

H. Huntfield

GASLIGHT AND DAYLIGHT,

WITH

Some London Scenes They Shine Upon.

BY

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"THE BADDINGTON PEERAGE," ETC.

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How they beat down the flickering wax-ends in their sockets. And the pretty girls—pretty still—yet looking pale, and a trifle draggled, and a thought sickly. There was a faint odour through the crowded rooms of faded roses and spilt perfumes, and spent champagne corks. The Honourable Mrs. Plover's *soirée* was over. Slowly down the grand staircase came the company, looking, if I may be permitted the use of vulgarism, 'seedy.' Slowly the yawning footmen opened the carriage-doors, and the sleepy horses clattered off. This was break of day—the day the grubs have to earn their daily bread by—and it was time for the butterflies to be in bed.

XVIII.

ARCADIA.

ARCADIA!—what a nice place it must have been to be sure! A perpetual pic-nic, without wasps or thunder-storms, and with nothing to pay. A smiling landscape, all gently undulating—no fierce rocks or yawning chasms. Banks on which wild thyme and violets continually grow. Eternal summer. Fruits, flowers, and odoriferous herbs. Innocent flocks of more innocent sheeplings; soft, mild, benignant, undesigning bleaters with dainty coats of whitest wool, hanging in worsted ringlets, unsmirched by the red ochre or cinnabar of mercenary grazier; yet when the sun rises or sets, gleaming with iris tints from Nature's prism, making of each a mutton-rainbow—like Mr. Hunt's sheep in his picture of *Our English Coasts*. And then the shepherds with their long hair confined by an azure ribbon; their abundance of clean linen, and guilelessness of braces; their silken hose, and shoon with purple heels; their harmless sports consisting in shooting at a stuffed bird on a highly decorated Maypole with a cross-bow bedecked with ribbons. And the shepherdesses, with auburn tresses and wide-spreading straw hats, with golden crooks, and wreaths of flowers, and petticoats of gold and silk and satin brocade. And the old women—the Dorcases and Cicelys—dear old dames with silvery hair, scarlet cloaks, and ebony crutch-sticks; but who never scolded, oh no, nor had the rheumatism, nor groaned about their precious bones and the badness of the times. There were no Game Laws in Arcadia, no union workhouses, no beer-shops, no tally-men, no police. There were balls every

and all day long in Arcadia; endless country dances. No shepherd beat another shepherd or shepherdess with his crook, or a poker, or pewter-pot; for there was no quarrelling—save here and there a trifle of bickering, a transient fugacious jealousy when Celia detected Corydon kissing of Phyllis, or if Sacharissa in a pet broke Damon's pipe. But these fleeting differences would soon be reconciled: all would kiss and be friends: and banquets to re-united friendship would take place in cool grottoes on carpets of fair flowers; the viands (fruits, syllabubs, and cakes of finest flour), cooled by murmuring, rippling, pebbly, sparkling streamlets, and by fragrant boughs outside the cave, drooping with foliage and luscious fruit, and waved by the pitying summer breeze; sheltering the grotto's inmates from the burly Sun's too bold salute. And the sky was very blue, and the birds sang carols continually.

Yet, though the golden age be gone, and there are no more picturesque shepherds or shepherdesses, save in the canvasses of Watteau and Laneret, Arcadia still exists. It lives in the very heart of London.

The prototype of the London arcade was, undoubtedly, the Oriental Bazaar. There is not a town in Turkey or Hindostan, without some dirty, stifling, covered passage, both sides of which overflow with amphitheatres of knick-knackery for sale. The Bezesteen of Stamboul is a genuine arcade, with all the crowding and confusion, the kaleidoscopic arrangement and gossip-bargaining of the Arcadia of England.

The French, who manage so many things better than we ourselves do, and not a few so much worse, have long had an Arcadia of their own. As a special measure of relief for their legionary *flâneurs* or street-pacers—driven, in wet weather, from the much-sauntered-over Boulevards—there were devised the unrivalled galleries and passages which are the delight of Paris, the admiration of strangers, and the bread-winners of unnumbered artificers, factors, and retailers of those heterogeneous odds and ends known as *articles de Paris*. To the Passage de l'Opéra, des Panoramas, du Saumon, Jouffroy; from the Galeries Vivienne, Colbert, and Véro-Dodat; the caricatures of Gavarni and Grandville, the classic lithographs of Jullien, the novels of Paul de Kock, the statuettes of Danton, and the ballads of Mademoiselle Eloïsa Puget owe their chief celebrity. Beneath those glass roofs literary and artistic reputations have been won and lost.

