

Trips About Town.

BY GEORGE R. SIMS.

V.—IN LIMEHOUSE AND THE ISLE OF DOGS.



JUST outside the West India Dock Station there is a little one-horse 'bus which takes you by a winding way of high, black walls, broken here and there by bridges and wharves and the towering masts of ships, to Millwall.

As you near the journey's end the driver—there is no conductor—opens a little trap in the roof of the 'bus and puts his hand through. In his open palm you deposit the penny for your fare, and a few moments later the 'bus stops, and you alight and find yourself at the commencement of the West Ferry Road and in the famous Isle of Dogs.

It is the island note that greets you at first. If the bridge is up you have to enter by the lock gates, and you may, by a stretch of the imagination, fancy yourself performing a Blondin feat, with the welcome addition of a row of protecting chains on each side of you.

Across the water you are in a land of one familiar sound and a score of unfamiliar scents. The sound is one ever dear to the ears of the Briton—the clang of the hammer as it descends on ringing iron. You listen to the sound that speaks of England's might, and you remember the song that Charles Mackay sang of Tubal Cain. The memory that the scents bear in upon you is of another poet—Coleridge, who sang of Cologne.

The odours are overpowering. They do not mix, but with every breeze each salutes you with its separate entity. One odour is that of heated oil, another that of burning fat, others are of a character which only visitors with a certain amount of chemical experience could define.

The odours saturate you, and cling to you, and follow you. They are with you in the highway and the by-way. You pass into the house of a friend who has offered you his hospitality at the luncheon hour, and the door that closes behind you does not shut them out. Nothing is sacred to them, not even the church. Even the flowers in the little gardens that the West Ferry Road can show here and there have lost their own

perfume and taken that of the surrounding industries.

The island is no dreaming place. It is a land of labour. From morn till eve the streets are deserted; the inhabitants are behind the great walls and wooden gates—husbands, wives, sons, and daughters, all are toiling. The only life in the long, dreary roads and desolate patches of black earth that are the distinguishing notes of the side streets is when the children come from school. Then the red and blue tam-o'-shanters of the little girls make splashes of colour here and there, and the laughter of romping children mingles with the clang of the hammer and the throb of the engine.

In Ingleheim Street, a turning off West Ferry Road, there is a quaint brick building that at once attracts your attention, for above it is a flagstaff, and in the wire-protected windows there are flowers.

When you go down over the rough bit of roadway that ends in a wall of corrugated iron and a suggestion of black sheds beyond you read above the doorway of the quaint building the words, "St. Cuthbert's Lodge," and you remember that this is the address of the Rev. Richard Free, the author of that intensely human document, "Seven Years' Hard," the story of seven years' patient, and often heart-breaking, work among the poorest population of a land of drudgery and desolation.

When we came first upon St. Cuthbert's Lodge, not knowing what it was, the oddness of the building struck both my colleague and myself. The suggestion it conveyed to my mind was that of a lifeboat station or ark of refuge on a lonely shore. Why it conveyed that impression I cannot say. I am inclined to imagine that somewhere on the Yarmouth shore I have, in years gone by, seen something like it.

A veritable ark of refuge has this quaint little building—with the ship masts stretching high above it—proved to many in Millwall.

Mr. Free and his wife, cut off from the world, with which their one link is the little, conductorless one-horse 'bus, have brought the love of light and colour into houses of



"ST. CUTHBERT'S LODGE."

grimness and gloom, and, taking the human view of our poor humanity, have become popular characters in the island of mighty tasks and mean surroundings, of noxious trades and pleasureless lives, an island in which there are no places of amusement of any kind. When the day's work is over the lads and lasses of Millwall get out of it as quickly as possible. The island gardens form a green oasis in the desert. They are not in Millwall, but Millwall has in them a beautiful breathing space and a glorious view on the other side of a "cleaner, greener land."

So over the Thames—or rather under it by County Council subway—that portion of young Millwall which has not passed on to Poplar hastens, and finds in Greenwich a welcome surcease from the miserable monotony of dead wall and black chimney-pot.

