

XL. PLACARDS, BRASS-JEWELERS, TRUCK-HORSES, AND STEAMERS

As I wish to group together what fell under my observation concerning the Liverpool docks, and the scenes roundabout, I will try to throw into this chapter various minor things that I recall.

The advertisements of pauperism chalked upon the flagging round the dock walls, are singularly accompanied by a multitude of quite different announcements, placarded upon the walls themselves. They are principally notices of the approaching departure of "superior, fast-sailing, coppered and copper-fastened ships," for the United States, Canada, New South Wales, and other places. Interspersed with these, are the advertisements of Jewish clothesmen, informing the judicious seamen where he can procure of the best and the cheapest; together with ambiguous medical announcements of the tribe of quacks and empirics who prey upon all seafaring men. Not content with thus publicly giving notice of their whereabouts, these indefatigable Sangrados and pretended Samaritans hire a parcel of shabby workhouse-looking knaves, whose business consists in haunting the dock walls about meal times, and silently thrusting mysterious little billets--duodecimo editions of the larger advertisements--into the astonished hands of the tars.

They do this, with such a mysterious hang-dog wink; such a sidelong air; such a villainous assumption of your necessities; that, at first, you are almost tempted to knock them down for their pains.

Conspicuous among the notices on the walls, are huge Italic inducements to all seamen disgusted with the merchant service, to accept a round bounty, and embark in her Majesty's navy.

In the British armed marine, in time of peace, they do not ship men for the general service, as in the American navy; but for particular ships, going upon particular cruises. Thus, the frigate *Thetis* may be announced as about to sail under the command of that fine old sailor, and noble father to his crew, Lord George Flagstaff.

Similar announcements may be seen upon the walls concerning enlistments in the army. And never did auctioneer dilate with more rapture upon the charms of some country-seat put up for sale, than the authors of these placards do, upon the beauty and salubrity of the distant climes, for which the regiments wanting recruits are about to sail. Bright lawns, vine-clad hills, endless meadows of verdure, here make up the landscape; and adventurous young gentlemen, fond of travel, are informed, that here is a chance for them to see the world at their leisure, and be paid for enjoying themselves into the bargain. The regiments for India are promised plantations among valleys of palms; while to those destined for New Holland, a novel sphere of life and activity is opened; and the companies bound to Canada and Nova Scotia are lured by tales of summer suns, that ripen grapes in December. No word of war is breathed; hushed is the clang of arms in these announcements; and the sanguine recruit is almost tempted to expect that pruning-hooks, instead of swords, will be

the weapons he will wield.

Alas! is not this the cruel stratagem of Brace at Bannockburn, who decoyed to his war-pits by covering them over with green boughs? For instead of a farm at the blue base of the Himalayas, the Indian recruit encounters the keen saber of the Sikh; and instead of basking in sunny bowers, the Canadian soldier stands a shivering sentry upon the bleak ramparts of Quebec, a lofty mark for the bitter blasts from Baffin's Bay and Labrador. There, as his eye sweeps down the St. Lawrence, whose every billow is bound for the main that laves the shore of Old England; as he thinks of his long term of enlistment, which sells him to the army as Doctor Faust sold himself to the devil; how the poor fellow must groan in his grief, and call to mind the church-yard stile, and his Mary.

These army announcements are well fitted to draw recruits in Liverpool. Among the vast number of emigrants, who daily arrive from all parts of Britain to embark for the United States or the colonies, there are many young men, who, upon arriving at Liverpool, find themselves next to penniless; or, at least, with only enough money to carry them over the sea, without providing for future contingencies. How easily and naturally, then, may such youths be induced to enter upon the military life, which promises them a free passage to the most distant and flourishing colonies, and certain pay for doing nothing; besides holding out hopes of vineyards and farms, to be verified in the fullness of time. For in a moneyless youth, the decision to leave home at all, and

embark upon a long voyage to reside in a remote clime, is a piece of adventurousness only one removed from the spirit that prompts the army recruit to enlist.

I never passed these advertisements, surrounded by crowds of gaping emigrants, without thinking of rattrops.

Besides the mysterious agents of the quacks, who privily thrust their little notes into your hands, folded up like a powder; there are another set of rascals prowling about the docks, chiefly at dusk; 'who make strange motions to you, and beckon you to one side, as if they had some state secret to disclose, intimately connected with the weal of the commonwealth. They nudge you with an elbow full of indefinite hints and intimations; they glitter upon you an eye like a Jew's or a pawnbroker's; they dog you like Italian assassins. But if the blue coat of a policeman chances to approach, how quickly they strive to look completely indifferent, as to the surrounding universe; how they saunter off, as if lazily wending their way to an affectionate wife and family.