Milan followed in the wake of Paris, and the city of the Duomo

boasts many plate-glass-adorned and knick-knack-crowded covered thoroughfares. Vienna and Berlin followed; but England knew not arcades before the present century. Some inventive genius accomplished a great feat in conjunction with certain shopkeepers and the Cork and Burlington estates. He brought Arcadia into Piccadilly, and built the Burlington Arcade.

At first the shops of this Arcade were small and dark. They sold no articles of positive necessity: the useful arts were repellent to Burlingtonian notions of industry: and luxury was almost exclusively purveyed for. Burlington (as became a comital godfather) was intensely aristocratic. Boots and shoes and gloves were certainly sold; but they fitted only the most Byronically small and symmetrical hands and feet; none but the finest and most odoriferous leathers were employed in their confection, and none but the highest prices charged for them. The staple manufactures of this Arcade have been in turns jewellery, fans, feathers, French novels, pictorial albums, annuals, scrap-books, caricatures, harps, accordions, quadrille music, illuminated polkas, toys, scents, hair-brushes, odoriferous vinegar, Rowlands' Macassar Oil, zephyr paletôts, snuff-boxes, jewelled whips, clouded canes, lemon-coloured gloves, and false whiskers. Scarcely a fashionable vice, an aristocratic frivolity, or a Belgravian caprice, but had (and has) a representative in the Burlington Arcade. It was a little Vanity Fair. I have walked it many and many a time for years, thinking of John Bunyan, and wondering which was Britain Row and Portugal Row.

There was but one active handicraft exercised in the Arcade, and that was hair-cutting. The handicraftsmen cut your hair in sophisticated saloons, decorated with fallacious mural paintings of impossible Grecian landscapes, with flaming Greeks and Turks fighting. Below they inveigled you to buy drugs and potions wherewith to dye the gray hairs you should be proud of, blue black; and stuffs to make you emulate the smell of the civet, or the musk rat, and hogs' lard condimented into bears' grease, and wigs;—woven lies made from dead men's hair to thatch live fools. Further on, there were boots to pinch feet, corsets to tighten waists, and gloves to cramp hands. Boys with bundles were rigidly excluded from the precincts. Smoking was not allowed through its length or breadth. It was paraded by padded, tight-booted, tight-girthed, wiggled old beaus striving to look like boys of twenty;

by boys aping the vices of old men ; by carpet warriors, and by knights fresh from Almack tournaments.

The department of Arcadia to which I have just (and it may seem to you rather harshly) alluded, has not been free from the vicissitudes, humiliations, and mutabilities common to buildings and thoroughfares, as well as to men. Yet, on the whole, it may be said that the Burlingtonians have been a prosperous and well-to-do community. If Burlington had appealed to the wisdom, learning, good taste ; or to the scientific or philosophic tendencies of humanity, it might have been bankrupt long ago, and its traders gone barefoot. But Burlington has calculated, like the quack doctor, that of every fifty passers-by forty are fools. With Robert Macaire it has studied the immortal axiom delivered by that sage to Bertrand, ' The day passes, but the fools remain ;' and has occupied itself with what is co-existent with the world and with humanity—human folly. But for such customers, the booths in Vanity Fair, wherever its tents be pitched, would drive a poor trade indeed.

I will leave the Province of Burlington, and direct my attention to that of Exeter. One was of comital rank ; but this is the fief of a marquisate. A word as to its antecedents.

Where now stands the street that forms the approach to Rennie's magnificent bridge—the Bridge of Waterloo ; the bridge of gorgeous sunset views—the Bridge of Sighs—the Rialto of transpontine theatricals, industrials of the New Cut, Elephant and Castle omnibuses, and women without names, without hope, without lives (save a certain dog-like existence). there stood, before I was born, certain dingy brick houses. One of them was the old office of the old (and now dead) ' Courier ' newspaper ; and many may be old enough to remember the bulletin of the great victory of Waterloo being pasted up on the ' Courier ' windows on the 21st of June, 1815. Another was the old Lyœum Theatre ; a third was Mr. Day's trunk-shop. Close beside these buildings, stood two mighty elephants' tusks and a burly Beefeater, directing the eager sight-seer, the impatient country cousin, the enthusiastic holiday-maker, to the Museum or Menagerie of Wild Animals, known throughout the United Kingdom as Crosse's Wild Beast Show. Here had the lord of ' aitches ' and the Patent Theatres—the great John Philip Kemble—borrowed of Mr. Crosse the rhinoceros on which he took his ever-memorable ride through Covent Garden Market—in the early morning, when the sun was bright, and saloop-stalls were yet about—as dignified as a