There is a Ladies' Settlement, St. Mildred's House, in Millwall, which suggests the refining influence of gentle womanhood. The conditions of life among the women workers

of the place are affected by the nature of their employment. The dirt of their drudgery, the odour of their occupation, are brought into the home by the men and women alike. There is no escape from either. But the humanizing influences brought to bear upon the situation have not been altogether in vain, and in the little back-yards and scanty patches of green still left here and there before some of the houses there are flowers struggling to be pretty under difficulties, and fowls and rabbits that look considerably

plumper and healthier and happier than their owners.

In the centre of the island lies Desolation Land, a vast expanse of dismal waste ground and grey rubbish heaps. All round the open space is a black fringe of grim wharves and of towering chimneys, belching volumes of smoke into a lowering sky that seems to have absorbed a good deal of the industrial atmosphere.

This waste land is spanned by the soot-dripping arches of the railway, which is the one note of hope in the depressing picture, for occasionally a train dashes shrieking by towards a brighter bourne.

Across the waste, as we gaze wearily around it, borne down by our environment, comes a lonely little lad, who wheels his baby sister in a perambulator roughly constructed out of a sugar-box. They are the only human beings in sight.

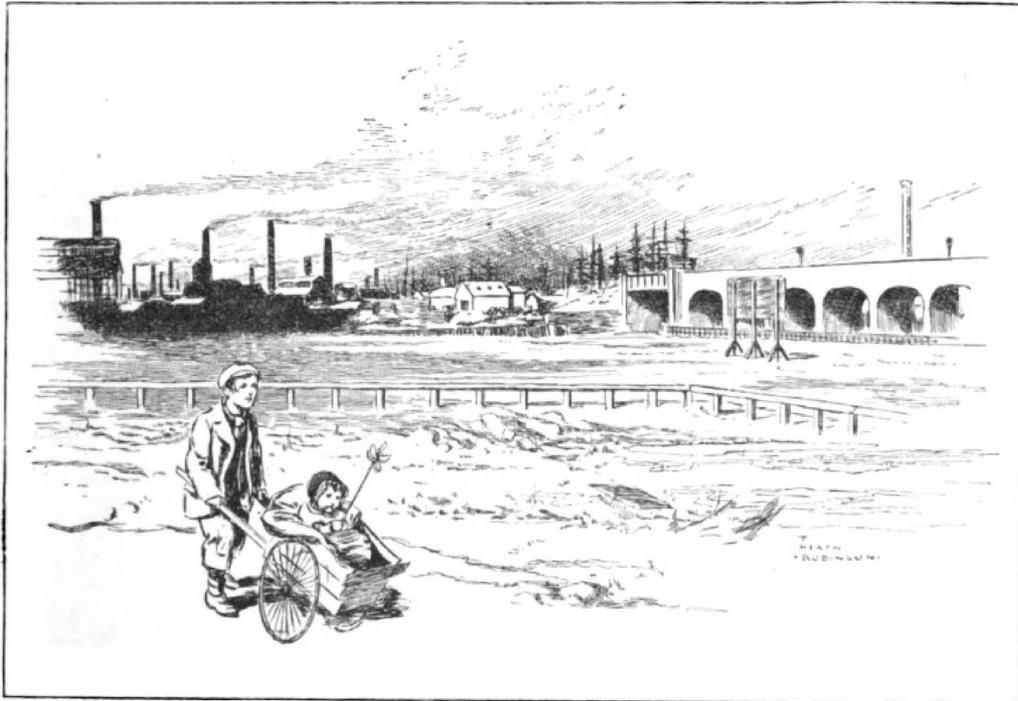
Years ago this desolate spot was farm land. It might yet be secured and made into a green playground for the children, who at present have only the roads and the

miniature mountains of rubbish that have gradually risen at the end of side streets closed in by factory walls. If this central desert could be secured and "humanized" and turned into a healthy playground, it would be a grand thing for the Millwall that is—a grander still for the Millwall that is to be.

