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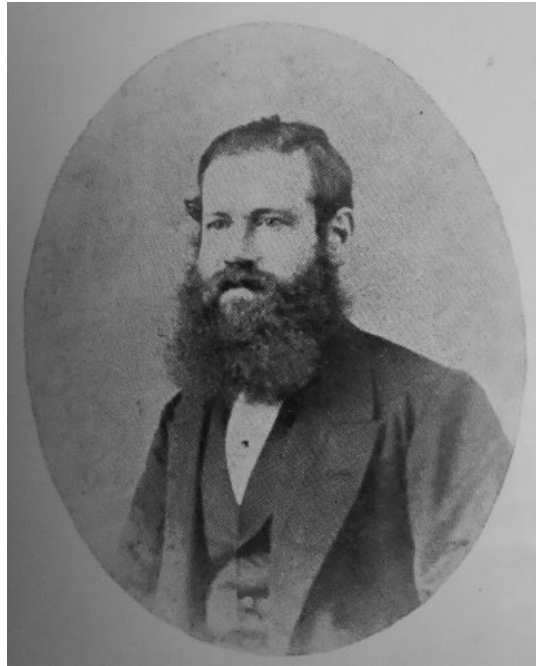


Rambling Recollections of Chelsea and the surrounding District as a Village in the early part of the past century

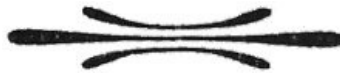
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By AN OLD INHABITANT





INTRODUCTION.



In offering my early recollections of Chelsea and surrounding neighbourhood, I thought they might be interesting to many of my old friends and neighbours, and while away pleasantly some of their leisure moments. The idea of compiling them from a diary, spasmodically kept, only occurred to me when confined to my room, to pass away some of the weary hours, and I certainly found the task extremely advantageous. Accordingly, I have had them printed, for presentation to my friends, as a souvenir of our old friendship.

*Highfield Lodge,
Wandsworth Common.
June, 1901.*

CHAPTER 1.—Early Recollections.

In my early recollection Chelsea had many industries characteristic of the village, which have entirely passed away. The only conveyance—a two-horse stage coach, called the “Village Clock”—used to run from the Cross Keys, in Lawrence Street, twice a day, for one shilling to Charing Cross, and one-and-six pence to the City. It would stop to change horses at the “Black Horse,” in Coventry Street. Time, from Chelsea, ten in the morning and two in the afternoon; supposed to do the journey in an hour—which it never did. This coach appeared to be as much as was required, as it was seldom full, although it would go round in the morning to pick up its regular passengers.

The roads and streets had a very different appearance at that time, when the King’s Road was like a country road, with a toll gate on the north-east side of Sloane Square. By the Asylum Wall, as far as Whitelands, there was no path at all. Where Colville Terrace now stands was Colville’s Nursery, as far as Downing’s Floorcloth Factory, with no path, and on the opposite side from Whitelands to the White Stiles was Siger’s Nursery. The White Stiles—where is now Avenue Terrace—was an open space with a grand avenue of horse chestnuts and some old-fashioned wood fence with two stone steps and a stile at each end, and where Bywater Street and Markham Square stand was Morr’s Nursery.

The King’s Road only took a second place in Chelsea proper. Paradise Row and Cheyne Walk were considered the busiest and most thriving parts of the village, as nearly all its industries were located on the river bank, and nearly all the best families lived in Cheyne Walk or Paradise Row, and in the Royal Hospital, where the old soldiers used to pass the board, and pensions were paid.

For a boy in those days there were but few opportunities for amusement and recreation. The only resources we had were rowing, running, swimming and boxing, to learn which was the proper thing to do and nearly every boy's ambition. I know it was mine, and as soon as I could save up two-and-six pence and get a half holiday, I used to go up to Air Street, Piccadilly, to a tavern on the right hand side kept by a retired prize-fighter, there to have a lesson from a professional in the "noble art of self-defence," as it was then called. There were always a lot of professionals waiting about who used to take it in turns to give the lessons, and a very shabby, disreputable lot they were. We had to pay one shilling for the lesson and sixpence for the use of the room, the lesson to last twenty minutes (which was quite long enough.) You could have a wash and brush up if you knew your way about and were a regular customer, and could always get information of the whereabouts of a fight that was to come off. After leaving I would walk down St. James' Street to Charing Cross, to the pastrycook's shop at the left hand corner of Spring Gardens, and sit down at one of the tables, and, as we then called it, "do the Baron," by ordering a sixpenny ice, or jelly and two cheese-cakes, and give the pretty waitress the twopence change, and go home proud and happy thinking of my next dissipation. These expeditions were always taken alone, being too choice to be shared with anyone else.

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Downing's Floorcloth Factory, that I was speaking of, was burnt down about 1829, having been set on fire one Saturday night, and a young man about eighteen, named Butler, was hanged for it. His father used to be a sort of odd man or jobbing gardener for us, and a committee for his defence sat at our house, mostly people belonging to the chapel that young Butler was connected with. I used to be taken out to see an old officer from Chelsea Hospital, who used to come in full uniform with cocked hat and white plume of feathers, to be chairman. I can see him now, going up the stairs with his sword clinking on every stair. A memorial was sent in, but was not successful. The evidence of a woman who knew him and lived in one of the cottages at the back, stated that she came home late on the Saturday and forgot to take in her black-bird, and was woke up by its making a noise. She got up to take it in, and saw young Butler in the factory yard holding the dog by the chain and patting it. Butler had only recently been discharged for some irregularities. The place had been robbed as well as set on fire. It was well known that others were in it, but they escaped and were never taken, as there were no police at that time, only the night watchman—a tall old soldier, who was paid by subscription by the inhabitants, and used to perambulate the streets and call out the hour and state of the weather—such as "Half-past two and a stormy night," and would eke out his livelihood by calling up the riverside labourers and lightermen at such times as the tide served.

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I well recollect the first policeman coming on duty in Chelsea. Nearly all the school boys, nurse girls, and children turned out to see him. His beat when I saw him was along Green's Row by the dead wall of Burton's Court. He was a tall, ungainly-looking countryman, dressed in a blue bobtailed coat with white metal buttons, white duck trousers, heavy blucher boots, and a top hat and white gloves. For several days an admiring crowd persistently followed him up and down his beat, a little way behind like the tail of a comet, the crowd in the road and he on the path, but the novelty wore off after a time.

At that time the Swan brewery stood at the bottom of Swan Walk on the River, and between that and the Botanical Gardens was the Skinner's Company's Dock and barge wharf, where the state barge was kept. Old Captain May had charge of her, a worthy old man and quite an important character among the riverside people, as he had the engaging of the watermen to row the barge on Lord Mayor's Day and other state occasions, and when they went swan-umping. As they were well fed and well paid it was considered a desirable appointment. It took eighteen watermen to row the barge, and I think they were paid one guinea each for the day. We used to think it a grand sight to see them in their scarlet coats and badges, breeches, low shoes and silk stockings. It used to be almost a holiday when they went out, as nobody could stick to his work. The land between the barge house and the brewery was a rare place to catch eels, and a favourite place for us boys to lay night lines, as it was always well ground-baited by the refuse from the brewery. I have taken twenty-four eels off twenty-five hooks on a night line. There used to be a grand day's sport for us boys once a year at the brewery, on Good Friday. The drains from the brewery at their outlet on the river were stopped up by ramming bags of sand in them when the tide was down, and every boy or man that had a dog (and there were but few who had not) would arrive as the tide served inside the yard gates in readiness, and at a given signal the hot liquor from the coppers would be let down the drains, and in a few minutes out rushed the rats by the score. Away went the dogs, and as all the outlets were stopped there was a nice scrimmage, and there being a large number of barrels in the yard that the rats could get between and the dogs could not, it would last some time, for we had to move the barrels, and a good many of the rats would get away. I have seen them run up a barrel and get in the bung hole. They were quite safe then, and it would drive the dogs almost mad, and we had a job to get them away.

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There were several notable characters along the waterside. One hard-featured, powerful old man, named Jamie Cator, had the reputation of being a remnant of the old press gang—and he looked it every bit. He was morose, dark-featured, heavily marked with the small-pox, and had a deep scar from the corner of his mouth to the back of his jaw, which did not add to his beauty. He was dressed in oiled canvas trousers, a shiny black sailor's hat, and an old pensioner's undress blue short coat, and was not looked upon with respect. He had a small pension of some sort from the navy, and used to eke out his living by bringing down the floats of timber from the docks to the different timber yards, and at other times to work on the sand-barges dredging in the river.

There was another well-known character, a half-witted fellow, who got his living by collecting corks and drift wood that was washed in by the eddies at high tide. He had an old boat that had been mended by tacking bits of old floor cloth over the holes in her, and when afloat had always to have someone baling out the water to keep her so. The Thames in those days was considerably more of a highway than at present. There were two watermen who went regularly up to Thames Street every day as a sort of carriers, and would fetch or take anything from a message to a house of furniture. They would frequently bring a barrel of herrings, or two or three sacks of potatoes, or anything they could buy cheap, and would go round themselves with a bell and announce that they would sell in the boat at the drawdock, at six in the evening, and in the winter they would have one or two flaring lights and sell by Dutch auction. Of course, we boys always attended these sales.

