

WAKEMAN'S WANDERINGS.

LONDON, June 26, 1893.—My companion was as interesting a character as one can easily find in London. I made his brief acquaintance at a time when, turning costermonger, I had rent to pay for some coster friends and myself in the unsavory precincts of Hare Lane. I seemed to interest him; he truly interested me; and we grew to be friends; or as much so as his natural suspicion of all humanity, as a London rent collector, and his fixed and amiable idea that there were in the whole world, outside of London, few people and little territory "worth worritin' a body's 'ead about," would permit.

He had in earlier days been a police inspector, and bore something of a record of vigorous experience in the East End regions, from certain missing fingers, somewhat less provision of nose and ears than originally allotted, with various and vagarious gerrymanders of his face, neck and scalp which unpleasantly hinted of riot, ambulance surgeons and curious capillary and cuticle transplantings in the general hospital. A period of ethical and physical repose as beadle, which followed the efforts of some Billingsdate "mobbers" to convert him into a mingle with which to playfully "smooth out" some of his fellow inspectors, which retired him from the force with portions of his organism intact and a small pension, gave him something of a benign look. This was curiously blended with a wise judicial air, for having for a time, as truant-school "visitor," inspector or detective, engaged in chasing truant scholars up and down gutter-spouts, into and out of cesspools and sewers and up chimney-flumes and beneath their mother's petticoats, to finally land them behind the walls of the "Ragged School" prison.

He was indeed, though stately and calm in demeanor, a man literally of parts. Duty had, as it were, rendered him plainly divisible. And I never had higher esteem for his short, broad, energetic and always perspiring wife's exactitude of description than when she groaningly remarked that "William Erory Hevans was no less than a hob-jec." "A hob-jec," she would repeat in a sort of exultation of dejected admiration, "Hi must remark it, a hob-jec as if 'e goes on a gettin' sepparated by waga-bonds an' houtlaws, an' Hi outlives 'im—'which I prays Hi don't!—'ll put me on the poors rates a buryin' 'im in bits."

Mr. Evans, whom I always addressed for his service record as "Mr. Inspector," and who always returned for the same a fine official salute which displayed the two remaining fingers of his right hand to the best advantage, was now in the charities and the rents. He was employed during certain days of each week by one of those London charity organizations which support as many officers and committees as wards, to unexpectedly drop in upon its few dependents at their homes, and observe if the tea and tracts bestowed were effecting upright living; and it was from his reports, from which he wisely eliminated the separation of his own members, that data were secured for those touching annual reports of beneficence which draw tears from honest British eyes and shillings from plethoric British pockets.

All other days at Mr. Evans' disposal were occupied in the collection of rents. I should not like to repeat his observa-

tions regarding this vocation, or the people with whom it brought him into business relations. On the one hand were some of the worst, and to me the most pitiable, of London's lowly; on the other were two maiden sisters, over seventy years of age, immensely wealthy and far uglier and greedier than they were rich. Among their properties were scattered small houses and tenements beyond the Bethnal Green region, to the north of Mile End Road; some of these in the most congested of London districts, and others straggling along desolate half-country roads. Endless dining and dunning were necessary to secure any manner of returns upon these. It was always a problem with my friend which was the worst end of a day—his rounds among the vigorous-lunged brawlers in his endeavors to collect rent, or his meeting with the ancient dames when he turned in his petty daily returns. They receive him in high dudgeon and chintz wrappers and with cudgels like a policeman's billy, their shrill invective being emphasized by crashing the cudgels upon a huge oaken strong box standing between them, as though it were the heads of their recalcitrant tenants or Mr. Evans' own picturesque cranium which, he confided to me, he always kept as conveniently near the door as consistent with his obligations as a man and a collector.

