

JOHN ASHTON

THE FLEET. ITS RIVERS,
PRISON, AND
MARRIAGES

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Prison, and Marriages**

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PREFACE

THIS book requires none, except a mere statement of its scheme. Time has wrought such changes in this land of ours, and especially in its vast Metropolis, "The Modern Babylon," that the old land-marks are gradually being effaced – and in a few generations would almost be forgotten, were it not that some one noted them, and left their traces for future perusal. All have some little tale to tell; even this little River Fleet, which with its Prison, and its Marriages – are things utterly of the past, entirely swept away, and impossible to resuscitate, except by such a record as this book.

I have endeavoured, by searching all available sources of information, to write a trustworthy history of my subject – and, at the same time, make it a pleasant book for the general reader. If I have succeeded in my aim, thanks are due, and must be given, to W. H. Overall, Esq., F.S.A., and Charles Welch, Esq., Librarians to the Corporation of the City of London, whose friendship, and kindness, have enabled me to complete my pleasant task. It was at their suggestion that I came upon a veritable *trouvaille*, in the shape of a box containing Mr. Anthony Crosby's Collection for a History of the Fleet, which was of most material service to me, especially in the illustrations, most of which were by his own hand.

I must also express my gratitude to J. E. Gardner, Esq., F.S.A., for his kindness in putting his magnificent and unrivalled Collection of Topographical Prints at my disposal, and also to J. G. Waller, Esq., F.S.A., for his permission to use his map of the Fleet River (the best of any I have seen), for the benefit of my readers.

JOHN ASHTON.

The Fleet

ITS RIVER, PRISON, AND MARRIAGES

CHAPTER I

ONLY a little tributary to the Thames, the River Fleet, generally, and ignominiously, called the Fleet *Ditch*, yet it is historically interesting, not only on account of the different places through which its murmuring stream meandered, almost all of which have some story of their own to tell, but the reminiscences of its Prison stand by themselves – pages of history, not to be blotted out, but to be recorded as valuable in illustration of the habits, and customs, of our forefathers.

The City of London, in its early days, was well supplied with water, not only by the wells dug near houses, or by the public springs, some of which still exist, as Aldgate Pump, &c., and the River Thames; but, when its borders increased, the Walbrook was utilized, as well as the Fleet, and, later on, the Tye-bourne, or twin brook, which fell into the Thames at Westminster. In the course of time these rivulets became polluted, land was valuable; they were covered over, and are now sewers. The course of the Fleet being clearly traceable in the depression of Farringdon Street, and the windings of the Tye-bourne in the somewhat tortuous Marylebone Lane (so called from the Chapel of St. Mary, which was on the banks of "le bourne," or the brook¹). Its further course is kept in our memory by Brook Street, Hanover Square.

The name of this little river has exercised many minds, and has been the cause of spoiling much good paper. My own opinion, backed by many antiquaries, is that a *Fleet* means a brook, or tributary to a larger river, which is so wide, and deep, at its junction with the greater stream as to be navigable for the small craft then in use, for some little distance. Thus, we have the names on the Thames of Purfleet, Northfleet, and Southfleet, and the same obtains in other places. Its derivation seems to be Saxon – at least, for our language. Thus, in Bosworth's "Dictionary of the Anglo-Saxon Language," we find, "Flede-Fledu: part. *Flooded; overflowed*: tumidus²: Tiber fledu wearð³ – the Tiber was flooded (Ors. 4. 7)."

Again, the same author gives: "Fleot (*Plat fleet*, m. *a small river*; Ger. *flethe*. f. *a channel*). *A place where vessels float, a bay, gulf, an arm of the sea, the mouth of a river, a river*; hence the names of places, as *Northfleet, Southfleet, Kent*; and in London, *Fleet ditch; sinus*.⁴ *Sœs Fleot, a bay of the sea*. [5] *Bd.* 1. 34."

Another great Anglo-Saxon scholar – Professor Skeat, in "An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language": "Fleet, a creek, bay. In the names *North-fleet, Fleet Street, &c.* Fleet Street was so named from the Fleet Ditch; and *fleet* was given to any shallow creek, or stream, or channel of water. See Halliwell. M.E. *fleet* (Promptorium Parvulorum, &c., p. 166). A.S. *fleót*, a bay of the sea, as in *Sœs Fleot*, bay of the sea. Ælfred's tr. of Bede, i. 34.⁵ Afterwards applied to any channel or stream, especially if shallow. The original sense was 'a place where vessels float,' and the derivation is from the old verb *fleet*, to float, &c."

The French, too, have a cognate term, especially in Norman towns, as Barfleur, Honfleur, Harfleur, &c., which were originally written *Barbeflot*, *Huneflot*, and *Hareflet*: and these were sometimes written *Hareflou*, *Huneflou*, and *Barfleu*, which latter comes very near to the Latin *flevus*, called by Ptolemy *fleus*, and by Mela *fletio*. Again, in Brittany many names end in *pleu*, or *plou*, which seems to be very much like the Greek *πλεω*: *full, swollen*, which corresponds to our Anglo-Saxon *Flede*; Dutch *Vliet*.

¹ The name of this church has been Latinized as "Sancta Maria de Ossibus"!

² Swollen.

³ The real quotation in Orosius is "p̃a wearð Tiber seo eā swa fledu."

⁴ A bag, or purse, a fold of a garment; a bay, bight, or gulf.

⁵ I cannot find this quotation in "Boedoe Historia Ecclesiastica," &c., in any edition I have seen, but in 1.33. I do find Amfleet, and in John Smith's edition (Cambridge, 1722) as a note to Amj-leor he says "Vulgo Ambleteau or Ambleteuse, about 2 miles north of Boulogne"

But it has another, and a very pretty name, "The River of Wells," from the number of small tributaries that helped to swell its stream, and from the wells which bordered its course; such as Sadler's Wells, Bagnigge Wells, White Conduit, Coldbath, Lamb's Conduit, Clerkenwell – all of which (although all were not known by those names in Stow's times) were in existence.

Stow, in his "Survey of London" (ed. 1603, his last edition, and which consequently has his best corrections), says —

"That the riuer of Wels in the west parte of the Citty, *Riuer of Wels*. was of olde so called of the Wels, it may be proued thus, William the Conqueror in his Charter to the Colledge of S. Marten le Grand in London, hath these wordes: I doe giue and graunt to the same Church all the land and the Moore, without the Posterne, which is called Cripplegate, on eyther part of the Postern, that is to say, from the North corner of the Wall, as the riuer of the Wels, there neare running, departeth the same More from the Wall, vnto the running water which entereth the Cittie; this water hath beene long since called the riuer of the Wels, which name of riuer continued, and it was so called in the raigne of Edward the first; as shall bee shewed, *Decay of the Riuer of the Wels*. with also the decay of the saide riuer. In a fayre Booke of Parliament recordes, now lately restored to the Tower,⁶ it appeareth that a Parliament being holden at Carlile in the yeare 1307, the 35 of Edward the I. Henry Lacy Earle of Lincolne, complayned that whereas, in times past the course of water, *Parliament Record*. running at *London vnder Olde bourne bridge*, and *Fleete Riuer of Wels bare ships*. bridge into the Thames, had beene of such bredth and depth, that 10 or 12 ships, Nauies at once with marchādises, were wōt to come to the foresaid bridge of Fleete, and some of them to Oldborne bridge: now the same course by filth of the Tanners & such others, was sore decaied; also by raising of wharfes, but specially by a diversiō of the waters made by them of the new *Temple*, for their milles Patent Record. *Mils by Baynards Castel, made in the first of King John*. standing without *Baynardes Castle*, in the first yeare of King *John*, and diuers other impediments, so as the said ships could not enter as they were wont, & as they ought, wherefore he desired that the Maior of London, with the shiriffes, and other discrete Aldermen, might be appointed to view the course of the saide water, and that by the othes of good men, all the aforesaide hinderances might be remoued, and it to bee made as it was wont of old: wherupon *Roger le Brabazon*, the Constable of the Tower, with the Maior and Shiriffes, were assigned to take with them honest and discrete men, and to make diligent search and enquirie, how the said riuer was in old time, and that they leaue nothing that may hurt or stop it, but keepe it in the same estate that it was wont to be. So far the record. Wherupon it folowed that the said riuer was at that time cleansed, these mils remoued, and other things done for the preseruacion of the course thereof, notwithstanding neuer brought to the olde depth and breadth, whereupon the name of riuer ceased, and was since called a *Turnemill Brooke*. Brooke, namely Turnmill or Tremill Brooke, for that diuers Mils were erected vpon it, as appeareth by a fayre Register booke, conteyning the foundation of the Priorie at Clarkenwell, and donation of the landes thereunto belonging, as also by diuers other records.