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In Paradise Row, were Harrison's, the tallow melters and candle makers, who used to do the work under the shop in a cellar, reached by a flap from the outside. Charlie, the candle maker, was quite a favourite with us boys, for he would occasionally invite two or three of us to supper in the cellar. It was an understood thing that we should bring some potatoes and enough money for a pot of four half and half. We assembled as soon as the shop was closed and the master gone, about half-past six; and then such glorious suppers! I do not think I ever had such before or since. Our first operation was to wash the potatoes, place them in the furnace hole and cover them up with the ashes, and rake out some more ashes and pat them well down. Next, Charlie would go to a special fat-bin and bring forth five or six lumps of fat, each containing a kidney, which by some mistake had been left in. These were dexterously taken out, tied up separately in a piece of thin lining kept for the purpose, leaving a long loop. He would then string them on a dipping rod, used for dipping the candles, place the rod across the coppers and plunge them in the boiling fat. In about twenty minutes they were done, and taken out, and the potatoes, beautifully baked, divided between us. At times we were short of plates, but that did not trouble us, for an inverted saucepan lid answered every purpose. We would then sit and tell stories till we were obliged to go home. Charlie used to work all night Tuesday and Friday, as on those days they got the fresh fat in from the butchers.

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In the summer there was the grass-boat, owned by an old man and his wife and a grown-up daughter. It had been an old ship's jolly-boat, and had a roughly-built half deck cabin about the size of a four-wheeled cab. The three of them lived in it, and came twice a week to the draw-dock with bundles of coarse rush grass cut in the marshes on the river's bank, to sell to the local tradesmen to feed their horses, at three half-pence a bundle; and all they had left was taken by the cowkeepers at a penny a bundle. When there was no grass they would go sand-dredging, getting the sand by a pole with a leather bag on an iron frame at the end, with a rope to a block rigged up and attached to a windlass. The old man would let down gradually the pole, and the wife and daughter would wind it up. They were a terribly drunken lot; but the temptation to drink in those days in Chelsea was very much greater than at present, for since I can recollect, in that one road not much over a mile, from Battersea Bridge to Ebury Bridge on the canal, there have been eighteen public houses closed, and only one new license granted, and that is to the "Chelsea Pensioner." The names of the thirteen houses that I alluded to were the "Green Man" at the bottom of Beaufort Street, at the back of Luke Flood's house, the "Adam and Eve," the "Cricketers," the "Magpie and Stump," the "Don Saltero," the "Yorkshire Grey," the "King's Head," the "Old Swan," the "Fox and Hounds," the "Snow Shoes," the "General Elliott," the "Duke of York" (that was the house in Wilkie's picture of the reading of the news of the Battle of Waterloo), the "Rose and Crown," the "Cheshire Cheese," the "Nell Gwynn," the "Marquess of Granby," and the "Waterworks," and several beerhouses. All of these houses have been closed or pulled down.

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At the corner of Smith Street was the house where Tommy Faulkner, who wrote the history of Chelsea, carried on his business of bookseller, library keeper, stationer and printer. There were some rich people at that end of Paradise Row, several of them Quaker families, keeping two or three servants. Near the corner of the alley leading into Durham Mews, lived a doctor, a celebrated anatomist, and at the bottom of his garden in the Mews stood a building with no window that could be seen. That had the reputation of being the dissecting room. None of us boys would pass it after dark, as it was reported that the body snatchers who robbed the grave yards, would bring the bodies in a sack to sell to the doctor.

The present Children's Hospital was Miss Pemberton's ladies' school, Gough House, with a lozenge-shaped grass plot and a carriage drive; an avenue of elm trees led on each side to the house from the iron entrance gates, by the side of which stood the coachhouse and stables.

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A trip to Clapham was quite an undertaking, as there were no means of getting there but by walking. Once a year I used to go with the mother to pay the ground rent. We had to start after an early dinner and walk over Battersea Bridge along the road, with fields on each side to the top of Surrey Lane, pass Weller's Farm, and strike off to the left by a pathway through cornfields to Long Hedge Farm—where the Chatham and Dover works now stand—and pass through some water meadows with bridges of planks across the dikes and penstocks, and up the hill by the side of some old cottages that brought you out in the Wandsworth Road; across a narrow footpath, a steep hill with steps cut in the gravel, called Matrimony Hill, and through the old churchyard. A few doors to the left was a ladies' school,—our destination. The lady we were to see was a Miss Hart, a parlour boarder there. We were regaled with biscuits and a glass of currant wine, which we quite appreciated, to help us on our way home.

In Smith Street, at the corner of Durham Mews, stood Durham House School, a large, square, rambling old building, without any pretence to architectural design, apparently built at different times. It contained over forty rooms and dormitories, with a large playground at the back extending the whole length of the mews. It was strictly a boarding school, and must have had nearly one hundred boys training for Eton and Harrow and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, mostly the sons of the aristocracy and the leading families. Some of our most eminent men were trained there. Some of the younger boys on the fourth form were allowed out with the usher on the Wednesday afternoons in the summer time, from two till six, to wander in the fields and lanes to gather wild flowers and to receive instruction in botany. I became acquainted with them at the tuck shop in Queen Street, kept by an old crippled shoemaker, where we used to gamble for sweets by an apparatus called a "doley." You dropped a marble down a spiral column on to a tray at the bottom with a lot of indents for the marble to lodge in, all numbered, and the highest number took the prize.

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There were two ushers to the fourth form who took duty in turns. One a stout, sombre-looking man, whose sole enjoyment appeared to be to sit out on the riverside of the Thames and smoke, drink beer, and read. I think I became rather useful to the boys as I could always find them bait, and knew where the best fishing was to be had, and would get them white mice. The other usher was a very much younger man, and better liked, as he would bring the boys to certain places and leave us to ourselves, with strict instructions to meet him at six. Usually the place of meeting was the Monster Tavern, at the end of the Willow Walk. We very soon found out that he was courting a young lady at a tavern in the Vauxhall Bridge Road. I recollect one Wednesday before Palm Sunday we had been left at the ferry to go over to Battersea fields for the afternoon. We wandered about amusing ourselves till we got to Latchmere, at the bottom of Pig Hill. They were then building the South Western Railway, and the land was all open so we wandered along by the side of the stream, about six feet wide, that bounded the long gardens of the large houses in the Wandsworth Road. It had willow trees on the banks on each side, and we began to gather palm, when we came to one tree on the opposite bank that had some exceptionally fine bits, but out of our reach. So we tied our handkerchiefs together, placed a large stone in the end and threw them as a lasso over the end of the branch and drew it to us. Four or five of us pulled it over and held it while the others were to gather. I was at the end pulling with all my strength, when all at once I found myself lying on my face on the other side of the stream in the garden, with the old gardener standing over me. I was tolerably scared. He collared me and took me up the garden into a sort of paved yard, and placed me between a dog kennel, occupied by a tremendous mastiff, and a pump, just outside the reach of the dog's chain. The dog seemed to treat me with the most utter contempt. I do not think he would have hurt me, as he simply walked up and down and sniffed a bit, and then laid down and went to sleep. As I stood on one side I had a view of the kitchen or scullery with the servants, and on the other side through an open doorway in the wall, I had a view of the lawn and flower garden, and the glass casements of the dining room.

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I was kept standing there for more than two hours, when my captor, the old gardener, came and had a look at me, and went into the house and returned with a stout red-faced man, with no hat and a white handkerchief round his neck, who went into the house. It had got dark by this time, and the lights were lit; he presently returned, and the cowardly old brute, took me by the collar and almost choked me, and pressed his great coarse knuckles into my neck, and tried to hurt me as much as he could. I should have liked to have had him to myself for a little time. I know his poor old shins would have known it. He fairly dragged me into the house and through a glass door into the dining room, where there were at least ten or twelve ladies and gentlemen at dessert. I was taken to the end of the table, where a tall, white-haired old gentleman sat who was very deaf, and I was questioned by two or three of them, and one gentleman who looked like a clergyman, began to lecture me and said how wicked it was to come into a gentleman's garden to steal the fruit. One young lady said, "Oh, Pa, that cannot be, there is no fruit now." From questions by one and the other I had to tell them everything; the usher's going courting seemed to rather amuse the young people. After being seriously talked to I was allowed to go, and was taken out into the front hall, when one of the young ladies came out with a bunch of grapes and some figs and thrust into my hand, and at the side door by the stables I was met by one of the maid servants with a lump of pudding. I very soon made my way down Falcon Lane to the High Street and turned into Church Street, and as I passed old Battersea Church I knew it was nine o'clock, as the bells began to ring—as they did every evening at that time. I think that was about the last of our Wednesday afternoon outings alone, as it came to the knowledge of the usher, and he was afraid it might get to the school authorities.

