

sandwiches hiding lovely slices of tongue; tender mackerel I had myself grilled to a crisp as brown as a frost-touched maple leaf; Roquefort cheese "wich," as Jem truly said, "made Cheddar turn green with envy;" shallows of Kentish strawberries each as large as a walnut and sweet as nectar, real powdered sugar, a pot of clotted cream as yellow as gold, and three beautiful tin spoons and saucers for their service. There were other toothsome tid-bits which would have done honor to the real quality; along with cold tea by the jug full, and a few dark-looking, chunky bottles of ale, a tribute to Jem's affection for Becky and a cunning provision for himself; for on this point he had approached me with confidence, genuine feeling and wise insight into the social requirements of a London East End coster girl.

"Wat's the use," he said, with almost a tinge of bitterness, in his sturdy plea, "wat's the use a leavin' out the wet? A real London lady's no moor good at a houtin', 'thout wettin' er up a bit, than a cow 'thout runnin' water. Wy, 'n' all them yer rich, dry wittles 'd crackle Becky's constitushun inter kindlers afore night, 'thout a sup o' wet. At 'Ampstead er Hepping, give a ooman wat she's used ter. an' plenty hof it, 'n' no fear, she'll make folks 'arpy w're she bides!"

Jem was a sight in his new "clobber," gleaming rows of buttons and stunning "kingsman." Becky was no less a sight in her grand gown and feathers. Bolivar was even a more interesting sight in his sleek coat and wonderful decoration, a portion of which comprised feathers waving from his trembling ears, a set of false whiskers depending from his shaggy chin, with bright ribbons crossed and recrossed about his nimble legs; and Sprat, a tiny coster lad without recorded ancestry, who often accompanied us on our daily hawking adventures and slept in our cart at night, who was this day to be our "coachy and vally" combined, clad in Jem's every-day jacket, waistcoat and "kingsman," was a sight of atom-like habilitated matter one seldom in a whole lifetime beholds.

Indeed we were altogether such a sight that, as we finally sallied forth, the denizens of Bell Lane, Shoreditch, were so pleased with our appearance and so enthusiastic over our various gracious returns of their hearty encomiums, which included occasional showers of half-pennies among the Bell Lane ragamuffin youths, that this admiration for our spirit in so gallily upholding the gallantry of the thoroughfare was at length expressed in enthusiastic cheers. These encouraged Sprat to larrup Bolivar far beyond his wont or deserts. The donkey thereupon took most of his whiskers and all of his bit firmly between his teeth. Then, after lifting Sprat out of his temporary box with his nimble heels, he straightway broke into a fierce canter, never checking his furious pace until he ran head-foremost into the old Stoke-Newington church wall. After alighting here over each other's heads, we took time to reassure Bolivar of the peaceful nature of our expedition, read our ambitious coachman a highly-spiced coster warning, made some slight necessary repairs, gathered together our distributed hampers and their contents, and then proceeded with great calmness and circumspection, but none the less merrily, on our pleasant holiday way.

As we jogged along at an easy gait in the fine May morning, there was much to see and know through the medium of my coster friends' sources of information. While they quaintly told me of this and that, to them, familiar object along or upon the highway, I gave them, in return, a bit of the Forest history. Some of these things my readers may care to know as well as Jem and Becky and Sprat. In ancient times it was known as Waltham Forest, and in those days comprised 60,000 acres. It was exclusively used as the royal hunting-ground, with most cruel foresters in charge who usually settled the cases of poachers with their darts, scarcely troubling the hard justices in Eyre, who, until 1670, held their justice seat here in the Forest every three years. In later though still olden times the annual Epping hunt was one of the most famous stag hunts of England. Even today this ancient custom is still observed by unloosing, every Easter Monday, a fat, beribboned stag, which ambles amiably about the Forest, followed by hundreds of London quasi-huntsmen, a lot of happy, friendly curs and perhaps ten thousand East End ragamuffins who fall over each other merrily and madly in the general scramble through the shadowy forest glades.