"This brooke hath beene diuers times since clensed, namely, and last of all to any effect, in the yeare 1502 the 17th of Henrie the 7. the whole course of Fleete dike, then so called, was scowred (I say) downe to the Thames, so that boats with

⁶ The Records were kept in the Tower, and at the Rolls Office, in a very neglected state, until they were removed to the present Record Office in Fetter Lane.

fish and fewel were rowed to Fleete bridge, and to Oldburne bridge, as they of olde time had beene accustomed, which was a great commoditie to all the inhabitants in that part of the Citie.

"In the yeare 1589, was granted a fifteene, by a common Councell *Fleete dyke promised to be clenched; the money collected, and the Citizens deceiued.* of the citie, for the cleansing of this Brooke or dike: the money amounting to a thousand marks collected, and it was undertaken, that, by drawing diuerse springes about Hampsted heath, into one head and Course, both the citie should be serued of fresh water in all places of want, and also that by such a follower, as men call it, the channell of this brooke should be scowred into the riuer of Thames; but much mony being therein spent, ye effect fayled, so that the Brooke by meanes of continuall incrochments vpon the banks getting ouer the water, and casting of soylage into the streame, is now become woorse cloyed and that euer it was before."

From this account of Stow's we find that the stream of the Fleet, although at one time navigable, had ceased to be so in his time, but we see, by the frontispiece, which is taken from a painting (in the Guildhall Art Gallery) by Samuel Scot, 1770 (?) that the mouth of the Fleet river, or ditch, call it which you like, was still, not only navigable, but a place of great resort for light craft.

The name "River of Wells" is easily to be understood, if we draw again upon Stow, who, in treating of "Auncient and present Riuers, Brookes, Boorns, Pooles, Wels, and Conduits of fresh water seruing the Citie," &c., says —

"Aunciently, vntill the Conquerors time, and 200 yeres after, the Citie of London was watered besides the famous Riuer of Thames on the South part; with the riuer of the WELS, as it was then called, on the west; with water called Walbrooke running through the midst of the citie into the riuer of Thames, seruing the heart thereof. And with a fourth water or Boorne, which ran within the Citie through Langboorne ward, watering that part in the East. In the west suburbs was also another great water, called Oldborne, which had his fall into the riuer of Wels: then was there 3 principall Fountaines or wels in the other Suburbs, to wit, Holy Well, Clements Well, and Clarkes Well. Neare vnto this last named fontaine were diuers other wels, to wit, Skinners Wel, Fags Wel, Loders Wel, and Rad Well; All which sayde Wels, hauing the fall of their ouerflowing in the foresayde Riuer, much encreased the streame, and in that place gaue it the name of Wel. In west Smithfield, there was a Poole in Recordes called Horsepoole, and one other Poole neare vnto the parish Church of Saint Giles without Cripplegate. Besides all which they had in euerie streete and Lane of the citie diuerse fayre Welles and fresh Springs; and, after this manner was this citie then serued with sweete and fresh waters, which being since decaid, other means haue beene sought to supplie the want."

Here, then, we have a list of Wells, which are, together with those I have already mentioned, quite sufficient to account for the prettier name of the "River of Wells." Of these wells Stow writes in his deliciously- quaint phraseology: —

Fitzstephen. Holy well.

"There are (saith *Fitzstephen*) neare London, on the North side special wels in the Suburbs, sweete, wholesome, and cleare, amongst which *Holy well*, Clarkes wel, and Clements wel are most famous, and frequented by Scholers, and youthes of the Cittie in sommer evenings, when they walke forthe to take the aire.

"The first, to wit, Holy well, is much decayed, and marred with filthinesse laide there, for the heightening of the ground for garden plots.

Clements well.

"The fountaine called S. Clements well, North from the Parish Church of S. Clements, and neare vnto an Inne of *Chancerie*, called *Clements Inne*, is faire curbed square with hard stone, kept cleane for common vse, and is alwayes full.

Clarks well.

Playes by the Parish Clarks at Clarks well.

Players at the Skinners well.

"The third is called Clarkes well, or Clarkenwell,⁷ and is curbed about square with hard stone, not farre from the west ende of Clarkenwell Church, but close without the wall that incloseth it; the sayd Church tooke the name of the Well, and the Well tooke the name of the Parish Clarkes in London, who of old time were accustomed there yearely to assemble, and to play some large hystorie of holy Scripture. And, for example, of later time, to wit, in the yeare 1390, the 14 of Richard the Second, I read the Parish Clarks of London, on the 18 of July, playd Enterludes at *Skinners well*, neare vnto *Clarkes well*, which play continued three dayes together, the King, Queene, and Nobles being present. Also the yeare 1409, the 10 of Henrie the 4. they played a play at the *Skinners well*, which lasted eight dayes, and was of matter from the creation of the worlde. There were to see the same, the most part of the Nobles and Gentiles in England, &c.

Skinners well.

Wrestling-place.

"Other smaller welles were many neare vnto Clarkes well, namely *Skinners well*, so called for that the Skinners of London held there certaine playes yearely playd of holy Scripture, &c. In place whereof the wrestlings haue of later yeares beene kept, and is in part continued at *Bartholomew tide*.

Fagges well.

"Then was there Fagges well, neare vnto *Smithfield* by the *Charterhouse*, now lately dammed vp, *Tod well*, *Loders well*, and *Rad well*, all decayed, and so filled vp, that there places are hardly now discerned.

"Somewhat North from *Holy well* is one other well curbed square with stone, and is called *Dame Annis the Cleare*, and not farre from it, but somewhat west, is also one other cleare water called *Perillous pond*⁸, because diuerse youthes by swimming therein haue beene drowned; and thus much bee said for Fountaines and Wels.

"*Horse poole* in *Westsmithfield*, was sometime a great water, and because the inhabitants in that part of the Citie did there water their Horses, the same was, in olde Recordes, called *Horspoole*, it is now much decayed, the springs being stopped vp, and the land waters falling into the small bottome, remayning inclosed, with Bricke, is called *Smithfield pond*.

Poole without Cripplegate.

"By S. Giles Churchyard was a large water, called a *Poole*. I read in the year 1244 that Anne of Lodburie was drowned therein; this poole is now for the most part stopped vp, but the spring is preserued, and was cooped about with stone by the Executors of *Richard Wittington*."

⁷ This is the only one left whose position is a matter of certainty.

⁸ Afterwards known as "Peerless Pool," an unmeaning cognomen.

CHAPTER II

LONDON, for its size, was indeed very well supplied with water, although, of course, it was not laid on to every house, as now, but, with the exception of those houses provided with wells, it had to be fetched from fixed public places, which were fairly numerous. When the waters of the Fleet, and Wallbrook, in the process of time, became contaminated, Henry III., in the 21st year of his reign (1236), granted to the Citizens of London the privilege of conveying the waters of the Tye-bourne through leaden pipes to the City, "for the poore to drinke, and the rich to dresse their meate." And it is only a few years since, that close by what is now called "Sedley Place," Oxford Street, but which used to be the old hunting lodge of bygone Lord Mayors, some of these very pipes were unearthed, a fine cistern being uncovered at the same time.

For public use there were the great Conduit in West Cheape: the Tonne or Tun in Cornhill, fountains at Billingsgate, at Paul's Wharf, and St. Giles', Cripplegate, and conduits at Aldermanbury, the Standard in Fleet Street, Gracechurch Street, Holborn Cross (afterwards Lamb's Conduit), at the Stocks Market (where the Mansion House now stands), Bishopsgate, London Wall, Aldgate, Lothbury – and this without reckoning the supply furnished from the Thames by the enterprising German, or Dutchman, Pieter Moritz, who in 1582 started the famous waterworks close to where Fishmongers' Hall now stands.