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CHAPTER 3.—Entertainments and Sports.

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Entertainment or amusement in Chelsea was very poor, as there was no room or place for the purpose. The only one I can recollect was when a professor of mesmerism and clairvoyance came down and took the skittle ground at the back of the "George and Dragon." He was a thin, shabby old man, dressed in black with very dirty linen. With him were his wife, and two girls—

his daughters, he informed us—one about twelve and the other about fourteen, with ringlets, shabbily dressed and closely covered up in old cloaks. They did all the advertising and canvassing themselves, by taking round the bills and trying to sell tickets at sixpence each. The sides of the skittle ground were decorated by the hanging of table covers, curtains, pieces of carpet, sheets, or anything else that would cover over the walls. The platform at the end was composed of the taproom tables with some boards across, an old square piano belonging to the house stood on the floor; the lighting was effected by double tin sconces hung on the wall with two tallow dips in each. The seating accommodation for the ticket holders consisted of chairs; those who paid threepence at the doors had forms or planks to sit on with a gangway down the middle. The performance commenced about seven by one of the young ladies playing the piano, and the other a triangle, the old lady being engaged in taking the money at the entrance. The professor mounted the platform and addressed his audience, commenting upon the wonderful and mysterious scene he was about to enact. He commenced with the usual conjuring tricks of borrowing a hat and making a pudding in it and bringing a live pigeon and a large cabbage out of it, and then returning the hat undamaged to its owner, which to us children was a great wonder. Then came the card tricks, and the ventriloquial dialogue with the puppets, with a handkerchief over each hand to form the figures, and then the grand event of the evening. The table was removed from the platform and replaced by two chairs, and the two girls, dressed in white frocks and yellow sashes, came on. After addressing the audience, he proceeded to throw the elder one into a trance, which he appeared to succeed in doing, for she stood perfectly upright and still. He then placed the two chairs a certain distance apart, back to back, and taking the girl up in his arms, laid her on her back with her head resting on the back of one chair and her feet on the other, and she remained so for some minutes. Next he lifted up the other girl and placed her standing with one foot on her sister's chest, and the other at her knees, and she remained so for some minutes, when she was taken down and placed with her back to the company for the usual thought-reading performance. At the end, as an extra, a pale, sickly youth was introduced, and sang "Wapping Old Stairs," and "Sally in our Alley," the young lady playing the accompaniment, much to the satisfaction of the company. At the conclusion a plate was sent round to collect for the benefit of the artist.

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Chelsea Regatta was a grand day, usually about Whitsuntide, when rowing took place for various prizes, subscribed for by the inhabitants, the publicans being the most active promoters, and the leading gentry patrons and liberal subscribers; first among them the Bayfords and the Owens, great rowing men and very liberal to the watermen. I think one of the Bayfords was the first winner of the silver sculls. The amount collected at a time would be as much as fifty or sixty pounds. There was a grand prize, a boat to cost twenty pounds, and various money prizes. The limit of entries was twelve, to be drawn by lot by Chelsea watermen, with certain restrictions. The race was in two heats, six in a heat, the first and second in the two heats to row in the final; the course from a point opposite the "Yorkshire Grey" stairs, round a boat moored opposite the "Adam and Eve," back and round a boat moored opposite the Brunswick Tea Gardens at Nine Elms, and back to the starting point. The waterside on a regatta day was like a fair, as there were always two or three mountebanks, a circus and a dancing booth on the various pieces of vacant ground in the neighbourhood of the river. Some of the performers, dressed as clowns, played a kind of river tournament, sitting straddle-legged on beer barrels afloat, tilting at each other with long poles; the fun was to see them tumble each other into the water. Then there was the old woman drawn in a washing tub by four geese. After each display the performers would march with a band to their different places of entertainment. From out of the fund provided, there were prizes given for running in sacks, and climbing the greasy pole for a leg of mutton fixed at the top, and a prize for running along a greased pole placed horizontally from the stem of a coal barge, and extending over the water some twenty feet. On a barge moored opposite the end of the pole were four spars radiating with a basket at the end of each from a capstan that revolved, containing a prize, and just within reach of the end of the greased pole. One was usually a small live pig, others a fat goose or a live duck with its wings cut. The "running the pole" was most difficult, for as soon as you got near the prize at the end of the pole it would be dipped by the weight and slip you off into the water; while if you got to the end of the pole and touched the basket as it revolved it would fly away from you. The live prize was the most difficult to contend with, for you had to fight with it to get it on shore. The proceedings all finished up with a grand display of fireworks. On the following day the boat decked with flags, in a van, would be drawn round the principal streets with the watermen who had been engaged in the contest, singing some doggerel verses composed for the occasion, and thanking the people for their liberal subscriptions.

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CHAPTER 4.—Chelsea Notabilities.

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There were some notable people living in Cheyne Walk in those days. At number three lived Mr. Goss, organist at St. Luke's, afterwards at St. Paul's Cathedral, who was subsequently knighted. At number five lived Justice Neild, an eccentric old bachelor, who left half a million of money to the Queen, and next door lived Doctor Butler, curator of the British Museum, and at Gothic House lived Mr. Moore, a man seven feet high, and stout in proportion, dressed in a long drab coat, breeches and Hessian boots with large tassels. He had been a contractor for the stores and accoutrements for Wellington's army in the Peninsular campaign. A constant visitor was the

Countess of Harrington, in a splendid carriage with two tall footmen behind in a quaint brown livery trimmed with gold lace, breeches and silk stockings. Then there were the Owens and the Bayfords, very charitable people. Then there was "Don Saltero's" tavern, kept by a tall Scotchman and his factotum, a little short fat man, a sort of "Joe Willett of the Maypole," who was barman, cellarman, and waiter in one. There used to be a goodly company of an evening in the coffee room of retired officers and well-to-do people in the neighbourhood, to play whist and chess, and sometimes all-fours. There was an ordinary on Sunday at two o'clock, when they gave you a rare good dinner for two-and-sixpence, including beer.

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I well recollect the Kingsleys coming to Chelsea, I think it was about the year 1832. I know it was near about the "cholera year." The first time I saw Charles and Henry they were boys about twelve and fourteen. I met them in the rectory garden at the giving of prizes to the St. Luke's National School boys, when they were regaled with buns and milk. The rector and the boys were great favourites with the parishioners as they were courteous and very free with everybody. I can recognize many of the characters in "The Hillyars and the Burtons" as old Chelsea inhabitants, and the description of the mounds and tablets in old Chelsea Church and the Churchyard, and the outlook over the river is as correct as it well can be.

Opposite the Church in the corner by the Church draw-dock stood the cage, and by the side of it the stocks, then came Lombard Street, and the archway with shops and wharfs all along the riverside up to Battersea Bridge. At that time there were fishing boats, and fishermen got a living by catching roach, dace, dabs and flounders, and setting pots for eels all along Chelsea Reach, and between Battersea Bridge and Putney, and they would hawk them through the streets of a morning. The eels were carried in little tubs, as many as eight or ten, one on top of the other, on the man's head, and sold by the lot in each tub at about sixpence or eightpence each.

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The favourite promenade, especially on a Sunday, was the River Terrace at the back of Chelsea Hospital. It was thrown open to the public, and you gained access to it from the gate of the private gardens opposite King Charles' statue. It consisted of a gravelled terrace and a dwarf wall on the river side, with two rows of immense elms commencing at the outlet of Ranelagh Ditch to the river, and ending at the Round House. On the corner by Ranelagh Ditch stood the College Water Works, with the old machinery going to decay, that had been used to pump water for the use of the hospital. This was a grand place, and considered extremely fashionable, where most of the courting and flirting by the young people was carried on. The Ranelagh Ditch was the boundary of the hospital grounds at that time, and was an open stream about nine feet wide; while its banks were supported by planks and struts across it. It was open right up to the end of Eaton Place. It was crossed by two bridges, one called Ranelagh, in the Pimlico Road, by the side of the "Nell Gwynn" tavern, the other called Bloody Bridge, in the King's Road, between Sloane Square and Westbourne Street. On the banks of this foul and offensive stream there was no better than a common sewer. Between the two bridges at the back of George Street and overlooking it, were crowded together a lot of old two and three-roomed cottages that periodically at high tide were flooded by the offensive matter. The district was known as Frog's Island, and suffered terribly in the outbreak of cholera in 1832. It was inhabited by a class that was always in a chronic state of poverty, and as there had been a very severe winter, that had a great deal to do with it. I think this stream is now covered over. It had its rise from the overflow in the Serpentine, in Hyde Park, and crossed under the road at Knightsbridge, about where Albert Gate now stands, into the Park. [32]

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CHAPTER 5.—Old-time Chelsea.

