the busy days when near two hundred vessels set out from Poole for Labrador, leaving in the spring, returning in the fall; days when the owners of the ships lived in fine red-brick houses about town (“ah, there were gentlemen then”), and the great warehouses were packed with oil and skins and produce from outlandish ports. He minds one year when they reached Labrador too late—got there the 10th November and remained ice-bound till the following August; how dear clothes were, and how they tried to palm off feathers and shells upon you instead of your change. The life was rough and hard, but he liked it a deal better than shoemaking, which was his father’s occupation. “He were sexton thirty-five years,” said my friend, nodding at the Tower, which jutted above the uneven roofs. “I was christened there in 1816, but I never was much of a church-goer. My wife was a Methodist, and so I went with her.”

He shifted his position a little as he spoke of his wife, and he turned his steady sailor’s eyes from me to look down the cobbled street again, up which, no doubt, he had often watched her run breathless to meet him as his boat touched the quay after a long voyage. He was silent a moment, and his hands moved restlessly. Then he told me how good she had been. There were ten children, and his wages, averaging from £1 to £4 a month, were not sufficient, so she had to work. And she did work, mind you. No grumbling, and the best of tempers always. Boys and girls all out in the world now, keeping themselves, and he is contented and hearty, considering his age; but he has lost HER, and that’s bitter bad, sure enough.

*Amavimus, amamus, amabimus*—you remember these words on Charles Kingsley’s grave in Eversley churchyard? The unlettered Poole sailor, ignorant of books (“ah, les livres; ils nous débordent, ils nous étouffent, nous périssons par les livres”), ignorant of that which we term Cultivation, has learnt what is best worth knowing, and has, like Andersen’s Little Mermaid, gained the right to an immortal soul, a possession which above all others cannot be stolen and must be paid for. *Amavimus, amamus, amabimus*—that sentence contains the Law and the Prophets.

There was a stir about the quay, and a vessel laden with timber from the Baltic came steaming with a harsh, whistling cry up to the wharf. Swedish sailors on board the *Oscarsham* at our back called to each other in their guttural tongue. The quaint road, girdling the harbour, full of surprises, and interesting as the most interesting of books, remained unexplored while I listened to the kind voice, and noted how the strong old face would break into a smile in spite of his good breeding as I showed my land-lubberly ignorance on some question of rigging or of build. The Swedish sailors’ tones acted as a sort of chorus. The whistle from the timber ship hardly made me turn my head. I heard how the Newfoundland trade has left the place, owing to a sand-bar across the harbour, which lately had formed and prevented boats over a certain tonnage

from entering—and what a pity it was, and how much the loss of the trade, which had mainly gone to Scotland, had altered Poole. He showed me the posts to which the scales used to be attached when certain goods, on which duty is no longer paid, were weighed in front of the Excise Office, and pointed out a queer old stone building called the Town Cellars, once undoubtedly a church, and gave me exact directions how best to find a fragment of the Thirteenth Century wall that fortified the place in former times. But better than anything else, it was pleasant to hear of his journeys by sea to London with cargoes of clay and grain and oil-cake, and what he thought of the city as his boat lay alongside the wharf just Below Bridge; and best of all were the glimpses of that home of his about which he is always thinking. Views of the Houses of Parliament and St Paul’s, Labrador scenery and Dorsetshire moors perpetually melted like magic lantern slides into commonplace cottage interiors, over which he would linger long and affectionately.

*Amavimus, Amamus, Amabimus*, my brother. A king on his throne can have no happier, tenderer memories when he comes to three-score years and ten than has this poor sailor. There will dawn the day when the remembrance of ambition and worldly hopes fulfilled avails nothing, when pictures, books, diplomas, ribbons and stars, gold and precious stones will be all thrust away. Then Love must sit by one’s side and repeat the well-remembered stories and sing the dear songs, rocking us to sleep the while; for without her pitying presence Heaven help the poor dying sinner.