The Fleet river (I prefer that title to the other cognomen, "Ditch"), flowing through London, naturally became somewhat befouled, and in Henry the VII.'s time, *circa* 1502, it was cleansed, so that, as aforesaid, "boats with fish and fewel were rowed to Fleete bridge, and to Oldburne bridge." We also know, as Stow records, that more springs were introduced into the stream from Hampstead, without effect, either as to deepening or purifying the river, which had an evil reputation even in the time of Edward I., as we see in Ryley's "Placita Parliamentaria" (ed. 1661), p. 340 —

"Ad petitionem Com. Lincoln. querentis quod cum cursus aque, que currit apud London sub Ponte de Holeburn, & Ponte de Fleete usque in Thamisiā solebat ita largus & latus esse, ac profundus, quod decem Naves vel duodecim ad predictum Pontem de Fleete cum diversis rebus & mercandisiis solebant venire, & quedam illarum Navium sub illo Ponte transire, usque ad predictum Pontem de Holeburn ad predictum cursum mundanum & simos exinde cariare, nunc ille cursus per fordes & inundaciones Taunatorum & p varias perturbaciones in predicta aqua, factas & maxime per exaltationem Caye & diversionem aque quam ipsi de Novo Templo fecerunt ad Molendina sua extra Castra Baignard, quod Naves predictae minime intrare possunt sicut solebant, & facere debeant &c. unde supplicat quod Maior de London assumptis secum Vice com. & discretionibus Aldermannis cursum predictae aque videat, & quod per visum & sacra proborum & legalium hominum faciat omnia nocumenta predictae aque que invenerit amovere & reparare cursum predictum, & ipsum in tali statu manutenere in quo antiquitus esse solebat &c. Ita responsum est, Assignentur Rogerus le Brabazon & Constabularius Turris, London Maior & Vice Com. London, quod ipsi assumptis secum discretionibus Aldermannis London, &c., inquirant per sacramentum &c., qualiter fieri consuevit & qualis cursus. Et nocumenta que invenerint amoveant & manueri faciant in eadem statu quo antiquitus esse solebat."

Latin for which a modern schoolboy would get soundly rated, or birched, but which tells us that even as far back as Edward I. the Fleet river was a nuisance; and as the endorsement (Patent Roll 35 Edward I.) shows – "De cursu aquae de Fleeta supervivendo et corrigendo," *i. e.*, that the Fleet river should be looked after and amended. But the Commission issued to perfect this work was

discontinued, owing to the death of the king. (Patent Roll 1 Edward II., pars 1. m. dorso.) "De Cursu Aquæ Flete, &c., reducend et impedimenta removend."

And Prynne, in his edition of Cotton's "Records" (ed. 1669, p. 188), asks "whether such a commission and inquiry to make this river navigable to Holborn Bridge or Clerkenwell, would not now be seasonable, and a work worthy to be undertaken for the public benefit, trade, and health of the City and Suburbs, I humbly submit to the wisdom and judgment of those whom it most Concerns."

So that it would appear, although otherwise stated, that the Fleet was not navigable in May, 1669, the date of the publication of Prynne's book.

As a matter of fact it got to be neither more nor less than an open sewer, to which the lines in Coleridge's "Table Talk" would well apply —

"In Cöln, that town of monks and bones,
And pavements fang'd with murderous stones,
And rags, and hags, and hideous wenches,
I counted two-and-seventy stench;
All well-defined and genuine stinks!
Ye nymphs, that reign o'er sewers and sinks,
The river Rhine, it is well known,
Doth wash the City of Cologne;
But, tell me, nymphs, what power divine
Shall henceforth wash the River Rhine?"

The smell of the Fleet river was notorious; so much so, that Farquhar, in his *Sir Harry Wildair*, act ii., says, "Dicky! Oh! I was just dead of a Consumption, till the sweet smoke of *Cheapside*, and the dear perfume of *Fleet Ditch* made me a man again!" In Queen Anne's time, too, it bore an evil reputation: *vide The Tatler* (No. 238, October 17, 1710) by Steele and Swift.⁹

"Now from all parts the swelling kennels flow,
And bear their trophies with them as they go:
Filth of all hues and odours seem to tell
What street they sail'd from, by their sight and smell.
They, as each torrent drives, with rapid force,
From Smithfield or St. Pulchre's shape their course,
And in huge confluent join'd at Snow Hill ridge,
Fall from the Conduit, prone to Holborn Bridge.
Sweepings from butchers' stalls, dung, guts, and blood,
Drown'd puppies, stinking sprats, all drench'd in mud,
Dead cats and turnip-tops come tumbling down the flood."

We get a glimpse of prehistoric London, and the valley of the Fleet, in Gough's "British Topography," vol. i. p. 719 (ed. 1780). Speaking of John Conyers, "apothecary, one of the first Collectors of antiquities, especially those relating to London, when the City was rebuilding... He inspected most of the gravel-pits near town for different sorts and shapes of stones. In one near the sign of Sir J. Oldcastle, about 1680, he discovered the skeleton of an elephant, which he supposed had lain there only since the time of the Romans, who, in the reign of Claudius, fought the Britons near this place, according to Selden's notes on the Polyolbion. In the same pit he found the head of a

⁹ *Journal to Stella*, October 17, 1710 – "This day came out *The Tatler*, made up wholly of my Shower, and a preface to it. They say it is the best thing I ever writ, and I think so too."

British spear of flint, afterwards in the hands of Dr. Charlett, and engraved in Bagford's letter." We, now-a-days, with our more accurate knowledge of Geology and Palæontology, would have ascribed a far higher ancestry to the "elephant."

As a matter of course, a little river like the Fleet must have become the receptacle of many articles, which, once dropped in its waters, could not be recovered; so that it is not surprising to read in the *Mirror* of March 22, 1834 (No. 653, p. 180), an account of antiquarian discoveries therein, which, if not archæologically correct, is at least interesting.

"In digging this Canal between Fleet Prison and Holborn Bridge, several Roman utensils were lately discovered at the depth of 15 feet; and a little deeper, a great quantity of Roman Coins, in silver, brass, copper, and all other metals except gold. Those of silver were ring money, of several sizes, the largest about the bigness of a Crown, but gradually decreasing; the smallest were about the size of a silver Twopence, each having a snip at the edge. And at Holborn Bridge were dug up two brazen lares, or household gods, about four inches in length, which were almost incrustated with a petrified matter: one of these was Bacchus, and the other Ceres; but the coins lying at the bottom of the current, their lustre was in a great measure preserved, by the water incessantly washing off the oxydizing metal. Probably the great quantity of coin found in this ditch, was thrown in by the Roman inhabitants of this city for its preservation at the approach of Boadicea at the head of her army: but the Roman Citizens, without distinction of age or sex, being barbarously murdered by the justly enraged Britons, it was not discovered till this time.

"Besides the above-mentioned antiquities, several articles of a more modern date were discovered, as arrow-heads, scales, seals with the proprietors' names upon them in Saxon characters; spur rowels of a hand's breadth, keys and daggers, covered over with livid rust; together with a considerable number of medals, with crosses, crucifixes, and Ave Marias engraven thereon."

A paper was read, on June 11, 1862, to the members of the British Archæological Association, by Mr. Ganston, who exhibited various relics lately recovered from the bed of the river Fleet, but they were not even of archæological importance – a few knives, the earliest dating from the fifteenth century, and a few knife handles.

Previously, at a meeting of the same Society, on December 9, 1857, Mr. C. H. Luxmore exhibited a green glazed earthenware jug of the sixteenth century, found in the Fleet.

And, before closing this antiquarian notice of the Fleet, I cannot but record some early mention of the river which occur in the archives of the Corporation of the City of London: —

(17 Edward III., A.D. 1343, Letter-book F, fol. 67.) "Be it remembered that at the Hustings of Common Pleas, holden on the Monday next before the Feast of Gregory the Pope, in the 17th year of the reign of King Edward, after the Conquest, the Third, Simon Traunceys, Mayor, the Aldermen and the Commonalty, of the City of London, for the decency and cleanliness of the same city, granted upon lease to the butchers in the Parish of St. Nicholas Shambles, in London, a piece of land in the lane called 'Secollane' (sea coal), neare to the water of Flete, for the purpose of there, in such water, cleansing the entrails of beasts. And upon such piece of land the butchers aforesaid were to repair a certain quay at their charges, and to keep the same in repair; they paying yearly to the Mayor of London for the time being, at the Feast of our Lord's Nativity, one boar's head." ¹⁰

¹⁰ "Memorials of London and London Life in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Centuries," by H. J. Riley, 1868, p. 214.