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It was a grand sight on the first of May to see the four-horse mail coaches pass along Knightsbridge at eight in the evening. As many as fourteen would pass all in their new livery of scarlet coats and broad-brimmed top hats, trimmed with gold lace, the guards blowing their horns. I have seen them take up passengers at the top of Sloane Street, who arrived there in one of the old two-horse hackney coaches, and it appeared quite an undertaking to get the passengers on board. They would branch off there, some going along the upper road through Kensington, and the others along the Fulham Road and across the river at Putney. The road from Chelsea to Buckingham Palace was mostly through fields, some of them called the Five Fields (now Eaton Square and neighbourhood), extending as far as Grosvenor Place and St. George's Hospital, which you could see from the toll-gate in Sloane Square, the only building on that part being Eaton Chapel. The road to the Palace was very lonely, as there were but few houses. The Chelsea Bun Houses—there were two of them—stood on the left side of the Pimlico Road, about one hundred yards beyond the toll-gate by the "Nell Gwynn" tavern. The first one kept at that time by London, had a frontage of at least fifty feet. It was built out fifteen or twenty feet from the house, and had a colonnade in front over the pathway; the other, kept by Chapman, was two doors further on, of the same style but much smaller. On a Good Friday morning I have seen a large crowd waiting to get served, which they did through the window. I have seen carriages and traps waiting as far as the tollhouse. A little farther on, where St. Barnabas' Church now stands, was the "Orange" tavern and tea gardens, with a theatre where regular plays were acted, and beyond, just before you came to the wooden bridge over the canal there was a road leading down to the Chelsea Water Works reservoir and filtering beds, and at the bottom stood the "White House," with its ferry over to the "Red House" at Battersea, a great sporting riverside house,

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where nearly all the pigeon shooting took place. There was always a great crowd of amateur sportsmen outside waiting for a shot at any birds that escaped, and frequently a dispute would arise as to who shot the bird, often ending in a fight.

There were no buildings on the right hand side of the road, but some marshy ground and a row of willow trees between it and the canal as far as the basin, which was surrounded by a few shops and wharves, and where Victoria Station now stands. And nearly opposite stood Bramah's Iron Foundry, where nearly the first iron lighthouse was built and fitted together and erected in the yard complete, and then taken and shipped to one of the West India Islands, I think Jamaica, and re-erected. It was afterward's Bramah's Great Unpickable Lock Factory. p. 35

At the other side of the canal was the Willow Walk, a raised road leading from the Monster Gardens to Rochester Row, with market gardens and low swampy ground running right down to the river on one side, and the canal on the other. In winter I have seen snipe, teal and wild duck shot on the ground at the west end of Chelsea. Just over Stamford Bridge stood Stamford House, once the residence of Nell Gwynn, now occupied by the Gas Company's engineer, and just beyond, through a farm yard, was a public footpath right through the orchards and market gardens alongside of the river right away to a riverside tavern, with a lane bringing you out by Parson's Green. In the orchards was grown some of the choicest fruit to be found in the country. There were some old walls with fruit trees that appeared to have stood there for centuries. This district was known as Broom-house, and was owned and occupied by the Bagleys, Steels, Matters, and Dancers, market gardeners and fruit growers. Higher up the river at Hammersmith, Chiswick and Isleworth were the strawberry gardens that supplied London with that delicious fruit. They were carried to Covent Garden Market twice a day by women in large round baskets on their heads. You would meet them along the road of a morning about seven, and again about three with a second picking, always on the trot, in gangs of as many as twenty. The strawberries were packed in small tapering baskets called pottles, holding about two-thirds of a pint, and then in large baskets called rounds, containing seventy-two pottles; these rounds containing seventy-two pottles would sell at from twelve to sixty shillings, according to the season and quality of the fruit. This was considered a very profitable industry as both pickers and the carriers were much better paid than the ordinary employees. It was quite a harvest, and lasted from three weeks to a month. p. 36

The lying in state of the Duke of Wellington was held in the dining hall of Chelsea Hospital. There was a raised platform at the west end beautifully draped in black velvet and white silk, with silver cords and tassels. The coffin was attended by four officers, generals, as chief mourners, and the gangway that the public passed along was lined with guardsmen. During the ten days for which the body was on view the crowd was immense, and on about the third day there were two women trampled to death, and a great number injured, owing, it was supposed, to a number of artillerymen marching up in a body and trying to force their way through the crowd. Steps were immediately taken to erect barricades, and police officers were stationed to regulate the crowd. As it extended three parts of the way up Ebury Street, some had to wait from five to six hours, only a certain number being allowed to pass round at a time, and there were many taken out of the crowd that could not stand the crush and had fainted. p. 37

The Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race was best seen from Cheyne Walk as the course at that time was from Westminster to Putney, for that and all other leading races, and the race was considered a dead certainty for whichever boat got through Battersea Bridge first and had the Middlesex shore.

They used to have some tolerably good sailing matches for small boats off Chelsea Reach. The course was from a boat moored opposite the "Adam and Eve," turning round a boat moored off Lambeth Palace, and back to the starting point. Races were arranged to start at about three-quarter's flood so that they would finish on the ebb of the tide. They were small tubby-looking, half-decked boats, not above three tons, and would carry an immense amount of canvas, and when there was a breeze and the river was a little bit lumpy they would dance about merrily and were a very pretty sight. They were generally sailed by the owners. p. 38

CHAPTER 6.—Public Gardens.

The first public garden that I recollect, long before Cremorne, was the Manor House in the King's Road, between Little's Nursery and Shawfield Street, where Radnor Street and the Commercial Tavern now stand. It was a detached house with carriage drive in front, and grounds reaching to where the bottom of Radnor Street is. It used to be occupied by one, Colonel Middleton, and in about 1836 it was taken by a man of the name of Smith, and turned into a tea and recreation garden, a sort of little Vauxhall with coloured lamps, statuary, shrubbery, winding path and fountain, with music and dancing. Flexmar the clown, when a youth, was one of the regular visitors and would amuse the company with a break-down dance, and the great Mackney, the negro delineator and stump orator (I believe still on the music hall stage), as a youth was a very clever violinist, and would entertain the company by playing in almost any position and imitating almost any sound. It was carried on only a few years, after which the owners built the Commercial Tavern, with a large room behind, now Radnor Chapel. The grounds were laid out for builders, and Radnor Street was built, leaving the old Manor House standing at the corner in p. 40

the King's Road. It was then turned into the Chelsea Literary and Scientific Institution, and so continued until removed to the Chelsea Town Hall. It struggled on for a few years and then came to grief.

CREMORNE.—The first I recollect of Cremorne was a man known as Baron de Barranger, who used to ride about in grey military uniform with his two sons, tall, military-looking men. They carried on a sort of livery stable and tavern at Cremorne House, by the river, and called it the Stadium Canteen. It was on a road by the river, leading from the bottom of Cremorne Lane past Cremorne and Ashburton House and the cottage to the Lammas Lands, known as the Lots meadows, some eight or ten acres in extent, which was sold by the parish for about three or four hundred pounds. There was, even in De Barranger's time, some entertainment at Cremorne, for in the meadow known as Cremorne Meadow on the opposite side of the King's Road, a fair was held, and at Cremorne ground some pony races and a horse and sporting-dog show, but the commencement of Cremorne as a place of public entertainment was in about 1839, under Baron Nicholson, of the Garrick Head, in Bow Street. This was where the "Judge and Jury" was held, with Baron Nicholson as the presiding judge, when counsel used to appear in wig and gown, and very remarkable mock trials were held, the evidence being of a broad and indecent character. The partner of the Baron in organising the fete at Cremorne was a man of the name of Littlejohn. It was extensively advertised by bands of music drawn about in stage coaches, and was called a "Thousand Guinea Fete." The entertainment lasted three days, and dancing, singing, music and drinking went on till the small hours of the morning. This, I believe, was not a commercial success.

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Two years after the place was opened by a Mr. Ellis, I think, a musical man connected with Drury Lane Theatre; regular entertainments were provided, and a band stand erected with a circular dancing platform round it, and a lot of alcoves and nooks for refreshments under the band stand and round the platform and in various parts of the gardens. A pavilion for concerts was afterwards added. Before these arrangements were made the dancing was in the long room of Cremorne House, which was turned into the supper room. The House was kept open during the summer in a languishing sort of way till about 1848, when it came to grief and was closed. About 1849 it was purchased by a Mr. Simpson, I believe, a hotel keeper from near Covent Garden Theatre, and the whole thing was greatly improved and decorated and opened with some first-class music and popular artistes. Two of the leading cornet players were engaged, Coney and Arbin, and a great amount of vigour and energy were thrown into its management, and from that time it became the most popular place of amusement and appeared to be vieing with Vauxhall Gardens, which were then on the wane of their popularity. The land on the river front was taken in and converted into a pleasure garden, and a rustic bridge thrown across the road, connecting it with Cremorne proper, and river fetes were given, with fireworks and the assistance of steamboats. An hotel was built on the river front, and a grand panorama of the Siege of Sebastopol, was shown with the assistance of some of the Foot Guards. An accident happened by the falling of a platform and several were injured. The balloon ascents were a great feature by Lieutenant Gale, Adam, and Coxwell taking up acrobats who performed on the trapeze in mid air. A Madam Potoven ascended sitting on the back of a white heifer fixed on a platform suspended from the car, and a Frenchman came down in a parachute, falling opposite Chelsea Church in Robert (now Sydney) Street, and was killed.

