

LONDON AMUSEMENTS.

London, that vast theatre of misery, does not contain a being more miserable than the French tourist. The Frenchman, as a rule, does not travel beyond the limits of the French language; but sometimes an adventurous individual determines that he will visit England; his friends attempt to dissuade him, but in vain; they represent to him the absence of the sun, the eternity of the rain, the perils of hypochondria and suicide. He buttons up his coat to his chin, strikes his breast with his extended palm (like the gorilla, French version), and declares, with the air of a man destined for Timbuctoo, that he has pledged himself that he must go. Stirred by a speech on the left, or an article by De Girardin, he desires to visit a free people, and to observe with his own eyes those institutions which are envied and admired by the Liberals of Paris.

Sometimes he blooms into the man of fashion. Sometimes he congeals into marriage and respectability; but generally he sinks head-over-sails in debt, and goes to the bad. In the Derby week London is inundated with equestrian farmers, undergraduates truant from the universities, officers from Aldershot and country quarters. Every kind of amusement which British ingenuity can invent is catered for their benefit; but the list of them is by no means large. First and foremost comes Cremorne. It is a huge garden, brilliantly lighted, and decorated, it is needless to say, in excessively bad taste. It contains a theatre, in which the entertainments are chiefly of a ballet character; the ballet is second rate, but the corps is numerous and very finely clothed. There is also a circus, some American bowling-alleys, a fortune-teller in a grotto, and a variety of booths, such as may be seen in a country fair. In the centre of the garden is a large platform; a fine band of music plays, and a few couples wait over the wilderness of boards in an isolated, melancholy kind of way. The promenade is perfectly correct, and an elegant, well-dressed crowd walks interminably round and round; there is much beauty, and the toilets are magnificent; the salutations which are exchanged are rather familiar, and sometimes the laughter is a little loud; otherwise the unskilled observer might imagine that he had entered the *beau monde*.

Such is Cremorne; a Jardin Mabille without the *concan*; which is the "Hamel" without the Prince. Forget that it is dissolute, and it becomes extremely dull; its entertainments are stupid; its suppers are detestable; there is no gaiety; no medium between the most rigid decorum and frantic riot. During the last twenty years London has been gradually keeping better hours. In the days of the mad Lord Waterford, the young bucks used to go to the English in Covent Garden, polished off a watchman or two in the gray dusk of early morn, and had seldom bagged their last knocker before daylight. Less than ten years ago there were cider cellars and coal holes in which minstrel entertainments, *poes plastiques* and other delicate amusements used to be prolonged till two, three, or even four A. M. But these gradually died away, and five years ago the only places open to the homeless wanderer were the restaurant saloons, significantly called night-houses, and one casino in the neighborhood of Oxford street, which was opened at one, and in which dancing was prolonged till six, which was very select, and to which it was necessary to go in evening dress.

These establishments were not allowed to retail wine, beer, or spirituous drinks; but under their refreshment license they could be open till any hour, and they easily managed to evade the law. It was done thus:—Two gentlemen, we will suppose, find themselves on their way home from a party in the neighborhood of Princes street, Leicester square. They are suddenly seized with a desire to drink champagne. They go to No. 3, and tap gently at the door. A little wicket is opened, and the aperture is filled with an uneasy, blood-shot eye. It settles into calmness as they survey the white cravat; the door is opened; they go in; before them a long passage, and another door, guarded by another porter. "All right, Tom," says the first porter, and the second door is opened. They enter a large saloon lined with red velvet divans; counters at both ends; supper rooms at the sides; champagne bottles popping, silk gowns rustling. *Spurgeon*! cries a voice. A waiter closely resembling that justly celebrated preacher attends the summons. *A gin sling and a glass of cold pale!* *Satan*! cries another voice; and a man with black, elf locks dancing round his forehead appears. *A bottle of Jizz!*

In the midst of this scene a bell rings. Bottles and glasses disappear from the counters into unknown depths. Satan and Spurgeon run wildly to and fro. In a minute the marble tables are bare. The door opens, and two policemen enter the room, look at them and vanish amid derisive laughter; and the play goes on. But—! think it was in 1862—a certain police magistrate of rigid morals determined that this sort of thing should be put a stop to. An act of Parliament was passed condemning all refreshment rooms to be closed at 1 A. M. The policemen were ordered to enforce the law, it has been enforced; and marvellous has been the result. Previously, London displayed a spectacle, without its parallel in this wicked world. Often in broad daylight, on a summer morning, the Haymarket would be crowded with a class of persons who do not appear to advantage at such an hour, and a large majority of whom would be intoxicated, more or less. But now, at 2 o'clock the streets are deserted, and nearly every one in bed. This measure of reform pleased all parties; immorality led nothing by it, and decorum gained a good deal; which, of course, is a very satisfactory state of things.

The music hall is also a growth of modern times. Young men can remember when Evans was the only place where one could eat one's supper to the sound of music; but only middle-aged men can recall the Evans of the past; the cozy little room, with its snug corners and its literary corners, celebrated by Thackeray (as the Dust-Hole) in the "Newcomes." But the days in which the company could take part in the entertainment passed by. The little room gave place to a spacious hall, with private boxes darkly screened, but behind which fair faces could sometimes be dimly seen, and a gallery of theatrical paintings, second only to the collection in the Garrick, lined the walls. Then came the era of *Reddy Green*, with his jovial red face, and his hospitable spirit-box, and his merry, familiar, oft-repeated jokes. But as huge buildings sprang up in Holborn, and his reign was at an end.

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