He also often related that these interviews always terminated in a mild protest on his part "as 'ow'eaven itself could'nt make Britons true out o' 'scampers,'" whereupon the old ladies went right away into "convulsions," yelling "Hoot!—toot!" at him, and set to beating the chest with greater vigor than ever; during which martial thundering he always quietly withdrew; and it was my study of this word "scampers" which enabled me to discover that there are supposed to be more than 100,000 families in London so known to landlords. All of this brought me to Mr. Evans' door at an early hour of a recent morning, for the purpose of accompanying him on a day's rounds for the collection of rents.

Mr. Evans, in his ancient, bell-crowned hat, high collar, broad stock, short topcoat, long waistcoat, baggy black trousers and huge thick-soled shoes, looked every inch a man of affairs. An ink-bottle was slung to one of the big buttons of his shiny waistcoat; a well-worn pocket-book filled with blank receipts, arrears records at quit-notices was under one arm, and a very heavy walking-stick, giving its owner something of an official air, was held handily under the other. He seemed glad and relieved at the prospect of company. As we trudged along Cheapside and Whitechapel Road he favored me with an analytic disquisition upon London "scampers."

"Scampers," said Mr. Evans judicially and firmly, "is a bad lot—leastwise nearly all on 'em. They're flyers, flitters, slippin' in a 'ouse unbeknown; stayn' as though they howned it, to th' point of summonses, an'—scall away they goes like a passel o' Gipsies."

"Ow does they git that way? Some on 'em's born so; most on 'em. Some on 'em's ground so. Some on 'em's chased so. Some on 'em finds others scampin', an' jess takes to it like costers does to buttons and rumpuses. Many on 'em's made so by registerin', sum-

monsin', finin' and the work-us; fur if once th' School Board claps its paws on yer young uns, it's pay the rate er work a fine, an' nothink but death an' scampin' can keep the young uns their sel's ouden school or prison!"

In justice to the old rent collector's truthfulness I should add that even this language does not convey the faintest idea of the endless war going on in the great cities of England between the school boards and certain classes of the poor and ignorant. The State, through its various statutory provisions for compulsory "free" education, enacted during the past twenty-three years, in effect says:

"You, Tiny Tot, aged five years, are to attend such school as we may provide, or your parents select, every school-day of your life, until you are thirteen years of age, or have passed the sixth standard, or we will clap you in a criminal institution; and you, Tiny Tot's father, must pay for what we compel your child to do, or we will fine you for every absence recorded against it, and tax you for the cost of its imprisonment whenever we finally shut it up; and then, if you cannot pay its accrued fees and fines, and accruing judgments against yourself, we will also clap you in jail until they are paid or are liquidated by imprisonment; we will then release you and again begin the same wholesome care of yourself and your offspring!"

Out of this exquisite system has grown, naturally and in order, millions of school-haters and liars; hundreds of thousands of petty law-breakers before the local magistracy; tens of thousands of children—criminals among the good and bad alike; an army of "visitors," inspectors and detectives, whose unempowered though universally-exercised brutality among helpless children and distracted and ignorant mothers is inexpressibly infamous; and hundreds of so-called Industrial Schools, or "Ragged" and "Truant" schools, as they are more popularly termed, which, whatever their merits of management on the line of their legalized purposes, are an inexcusable outrage upon the inalienable rights of child-life and home-life in any civilized land.

The first places on the collector's list were found in a noisome court in which the sunlight never came. On our approach there was a lively scattering in every direction of that portion of the half-naked population with whom we had business, who either totally disappeared or barred their doors against our entrance. Such unpromising negotiations as were possible were of necessity held through keyholes or broken panes of glass. As was the collector's custom here, he shortly announced in a loud tone of voice that, as he had nothing else on hand that day, we would sit down and wait. We did sit upon a filthy form which had just been vacated. Certain indications of restlessness were soon plainly audible from within. This seemed to communicate itself to those neighbors on the outside who, themselves being accustomed to similar experiences from other sources, through the natural alliance of misery, began a series of maneuvers for our discomfiture. A basin full of dirty water suddenly rained down upon us, and the old court rang with coarse laughter. Strapping barefoot girls, in a sort of horse-play, began hustling us as