So, moralizing, I left my old friend to continue his dreaming undisturbed in the sunshine on the quay, as I went my way on a search after a certain portrait of Charles the Second mentioned by Murray. At last I found, stooping over his desk, a keen-faced, brisk man, who told me that long ago the picture had been taken from over his office mantelpiece in the old Town House and was now in the Guild Hall. The desk, set against a long, narrow window, darkened by a pillared verandah, was full of papers, and the busy hand was tinting as I stumbled by chance into the quiet little room. Nevertheless there was a quarter of an hour at my disposal, during which time I could see, if I pleased, a tinder box, with its flint and steel, mightily out of fashion and useless indeed, and I could listen to an account of a lawsuit brought many years ago by the town-clerk against the corporation. The town-clerk was awarded heavy damages, but his opponents being poor all their possessions had to be given up to him. The mayor’s chain, the maces, the very clock from the Guild Hall (do you remember the allusion to that clock in Mr. Gosse’s account of his Poole school days?), all these things became the triumphant clerk’s and were sold. For years His Honor had to do without his decoration, but lately a new one had been subscribed for, my informant giving one of the fifty-four links (which cost him a matter of seven pounds, fifteen shillings) as his family had provided a mayor more than once in bye-gone years. And not only that, but he is the descendant of the founder of the Wadham College, Oxford, and could bear the same arms if he chose; and not only that, but to his mother’s people belonged I. B. Blandford, Bishop of Oxford, *tempe* Charles II., and a cousin has one of the bishop’s silver dinner bells marked with his name, and some of his property was in the family till the other day. He has ships of his own, and is cheery and prosperous. Has been thirty-five years in Poole and has never been a week out of it. Had I noticed the *County of Durham* down by the wharf? She was going up light to Newcastle to load coal for the Baltic. She had brought timber, and her freight was worth nearly £900. It has cost £11 to lighten her and get her over the bar. A pity about the Newfoundland trade? Not a bit of it. A stupid, old-fashioned lot those merchants, never altering from year to year, no improvements, no go. There was still plenty of trade with smaller vessels; he has four, and makes enough for the wife and children, he was thankful to say.

Outside, the sailor still stood, looking up the harbour for the return of the ships from Labrador, or bending his tranquil gaze to where among the hills he could see Corfe Castle and Upton (the latter belonging to the Ticbbornes; some of the villagers recognized the Claimant, it is said), and the old landmarks that never change. Inside, I listened to talk of progress, of commerce, of pride, of possession. What is best? To have finished your work and to be ready to take the wages you have earned, and to go hence, or to be still toiling on in the heat and burden of the day?

WALTER POWELL.

## MONTREAL LETTER.

THE example set by our City Surveyor in going abroad to examine other, and let us suppose better, systems of municipal engineering has had the effect of a New York autumn fashion. Every body wants to get the trip, if not the information, and to secure the infectious bonus, if not the improvements. The Assistant Surveyor took his flight, and the two swallows bid fair to make a winter as well as a summer of it. Upon the understanding that “it would not happen every year,” the Chief of the Fire Brigade went next. If the chairman of the committee had said, “on the understanding that it must happen every year,” we should have regarded the proposal less as a jaunt for the chief and more as a duty for us. He went to Baltimore to attend a Firemen’s Convention, and an unexpected balance in the hands of the Fire Committee was disposed of by paying his expenses. But our worthy chief turned the wrong side of his spectacles out when he

was abroad. After an exhaustive examination of the systems and appliances in operation in Boston, New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Washington, at the special request of the Fire Committee of the council and of the city underwriters, he returned without stumbling upon a single improvement upon our own equipment. If an exception could be made to such a sweeping statement, it could only be in favour of the water towers, and he intends to recommend the purchase of one for Montreal, even if it should cost \$3,500. These are said to perform the work of three steam engines. The Chief kept on his spectacles when he compared the speed of the responses to fire alarms, and was proud to return in the belief that while in New York two horses could be hitched to a steamer in nine seconds, we can hitch nine horses to four steamers in the same space of time. Chemical engines are not much used in the great cities of our rival neighbourhood, and when they are in requisition they are small and light. The engines used are entirely of American manufacture, but the Chief hardly does credit to the inventive intellect of America when he explains this on the grounds of tariff protection. Here the Chief thinks our horses have the advantage; there, the men and their quarters. Every man has a sliding-pole from his bed to his post on the engine.