(31 Edward III., A.D. 1357, Letter-book G, fol. 72.) "Also, it is ordered, that no man shall take, or cause to be carried, any manner of rubbish, earth, gravel, or dung, from out of his stables or elsewhere, to throw, and put the same into the rivers of Thames and Flete, or into the Fosses around the walls of the City: and as to the dung that is found in the streets and lanes, the same shall be carried and taken elsewhere out of the City by carts, as heretofore; or else by the *raykers*¹¹ to certain spots, that the same may be put into the *dongebotes*,¹² without throwing anything into the Thames; for saving the body of the river, and preserving the quays, such as Dowegate, Quenheth, and Castle Baynards, (and) elsewhere, for lading and unlading; as also, for avoiding the filthiness that is increasing in the water, and upon the banks of the Thames, to the great abomination and damage of the people. And, if any one shall be found doing the Contrary hereof, let him have the prison for his body, and other heavy punishment as well, at the discretion of the Mayor and of the Aldermen."¹³

(7 Henry V. A.D. 1419, Journal 1, fol. 61.) "It is granted that the *risshbotes*¹⁴ at the Flete and elsewhere in London shall be taken into the hands of the Chamberlain; and the Chamberlain shall cause all the streets to be cleansed."¹⁵

The northern heights of London, the "ultima Thule" of men like Keats, and Shelley, abound in springs, which form the bases of several little streams, which are fed on their journey to their bourne, the Thames (to which they act as tributaries), by numerous little brooklets and rivulets, which help to swell their volume. On the northern side of the ridge which runs from Hampstead to Highgate, birth is given to the Brent, which, springing from a pond in the grounds of Sir Spencer Wells, is pent up in a large reservoir at Hendon, and finally debouches into the Thames at Brentford, where, from a little spring, which it is at starting, it becomes so far a "fleet" as to allow barges to go up some distance.

On the southern side of the ridge rise the Tybourne, and the Westbourne. The former had its rise in a spring called Shepherd's Well, in Shepherd's Fields, Hampstead, which formed part of the district now known as Belsize Park and FitzJohn's Avenue, which is the finest road of private houses in London. Shepherd's Well is depicted in Hone's "Table Book," pp. 381, 2, and shows it as it was over fifty years since. Alas! it is a thing of the past; a railway tunnel drained the spring, and a mansion, now known as The Conduit Lodge, occupies its site. It meandered by Belsize House, through St. John's Wood, running into Regent's Park, where St. Dunstan's now is, and, close to the Ornamental Water, it was joined by a little rivulet which sprang from where now, is the Zoological Gardens. It went across Marylebone Road, and, as nearly as possible, Marylebone Lane shows its course; then down South Molton Street, passing Brook Street, and Conduit Street, by Mayfair, to Clarges Street, across Oxford Street and into a pond in the Green Park called the Ducking Pond, which was possibly used as a place of punishment for scolds, or may have been an ornamental pond for water-fowl. Thence it ran in front of Buckingham Palace, where it divided, which was the cause of its name. Twy, or Teo (double), and Bourne, Brook – one stream running into the Thames west of Millbank, doing duty by the way in turning the Abbey Mill (whence the name), and the other debouching east of Westminster

¹¹ The street sweepers.

¹² Dung boats.

¹³ See Riley, p. 299.

¹⁴ This was probably because the rushes were spilt in the river. At that time the house-floors were strewn with rushes, which were brought to London in "Rush boats;" and an ordinance, *temp.* 4 Henry V., provides that "all rushes in future, laden in boats or skiffs, and brought here for sale, should be sold by the cart-load, as from of old had been wont to be done. And that the same cart-loads were to be made up within the boats and skiffs in which the said rushes are brought to the City, and not upon the ground, or upon the wharves, walls, or embankments of the water of Thames, near or adjacent to such boats or skiffs; under a heavy penalty upon the owner or owners of such boats, skiffs, and rushes, at the discretion of the Mayor and Aldermen."

¹⁵ See Riley, p. 675.

Bridge, thus forming the Island of Thorns, or Thorney Isle, on which Edward the Confessor founded his abbey, and the City of Westminster.

The Westbourne took its rise in a small pond near "Telegraph Hill," at Hampstead; two or three brooklets joined it, and it ran its course across the Finchley Road, to the bottom of Alexandra Road, Kilburn, where it was met by another stream, which had its source at Frognal, Hampstead. It then became the Westbourne, as being the most westerly of all the rivers near London, taking the Wallbrook, the Fleet, and the Tybourne.

Its course may be traced down Kilburn Park Road, and Shirland Road. Crossing the Harrow Road where now is Westbourne Park Station, *Eastbourne* and *Westbourne* Terraces mark the respective banks, and, after crossing the Uxbridge Road, it runs into the Serpentine at the Engine House. Feeding that sheet of water, it comes out again at the Albert Gate end, runs by Lowndes Square, Cadogan Place, &c., and, finally, falls into the river at Chelsea Hospital.

CHAPTER III

THE Fleet, as far as can be ascertained, owes its birth to an ornamental water, fed by springs – one of the numerous ponds in Highgate and Hampstead – in the park of Ken Wood, the seat of Earl Mansfield, now occasionally occupied by the fourth successor to that title; who, being keeper of the royal Castle of Scone, prefers, as a rule, his northern residence. In the No Popery riots of 1780, with which Lord George Gordon was so intimately connected, Ken Wood House was on the brink of being destroyed by the rioters, who had, already, wrecked his lordship's house in Bloomsbury Square, and destroyed his most valuable library. Tradition says that Ken Wood was saved owing to the landlord of "The Spaniards," well known to all pedestrian frequenters of Hampstead, giving them his beer, &c., until they were incapacitated, or unwilling, to fulfil their quest, meanwhile sending messengers for the Horse Guards, who opportunely arrived, and prevented the destruction of the mansion. It is quite possible that this is a true story, for a footnote (p. 69) in Prickett's "History of Highgate" says: "The following is copied from a receipt of one of the constables of the Hundred of Ossulston: 'Received 8s. 6d., being the proportion taxed and assessed for and towards the payment of the several taxations and assessments which have been made upon the said Parish (amounting to the sum of £187. 18s. 7d.) towards an equal contribution, to be had and made for the relief of the several inhabitants of said Hundred; against whom, the several persons who were damnified by rioters within the same Hundred, in the month of June, 1780, have obtained verdicts, and had their executions respectively.'"

Commencing thus in one of the prettiest parts of the most picturesque suburbs of London, it flows from one to the other, right through the chain of the Highgate Ponds, fed by several rills, the first being near the Hampstead end of Millfield Lane – which is, by some, regarded as its source. From the lower pond it crossed the Highgate Road, and, for some distance, it ran parallel with it, although a little way eastward. It again crossed the Highgate Road not far from its junction with the Kentish Town Road, the course of which it followed, until it came to Hawley Road, where it was joined by a sister brook, whose source was the pond in the Vale of Health at Hampstead, flowing from which, it was fed by a brooklet, over which the abortive viaduct of Sir Thomas Marion Wilson's construction is carried. It ran into, and through, the Hampstead Ponds, which end at the lower east heath, near Pond Street (a locality easily recognized when once any one has seen St. Stephen's Church, Haverstock Hill, one of the most beautiful churches in London). These ponds are immortal, if they needed immortality, as the very first page of "Pickwick" gives an entry in the Transactions of the Pickwick Club:

"May 12, 1827. Joseph Smiggers, Esq., P.V.P., M.P.C., presiding. The following resolutions unanimously agreed to —

"That this Association has heard read, with feelings of unmingled satisfaction, and unqualified approval, the paper communicated by Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G.C., M.P.C., entitled, "Speculations on the Source of the Hampstead Ponds, with some observations on the Theory of Tittlebats"; and that this Association does hereby return its warmest thanks to the said Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G.C., M.P.C., for the same."

Its memory is still retained in the Fleet Road.

On its way through Kentish Town it passed through a purely pastoral country, such as we, who know the district only as covered with houses, can hardly reconcile with existing circumstances. The Guildhall Collection relating to the Fleet River, is very rich in water-colour drawings and pen-and-

ink sketches of undoubted authenticity, and from them I have selected what, in my opinion, are the most suitable for this work.¹⁶

From the above, and this view of Highgate, so late back as 1845, we can fairly judge of the pleasant scenery which existed almost at our doors – before the iron roads brought population, which begat houses, which destroyed all rusticity, leaving bricks and mortar on the site of verdant meads, and millions of chimneys vomiting unconsumed carbon and sulphur, in the place of the pure fresh air which once was dominant.

Here we see the Fleet running its quiet course – and the other sketches bear witness to its rurality.

After the Fleet had recrossed the Highgate Road near the junction of that road and the Kentish Town Road, it passed near the *Gospel Oak*, which now gives its name to a railway station in the locality. About this oak, there was a tradition that it was so called because St. Augustine preached underneath its boughs – a fact which is probably as correct as the story that the Church of St. Pancras was the first Christian Church in England. In truth, there are, or were, many Gospel Oaks and Elms throughout the country; for instance, there is an iron foundry near the parishes of Tipton and Wednesbury called *Gospel Oak Works*. It was, as a matter of fact, a traditional custom, in many places, when, on Holy Thursday (Ascension Day), the parochial bounds were beaten, to read a portion of the Gospels under some well-known tree, and hence its name. One or two quotations will easily prove this.