Sir Walter Besant complained that in all Millwall there were no book-shops. That is

excellent point from which to take a trip around Limehouse.

Close at hand is the Causeway, the Chinese quarter. Now that a considerable portion of it has been pulled down, the Chinese element is not so prominent as it used to be. A goodly number of the sons of the Flowery Land have removed to the neighbourhood of High Street, Poplar; but in Limehouse the Asiatic seafaring man is still a conspicuous



"DESOLATION LAND."

still true, but the taste for reading has penetrated to the island, and in the shopping part of it there are several stationers' shops where periodical literature may be obtained. It is principally for the younger generation. The windows are filled with "Tales of the Wild West" for the young gentlemen and "How to be Beautiful" for the young ladies, and of fashion journals there is quite a plentiful display. As I have not, in any of my visits to Millwall, observed the fashionable hats and blouses given in the plates exhibited, I can only surmise that they are reserved for the evening visits to Poplar and Greenwich, or for the Sunday trips to regions still farther away "on the mainland."

When we again take "the little 'bus," as it is affectionately called on the island, or, rather, when we let the little 'bus take us, it is for the return journey. The 'bus terminus—the West India Dock Station—is an

note. You will find specimens of him—Oriental, mysterious, romantic—at almost every turn.

At the corner of the Causeway, as we turn into it in search of "China Town in London," we come upon a group of Lascars in their picturesque little round caps chatting together. Through the dock gates close at hand we see the Jap, the Chinaman, the Malay, and the negro pass side by side with the Scandinavian and the Russian. In and about Limehouse we should have little difficulty in finding the Persian, the Arab, the Egyptian, or even the South Sea Islander.

But first let us make our way through narrow, winding China Town. There is no mistake about the Chinese element. The Chinese names are up over the doors of the little shops, and as we peer inside them we see the unmistakable Celestial behind the counter and Chinese inscriptions on the walls.

At the back of one little shop is an opium den. If we enter we shall find only a couple of clients, for this is not the hour. The "den" is dark and dirty and reeks unpleasantly.

There are no Oriental garments or pigtails in this or in any other part of China Town. The Chinamen who have settled here in business have mostly married English wives, and have English babies who are wheeled out in English perambulators. The Chinese lodgers in the Chinese boarding-houses round about are seafaring men, and dress in serge suits and wear cloth caps under which the pigtail, if it has not been sacrificed, is coiled up and concealed. A pigtail would have a bad time in the hands of the local larrikin.

Here is a Chinese grocery store. Some of the canned goods are familiar to European eyes, but all are labelled in Chinese characters. There are also mysterious compounds in glass bottles which may be drugs or dainties, something to eat or something to drink. The closest scrutiny fails to enable either my colleague or myself to arrive at a conclusion.

We go into the shop and some young Chinamen come forward from a back parlour, gaze at us, and summon the proprietor.

The proprietor is understood to speak English. He speaks it, and in despair I try a few words of Pidgin English which I remember to have read in a book of Charles Leland's. I say "top side galaw," "belongey," "ketchee," and "chop" and "chow." But Mr. Ching Kung only smiles at my Chinese and tries some more of his own English.

Eventually I buy a long paper packet,

scrawled all over with Chinese characters in gold on a pink and green ground, and I pay three-and-sixpence for it. I think I have purchased something absolutely Chinese to present to my domestic circle, and I carry it under my arm during the whole of our wanderings about Limehouse. When I get it home and open it amid the eager expectation of the aforesaid domestic circle I discover that I have spent three-and-sixpence in "crackers"—the familiar firework that little English boys let off in the streets on the fifth of November and other festive occasions.

A little way down from the Chinese grocer's is a typical Chinese boarding-house. In a big, square window there is a stuffed "sea parrot," with a weird Oriental arrangement of shells and seaweed and dried fish. Several young Chinese sailors are standing in the doorway. One has just returned with something in a mug. It may be beer.