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The gardens went on successfully for many years under the able management of Bishop, Partridge, and Adams, until the alteration in the licensing laws, when the time of closing was fixed at twelve, the beginning of the most profitable time. The concern then fell into the hands of E. T. Smith, and was carried on by him for a few years without any very marked results—it appeared to have passed its pristine glory. It then passed into the hands of the proprietor of the Glove and Scents Emporium in the Gardens, who was the last proprietor, for it was soon after closed for good, and the land, together with the Ashburton estate and the Lots or Lammas Lands were laid out and let for building purposes. The only part left uncovered by buildings is the Ashburton Nursery on the King's Road front. Vauxhall Gardens had been closed some years so Cremorne was the only public gardens near London of any account.

A great impetus to all places of amusement was caused by the '51 Exhibition in the Park. It was a grand year for all people in business in London for the visitors were immense from all quarters of the world, and you would meet in the streets the costumes of all the nationalities of the globe. There was an average of one hundred thousand visitors passing the turnstiles every day, and on the last Thursday there were one hundred and thirty seven thousand.

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CHAPTER 7.—My First Census.

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The first census that I can recollect, if all the enumerators had the experience I had, must have been a very incomplete and misleading return. I was asked to take a section of four hundred forms to deliver, get filled up and return, for which I was to receive one guinea, and for every fifty beyond that number two shillings and sixpence, and as I was told it would only take a few hours on the Saturday afternoon to deliver, and the same on the Monday to collect, I thought it was pretty good pay. But never any more! for it took me nearly three weeks to complete, and at least two-thirds of the papers I had to worry out the particulars and fill them up myself as best I

could, for the people were very suspicious and had a notion that the government had a sinister motive in getting these returns. One was supposed to be that there was a conscription for the army, and every able-bodied man was to serve, and another was that they were going to introduce passports as they did on the continent, and anything continental at that time was not at all popular.

I recollect the passing of the Reform Bill in '32, when there was a great illumination, and gangs of men and boys went about breaking the windows of all the houses that were not lit up. Nearly all the windows on one side of Smith Street were broken. The illumination consisted of tallow candles stuck in square lumps of clay, about six in each window. Chelsea has always had a strong radical element, for during the agitation over the Reform Bill, the Unionists had one or two meeting houses. There was one in Leader Street, and another in Doyley Street, and in '48, the time of the Chartists, one of the sections met on the Chelsea Common and marched with their portion of the partisans to the great meeting on Kennington Common, and returned in procession along the Kennington Road to the Westminster Bridge. Here they were broken up by the police and not allowed to proceed in procession, and the petition was sent on in two four-wheeled cabs. There was great excitement, and it was generally expected that there would be serious rioting. Great precautions were taken, the military were all confined to barracks, and a large number of artillery with their guns from Woolwich were drafted into London overnight, and all the body of local reserve men—old soldiers with pensions—were kept under arms, and 100,000 special constables were sworn in.

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The recruiting sergeant in Chelsea on Whitsun and Easter Mondays and during the regatta was very active. There would be two or three smart fellows from the cavalry with one or two young fellows, posing as recruits, for decoys. The artillery sergeant would be in smart blue uniform, and then came the regiments of the line. The decoys for the latter were two or three smartly dressed girls of doubtful character. Then came the East India Company sergeant, and last but not least came the recruiting for the Spanish legion. They all had their gangs of harpies and hangers on, as the sergeant spent money freely, every recruit being worth five to six pounds to him. It was a common practice to get a lad half drunk over night, and in the morning to bounce him that he had enlisted, and there were always plenty to swear that he had done so. The recruits for the Spanish legion were a rare motley crew, and would go singing through the streets, half drunk, in gangs, that they were going fighting for the Queen of Spain, and collect drink and money. A good part of the crowd would be loafers and not recruits at all. The great recruiting ground was along the riverside, and at the public houses along the roads leading to the fair at Wandsworth, which was held on a piece of land in the York Road, just beyond where Wandsworth Station now stands. The recruits for the Spanish legion were a poor miserable lot, as they were the refuse from the others. They would take them at any age, from sixteen to fifty, and were not at all particular about size or health; in fact, there is little doubt that lads of fourteen were sent out. They used to assemble by Northumberland Passage, Charing Cross, and march in gangs to Tower Hill to pass the Board of Commissioners that sat in a room over a sailmaker's, and having passed, would go by steamboat to Gravesend ready to embark; and it was generally asserted that they never shipped above two-thirds of the recruits they enlisted. The balance would desert and enlist again, and were assisted in so doing by the recruiting sergeant.

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CHAPTER 8.—The London Docks.

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People had to walk more in those days, as there was no riding to your employment. I know the first employment I obtained was at the London Docks as checker to the landing of goods, and I had to get there by eight and leave at four. No time for meals, which I had to eat behind the desk flap. I had to stand all day on a wheeled platform, with a desk in front, that was moved along the quay wherever it was wanted. It used to take one and a half hours to get there; it was a long drag, but as I got twelve shillings per week I thought it an important post. I could sometimes if the tide served, get a ride home by taking a scull and dropping up with the tide; they were generally glad of a hand. I should think the dock labourer was very much worse off in those days than at present, as there appeared plenty of labourers, and they were only taken on as wanted and discharged as soon as done with, many of the jobs lasting only three hours, and the pay being fourpence per hour. They got their shilling and were done with till they got the next job.

I recollect the way one tall brawny Scotchman, over six feet high, named Macdonald, used to select his gangs; he would go to the dock gates where the crowd was waiting, and not say a word but plunge in and take those he wanted by the collar and swing them round behind him just like you would select from a drove of ponies, and his attendant would give them a ticket with a number on it. From thence the engaged commenced the walk from Chelsea to the docks, through the College Walk, up Ebury Street, and through Elliot's, the Stag Brewery, always having a look in at the stables at several of the most beautiful black dray horses, splendidly kept and as well cared for as in a nobleman's stables. Then up Castle Lane to Palmer's Village, where I would meet a companion who was employed in Thames Street, and then along York Street and Tuttle Street, next out in the open space by Westminster Hospital, close to Palace Yard, up the steps to the high pavement, and through a passage by a public house to Westminster Bridge, through Pedler's acre, along Stangate and Bankside, through the Brewery, and come over the new Bridge just opened, and out by the water wheel, along Thames Street, over Tower Hill to the

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docks. I got my appointment through the interest of an old Quaker gentleman who lived at No. 5 Paradise Row, with his two sisters. I had to go of an evening to get instructions in my duties, and he was very particular to impress upon me that neatness was the most important point in bookkeeping, and that the red ink lines in their proper place was the beauty of a ledger, and never to erase a mistake, but draw the red lines across it and enter the correction in red ink on the margin, which I hear is still held good to the present day. I have often walked from Chelsea to the Robin Hood at Kingston Bottom and back after I had done my day's work, to do my courting and see the young lady, the daughter of the head gardener at Park House, who lived at the lodge by the entrance gates. I was not a recognized suitor, and had to do the courting under difficulties; I would go along the road past the lawn and shrubbery to where the peacock roosted in the big trees, and imitate its screech as a signal that I was there, and then come along the road to where the fence and the hedge met and squeeze through into the kitchen garden, and sit down on the trunk of an old walnut tree and wait. It was here that most of our courting was done.

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This went on for some time, till the young lady was sent away as companion to an old lady at Bath, but correspondence was both difficult and expensive. As every letter cost eightpence for postage it was too expensive to last long. I would sometime be able to get them franked, which was a privilege allowed Members of Parliament and certain persons in an official position to send them free of charge. I could generally get a couple sent off in this way by meeting the manservant of an old officer in the hospital, and treating him to a four of hot rum at the Phoenix Tavern, in Smith Street.

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CHAPTER 9.—An Exciting Experience.