In the "Bury Wills," p. 118, is the following passage in the will of John Cole of Thelnetham, dated May 8, 1527: "Item, I will haue a newe crosse made according to Trappett's crosse at the Hawe lanes ende, and set vp at Short Grove's end, where the gospell is sayd vpon Ascension Even, for ye wch I assigne xs."

And, in the poem of Herrick's "Hesperides," which is addressed "To Anthea."

Dearest, bury me
Under that holy Oke, or Gospel Tree;
Where, (though thou see'st not,) thou may'st think upon
Me, when thou yerely go'st procession."

It also passed near Parliament, or Traitors' Hill – a name which is much in dispute; some maintaining that it was fortified by the Parliamentary Army, under Cromwell, for the protection of London, others that the 5th of November conspirators met here to view the expected explosion of the Houses of Parliament. This, which forms the most southern part of Hampstead Heath, and therefore the nearest, and most accessible to the great bulk of Londoners, has a beautiful view of Highgate and London, and has, I am happy to say, been preserved as an open space for the public.

We have now followed the Fleet in its course to Kentish Town, the etymon of which is, to say the least, somewhat hazy. Being so, of course, an immense amount of theory has been expended upon it. Some contend that it springs from the Prebendary attached to St. Paul's Cathedral, of Cantelupe, or Cantelows, now (in *Crockford*, called Cantlers): one antiquary suggesting that it owes its name to the delta formed by the junction of the two branches of the Fleet – from *Cant* or *Cantle*, a corner; – whilst yet another authority thinks that, as the Fleet had its source from Ken Wood – it was called Kenditch – hence Kenditch or Kentish Town. Be it as it may, it was a very pleasant and rural suburb, and one of some note, for herein William Bruges, Garter King-at-Arms, had a country house, at which he entertained, in the year 1416, the Emperor Sigismund, who came over here, in that year, to try and mediate between our Henry V. and the King of France.

In still older times it formed part of the great Middlesex forest, which was full of wolves, wild boars, deer, and wild oxen; but we find that, in 1252, Henry III. granted to Thomas Ive, permission

¹⁶ See pages 28, 29, 30, 31, &c.

to inclose a portion of the highway adjoining his mansion at Kentessetone. And in 1357, John of Oxford, who was Mayor of London in 1341, gave, amongst other things, to the Priory of the Holy Trinity, in London, a mill at Kentish Town – which, of course, must have been turned by the Fleet. The kind donor was one of the very few Mayors who died during his mayoralty.

It is said, too, that Nell Gwynne had a house in Kentish Town, but I can find not the slightest confirmation of the rumour; still, as there is a very good pen-and-ink sketch of the old house said to be hers, I give it, as it helps to prove the antiquity of Kentish Town, now, alas! only too modern.

And there was another old house close by the Fleet there, an old farmhouse known as Brown's dairy.

This old Farmhouse had, evidently, a nobler origin, for it was moated; and, in 1838, the moat existed on the east and north sides. It belonged to the College of Christ Church, Oxford, and was held of the Manor of Cantelows at a small fine. There was a good orchard, which at the above date (the time of its demolition) contained a large walnut tree and some mulberry trees. The building materials were sold for £60, so that it evidently had done its work, and passed away in the ripeness of old age.

The Castle Inn is said to have been the oldest house in Kentish Town, and there is a tradition that Lord Nelson once lived here, "in order that he might keep his eye upon the Fleet," and planted a sycamore in the garden.

Before taking leave of Kentish Town, I cannot help recording a legal squabble, which resulted in a victory for the public. —*Times*, February 12, 1841: —

"Court of Queen's Bench, *Thursday, February 11, 1841*. (Sittings at Nisi Prius, at Westminster, before Lord Denman and a special jury.)

"The Queen v. Tubb

"This was an Indictment against the Defendant for obstructing a footpath leading from Pond Lane, at Hampstead, over Traitors' and Parliament Hill, to Highgate.

"The case lasted the whole day.

"The jury brought a verdict for the Crown, thus establishing the right of the Public to one of the most beautiful walks in the neighbourhood of the metropolis."

The Fleet babbled through the meadows, until its junction with that other stream which flowed from the pond in the Vale of Health at Hampstead, which took place where now is Hawley Street, and the united brook, or river, ran across what are now the Kentish, and Camden, Town Roads, and between Great College Street, and King Street; it then followed the course of the present road to King's Cross, passing by St. Pancras Church – which, originally, was of great antiquity, and close by which was a celebrated healing well, known as Pancras' Wells. These waters cured everything – scurvy, king's evil, leprosy, cancers, ulcers, rheumatism, disorders of the eyes, and pains of the stomach and bowels, colds, worms, &c., &c.

In the Church, and Churchyard, were interred many illustrious dead, especially Roman Catholics, who seem to have taken a particular fancy to have their remains buried there, probably on account of the tradition that this was the last church in which mass was celebrated. It was a favourite burial-place of the French clergy – and a story is told (how true I know not) that, down to the French Revolution, masses were celebrated in a church in the south of France, dedicated to St. Pancras, for the souls of the faithful interred here.

Many historical names are here preserved – amongst whom are Pasco de Paoli, the famous Corsican; Walker, whose dictionary is still a text book; the Chevalier d'Eon, respecting whose sex there was once such a controversy; Count O'Rourke, famous in the world of fashion in 1785; Mrs.

Godwin – better known, perhaps, as Mary Woolstencraft – who also was married here; William Woollett, the eminent landscape engraver, a branch of art in which he may be said to have been the father; Samuel Cooper, whose miniatures cannot be surpassed; Scheemaker the younger, a sculptor of no small note. Nor in this *campo santo* was Music unrepresented, for there, amongst others, lie the bodies of Mazzinghi, who brought the violin into fashion here in 1740; and Beard, a celebrated singer in 1753. The river flows hence to Battle Bridge, or King's Cross, as it is now termed, forming in its way a sort of pond called "Pancras Wash," and running through a low-lying district called "The Brill."¹⁷ This peculiarly unsavoury neighbourhood has now been cleared away, in order to afford siding room, &c., for the Midland Railway.

But Dr. Stukeley, who certainly had Roman Camps on the brain, discovered one in the Brill. He planned it out beautifully. Here were the Equites posted, there the Hastati, and there were the Auxiliarii. He made the Fleet do duty for a moat which nearly surrounded Cæsar's Prætorium, and he placed a Forum close by St. Pancras' Church, to the northward of which he assigned a Prætorium to Prince Mandubrace. Is it not true? for is it not all written in his "Itinerary"? and does he not devote the first seventeen pages of the second volume of that work, entirely to the Brill, assuring us of the great pleasure he received in striding over the ground – following, in imagination, the footsteps of the Roman Camp Master, who *paced* out the dimensions of the Camp?

¹⁷ See [previous page](#).

CHAPTER IV

THAT it was *countrified* about this part of London, is shown by the accompanying Copy of an engraving, by J. T. Smith, of a view "near Battle Bridge."¹⁸

The etymology of Battle Bridge, which consists of only one arch, and now forms a part of the Fleet Sewer, is a much vexed question. At one time it was an article of faith, not to be impugned, that here, A.D. 61, was fought the famous battle between the Romans, under Suetonius Paulinus, and the Britons, under Boadicea, Queen of the Iceni, which ended so disastrously for the natives – eighty thousand of whom are said to have been killed. But there seems to be a doubt, as to whether this was the exact spot where this historical contest took place, for Tacitus makes no mention of the little river Fleet, which must then have been navigable for light and small craft, for an anchor was found, in its bed, at Kentish Town. He only describes it (Tacit. Ann. lib. xiv. c. 34) a spot of ground, "narrow at the entrance, and sheltered in the rear by a thick forest." No remains have ever been exhumed, nor have Roman, or British, relics been found near the spot.

In the first quarter of this century the Fleet, for the greater part of its time, ran placidly along, as we see by these two pen-and-ink sketches, taken at Battle Bridge.¹⁹ But, occasionally, it forgot its good manners, and overflowed its banks, flooding portions of Kentish Town, Somers Town, and Battle Bridge, as we read in the *Gentlemen's Magazine*, vol. lxxxviii. part i. p. 462, Saturday, May 9, 1818: —

"From the heavy rain, which commenced yesterday afternoon at six o'clock, and continued pouring incessantly till four this morning, Battle Bridge, St. Pancras, and part of Somers Town were inundated. The water was several feet deep in many of the houses, and covered an extent of upwards of a mile. The carcasses of several sheep and goats were found near Hampstead Reservoir, and property was damaged to a very considerable amount."

There must have been a Mill here, for Stow tells us that in the reign of Edward VI. "A Miller of Battaille Bridge was set on the Pillory in Cheape, and had both his eares cut off, for seditious words by him spoken against the Duke of Somerset."