lord, playing the fool as only wise men can. Here had the howlings of unnumbered savage brutes, the rugged Russian bear, the armed rhinoceros, like the Hyrcanian beast, shook the bricks of Exeter Change. Ye spotted snakes, ye dwelt there; hyenas, ye have laughed; jackals, ye have wept deceivingly; blue-faced monkeys, ye have shown your cerulean visages in those byegone Arcadian precincts. Here the "White Milliner," supposed to have been the Duchess of Tyrconnel fallen upon evil days, sold ribbons and gauzes. There held out against the united forces of Apothecaries' Hall and His Majesty's foot-guards Chune, unconquered of refractory elephants. There he laughed at pounds of calomel and bales of drugs, and shook his sides with elephantine scorn at guns and pistols; till the great, embrowned regulation muskets of His Majesty's foot-guards cracked his leviathan skin and let his giant life out. Crosse's *must* have been an exhibition. Why wasn't I alive when Exeter Change was extant, and the admission 'up stairs' one shilling, or under?

But Arcadia was fated to come again; and Exeter Change, though it retains its name, has changed its locale, and is no more what it was. It is a changed change. It had a transition state—a sort of chrysalis-like grubhood as a bad bazaar—a very bad and lame imitation of those Margate and Ramsgate, and general watering-place knick-knack shops, where there are countless assemblages of trifles, unconsidered, because really useless, and where you may, perhaps, (if you have great good luck) win, after the investment of from seven to fifteen shillings, such a prize as a German silver pencil-case, or a tea-pot stand of plaited rushes. And then Exeter Change became a wilderness of bricks and mortar, scaffold-poles, hods, ladders and ropes, and it and its neighbourhood went mad on the building question, after which and (up to 1853) ultimately, the Change changed its site, and burst on the world as an arcade—an Arcade of desolation, silence, despair.

What can I compare it to? The street of the tombs at Pompeii—the Via Sacra with all the shops shut up and half a dozen funerals of Sextus Quintilius Somebody winding their way through its mournful lengths? A street in Tripoli or Algiers at mid-day when the sun is very hot and the plague is very bad about? The 'dark entry' in Canterbury Cathedral Yard multiplied by two? Lawrence Pountney Hill (about the dreariest of thoroughfares I know) of a Sunday afternoon? Anything, anywhere, in any climate, country, age, or circum-

stance that is gloomy, dismal, heart-depressing, unventilated, graveyard-smelling—dull. This gloomy avenue leads from one and into another of the merriest London streets you would wish to find: one the bustling Catherine Street with its noisy News Exchange, and Old Drury (though to be sure that is not so very gay) at the top; the other the lively Wellington Street, embellished as it is with one of the most abusive cab-stands in the metropolis, and the sprightly Lyceum Theatre. But the Arcade is so dull. Some ghastly artist undertook, on its construction, to decorate it with mural arabesques. He has succeeded in filling the spaces between the shop-windows with some skeleton figures;—dripping, faded funerealities. These ‘arabesques’ (‘mauresques’ would be more appropriate, for they are very mortuary) twist themselves into horrible skeleton presentments, all in a leaden, deadened, dusky tone of colour; and, high over gas-lamps, and grimly clambering about shop-fronts, are melancholy dolphins and writhing serpents, and attenuated birds of paradise; all looking intensely wretched at the positions in which they find themselves. Likewise there are scrolls, which the Furies might twist in their hair; and leaves which seem ready to drop off for very deadness, and sepulchral beadings, and egg-and-tongue fillets like rows of coffin nails.

And are there shops in this Arcadia? There are. And are these shops tenanted? Well; they *are* tenanted; but not much. A great many of the shops have had occupants; but somehow or other the occupiers are continually vacating. They never stopped. Doubtless they had many good and sufficient reasons for so persistently continuing not to remain. They went abroad, relinquished business, made their fortunes—perhaps. I can remember in this changing Change, house and estate agents, servants’ registry offices, coal-mine offices (with neat little hampers of Wallsend in the window—a novelty which would answer well, I opine, with a horse-dealer, if he were to put a few pasterns and fetlocks and a horse-shoe or two in *his* window), booksellers, newsvenders and publishers (news and publicity here!), cigar-shops, tailors and habit-makers, milliners, dressmakers, and bonnet-builders, architects and surveyors, and a toy-shop: *that* didn’t last. The drums and trumpets, the miniature guns and swords sounded and wielded there must have been of the same sort as those used at Napoleon’s midnight review; the Tombolas must have had death’s heads; the Jacks must have sprung,