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I was always fairly successful in getting employment, as I was always ready and willing to earn a few shillings, our circumstances being needy. I recollect sitting at home one Saturday evening when a friend of mother's came in who kept an old tavern at the bottom of Church Street, and was in sad trouble. She had just been to Doctor Philpot at the corner of the street for advice, and found out the doctor had been attending her husband for what was then known as the "Blue Devils," after a drinking bout. The potman who had attended to him had gone to take his pension and had not come back, and could not be found anywhere, and the patient was very restless, and there was no one in the house but her, the servant, and a young girl who served in the bar. She was afraid to be left, and I was asked if I would mind going home with her, and if she could get no one else I was to stop there where the young people and I knew each other well. I consented and started with her. By that time it was nearly eleven o'clock, and we found the patient quiet, and had been sleeping; and as soon as we could get the customers out, we closed the house, and had a good supper. The servant had been sitting with him. It was then past one o'clock when I went upstairs; it was a beautiful bright moonlight night, with the moon shining in through the garret casements, making it almost as light as day. There was very little furniture in the room; an old three-legged round bedroom table and two or three rush bottom chairs, a bedroom candlestick, and a tallow dip. I had brought with me one of the sensational tales that I had been reading at home, and sat quietly down to finish the tale. It must have been some hours, as it was just getting daylight, and the patient had not appeared to have moved, but lay on his back with his eyes wide open and shining like stars, staring at the ceiling. All of a sudden he appeared to jump clean on the top of me, and clutch me by the throat, upsetting the table and candle, and we both fell on the top of it and crushed it like a match box, and then the struggle commenced. We fought up and down, and in the struggle I stripped every rag off him, and he appeared to be trying to get me to the window to throw me out; and how our heels did rattle in that midnight struggle on the old garret floor, as we danced round in the shadow of the old Church on that Sunday morning.

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He was a little man, and I began to get the better of him, and got him on his back on the floor and held his arms down, when he made a plunge and snapped at my nose with his teeth. He just grazed the skin, and looked up and laughed. Of all the slippery things to handle, a naked man beats everything. The noise we made brought his wife and the two women in, and with their assistance we got him on to the bedstead, and with strips of the sheet we tore up, we tied him down to the bedstead, and he appeared to be pretty well done up. By that hour it was time to open, as there were always early customers on a Sunday morning, as it was a noted house for Dog's Nose and other early drinks at that time. It was then about seven, and we saw old Kirk, the beadle, going past to dust and prepare the Church, and as he was a friend we called him in for advice, and he suggested a straight waistcoat. As he knew the master of the workhouse in Arthur Street, he promised to go and borrow one, which he did, and brought one of the old pauper nurses to show how to put it on. It was a large shirt made of strong bed tick sewn up at the bottoms, with two holes to put the legs through, and open behind, with strap and buckles and sleeves a yard long, with large pieces of webbing sewn at the ends. When we had got the patient comfortably settled, I had some breakfast and went home with five shillings in my pocket, but I do not think I felt like taking on another such job.

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Funerals on the river in those days were a frequent occurrence. I recollect one in particular. A young man invalided home from the East India Company Service in an advanced stage of consumption came to stay with a sister at Chelsea. The husband worked at the malt house on the river, and there the young man died. He was a native of Mortlake and they took him there by the

river in a boat to bury him. I recollect their going by our garden, we boys standing with our caps off while the procession passed. There was one boat rowed by a pair of sculls, containing the coffin and the mother and sisters as chief mourners, followed by three or four boats full of friends, most of the women in white dresses, and the men with white scarves and bows, which was the usual mourning for an unmarried person.

CHAPTER 10.—A Boy's Tramp by Road to Epsom, on Derby Day, 1837.

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At that time it was a difficulty to get to Epsom any other way than tramping it, as there was no railway, and the lowest fare was ten shillings, coach or van, and, being anxious for the treat, I had saved up sixteen shillings and threepence, and by a little diplomacy I had arranged to be abroad for the day without letting anyone know where I was going. At about four o'clock on the Wednesday morning I started from Cheyne for my trip, with my savings and two or three slices of bread and butter in my pocket, and as I passed old Chelsea Church it was a quarter to five, and a beautiful bright spring morning. Going over Battersea Bridge and turning to the right through the Folley, a colony of small cottages with a private way through them into Church Street with fields and herb gardens on one side, then passing Battersea Church and the draw-dock, into Battersea Square, into the High Street and outside the Castle Tavern. This being open was the first evidence of the road to Epsom, as there was a donkey cart with five or six gipsy men and women and one or two children with them. They had a stack of peas and shooters, back scratchers, paper flowers, plumes of feathers, and small bags of flour, also wooden dolls to sell to the visitors on the road, as at that time the favourite amusement was blowing peas through a tin tube at the people as they drove along, and some of the peas would give one a very painful experience. Throwing bags of flour was another amusement indulged in.

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Passing along High Street into Falcon Lane—then really a lane with fields and market gardens on each side, and a small stream where Clapham Junction now stands, then known as the boling brook, and past some cottages to Battersea Rise, and then up the hill past the old smithy that dated from 1626, on to the Common and across it to the end of Nightingale Lane, and along a footpath across where the Station and the St. James's School now stand. It was then all common, and down Wandsworth Lane to the Wheatsheaf on the main road.

Everything here was in evidence of the Derby proper. All the gentlemen's houses had stands erected inside the front gardens, and the walls decorated with festoons of scarlet, most of them making it quite a gala day having dinner parties to see the visitors in their grand equipages, for the turn-outs of the aristocracy and royalty surpassed everything to be seen anywhere in Europe. All the shops and private houses had their windows decorated and full of visitors. It was reported that thirty thousand horses at that time went to Epsom on the Derby Day along the road at this point. The wayfarers to the Derby were mostly horsey-looking tramps with pails on their shoulders in twos and threes, very shabby and down-at-heel. Both men and women, with almost every toy or trinket you could mention; tin trumpets, squeakers, masks to sell on the road, came slouching along; then came barrows, trucks, donkey and pony carts, with all sorts of eatables, such as sheep's trotters, whelks, oysters, bread and cheese, fried sausages, saveloys, fish, ham and beef sandwiches, ginger beer and table beer—at that time it was allowed to be sold without a license. They would stroll along the road till they found a suitable pitch, and would there establish themselves. There were numerous parties of musicians in gangs of three or four, harp, violin and cornet, or cornet, trombone and French horn; armies of acrobats and children on stilts, conjuring, Punch and Judy shows; in fact, some on every open space all down the road to the Downs.

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The road through the village of Tooting to the Broadway, where you turned off in the Mitcham Road, was the most crowded, for some of the traffic divided and went straight on through Merton and Ewell to Epsom, but the greater part went by the Mitcham Road, past Daniel Defoe's house and Fig's Marsh, a long strip of marsh common on one side and the herb and lavender gardens on the other, and a number of wooden cottages with long gardens in front, that made quite a harvest by selling nosegays and refreshments. This extended all the way to the village of Mitcham, the Upper Green at which the Pleasure Fair is held to the present day, I believe the only one remaining near the metropolis, and at a stall outside the Ram I made my first halt for breakfast. I indulged in coffee, plum cake, fried sausages, and bread and butter, at the cost of eight-pence, and started on my way at seven by the clock at the Lavender Distillery, passed through the toll-gate down the road to Mitcham Green, a large open piece of green sward considered at that time one of the best cricket fields in Surrey, and producing some of the best cricketers, and still maintaining that character. I proceeded down the road with several good residences on each side and almost an avenue of trees and may hedges in full bloom, the road alive with every kind of vehicle and a large number of tramps. At the corner of Mitcham Green had collected a large number of itinerant musicians, and all sorts of diverting vagabonds, looking very shabby, dusty and down at heel, and as if it was anything but a prosperous occupation. There were no negro melodies in those days, but there was the troubadour with his guitar, wearing a broad-brimmed hat with a large feather and loose coloured slashed coat and short cape or cloak loose on his shoulders, and singing love songs, and a man with trestles and a sort of tray strung with wires, played with two short pieces of cane or whale bone with a knob of leather

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on the end, with which he struck the wires and knocked out a tune, and, by the same process, with bells arranged on a straight bar fixed on high trestles, tunes were played.

The long, straggling village of Mitcham was the end of the crowded inhabited part of the road to Epsom; past the old Brewery and one or two old houses you came to the old mill and bridge crossing the river Wandle, with a ford by the side where nearly every vehicle drove through water, and as soon as you crossed, the avenue of fine old elms commenced, and meeting overhead formed quite a delightful shade. Meadows and park-like grounds on each side, were well wooded, with only two residences and one farmhouse, an old house apparently half farmhouse and half residence, with very pretty gardens in front with a number of shrubs cut and trained into all manner of grotesque and fantastic shapes. The land on each side all the way to Sutton was purely agricultural and grazing land.

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The first buildings you came to on entering the village were some old wooden cottages and the smithy, adjoining which was the cage or lock-up, outside of which was the village constable and his assistants, two or three labourers sworn in for the occasion. The village consisted of one long, straggling street of small low cottages and a few mean shops, hardly a good house, saving the Inns, consisting of the "Angel," the "Greyhound," and the "Cock." The two latter were large coaching stations, the "Cock," with a big open space in front. The villagers were making their harvest by having tables outside and selling milk in small yellow mugs about the size of a jam pot at a penny each, and small loaves with currants and home-made cakes. Outside the "Cock" was a Punch and Judy performing to an admiring crowd, and by the toll-gate at the corner of the Cheam Road was the first breakdown. An old landau with eight occupants, drawn by a big cart horse, had parted right in half and shot all its contents into the road, and a general squabble commenced, especially among the ladies who, according to their account, had prophesied the disaster at starting. But the matter was soon settled as with willing hands the broken carriage was moved into a field by the roadside and they made themselves comfortable by falling to on the provisions, and I left them having a picnic in the broken vehicle.