Here, as elsewhere, just outside London, the road was not too safe for travellers, as the following account of a highway robbery will show. It was committed by one John Everett, whose career in life had been rather chequered. As an apprentice he ran away, and enlisted in Flanders, rising to the rank of sergeant. When the troops returned, he purchased his discharge, and got a situation in the Whitechapel Debtors' Court, but had to leave it, and he became a companion of thieves, against whom he turned king's evidence. He got into debt, and was locked up in the Fleet Prison, but was allowed to reside within the Rules, a district round about the prison, out of which no prisoner might wander; and there, in the Old Bailey, he kept a public-house. But he could not keep away from evil doing, and was sent to Newgate. On the expiration of his sentence, he turned highwayman. In the course of his professional career he, on December 24, 1730, stopped a Coach at Battle Bridge, which coach contained two ladies, a child, and a maidservant, and he despoiled them, but not uncivilly. The husband of one of the ladies coming up, pursued him, and next day he was caught. It was not then, any more than it is now, that every rogue got his deserts, but this one did, for he was hanged at Tyburn, February 20, 1731.

The name of "Battle Bridge" is well-nigh forgotten, and "King's Cross" reigns in its stead. Yet how few Londoners of the present generation know whence the name is derived! If they ever trouble

¹⁸ See next page.

¹⁹ See pages 41, 42.

their heads about it at all, they probably imagine that it was a cross, like the Eleanor Crosses, raised to the memory of some king.

And what king, think you, was it intended to keep in perpetual remembrance? None other than his Most Gracious Majesty King George the Fourth, of pious memory. Why this monument was raised I have never been able to learn, unless it was to celebrate his death, which took place in 1830, and probably to hold up his many virtues, as bright exemplars, to ages yet unborn; but a mad fit came over the inhabitants of Battle Bridge, and the hideous structure arose. It was all shoddy; in the form of an octagon building ornamented with pilasters, all substantially built of brick, and covered over with compo or cement, in order to render it more enduring. It was used as a police-station, and afterwards as a public-house, whilst the pediment of the statue was utilized as a camera obscura. I don't think they knew exactly what they were about, for one party wanted it to be called Boadicea's Cross, another went in for it being nationally named St. George's Cross; but the goodness of the late king was more popular, and carried the day, and we now enjoy the *nominis umbra* of King's Cross, instead of the old cognomen of Battle Bridge. It had a very brief existence. It was built between 1830 and 1835, and was demolished in 1845; the stucco statue only having been *in situ* for ten years. It is said that the nose of this regal statue had, for its base, an earthen draining tile, and that it was offered to a gentleman for sixpence!

There hardly seems to be any connection between "the first gentleman in Europe" and dustmen, but there is a slight link. Battle Bridge was peculiarly the home of the necessary dustman, and in a song called "The Literary Dustman," commencing —

"They call me Adam Bell, 'tis clear
That Adam vos the fust man,
And by a co-in-side-ance queer
Vy I'm the fust of dustmen,"

is the following verse: —

"Great sculptors all conwarse wi' me,
And call my taste divine, sirs,
King George's statty at King's Cross,
Vos built from my design, sirs."

Close by here, in Gray's Inn Road, was a mountain of refuse and dust; but it was as profitable as were the heaps of Mr. Boffin in Charles Dickens's "Our Mutual Friend." This mound once had a curious clearance, so it is said. It was bought in its entirety, and sent over to Russia, to help make bricks to rebuild Moscow; and the ground on which it stood was, in 1826, sold to a Company for £15,000.

"My dawning Genus fust did peep,
Near Battle Bridge, 'tis plain, sirs:
You recollect the cinder heap,
Vot stood in Gray's Inn Lane, sirs?"

Let us turn to a sweeter subject, and gossip about St. Chad's Well, the site of which is now occupied by the Metropolitan Railway at King's Cross. St. Chad is a saint in the English calendar, and might have been a distinguished temperance leader, if the number of wells dedicated to him, is any criterion. He lived in the seventh century, and was educated at Lindisfarne (at least so Bede says), and afterwards became Bishop of Lichfield, and, at his death, his soul is said to have been accompanied to heaven by angels and sweet music.

A good modern account is given in Hone's "Every Day Book," vol. i. pp. 323, 4, 5, which, as it was taken from actual observation about fifty years since, may well be transcribed. Speaking of the aforesaid dust-heap he says: —

"Opposite to this unsightly site, and on the right hand side of the road, is an anglewise faded inscription —



"It stands, or rather dejects, over an elderly pair of wooden gates, one whereof opens on a scene which the unaccustomed eye may take for the pleasure-ground of Giant Despair. Trees stand as if made not to vegetate, clipped hedges seem unwilling to decline, and nameless weeds straggle weakly upon unlimited borders. If you look upwards you perceive, painted on an octagon board, 'Health restored and preserved.' Further on, towards the left, stands a low, old-fashioned, comfortable-looking, large-windowed dwelling, and, ten to one, but there also stands at the open door, an ancient ailing female, in a black bonnet, a clean, coloured cotton gown, and a check apron, her silver hair only in part tucked beneath the narrow border of a frilled cap, with a sedate and patient, yet somewhat inquiring look. She gratuitously tells you that 'the gardens' of 'St. Chad's Well' are for 'Circulation' by paying for the waters, of which you may drink as much, or as little, or nothing, as you please, at one guinea per year, 9s. 6d. quarterly, 4s. 6d. monthly, or 1s. 6d. weekly. You qualify for a single visit by paying sixpence, and a large glass tumbler, full of warm water, is handed to you. As a stranger, you are told, that 'St. Chad's Well was famous at one time.'

"Should you be inquisitive, the dame will instruct you, with an earnest eye, that 'people are not what they were,' 'things are not as they used to be,' and she 'can't tell what'll happen next.' Oracles have not ceased. While drinking St. Chad's water, you observe an immense copper, into which it is poured, wherein it is heated to due efficacy, and from whence it is drawn by a cock, into glasses. You also remark, hanging on the wall, a 'tribute of gratitude,' versified, and inscribed on vellum, beneath a pane of glass stained by the hand of time, and let into a black frame. This is an effusion for value received from St. Chad's invaluable water. But, above all, there is a full-sized portrait in oil, of a stout, comely personage, with a ruddy countenance, in a coat or cloak, supposed scarlet, a laced cravat falling down the breast, and a small red nightcap carelessly placed on the head, conveying the idea that it was painted for the likeness of some opulent butcher, who flourished in the reign of Queen Anne. Ask the dame about it, and she refers you to 'Rhone.'²⁰ This is a tall old man, who would be taller if he were not bent by years. 'I am ninety-four,' he will tell you, 'this present year of our Lord, one thousand, eight hundred, and twenty-five.' All that he has to communicate concerning the portrait is, 'I have heard say it is the portrait of St. Chad.' Should you venture to differ, he adds, 'this is the opinion of most people who come here.' You may gather that it is his own undoubted belief.

"On pacing the garden alleys, and peeping at the places of retirement, you imagine the whole may have been improved and beautified, for the last time, by

²⁰ Rhone was an old waiter at the Well. See p. 51.

some countryman of William III., who came over and died in the same year with that king, and whose works here, in wood and box, have been following him piecemeal ever since.

"St. Chad's Well is scarcely known in the neighbourhood save by its sign-board of invitation and forbidding externals; ... it is haunted, not frequented. A few years, and it will be with its waters, as with the water of St. Pancras' Well, which is enclosed in the garden of a private house, near old St. Pancras Churchyard."

But, although the prophecy in "Hone" was destined to be fulfilled, yet it was twelve years before it came about, and it was not until September 14, 1837, that Messrs. Warlters and Co. sold, at Garraway's Coffee House, Change Alley, Cornhill, the "valuable Copyhold Property, situate in Gray's Inn Lane, near King's Cross, Battle Bridge," which consisted of "The well-known and valuable Premises, Dwelling-house, Large Garden, and Offices, with the very celebrated Spring of Saline Water called St. Chad's Well, which, in proper hands, would produce an inexhaustible Revenue, as its qualities are allowed by the first Physicians to be unequalled."

It was a good sized piece of ground; in shape of a somewhat irregular triangle, of which the base measured about 200 feet, and from apex to base 95 feet. It was Copyhold. The vendor was not to be asked for a title prior to 1793, and it was held of the Manor of *Cantlowes* or *Cantlers*, subject to a small fine, certain, of 6s. 8d., on death or alienation, and to a Quit Rent of 5d. per annum. We should say, nowadays, that the assessment was very small, as, including the large gardens, both back and front, the whole was only valued, including the *Saline Spring*, at £81 10s. per annum, of which £21 10s. was let off, but which formed but a small portion of the property.