The first time one of these mysterious personages accosted me, I fancied him crazy, and hurried forward to avoid him. But arm in arm with my shadow, he followed after; till amazed at his conduct, I turned round and paused.

He was a little, shabby, old man, with a forlorn looking coat and hat; and his hand was fumbling in his vest pocket, as if to take out a card

with his address. Seeing me stand still he made a sign toward a dark angle of the wall, near which we were; when taking him for a cunning foot-pad, I again wheeled about, and swiftly passed on. But though I did not look round, I felt him following me still; so once more I stopped. The fellow now assumed so mystic and admonitory an air, that I began to fancy he came to me on some warning errand; that perhaps a plot had been laid to blow up the Liverpool docks, and he was some Monteagle bent upon accomplishing my flight. I was determined to see what he was. With all my eyes about me, I followed him into the arch of a warehouse; when he gazed round furtively, and silently showing me a ring, whispered, "You may have it for a shilling; it's pure gold-I found it in the gutter-hush! don't speak! give me the money, and it's yours."

"My friend," said I, "I don't trade in these articles; I don't want your ring."

"Don't you? Then take, that," he whispered, in an intense hushed passion; and I fell flat from a blow on the chest, while this infamous jeweler made away with himself out of sight. This business transaction was conducted with a counting-house promptitude that astonished me.

After that, I shunned these scoundrels like the leprosy: and the next time I was pertinaciously followed, I stopped, and in a loud voice, pointed out the man to the passers-by; upon which he absconded; rapidly turning up into sight a pair of obliquely worn and battered boot-heels.

I could not help thinking that these sort of fellows, so given to

running away upon emergencies, must furnish a good deal of work to the shoemakers; as they might, also, to the growers of hemp and gallows-joiners.

Belonging to a somewhat similar fraternity with these irritable merchants of brass jewelry just mentioned, are the peddlers of Sheffield razors, mostly boys, who are hourly driven out of the dock gates by the police; nevertheless, they contrive to saunter back, and board the vessels, going among the sailors and privately exhibiting their wares. Incited by the extreme cheapness of one of the razors, and the gilding on the case containing it, a shipmate of mine purchased it on the spot for a commercial equivalent of the price, in tobacco. On the following Sunday, he used that razor; and the result was a pair of tormented and tomahawked cheeks, that almost required a surgeon to dress them. In old times, by the way, it was not a bad thought, that suggested the propriety of a barber's practicing surgery in connection with the chin-harrowing vocation. Another class of knaves, who practice upon the sailors in Liverpool, are the pawnbrokers, inhabiting little rookeries among the narrow lanes adjoining the dock. I was astonished at die multitude of gilded balls in these streets, emblematic of their calling. They were generally next neighbors to the gilded grapes over the spirit-vaults; and no doubt, mutually to facilitate business operations, some of these establishments have connecting doors inside, so as to play their customers into each other's hands. I often saw sailors in a state of intoxication rushing from a spirit-vault into a pawnbroker's; stripping off their boots, hats, jackets, and neckerchiefs, and

sometimes even their pantaloons on the spot, and offering to pawn them for a song. Of course such applications were never refused. But though on shore, at Liverpool, poor Jack finds more sharks than at sea, he himself is by no means exempt from practices, that do not savor of a rigid morality; at least according to law. In tobacco smuggling he is an adept: and when cool and collected, often manages to evade the Customs completely, and land goodly packages of the weed, which owing to the immense duties upon it in England, commands a very high price.

As soon as we came to anchor in the river, before reaching the dock, three Custom-house underlings boarded us, and coming down into the fore-castle, ordered the men to produce all the tobacco they had. Accordingly several pounds were brought forth.

"Is that all?" asked the officers.

"All," said the men.

"We will see," returned the others.

And without more ado, they emptied the chests right and left; tossed over the bunks and made a thorough search of the premises; but discovered nothing. The sailors were then given to understand, that while the ship lay in dock, the tobacco must remain in the cabin, under custody of the chief mate, who every morning would dole out to them one plug per head, as a security against their carrying it ashore.

"Very good," said the men.

But several of them had secret places in the ship, from whence they daily drew pound after pound of tobacco, which they smuggled ashore in the manner following.

When the crew went to meals, each man carried at least one plug in his pocket; that he had a right to; and as many more were hidden about his person as he dared. Among the great crowds pouring out of the dock-gates at such hours, of course these smugglers stood little chance of detection; although vigilant looking policemen were always standing by. And though these "Charlies" might suppose there were tobacco smugglers passing; yet to hit the right man among such a throng, would be as hard, as to harpoon a speckled porpoise, one of ten thousand darting under a ship's bows.

Our forecastle was often visited by foreign sailors, who knowing we came from America, were anxious to purchase tobacco at a cheap rate; for in Liverpool it is about an American penny per pipe-full. Along the docks they sell an English pennyworth, put up in a little roll like confectioners' mottoes, with poetical lines, or instructive little moral precepts printed in red on the back.

