

THE PARKES MUSEUM

THE PLACE TO SPEND A HAPPY DAY

By way of jest, my morning daily paper constantly includes in its menu of "To-day" the Parkes Museum, Margaret Street, adding, seductively, "free"; and no doubt many a festive Jonas Chuzzlewit has preened himself for a sight-seeing, and all unaware of the multitudes of Margaret Streets--surely only Charlottes of that ilk are more abundant--has started forth, he and his feminine, to find this Parkes Museum. One may even conceive a rare Bank Holiday thoughtfully put aside for the quest, and spent all vainly in the asking of policemen, and in traversing this vast and tiresome metropolis, from Margaret Street to Margaret Street, the freshness of the morning passing into the dry heat of the day, fatigue spreading from the feet upwards, discussion, difference, denial, "words," and a day of recreation dying at last into a sunset of lurid sulks. Such possibility was too painful to think of, and a philanthropic inquirer has at last by persistent investigation won the secret of the Missing Museum and opened the way to it for all future investigators.

The Margaret Street in question is an apparently derelict thoroughfare, opening into Great Portland Street. Immemorial dust is upon its pavements, and a profound silence broods over its vacant roadway. The blinds of its houses are mostly down, and, where the blackness of some

window suggests a dark interior, no face appears to reassure us in our doubt of humanity within. It may be that somewhen in the past the entire population of this street set out on a boating party up the river, and was upset by steam launches, and so never returned, or perchance it has all been locked up for a long term of imprisonment--though the houses seem almost too respectable for that; or the glamour of the Sleeping Beauty is upon it all. Certainly we saw the figure of a porter in an attitude of repose in the little glass lodge in the museum doorway. He may have been asleep. But we feared to touch him--and indeed slipped very stealthily by him--lest he should suddenly crumble into dust.

And so to the Museum and its wonders. This Parkes Museum is a kind of armoury of hygiene, a place full of apparatus for being healthy--in brief, a museum of sanitary science. To that large and growing class of people who take no thought of anything but what they eat and what they drink, and wherewithal they should be clothed, it should prove intensely interesting. Apart from the difficulty of approach we cannot understand how it is so neglected by an intelligent public. You can see germicides and a model convict prison, Pentonville cells in miniature, statistical diagrams and drain pipes--if only there was a little more about heredity, it would be exactly the kind of thing that is popular in literature now, as literature goes. And yet excepting ourselves and the sleeping porter--if he was sleeping--and the indistinct and motionless outline, visible through a glass door, of a human body sitting over a book, there was not a suggestion or memory of living humanity about the

place.

The exhibits of food are especially remarkable. We cleaned the glass case with our sleeves and peered at the most appetising revelations. There are dozens of little bottles hermetically sealed, containing such curios as a sample of "Bacon Common (Gammon) Uncooked," and then the same cooked--it looked no nicer cooked--Irish sausage, pork sausage, black pudding, Welsh mutton, and all kinds of rare and exquisite feeding. There are ever so many cases of this kind of thing. We saw, for instance, further along, several good specimens of the common oyster shell (*Ostrea edulis*), cockle shells, and whelks, both "almonds" and "whites," and then came breadstuffs. The breadstuffs are particularly impressive, of a grey, scientific aspect, a hard, hoary antiquity. We always knew that stale bread was good for one, but yet the Parkes Museum startled us with the antique pattern it recommended. There was a muffin, too, identified and labelled, but without any Latin name, a captured crumpet, a collection of buns, a dinner-roll, and a something novel to us, called Pumpnickel, that we had rather be without, or rather--for the expression is ambiguous--that we had rather not be without, but altogether remote from. And all these things have been tested by an analyst, with the most painful results. Nitrogen, oxygen, hydrogen, and the like nasty chemical things seem indeed to have occurred in everything he touched. Those sturdy mendicants who go about complaining that they cannot get food should visit this Parkes Museum and see what food is really like, and learn contentment with their lot.

There were no real vegetables, but only the ideals of a firm of seedsmen, made of wax and splendidly coloured, with something of the boldness and vigour of Michael Angelo about the modelling of them. And among other food stuffs were sweetmeats and yellow capers, liver flukes, British wines, and snuff. At last we felt replete with food stuffs, and went on to see the models to illustrate ventilation, and the exhibits of hygienic glazed tiles arranged around a desert lecture-theatre. Hygienic tiles stimulate the eye vigorously rather than relax it by any æsthetic weakness; and the crematory appliances are so attractive as they are, and must have such an added charm of neatness and brightness when alight, that one longs to lose a relative or so forthwith, for the mere pleasure of seeing them in operation.

A winding staircase designed upon hygienic principles, to bump your head at intervals, takes one to a little iron gallery full of the most charming and varied display of cooking-stoves and oil-lamps. Here, also, there are flaunted the resources of civilisation for the Prevention of Accidents, which resources are four, namely, a patent fire-escape, a patent carriage pole, a coal plate, and a dog muzzle. But the labels, though verbose, are scarcely full enough. They do not tell you, for instance, if you wish to prevent cramp while bathing, whether the dog muzzle or the coal plate should be employed, nor do they show how the fire-escape will prevent the explosion of a paraffin lamp. However, this is a detail. We feel assured that no intelligent person will regret a visit to this most interesting and instructive exhibition. It offers you valuable hints how to live, and suggests the best and tidiest way in

which you can, when dead, dispose of your body. We feel assured that the public only needs this intimation of its whereabouts to startle the death-like slumbers of Margaret Street with an unaccustomed tumult. And the first to arrive will, no doubt, find legibly and elegantly written in the dust that covers the collection the record of its discovery by Euphemia and me.