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Then along the road till you come to a long open common or waste land covered with rushes, grass and coarse scrubby growth to another toll-gate, of which I think I counted seven.

CHAPTER 11.—On the Downs.

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At eleven I turned down a lane about a mile before you get to the town, and over a stile and through corn-fields by a path that brought you to the Downs. At the bottom of the hill there was a large and busy crowd at that time in the morning although but a few visitors had arrived. The Grand Stand was there and the Enclosure, although very much smaller than at present. Tents and booths covered the ground extending at least one-third of the extent of the course, with the signs of well-known London taverns, long booths, fitted as stables with livery stable-keepers with familiar names attached. Boxing booths, single-stick and quarter-staff and wrestling booths.

One large refreshment booth had up for a sign in large letters—"Dan Regan, the Cambridge Gyp. Refreshments and good accommodation for man and beast. Palliasse prostration with matin peck, two-and-sixpence," and appeared to be doing a good trade. The accommodation a shakedown on some planks, and breakfast in the morning.

There did not appear to be any professional bookmakers, but the betting was carried on quite happily in the tavern booths and shops everywhere by everybody. Towards twelve o'clock the company began to arrive and get into place alongside the course, the four-in-hands drawn up, and carriages of every description, mostly taking out the horses to the stables in the tents, and formed a row two deep. The vans and other vehicles forming lower down in the same way, but further from the Grand Stand, and taking out the horses and tying them to the wheels, hundreds of loafers thus being busy selling pails of water and forcing their services to rub down and generally to extort a fee.

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There was almost everything to be had on the course in the way of eatables and drinkables; occupants of carriages and drags began to have their lunches spread on the top of those vehicles; corks began to pop and a general onslaught was made on the provisions by everybody. The entertainments commenced their business. Shapers in plenty, roulette tables, dice, three-card trick, pea and thimble, and the pricking in a curled up strap, and every phase of gambling without let or hindrance.

At about one a bell rang, the horses were brought out on to the course for one of the minor races, the course cleared by the few police there were, and the race run with very little excitement, for there did not appear to be much interest taken in the three or four races that were run before and after the great event of the day, the Derby, that was run about half past two or a quarter to three, when the company had fed and had got pretty well primed with wine, and the noise became furious and the excitement immense.

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There was a great concourse of people, and standing on the hill just before the Derby was run it looked one black moving mass, and you could see almost the whole of the course from start to finish. The races after the Derby did not appear to attract the visitors so much as the early ones, and drinking and the other amusements appeared to be all in full swing and had plenty of

patrons, and there was gambling of every form. I tried my luck at it with varied good and bad luck, but about five in the evening had spent about two shillings and a penny. I found I had only sevenpence halfpenny to carry me home out of my sixteen shillings and threepence which I had started with, so someone was thirteen shillings to the good; but, anyhow, I had seen the Derby, and had thoroughly enjoyed the trip so far. There then set in a general activity and bustle of brushing up and putting to of horses and preparing for the start home. However the people got their right horses and so few accidents happened was amazing.

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The best of the turn-outs got away first, and the company appeared to be getting livelier, and were decorating themselves with false noses and masks and dolls stuck in their hats, and blowing tin trumpets and using tin tubes to blow peas as they passed by the best of the turn-outs, and there were a large number of them, with the carriages drawn by four post horses and ridden by the post boys in coloured satin jackets, white top hats, breeches and top boots, different coloured striped jackets, silk or velvet jockey caps. The best of them had relays of horses which they changed at the "Cock," at Sutton, a favourite halting house. About six in the evening the road became crowded with both vehicles and pedestrians of every description, many of them driving most recklessly, and a breakdown of some sort occurred at every half mile. I counted four wagonettes, three light carts, one carriage and four vans, complete wrecks, and left in the ditches and the fields by the roadside, and several with shafts broken and otherwise damaged and tied up with ropes. The roadsides appeared like one continual fair all the way from the course, and the company playing all manner of mad antics.

At Sutton a carriage containing four ladies and a foreign-looking old gentleman, all elegantly dressed, and a man sitting on the box, had the misfortune for the post boys to get so drunk that one of them fell off his horse and had to be left behind, and the other was so incapable that he had run into several traps and done damage and was stopped by a threatening crowd, when he got off his horse and wanted to fight and was quite unable to continue his journey. Just then a four-in-hand drove up and was appealed to by the lady occupants for assistance. Two of the gentlemen volunteered to ride in the place of the post boys. The one left was with assistance tied in the provision hampers and fastened behind the carriage, while the two gentlemen mounted the horses and drove off amid cheers of an admiring crowd, looking, in their dress coats, top hats and green gauze veils and trousers not at all like post boys; but they appeared to be quite at home on their mounts, and the ladies and all started for home, quite happy. In getting nearer to London the crowd got thicker and the fun and horse-play became more furious, many of them halting at the taverns by the roadside, at all of which there was a large number stopping outside and in the fields provided for that purpose.

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Getting towards Mitcham the pea shooting and the flour throwing commenced, and the men selling bags of flour there for sixpence, were doing a roaring trade. The pelting led to a good many disturbances, often ending in a fight. The occupants of the various carriages and drags made themselves conspicuous by dressing up in paper coloured hats and false beards, and using fans and kissing their hands and bowing to the girls and women along the road; and most of the traps were decorated with large branches of may and horse chestnut blooms that had been torn from the hedges and the trees by the roadside.

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It was now drawing towards seven, and I began to get a bit tired, dusty and footsore, when I saw an opportunity of a ride, and by a little manœuvring I got behind a carriage without being seen by the occupants, and sat myself down comfortably on the step and had a nice ride all through Mitcham and Fig's Marsh, with only a flip with the whip now and then from a passing driver. Getting into the Mitcham Road and the Broadway I had to contest my possession of the seat with several boys who wanted it, and at the corner of the Broadway just turning into the Tooting Road, a biggish, rough-looking fellow who had been trying to get possession of my seat, snatched off my cap and threw it down in the road. I got off, collared and began to punch him, and had one or two rounds just opposite the Castle tavern. A crowd quickly surrounded us, and we were soon supplied with seconds, and were hustled by them through the large stable yard of the Castle tavern into a meadow at the back, attended by a large crowd of both men and women, and stripped for a regular fight. I certainly was the younger and the lighter of the two, but my knowledge of the use of my hands stood me in good stead of both weight and age. We had a fair stand-up fight, the only one I ever had in my life, and was well attended. I got terribly punished in the body, but not a crack on the face. It lasted nearly twenty minutes, when a master butcher that was well known in the neighbourhood, pushed through the crowd and said that "The young 'un has had enough of it," and the crowd began to murmur, when the butcher turned round and said, "If any of you particularly want a fight, you can have one. I do not mind obliging you," but the offer did not seem to be accepted.

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CHAPTER 12.—The First Steamboats.

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The Morris Dancers at Chelsea on May Day or early in May would pay us a visit, generally consisting of from nine to twelve, all men or lads. They had the appearance of countrymen, dressed some in smock frocks, others in shirt-sleeves, breeches and gaiters, and all decked out in coloured ribbons tied round their hats, arms, and knees of their breeches, with long streamers, and others carrying short sticks with ribbons twisted round, and bows on top, or garlands of

flowers tied on small hoops. They generally stopped outside the taverns in the roadway and danced to a drum and pan pipes, tambourine and triangle. They would form themselves into three rows, according to their number, about three feet apart each way, and would dance a sort of jig, and change places by passing in and out and turning round to face one another, striking their sticks and twisting their garlands to the time of the music, and then stamp their feet and give a sort of whoop or shout, and finish with a chant in honour of the month of May, and make a collection among the crowd.

The "Endeavour," a wooden paddle boat, was the first to run three times a week from Dyer's Hall Wharf, London Bridge, to Hampton Court; leaving London Bridge at nine and passing Chelsea at about a quarter past ten. The passengers had to be put on board in the wherries at a charge of threepence each. A signal was made from the Yorkshire Grey stairs for them to lay to to take them on board, as there was no pier at Chelsea at that time. The boat, always once or twice during the summer, would come to grief under Battersea Bridge by knocking its paddle-box off, and get a-ground once or twice before it got to Hampton Court. I have several times seen her a-ground just before you get to Kew Bridge, and lay there for two or three hours with no way of getting ashore but by being carried on men's backs through the mud. The fare was three shillings and sixpence, and five shillings. They always advertised "Weather and Tide permitting." If everything was favourable they would arrive about half past twelve and leave again at four. The passengers were not very numerous. The boat ran for about two years, and then one called the "Locomotive" started, a very much superior boat, and much quicker; and a start was made for a ider of a very primitive character at the Yorkshire Grey stairs—merely two old coal barges with gangways from the shore, and one from a landing stage. A company was then formed called the Chelsea Steamboat Company, with four small wooden boats, and a pier was built.