Suddenly the whirr of a gramophone is heard from the interior. "A Chinese gramophone," exclaims my colleague; "we shall hear something."



"A TYPICAL CHINESE BOARDING-HOUSE."

The record begins to make itself heard, and out over China Town float the familiar strains of "Bluebell." Two or three English girls and a couple of children attracted by the gramophone gather about the doorway. One of the big girls has a sparring match with a Chinese youth.

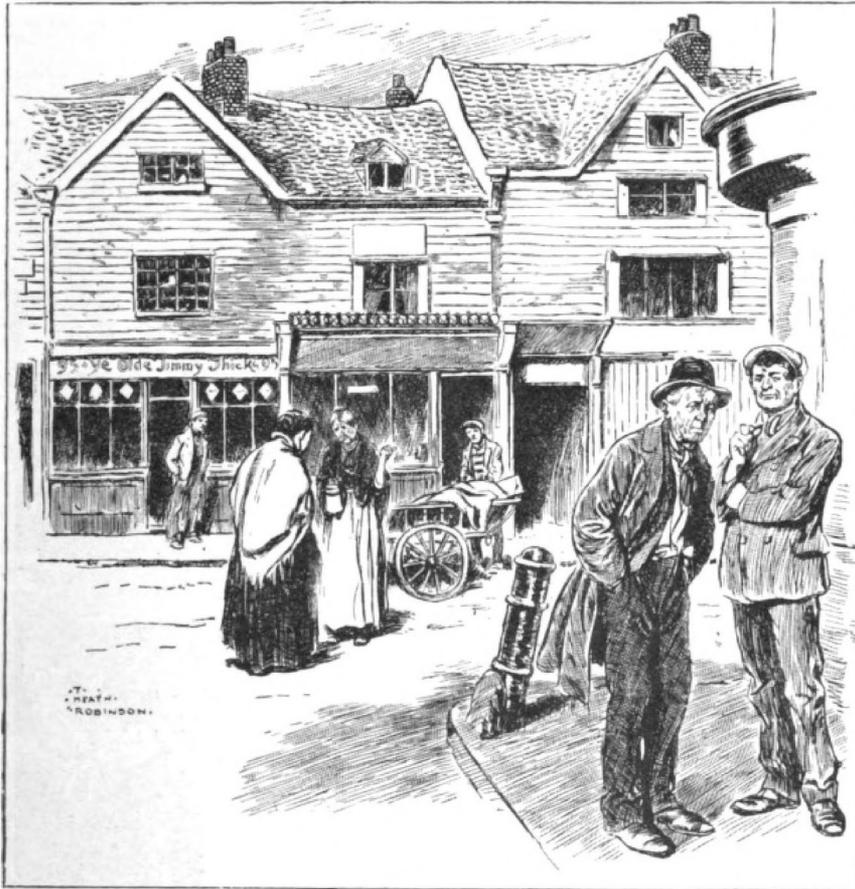
For the rest, though it is Saturday afternoon, the streets of China Town are silent as the grave. With the exception of the little group outside the lodging-house and ourselves there is no one in sight but a Custom-house official, who in gold-laced jacket and peaked cap passes leisurely along.

At the end of the Causeway are a few two-story houses built into railway arches. The trains run over the top-floor ceiling. Out-

presently in Three Colt Street. We have left Oriental Limehouse behind us. Here the environment is typical of the old-fashioned Cockney district with a strong leaven of the Irish element.

Here are plenty of public-houses well filled, and here are the local gentlemen who loll against the wall and the local ladies who gossip at street corners, basket or bag on arm and latchkey on forefinger.

Three Colt Street is a shopping neighbourhood, and one in which the shoppers take the middle of the road, for here are stalls and barrows with comestibles to suit the purse of the humble housewife whose allowance from her lord and master compels her to buy in the cheapest market.



"YE OLDE JIMMY THICKS."

side they are peaceful-looking dwellings. How much peace there can be on the top floor when an express or a heavy goods train passes over them one can only conjecture.