Among all the sights of the docks, the noble truck-horses are not the least striking to a stranger. They are large and powerful brutes, with

such sleek and glossy coats, that they look as if brushed and put on by a valet every morning. They march with a slow and stately step, lifting their ponderous hoofs like royal Siam elephants. Thou shalt not lay stripes upon these Roman citizens; for their docility is such, they are guided without rein or lash; they go or come, halt or march on, at a whisper. So grave, dignified, gentlemanly, and courteous did these fine truck-horses look--so full of calm intelligence and sagacity, that often I endeavored to get into conversation with them, as they stood in contemplative attitudes while their loads were preparing. But all I could get from them was the mere recognition of a friendly neigh; though I would stake much upon it that, could I have spoken in their language, I would have derived from them a good deal of valuable information touching the docks, where they passed the whole of their dignified lives.

There are unknown worlds of knowledge in brutes; and whenever you mark a horse, or a dog, with a peculiarly mild, calm, deep-seated eye, be sure he is an Aristotle or a Kant, tranquilly speculating upon the mysteries in man. No philosophers so thoroughly comprehend us as dogs and horses. They see through us at a glance. And after all, what is a horse but a species of four-footed dumb man, in a leathern overall, who happens to live upon oats, and toils for his masters, half-requited or abused, like the biped hewers of wood and drawers of water? But there is a touch of divinity even in brutes, and a special halo about a horse, that should forever exempt him from indignities. As for those majestic, magisterial truck-horses of the docks, I would as soon think of striking a judge on

the bench, as to lay violent hand upon their holy hides.

It is wonderful what loads their majesties will condescend to draw. The truck is a large square platform, on four low wheels; and upon this the lumpers pile bale after bale of cotton, as if they were filling a large warehouse, and yet a procession of three of these horses will tranquilly walk away with the whole.

The truckmen themselves are almost as singular a race as their animals. Like the Judiciary in England, they wear gowns,--not of the same cut and color though,--which reach below their knees; and from the racket they make on the pavements with their hob-nailed brogans, you would think they patronized the same shoemaker with their horses. I never could get any thing out of these truckmen. They are a reserved, sober-sided set, who, with all possible solemnity, march at the head of their animals; now and then gently advising them to sheer to the right or the left, in order to avoid some passing vehicle. Then spending so much of their lives in the high-bred company of their horses, seems to have mended their manners and improved their taste, besides imparting to them something of the dignity of their animals; but it has also given to them a sort of refined and uncomplaining aversion to human society.

There are many strange stories told of the truck-horse. Among others is the following: There was a parrot, that from having long been suspended in its cage from a low window fronting a dock, had learned to converse pretty fluently in the language of the stevedores and truckmen. One day

a truckman left his vehicle standing on the quay, with its back to the water. It was noon, when an interval of silence falls upon the docks; and Poll, seeing herself face to face with the horse, and having a mind for a chat, cried out to him, "Back! back! back!"

Backward went the horse, precipitating himself and truck into the water.

Brunswick Dock, to the west of Prince's, is one of the most interesting to be seen. Here lie the various black steamers (so unlike the American boats, since they have to navigate the boisterous Narrow Seas) plying to all parts of the three kingdoms. Here you see vast quantities of produce, imported from starving Ireland; here you see the decks turned into pens for oxen and sheep; and often, side by side with these inclosures, Irish deck-passengers, thick as they can stand, seemingly penned in just like the cattle. It was the beginning of July when the Highlander arrived in port; and the Irish laborers were daily coming over by thousands, to help harvest the English crops.

One morning, going into the town, I heard a tramp, as of a drove of buffaloes, behind me; and turning round, beheld the entire middle of the street filled by a great crowd of these men, who had just emerged from Brunswick Dock gates, arrayed in long-tailed coats of hoddin-gray, corduroy knee-breeches, and shod with shoes that raised a mighty dust. Flourishing their Donnybrook shillelahs, they looked like an irruption of barbarians. They were marching straight out of town into the country; and perhaps out of consideration for the finances of the corporation,

took the middle of the street, to save the side-walks.

"Sing Langolee, and the Lakes of Killarney," cried one fellow, tossing his stick into the air, as he danced in his brogans at the head of the rabble. And so they went! capering on, merry as pipers.

When I thought of the multitudes of Irish that annually land on the shores of the United States and Canada, and, to my surprise, witnessed the additional multitudes embarking from Liverpool to New Holland; and when, added to all this, I daily saw these hordes of laborers, descending, thick as locusts, upon the English corn-fields; I could not help marveling at the fertility of an island, which, though her crop of potatoes may fail, never yet failed in bringing her annual crop of men into the world.