

XXXII. THE DOCKS

For more than six weeks, the ship Highlander lay in Prince's Dock; and during that time, besides making observations upon things immediately around me, I made sundry excursions to the neighboring docks, for I never tired of admiring them.

Previous to this, having only seen the miserable wooden wharves, and slip-shod, shambling piers of New York, the sight of these mighty docks filled my young mind with wonder and delight. In New York, to be sure, I could not but be struck with the long line of shipping, and tangled thicket of masts along the East River; yet, my admiration had been much abated by those irregular, unsightly wharves, which, I am sure, are a reproach and disgrace to the city that tolerates them.

Whereas, in Liverpool, I beheld long China walls of masonry; vast piers of stone; and a succession of granite-rimmed docks, completely inclosed, and many of them communicating, which almost recalled to mind the great American chain of lakes: Ontario, Erie, St. Clair, Huron, Michigan, and Superior. The extent and solidity of these structures, seemed equal to what I had read of the old Pyramids of Egypt.

Liverpool may justly claim to have originated the model of the "Wet Dock," so called, of the present day; and every thing that is connected with its design, construction, regulation, and improvement. Even London

was induced to copy after Liverpool, and Havre followed her example. In magnitude, cost, and durability, the docks of Liverpool, even at the present day surpass all others in the world.

The first dock built by the town was the "Old Dock," alluded to in my Sunday stroll with my guide-book. This was erected in 1710, since which period has gradually arisen that long line of dock-masonry, now flanking the Liverpool side of the Mersey.

For miles you may walk along that river-side, passing dock after dock, like a chain of immense fortresses:--Prince's, George's, Salt-House, Clarence, Brunswick, Trafalgar, King's, Queen's, and many more.

In a spirit of patriotic gratitude to those naval heroes, who by their valor did so much to protect the commerce of Britain, in which Liverpool held so large a stake; the town, long since, bestowed upon its more modern streets, certain illustrious names, that Broadway might be proud of:--Duncan, Nelson, Rodney, St. Vincent, Nile.

But it is a pity, I think, that they had not bestowed these noble names upon their noble docks; so that they might have been as a rank and file of most fit monuments to perpetuate the names of the heroes, in connection with the commerce they defended.

And how much better would such stirring monuments be; full of life and commotion; than hermit obelisks of Luxor, and idle towers of stone;

which, useless to the world in themselves, vainly hope to eternize a name, by having it carved, solitary and alone, in their granite. Such monuments are cenotaphs indeed; founded far away from the true body of the fame of the hero; who, if he be truly a hero, must still be linked with the living interests of his race; for the true fame is something free, easy, social, and companionable. They are but tomb-stones, that commemorate his death, but celebrate not his Me. It is well enough that over the inglorious and thrice miserable grave of a Dives, some vast marble column should be reared, recording the fact of his having lived and died; for such records are indispensable to preserve his shrunken memory among men; though that memory must soon crumble away with the marble, and mix with the stagnant oblivion of the mob. But to build such a pompous vanity over the remains of a hero, is a slur upon his fame, and an insult to his ghost. And more enduring monuments are built in the closet with the letters of the alphabet, than even Cheops himself could have founded, with all Egypt and Nubia for his quarry.

Among the few docks mentioned above, occur the names of the King's and Queens. At the time, they often reminded me of the two principal streets in the village I came from in America, which streets once rejoiced in the same royal appellations. But they had been christened previous to the Declaration of Independence; and some years after, in a fever of freedom, they were abolished, at an enthusiastic town-meeting, where King George and his lady were solemnly declared unworthy of being immortalized by the village of L--. A country antiquary once told me, that a committee of two barbers were deputed to write and inform the

distracted old gentleman of the fact.

As the description of any one of these Liverpool docks will pretty much answer for all, I will here endeavor to give some account of Prince's Dock, where the Highlander rested after her passage across the Atlantic.

This dock, of comparatively recent construction, is perhaps the largest of all, and is well known to American sailors, from the fact, that it is mostly frequented by the American ship-, ping. Here lie the noble New York packets, which at home are found at the foot of Wall-street; and here lie the Mobile and Savannah cotton ships and traders.

This dock was built like the others, mostly upon the bed of the river, the earth and rock having been laboriously scooped out, and solidified again as materials for the quays and piers. From the river, Prince's Dock is protected by a long pier of masonry, surmounted by a massive wall; and on the side next the town, it is bounded by similar walls, one of which runs along a thoroughfare. The whole space thus inclosed forms an oblong, and may, at a guess, be presumed to comprise about fifteen or twenty acres; but as I had not the rod of a surveyor when I took it in, I will not be certain.

The area of the dock itself, exclusive of the inclosed quays surrounding it, may be estimated at, say, ten acres. Access to the interior from the streets is had through several gateways; so that, upon their being closed, the whole dock is shut up like a house. From the river, the

entrance is through a water-gate, and ingress to ships is only to be had, when the level of the dock coincides with that of the river; that is, about the time of high tide, as the level of the dock is always at that mark. So that when it is low tide in the river, the keels of the ships inclosed by the quays are elevated more than twenty feet above those of the vessels in the stream. This, of course, produces a striking effect to a stranger, to see hundreds of immense ships floating high aloft in the heart of a mass of masonry.

Prince's Dock is generally so filled with shipping, that the entrance of a new-comer is apt to occasion a universal stir among all the older occupants. The dock-masters, whose authority is declared by tin signs worn conspicuously over their hats, mount the poops and forecastles of the various vessels, and hail the surrounding strangers in all directions:--"Highlander ahoy! Cast off your bowline, and sheer alongside the Neptune!"--"Neptune ahoy! get out a stern-line, and sheer alongside the Trident!"--"Trident ahoy! get out a bowline, and drop astern of the Undaunted!" And so it runs round like a shock of electricity; touch one, and you touch all. This kind of work irritates and exasperates the sailors to the last degree; but it is only one of the unavoidable inconveniences of inclosed docks, which are outweighed by innumerable advantages.

Just without the water-gate, is a basin, always connecting with the open river, through a narrow entrance between pierheads. This basin forms a sort of ante-chamber to the dock itself, where vessels lie waiting their

turn to enter. During a storm, the necessity of this basin is obvious; for it would be impossible to "dock" a ship under full headway from a voyage across the ocean. From the turbulent waves, she first glides into the ante-chamber between the pier-heads and from thence into the docks.

Concerning the cost of the docks, I can only state, that the King's Dock, comprehending but a comparatively small area, was completed at an expense of some £20,000.

Our old ship-keeper, a Liverpool man by birth, who had long followed the seas, related a curious story concerning this dock. One of the ships which carried over troops from England to Ireland in King William's war, in 1688, entered the King's Dock on the first day of its being opened in 1788, after an interval of just one century. She was a dark little brig, called the Port-a-Ferry. And probably, as her timbers must have been frequently renewed in the course of a hundred years, the name alone could have been all that was left of her at the time. A paved area, very wide, is included within the walls; and along the edge of the quays are ranges of iron sheds, intended as a temporary shelter for the goods unladed from the shipping. Nothing can exceed the bustle and activity displayed along these quays during the day; bales, crates, boxes, and cases are being tumbled about by thousands of laborers; trucks are coming and going; dock-masters are shouting; sailors of all nations are singing out at their ropes; and all this commotion is greatly increased by the resoundings from the lofty walls that hem in the din.