Leaving these quaint specimens of architecture on the right, we wander in and out of a network of narrow by-ways and quaint old-world thoroughfares to find ourselves

Half-way down the street is a block of old-fashioned wooden houses, which are in curious contrast to the up-to-date bustle of the inhabitants.

One of these, an eating-house, boldly announces itself as "Ye Olde Jimmy Thicks," and I take it that the "thicks" are the slices of bread and butter, which are better

known at the coffee-stalls of the people as "door-steps."

Nearly opposite these wooden houses, which my colleague has sketched, is a public-house, in the window of which the programme of a summer outing is already displayed. "An outing will leave here for a day in the country first Monday in July; five shillings, including tea, cornet-player, and hat."

The hat is given that the party in the brake may all be similarly headgeared. It is a light white sun hat, suggestive of a song and dance in the cotton-fields. That you may see yourself in one before you start, a photograph of the company in a former excursion, all in the "included hat," is also exhibited in the tavern window.

This is busy, bustling, marketing Limehouse. The romantic riverside Limehouse lies a little farther away.

We turn into a narrow street and Dibdin and Dickens are with us in a moment. Here are wharfingers, tug and barge owners, ships' chandlers, riverside warehouses, and the house of the harbour-master.

We pause at Duke Shore Steps, a narrow cut in the long narrow way, and standing where the water washes up almost to our feet we see the great steamers pass, and it is as though one were looking out at a busy port through the chink in closed window shutters.

Through the hospitable portals of a ships' chandler we pass, and making our way by long lines of blocks, and coils of rope, and lamps, and

the fittings of cabins, and ships' stores, we come to a little wooden door at the end. It is opened and we fancy ourselves in a bathing-machine, for the water is almost on a level with the floor. The great river is in front of us. Scores of moored barges lie between us and the passing ships.

The smell of tar and rope is everywhere, and, as the sun shines on the broad bosom of the Thames and the big ships pass, one feels a Briton's pride in the great river that makes London the capital of the world's commerce.

From the ships' chandler's we pass into the premises of a firm of tug-owners. Here, again, the scene is a page from Dickens. In the office one looks round for Captain Cuttle, and, leaning from the sunny, wooden balcony that looks out over Limehouse



"A FAR-FAMED BIT OF LIMEHOUSE REACH."

Reach, one peers across the water for the wharf of Quilp.

Wonderfully picturesque are these old warehouses by the riverside, with their wooden balconies, their grey boarding, and their quaint, broken-up lines.

To sketch this far-famed bit of Limehouse Reach from the river, my colleague has to walk along a narrow plank from the doorway of the tug office to a barge some feet away. There is a fresh breeze blowing and it is high tide, and the feat for a landsman is not without its perils.

That it was safely accomplished the sketch at the bottom of the previous page happily shows; but there were moments when the artist, with an umbrella in one hand and his sketch-book in the other, wondered if all he had read about the condition of the waters of the Thames was true.

Penetrating the riverside labyrinth as far as Medland Hall, the well-known refuge in Ratcliff, we turn back and make our way through a public-house into a part of Limehouse which probably few strangers ever visit. It is an area of Poverty Land cut off from everywhere, and its inhabitants are frankly unfriendly. They do not love the stranger, and they do not court observation. They may be virtuous and orderly, but having seen some of the young men in their shirt-sleeves at the doorways, and having been greeted with the information that something unpleasant would be done to us if we came "spying" there, we were quite prepared for the information, which we received later on by the side of a narrow canal at which this area ends, that it was not considered safe to walk along that canal after nightfall alone.

This canal, or "cut," is forbidding enough in its blackness and loneliness. But from the artistic point of view it has its charms. Wandering along the lonely river by-way you come suddenly upon old green-painted Dutch houses with doorways that might have been transported from the quay-side of Rotterdam.

