

Water-Cresses.

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THE heroism of the unknown poor is a thing to set even the dullest marvelling, and in no place in all London is the virtue of the humblest — both young and old — so conspicuous as among the water-cress buyers at Farringdon Market.* So remarks a writer well acquainted with metropolitan street-life, and deep in his sympathy with its struggles and its sorrows.

Our readers do not need to be told that there are different *strata* in street-life. There is a wide social chasm between the Potato-seller, with his polished can, and the Purveyor of Water-cresses, whose sole trading 'plant' consists of a tray, from which every trace of jappanning has long since departed. 'Water-cress' selling is, strictly speaking, a branch of 'costering.' It is not, however, always carried on in connection with the larger branches of the Coster-mongers' business, but is generally confided to the younger members of the family, or is the commercial speculation of independent adventurers. It is not a very difficult matter to start in this the humblest branch of street-trade. A few half-pence and a worn-out tin tray, or superannuated basket, are all that are needed to 'fit out' the intending seller of water-cresses.

The selling of water-cresses in the streets is chiefly confined to the very young and very old. Homeless girls, boys in the same unhappy plight, and old men, whose failing limbs will just permit them to totter from one street to another, naturally turn to a trade which requires but little 'stock-money' at starting. Whilst, however, the elder members of the fraternity have their own narrow rounds, the young water-cress sellers, both male and female, have need of a good deal of strength, energy and perseverance, especially if they are 'in business on their own account.' 'Cresses' can only be procured at one of the early green-markets, and therefore our friends must be up betimes. Farringdon Market is† the great centre for the sale of water-cresses. These have for the most part to be purchased before the hour of the mechanics' breakfast, which necessitates an early run upon the markets. After the purchase is completed (and there is often a struggle for the best green bunches), the water-cress seller starts upon his morning rounds; and the familiar cry, 'Wo-orter-creesses,' is heard in suburban streets, before 'the working-man' is ready to go out to his daily labour. The rate of four bunches 'a penny' is not an immoderate price to give for this luxury to deck the breakfast-table, and it is wonderful what a finish it gives to the board as well as relish to the appetite.

However, when the morning supply is sold out, the toils of the lad or maiden who purveys the delicacy are far from being at an end. Again, as evening steals on and the sound of the muffin-bell is heard, the cry of the water-cress seller resounds through the streets. The tea-table as well as the breakfast-table demands the luxury of 'cresses.'

Mr. Mayhew* supplies us with a table of the sale of water-

* *London Labour and the London Poor*, Vol. i.

† We shall very probably soon have to say *was*, as this Market falls almost, if not quite, within the range of the Holborn Valley Improvements.