What would not the waters of St. Chad's Well cure? Really I think the proprietor hardly knew himself, for a handbill I have before me commences – "The celebrity of these waters being confined chiefly to its own immediate vicinity for a number of years; the present proprietor has thought proper to give more extensive publicity to the existence of a nostrum provided by Nature, through Divine Providence, approaching nearest that great desideratum of scientific men and mankind in general, throughout all ages; namely, an Universal Medicine... The many cures yearly performed by these waters does not come within the limits of a handbill, but, suffice it to say, that here, upon trial, the sufferer finds a speedy and sure relief from Indigestion and its train, Habitual Costiveness, the extensive range of Liver Complaints, Dropsy in its early stages, Glandular Obstructions, and that bane of life, Scrophula; for Eruptions on the Face or Skin its almost immediate efficacy needs but a trial." This wonderful water, with use of garden, was then, say 1835, supposed to be worth to the sufferer £1 per annum, or threepence a visit, or you might have it supplied at eightpence per gallon.

And yet it seems only to have been a mild aperient, and rather dear at the price. In the *Mirror* of April 13, 1833, Mr. Booth, Professor of Chemistry, professed to give an analysis of the "Mineral Waters in the neighbourhood of London," and he thus writes of St. Chad's Well: "It is aperient, and is yet much resorted to by the poorer classes of the metropolis, with whom it enjoys considerable reputation. From an examination, I find it to be a strong solution of sulphate of soda and sulphate of magnesia" – but he does not favour us with a quantitative analysis.

Neither does the proprietor, one Wm. Lucas, who not only propounded the handbill from which I have quoted, but published a pamphlet on the healing virtues of the spring, and he also adds to Mr. Booth's qualitative analysis, "a small quantity of Iron, which is held in Solution by Carbonic Acid."

"The Well from which the Waters are supplied, is excluded from the external air; the Water when freshly drawn is perfectly clear and pellucid, and sparkles when poured into a glass; to the taste it is slightly bitter, not sufficiently so to render it disagreeable; indeed, Persons often think it so palatable as to take it at the table for a common beverage."

This, however, is slightly at variance with the following, "As a Purgative, more so than could be inferred from their taste, a pint is the ordinary dose for an Adult, which operates pleasantly, powerfully, and speedily: " qualities which are scarcely desirable for a Table water.

That, at one time, this Well was in fashion, although in 1825 it was in its decadence, I may quote from the pamphlet (which, however, must be taken by the reader, *quantum valeat*):

Jonathan Rhone, who was Gardener and Waiter at these Wells upwards of Sixty Years, says, that when he first came into office at about the middle of the eighteenth Century, the Waters were in great repute, and frequently were visited by eight or nine hundred Persons in a morning: the charge for drinking the Waters was Three pence each Person, and they were delivered at the Pump Room for exportation, at the rate of Twenty-four pint bottles, packed in hamper, for One Pound Cash."

CHAPTER V

AS the Fleet was "the River of Wells" it may be as well to notice the Wells, which, although not absolutely contributing towards swelling its volume, are yet closely adjacent – namely, White Conduit, and Sadlers Wells. Both of these, as indeed were all the other Wells about London, were first known as mineral springs, a fact which drew the middle classes to seek relief from real, or fancied, ailments, by drinking the medicinal waters, as at Bath, Epsom, Cheltenham, Harrogate, Brixton, and elsewhere. Wherever people congregate, the mere drinking of salutary water, is but tame work, and the animal spirits of some of them must find an outlet in amusements, which materially assist, to say the least, in the agreeable passing of time. But the mere drinking of waters must have been irksome – even if people took to it as well as *Shadwell* in his play of "Epsom Wells" describes: —

"*Brisket*. I vow it is a pleasurable Morning: the Waters taste so finely after being fudled last Night. Neighbour *Fribbler* here's a Pint to you.

"*Fribbler*. I'll pledge you, Mrs. *Brisket*; I have drunk eight already.

"*Mrs. Brisket*. How do the Waters agree with your Ladyship?

"*Mrs. Woody*. Oh, Sovereignly: how many Cups have you arrived to?

"*Mrs. Brisket*. Truly Six, and they pass so kindly."

By degrees these medicinal waters, or Spas, as they were termed in later times, fell into desuetude, possibly because medical knowledge was advancing; and the Wells, with their gardens attached, became places of outdoor recreation, where the sober citizen could smoke his pipe, and have his beer, or cider, whilst his wife, and her gossips, indulged in tittle tattle over their Tea – which, although much dearer than at present, was a very popular beverage, and so, from health resorts, they imperceptibly merged into the modern Tea Garden – which, in its turn, has become nearly extinct, as have the Ranelagh and Vauxhall of a former age; which, however, we have seen, in our time, somewhat resuscitated in the outdoor portion of the several Exhibitions which have taken place, in the few past years, at South Kensington.

The White Conduit had a history of its own, which we can trace back, at all events, to the fifteenth century, for it was built as a reservoir to supply what was, afterwards, the Charterhouse.

This we can see by a royal licence, dated December 2, 9 Henry VI. an. 1431,²¹ which granted to John Feryby, and his wife Margery, that they might grant and assign to the Prior and Convent of the House of the Salutation of the Blessed Mary of the Carthusian Order, by London, a certain well spring (*fontein*) and 53 perches of land in length, and 12 feet in breadth, in the vill of Iseldon (Islington) to have to them and their successors for ever, and to the same Prior and Convent, to take the said land, and construct a certain subterraneous aqueduct from the aforesaid well spring, through the aforesaid land, and through the King's highway aforesaid, and elsewhere, as it may seem best &c., *non obstante* the Act against mortmain (*Teste Humfride Duce Gloucestr' Custode Angliæ apud Westm.*).

As we know, Henry VIII. put an end to the Monastic Orders in England, and, at the dissolution of the Priory, the reversion of the site, and house thereof, was granted, on April 14, 1545,²² to Sir Roger North, in fee, together with "all that the Head and original Well Spring of one Channel or Aqueduct situate and being in a certain field in the parish of Islington" – and it also gave, all the channels, aqueducts, and watercourses under ground "up to the site of the said House of the Carthusians."

²¹ Cart. Antiq. in Off. Augm. vol. ii. No. 43.

²² Pat. 36 Henry VIII. p. 13, m. 31.

But, although the spring might, and did, supply the Charter House, yet it is possible that the Conduit House, from which it got the name of *White Conduit*, from its being built of white stone – was built by Thomas Sutton, who founded the Hospital of the Charter House, – in 1611. It was either built by him, or repaired in 1641, for, incorporated in the building, was a stone containing his arms – and initials.²³

The other initials have not been identified. As the "White Conduit" it was known well into this century, but it fell somewhat into decay, about 1812 – was never repaired, and, finally, was pulled down in 1831 – to make way for the completion of some new buildings in Barnsbury Road, as a continuation of Penton Street: and the stone was broken up, and used in making the New Road.

So much for the Conduit itself; but it, although inert, exercised a large share in the amusements of Londoners down to a comparatively recent period. It was pleasantly situated in the fields, and, until this century, during the latter half of which, the modern Babylon has become one huge mass of bricks and mortar, it served as a pleasant place of recreation for the Cits. There was an uninterrupted prospect of Hampstead and Highgate – which bounded the northern view, and which was purely pastoral, with the exception of sparsely-dotted farmhouses. There is a tradition that, on the site of the comparatively modern *White Conduit House*, was (in the reign of Charles I.), a tavern in the course of erection, and that, being finished, the workmen were carousing at the very moment of the monarch's decapitation.

Doubtless, in these suburban fields, there was, for very many years, a place for refreshment, which probably took the form, in the Arcadian age of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, of new milk, curds and whey, and syllabubs, for Islington was famous for its dairy produce,²⁴ as we know by the account of the entertainment given to Queen Elizabeth at Kenilworth Castle in 1575 by the Earl of Leicester, when the Squier Minstrel of Middlesex made a long speech in praise of Islington, whose motto was said to be, "Lactis Caseus infans."

The earliest really authentic notice of the White Conduit House, I can find, is in the *Daily Advertiser* August 10, 1754. "This is to acquaint the public, that, at the White Conduit House, the proprietor, for the better accommodation of the gentlemen and ladies, has completed a long walk, with a handsome circular Fish-pond, a number of shady, pleasant arbours inclosed with a fence 7 feet high to prevent being the least incommoded from the people in the fields. Hot loaves,²⁵ and butter every day, milk directly from the Cows; coffee and tea, and all manners of liquors in the greatest perfection: also a handsome Long Room, from whence is the most Copious prospects and airy situation of any now in vogue. I humbly hope the continuance of my friends' favours, as I make it my chief study to have the best accommodations, and am, Gentlemen and Ladies, your obliged humble servant, Robert Bartholomew. *Note.* My Cows eat no grains, neither any adulteration in the Milk or Cream. Bats and Balls for Cricket, and a convenient field to play in."