The "cut," with the white towers of Limehouse Church above it, is a bit of Bruges, but along the banks it is Holland all the way with bits of London in between. The most picturesque portion of the "cut" is the lock-side. Here, with a pair of lovers leaning over the long, low wall, the little houses on the opposite side and the green trees in tubs, the white and green woodwork, and the broad river beyond the dock gates, the grim realism of the "cut" has ceased and the romance of the river begins again.

A lighterman comes along the little terrace

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in front of the lock-side houses and watches a barge steering its way to the open.

He makes some critical remarks in a tone which suggests that after the day's toil he has welcomed evening in with "the cup that cheers." The rest of the familiar line is not appropriate. He informs the loiterers and the passers-by that he knows more about the river and river craft than any man in Limehouse.

He is evidently a popular local character, for everybody greets him by his Christian name. He stares at my colleague and myself, for strangers are rare along the "cut," and asks who we are. He is more interested than ever in us when the people of whom he has inquired tell him that they don't know.

Limehouse off the main thoroughfares is a village in which everybody knows everybody else's business, or hastens to learn it at the earliest possible opportunity.

We leave the "cut" reluctantly, for the view at the bridge is one which appeals strongly both to my colleague and myself, and making our way by Church Row, a lane of old-fashioned little houses with green gardens in front of them, we come presently to Salmon Lane, the great market street of the district, which is densely packed from end to end with a Saturday marketing crowd. Here are soldiers and sailors in plenty, a few Lascars and Chinamen, Irish hawkers, and a sprinkling of foreign Jews.

At the end of Salmon Lane, where the crowd has ceased, for the market boundary is passed, we are astonished to see the legend "Real Turtle Soup" in the windows of a warehouse.

But this warehouse is one of the largest depôts for turtles in London. It is here that they are brought straight from the docks, and this warehouse supplies many of the famous London firms who furnish the City and the West with its calipash and calipee.

Threading our way back through the lane into the broad highway we pass the Chinese Mission, and come on the opposite side of the road to that admirable institution, the Strangers' Home. Within its walls Asiatics of all creeds and callings are housed and catered for. The arrangements are in every way admirable, and are highly appreciated by the sailors and travellers who seek shelter here.

When we enter the spacious general room a little group of Lascars is seated by the fire chatting. Lying at full length on one of the benches is a Cingalee. On a table in the centre of the room are Chinese and Japanese

books and periodicals, and these are being eagerly perused by the Orientals who have just come off their ships. There is a bagatelle board in a corner. A Parsee is amusing himself by playing while he waits for a friend who has given him an appointment at the Strangers' Home.

In the dining-rooms there are a number of long tables at which the castes and creeds eat separately. In the kitchen arrangements are made that each creed can cook according to its ritual.

The dormitories and cubicles are airy and

heard terrible tales. No one in the old days suffered more than the Asiatics at the hands of the "crimps."

The men who accept the advantages of the Strangers' Home and pay the moderate price asked are, as a rule, quiet and orderly and well-mannered, and the superintendent has little difficulty in maintaining harmony among men who belong often to creeds violently opposed to each other, and who might sometimes be expected in the heat of argument to let their angry passions rise.

But the privileges of the home are too



"IN THE STRANGERS' HOME."

comfortable. In one, an Arab sailor who has been taking a long rest in his first bed ashore for many weeks is just thinking of getting up and going out for a stroll.

Some of the Asiatics who patronize the home are sailors who "come with nothing and go with nothing," but many of them are men with a little means—small traders visiting London, who prefer the cleanliness, comfort, and security of the home to the risks of the lodging-houses and boarding-houses with which Limehouse and Poplar abound, and of which they have possibly

greatly appreciated to be lightly abused, and it is not until you pass out of Asia, which is the institution, into Europe, which is the street, that you pass from peace to unrest, from the quiet of a haven to the storm and stress of a turbulent sea of humanity.

We have wandered from the dock gates to the Isle of Dogs, and back again through Limehouse to the West India Road, and here we may bid good-bye to the East and, taking train, allow ourselves to be borne through the bowels of the earth to our own home haven in the West.