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The Wellesley Street tragedy (now called Upper Manor Street), occurred on the left hand side about four or five doors from the top. The house was kept by an old lady who let the best part to lodgers, and on one Sunday evening about nine she had taken her supper beer from the potman at the Wellesley Arms, who came round in those days at meal times with a tray made for the purpose of carrying beer to be sold at the customers' doors; and about eleven o'clock the people who occupied the upper part of the house came home and opened the door, but did not find any light as they expected, as it was usual for the old lady to leave a candle burning on the ledge of the staircase window. They went to a neighbour to get a light and returned and found the old lady at the foot of the stairs. She appeared to have been stunned and then strangled. The jug with the beer was standing on the stairs, the place had not been robbed, and nothing had been disturbed. The people in the house had been recently married, and it had been their practice to go away the whole of the Sunday and spend it with their friends. There were several arrests, but there appeared to be no clue, and the matter was never cleared up; the only theory was that it was a contemplated robbery, someone knocking her down and then strangling her, but got scared and took to flight without taking any thing.

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CHAPTER 13—Politics on Kennington Common.

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There appears always to have been a radical element in Chelsea, for a large contingent met on Chelsea Common and marched to Kennington Common to give the Dorsetshire Labourers, Frost, Williams, and Jones, a grand reception on their return from imprisonment. They were drawn by four horses in a hackney carriage with outriders, and followed by a large number of vehicles occupied by their admirers, and a large crowd, when a meeting was held on Kennington Common, and violent speeches were made. The crowd became very disorderly, some ugly rushes were made, and the few police and constables who were there got very roughly handled, and in one of the scimmages a policeman's top hat was knocked off, and got kicked, and I had a kick at it—what boy would not do so? In the excitement, anyhow, I got collared, and was being dragged away when a rush was made, the police upset, and we all rolled in the mud together, and I got away. More police came up and began to hunt the crowd, and made many arrests. I, in one of the crowds, rushed down a mews at the back of the houses in the Kennington Road. As I was without a cap, and covered in mud and my face was bleeding, it was thought they were after me, so I was picked bodily up and pitched over the wall into a lilac bush in one of the long gardens, and I slid down on to a stone garden roller on which I sat, pretty well dazed and thoroughly done up. I do not think I was noticed by the people in the house, for I sat there some considerable time, when some children from an upper window noticed me. Soon after, an old gentleman in a dressing gown and a scarlet smoking cap and two or three ladies appeared on a sort of verandah at the back of the house, and had a good look at me, but did not attempt to come down in the garden. Presently two men came up the steps from the kitchen under the verandah, one of them dressed as a groom, and the other in his shirt sleeves and a big rough hairy cap on, who I found afterwards was the potman at the White Bear Tavern opposite, while the other was the doctor's groom, who lived two or three doors higher up the road, who had been fetched in to arrest me. They brought me up into the hall at the bottom of the kitchen stairs, and the old gentleman began to question how I got into such a scrape, and where I came from. When I told him I came from Chelsea near the Hospital, he asked if I knew any of the officers, and as I mentioned several of them by name that he knew; he told me he was a retired army surgeon. I was allowed to go into the scullery to have a wash and brush the mud off, and it was suggested by the potman that I had

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better stop until it was dark for fear I should be known, and as I had no cap he went off to his mistress and begged an old one belonging to one of her boys, who had just gone back to school. As soon as it was dark I was let up the area steps and started home and went to bed saying nothing about it, but felt awfully sore and bad.

In speaking of the King's Road I forgot to mention a very famous pump which stood opposite the "Six Bells," close to the old burial ground, and that had the reputation of giving the most transparent and sparkling water that was to be obtained, which was fetched from far and near. The boys used to play some trick by placing a large stone up the curved nozzle, so that when the servants came with their jugs and began to pump it would send out the stone and through the bottoms of the jugs. It got complained of, and the parish put a grating which stopped that little game. The reputation of the water went on till some wag asserted that a human tooth had been pumped up and found its way to the water bottle on the dressing table. It then began to dawn on the authorities that it might not be so wholesome as reported, and the handle of the old pump was chained up, and soon after the road was widened by taking a part of the burial ground, and the old pump was done away with.

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CHAPTER 14.—Knightsbridge.

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At Knightsbridge there used to be a toll collector, but I do not recollect any toll gate. A man used to come out of a gate in the fence to collect it, about where the Bank now stands, beside it the Cannon Brewery, a large building with a cannon at the top, with the back overlooking the park. That and White's menagerie, adjoining the Fox and Bull tavern, were pulled down, and one of the first National Exhibitions was built on the ground. It was for a collection formed by a doctor who had travelled in China. It was a collection of all sorts of curios, illustrative of the habits, idol worship and life and industry of the Chinese, with native workmen and women carrying on their various trades and domestic apparatus, as they did at home with their temples, and performances in idol worship. It was first exhibited at the back of the Alexandra Hotel in a large room in the old barrack yard, and it was such a success that in the following year the large brick building was built on the site of the Cannon Brewery. There were a lot of immense stuffed dragons and winged snakes and flying fish and many-headed monsters and curious reptiles that had never been seen in Europe before, and several Chinese ladies sitting on pedestals exhibiting their deformed feet, which looked like hoofs with a row of small lumps of flesh underneath with nails that represented the toes. There was a large number of visitors, and it kept open for about two years, having had some waxworks added to its attractions.

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A little beyond the Alexandra Hotel stood a dairy that was noted for its asses' milk, which at that time was considered a cure for consumption. There would be as many as forty donkeys there of a morning and they would be driven in pairs by boys round to the customers and milked at their doors twice a day, which was a very large and profitable business.

On the Knightsbridge Road, opposite Gore House, stood an old tavern in the middle of the road with some old stables and sheds, a great place for the market carts and country wagons to stop at of a morning. Gore House became the residence of the Countess of Blessington, her daughter and Count D'Orsay, a very handsome and fashionable Frenchman. There were large grounds attached to the house and they used to give very grand garden parties both public and private, many of them for charities. I recollect going to one given for the benefit of the Caledonian School. It was a very grand and fashionable Fancy Fair with the guards and the Caledonian School band, and Athletic Sports, trials of strength, sword dances and the Highland fling, putting the stone and flinging the hammer, the bag-pipes, and many other Scotch pastimes. The grounds were very beautiful. The property was bought by the commissioners of the '51 Exhibition from their surplus funds, and the Albert Hall now stands on the site.

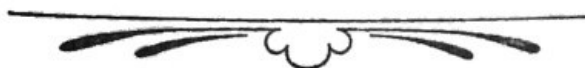
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The "Admiral Kepple" tavern at the top of College Street stood by itself, with tea garden at the back, and at the west side in the Fulham Road was the old parish pond, and a little farther west at the back of about where the "Stag" tavern now stands was a large pond from which Pond Place took its name. The present road in front of Chelsea Hospital was only a footpath that was closed every Holy Thursday; and the parish authorities beat the bounds, which they did on Holy Thursdays with the two beadle in uniform, the churchwardens, overseers, and parish constable, and the way-warden; and a great number of school children with willow wands would perambulate the parish to beat the bounds, and would knock down the obstruction and pass through the district called Jews' Row at that part, a labyrinth of courts and passages of small and two-roomed houses. It was called Jews' Row, bounded by White Lion Street on the east, Turk's Row on the north, and Franklin's Row on the west, and was inhabited by the very lowest and most depraved and criminal class both male and female, many low lodging houses and thieves' kitchens, and the roadway was at least one foot six inches lower than the path, and all along the curb the low, loose women would sit and insult and rob the passers by. It was quite impossible to arrest them as they escaped down the labyrinth of courts and alleys, and it was so well-known as a dangerous locality that very few people would venture through it, while the district lying to the east between White Lion Street and the boundary of the parish, and Chelsea Market, where Sloane Gardens now stand, was nearly as bad, with courts and alleys and crime and depravity. As a market it had long been disused. I can just recollect a few poor miserable stalls on the large

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Dear old Chelsea, the land-marks fast fading away,
Where the warrior, the statesmen, the grave, and the gay,
Came to rest and to play.
Where fair maids and grand dames spent their fortune and fame,
Then flirted away where grand lords and gay courtiers came
For their wooing by the silent highway.
Where men of learning high in the state,
Passed from their hearths to the dungeons and died for their Faith.
Brave to the last,
Dear old Chelsea will soon be but a page of the past.



Footnotes:

[32] It marks the parish boundary, and is carried across Sloane Square Station in great iron cylinders.—J. H. QUINN.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK RAMBLING RECOLLECTIONS OF CHELSEA
AND THE SURROUNDING DISTRICT AS A VILLAGE IN THE EARLY PART OF THE PAST
CENTURY ***

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