The city Boiler Inspector was the next to follow. His destination was Chicago, to be present at a meeting of the Boiler Inspectors’ Association of the United States and Canada. From this gathering the fact was elicited that in nine months 138 men were killed, 1,100 wounded, and \$2,000,000 worth of property was destroyed by explosions arising from inefficient or non-inspection. Then departed the Building Inspector, who was sent to Boston and New York with special reference to a proposed by-law for the protection of elevators. Though difficult to form comparisons of systems and appliances where population and business widely differ, Mr. Lacroix (they are all French, our civic officials, a fact which ought to have a deeper significance than one of race or creed), pronounces candidly that we are below the mark. During his educational journey, the array of inspectors, sub-inspectors, clerks, and wards, took away his official breath. In elevators, ropes are examined twice a year, and renewed as often as every three months if necessary, and a certificate of soundness is demanded. Here we dispense with the certificate, the soundness, the change of rope, and the inspection. Our ropes are renewed after a few men are killed, but a rope which contents itself with the death of one man is not worth troubling about. We spend annually \$2,000, where Boston spends \$65,000, and New York \$100,000. It is easy to add that Mr. Lacroix will recommend an inspection and an inspector for our elevators, and that the council will adopt the recommendation. What will be more difficult to add will be the good it will bring us. Only an additional blue-coat with blue buttons, a heavy moustache, and a fragrant cigar.

The Athletic Club House on the western slope of the mountain has the credit of introducing to Montreal a novelty which threatens to put a new freshness into the well-beaten track of popular entertainments. A company of 150 young people, boys and girls, known as Captain Clarke’s Cadets from Guelph, were invited to perform in the Victoria Skating Rink, the only building we possess which is capable of the spasmodic elasticity necessary to convert on short notice accommodation for one thousand into abundance for five. The young people made a sensation by arriving in Pullman cars, in which they resided during their visit, marching to the rink in full regimentals—the boys in Highland dress, and the girls in a semi-military, semi-picturesque costume—and by charming old and young with their graceful, precise, pleasing, and unique performance. They had the compliment of having the National Standard (if we have one) hoisted on the City Hall in their honour, and of being publicly received by His Worship, the Mayor.

For some weeks arrangements have been under way to receive with befitting hospitality a complimentary visit from the Connecticut National Guards. An official request that their arms be passed the customs free was granted in Ottawa, but unfortunately the gentlemen did not arrive on the date of the request, and the permission was understood, though not interpreted, to be restricted to that day. Much getting up and down stairs of military boots was necessary to save our hospitable honour; and at length red-tapeism gave way. We keep always on hand a cut and ready stock of municipal toys and sweets, which are doled out with periodic regularity in shape of parades of fire brigades, steeple chases in a coach and pair, drives with games of marbles on the mountain top, etc. Our civic master of ceremonies is not paid for originality, and our public guests must take our taffy or go without. The good natured pretence of satisfaction exhibited by the Connecticut Guards was a courtesy which would not have been lost on us were we not consumed by a greed of foreign praise.

Our colleges are all at work again for the winter, each with promise of marked success. The Faculties of Arts, Medicine, Science and Law in McGill University opened with the customary ceremonies. In the Congregational Theological Hall the formal opening was graced by an eloquent and impressive discourse from the Rev. Dr. Mackennat, a delegate from the Congregational Church in England, and Mr. George Hague, who presided, had much pleasure in intimating that the college had grown beyond all expectation, and was now getting too small. Mr. Hague is not usually given to humour. The Wesleyan and Presbyterian Theological Halls each opens with more