Henry the Third was the first sovereign to give the mayor and citizens of London the privilege of sporting in the royal forest; and thus it gradually grew into a vast common. But there were no legally defined rights. By 1871 suburban encroachments and enclosures had extended so rapidly that less than 4,000 acres of Epping Forest remained. A great popular agitation against its diminution followed. This resulted in the incorporation of London, under authority of an act of parliament, and at an expense to the present time of about three quarters of a million pounds, by purchase of manorial rights and other procedures, recovering several thousand acres which had been enclosed.

The entire area, amounting to about 6,000 acres, which stretches away to the northeast of London on the western border of Essex, from Wanstead to the town of Epping, a distance of about twelve miles, was publicly declared "forever free to the people" by the Queen, who appeared at the Forest in person, before a concourse of fully 200,000 Londoners, on May 6, 1882. Since that time portions of the tract have been measurably beautified and improved; but the chief glory of Epping Forest is in its actual primeval character. Scarcely an acre of its surface has ever been touched by a spade or plow. Old Roman camps are within it shaded by the self-same trees which clustered about them nearly 2,000 years ago; and the turf upon the earthwork where Boadicea, Queen of the Iceni, was defeated by Suetonius, with 80,000 Britons slain, since it received that mighty feast of blood, save for the prodding of antiquarians, has never been disturbed.

At Chingford, on the western slope of the Forest, we gave Bolivar as famous stabling as could be found, left Sprat to bring on the hampers at a seasonable hour to the woods between Queen Elizabeth's lodge and Connaugh lake, and set out for genuine coster's enjoyment of the Forest. Back towards London for several miles we had only seen patches of woods and coppices to our right. Here at Chingford the real Forest begins.

Jem and Becky, already within its accustomed spell, pressed forward to its heights with increasing speed, outstretched hands and radiant faces; and as I saw them far in advance, I could not but think of the old prints of Pilgrim when his burden fell.

We were at once in the thickest of it, not of the Forest, but of the mighty throng. Avenues upon avenues of East enders stretched in every direction. It was now after noon, the Saturday half-holiday, a joyous, glorious day withal, and it seemed that from all ways leading from London and near outlying towns great tides of humanity came sweeping on, each one greater than the one before it, and all finally merging at the edge of the woods and over the open spaces in seething masses of motion and color. It was like the action of incoming sea-tides breaking upon a shallow, shingly beach. No one can understand the complexity, the irrepressibility, the vastness of a London holiday crowd until the greater portion of these 100,000 or 150,000 souls can be seen here at a glance moving upon and almost storming this ancient Epping Forest en masse. Far back as the eye can reach hundreds upon hundreds of outlandish Essex shandryduns, as many traps and gigs, Whitechapel omnibuses, millers' and butchers carts, brewers' vans and coster's carts are moving towards you, around and between which countless thousands of folk afoot, centering from highways, from lanes and from footpaths across the fields, fare massed in seemingly inextricable confusion. For an instant there is something like terror in such a scene. I cannot tell why, but in it and through it I again saw what I looked upon all but thirty years ago, when Sherman's cruel edict emptied Atlanta of all its people, and left their homes in flames.

But those were faces set and white; these, bright and rubicund and broad with endless smiles. And in this respect your London "outer" differs from all other folk on earth. No matter whether he be great or humble, the moment his face is turned toward the fields or the sea he is a bundle of quivering sympathies, responsive in kind to every form of mirth, to the most vagarous incident or accident of situation or condition, and gives back a hundred fold every kindly look that nature can bestow. He may be rough and uncouth in what he says and does, but he has left all care behind, and makes in every moment of his holiday hours, even in untoward exigency and defeat, a place for unctious mirth and hearty cheer.

What are the amusements of this vast army of men and women and lads and lasses? Chiefly in wallowing, and I use the expression literally, in the sun and shade of Epping Forest. Thousands upon thousands have brought their hampers or baskets as we have done. Then, in great splashes of color, they group and heap themselves in wriggling bunches of enjoyment over field, upon brae, in cool recess, in shady avenue, upon grassy meadow, in deep wood glade, and actually wallow in the ancient Forest turf and soil. They wander and stroll and leap and race, and shout and sing and dance, and turn hand-springs and somersaults, and cavort and pirouette and act like half mad folk, just as they do at Hampstead Heath, while the bands roar and the crowds halloo, and mounted police and Forest verderers look on with benign smiles at the unres-