This gives us a very fair insight into the sober relaxations of our great-great-grandfathers: and that the White Conduit House was, about this time, a resort for harmless recreation; and, certainly, it would rejoice the modern temperance enthusiasts to find that the principal beverages there drank were "non-intoxicants." Oliver Goldsmith used frequently to go there, walking from his house at Islington; and, in his "Citizen of the World," letter 122, he writes, "After having surveyed the Curiosities of this fair and beautiful town, I proceeded forward, leaving a fair stone building on my right; here the inhabitants of London often assemble to celebrate a feast of hot rolls and butter. Seeing such numbers, each with their little tables before them, employed on this occasion, must no doubt be a very amusing sight to the looker-on, but still more so to those who perform in the Solemnity."

²³ See next page.

²⁴ In an early sixteenth century book (unique) printed by Wynkyn de Worde, called "Cocke Lorelles Boke" the dairy farming at Islington is mentioned — "Also mathewe to the drawer of London, And sybly sole mylke-wyfe of Islington."

²⁵ These Rolls were as famous as Chelsea Buns. "White Conduit loaves" being a familiar street cry.

And the same story of simplicity of amusement, and refreshment, is amusingly told in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for May, 1760, vol. xxx. p. 242, in a short poem by William Woty, the author of the "Shrubs of Parnassus, consisting of a variety of poetical essays, moral and comic, by I. Copywell, of Lincoln's Inn, Esq. 1760."

"*And to White Conduit House*
We will go, will go, will go."
Grub Street Register.

"Wish'd Sunday's come – mirth brightens ev'ry face,
And paints the rose upon the housemaid's cheek
Harriot, or *Mol* more ruddy. Now the heart
Of prentice resident in ample street,
Or alley, Kennel-wash'd *Cheapside*, *Cornhill*
Or *Cranborne*, thee, for calcumens renown'd,
With joy distends. His meal meridian o'er,
With switch in hand, he to *White Conduit* house
Hies merry hearted. Human beings here
In couples multitudinous assemble,
Forming the drollest groupe, that ever trod
Fair Islingtonian plains. Male after male,
Dog after dog, succeeding – husbands – wives —
Fathers and mothers – brothers – sisters – friends —
And *pretty little boys and girls*. Around,
Across, along, the garden's shrubby maze,
They walk, they sit, they stand. What crowds press on,
Eager to mount the stairs, eager to catch
First vacant bench or chair in *long-room* plac'd.
Here prig with prig holds conference polite,
And indiscriminate, the gaudy beau,
And sloven mix. Here *he*, who all the week
Took bearded mortals by the nose, or sat
Weaving dead hairs, and whistling wretched strain,
And eke the sturdy youth, whose trade it is
Stout oxen to contend, with gold bound hat,
And silken stocking strut. The red-arm'd belle
Here shews her *tasty* gown, proud to be thought
The butterfly of fashion: and, forsooth,
Her haughty mistress deigns for once to tread
The same unhallow'd floor. 'Tis hurry all,
And ratling cups and saucers. Waiter here,
And waiter there, and waiter here *and* there,
At once is call'd —*Joe – Joe – Joe – Joe – Joe* —
Joe on the right – and *Joe* upon the left,
For ev'ry vocal pipe re-ecchoes *Joe*.
Alas, poor *Joe*! Like *Francis* in the play
He stands confounded, anxious how to please
The many-headed throng. But shou'd I paint
The language, humours, customs of the place,

Together with all curtsy's lowly bows,
And compliments extern, 'twould swell my page
Beyond it's limits due. Suffice it then,
For my prophetic muse to say, 'So long
As fashion rides upon the Wing of time,
While tea and cream, and buttered rolls can please,
While rival beaux, and jealous belles exist,
So long *White Conduit* house, shall be thy fame.

W. W."

Later on in the century, it was still a reputable place of resort. In 1774, there was a painting at one end of the garden, the perspective of which served, artificially, to augment its size; the round fish-pond in the centre of the garden, still existed, and the refreshment-rooms, or boxes, were hung with Flemish and other pictures.

Hone ("Every Day Book," vol. ii. p. 1201, &c.) says, "About 1810, the late celebrated Wm. Huntingdon S.S.²⁶ of Providence Chapel, who lives in a handsome house within sight, was at the expense of clearing the spring for the use of the inhabitants; but, because his pulpit opinions were obnoxious, some of the neighbouring vulgar threw loads of soil upon it in the night, which rendered the water impure, and obstructed its channel, and, finally, ceasing to flow, the public was deprived of the kindness he proposed. The building itself, was in a very perfect state at that time, and ought to have been boarded up after the field it stood in was thrown open. As the new buildings proceeded, it was injured, and defaced, by idle labourers and boys, from mere wantonness, and reduced to a mere ruin. There was a kind of upper floor or hayloft in it, which was frequently a shelter to the houseless wanderer. A few years ago some poor creatures made it a comfortable hostel for the night with a little hay. Early in the morning a passing workman perceived smoke issuing from the crevices, and as he approached, heard loud cries from within. Some mischievous miscreants had set fire to the fodder beneath the sleepers, and, afterwards, fastened the door on the outside: the inmates were scorched by the fire, and probably they would all have been suffocated in a few minutes, if the place had not been broken open.

"The 'White Conduit' at this time (1826) merely stands to those who had the power, and neglected to preserve it.

"To the buildings grown up around, it might have been rendered a neat ornament, by planting a few trees, and enclosing the whole with an iron railing, and have stood as a monument of departed worth.

"'White Conduit House' has ceased to be a recreation in the good sense of the word. Its present denomination is the 'Minor Vauxhall,' and its chief attraction during the passing summer has been Mrs. Bland.²⁷ She has still powers, and, if their exercise here, has been a stay and support to this sweet melodist, so far the establishment may be deemed respectable. It is a ground for balloon flying and skittle playing, and just maintains itself above the very lowest, so as to be one of the most doubtful places of public resort. Recollections of it some years ago are more in its favour. Its tea gardens then, in summer afternoons, were well accustomed by tradesmen and their families; they are now comparatively deserted, and, instead, there is, at night, a starveling show of odd company and coloured lamps, a mock orchestra, with mock singing, dancing in a room which decent persons would prefer

²⁶ This revivalist used these initials as meaning "Sinner Saved."

²⁷ A somewhat famous singer in the latter part of the eighteenth and first quarter of the nineteenth centuries. She sang and acted at Drury Lane and the Haymarket – and also sang at Vauxhall. She became poor, and on July 5, 1824, she had a benefit at Drury Lane, which, with a public subscription, produced about £800. Lord Egremont also allowed her £80 a year. She was somewhat related to Royalty: her husband, Bland, an actor at Drury Lane, being the brother of Mrs. Jordan, who was the wife of William the Fourth.

to withdraw their young folks from, if they entered, and fireworks 'as usual,' which, to say the truth, are, usually, very good."

As time went on, the place did not improve, as we may see by the *New Monthly Magazine* for 1833, in an article – part of "Four Views of London." Speaking of the White Conduit – "Here too is that Paradise of apprentice boys, White *Cundick Couse*, as it is cacophoniously pronounced by its visitors, which has done much to expel the decencies of the district. Thirty years ago this place was better frequented – that is, there was a larger number of respectable adults – fathers and mothers, with their children, and a smaller moiety of shop lads, and such like Sunday bucks, who were awed into decency by their elders. The manners, perhaps, are much upon a *par* with what they were. The ballroom gentlemen then went through country dances with their hats on, and their coats off: – hats are now taken off, but coats are still unfashionable on these gala nights. The belles of that day wore long trains to their gowns: it was a favourite mode of introduction to a lady there, to tread on it, and then, apologizing handsomely, acquaintance was begun, and soon ripened into an invitation to tea, and the hot loaves for which these gardens were once celebrated. Being now a popular haunt, those who hang on the rear of the march of human nature, the suttlers, camp followers, and plunderers, know that where large numbers of men and boys are in pursuit of pleasure, there is a sprinkling of the number to whom vice and debauchery are ever welcome: they have, therefore, supplied what these wanted; and Pentonville may now hold up its head, and boast of its depravities before any part of London."²⁸

It got more and more disreputable, until it was pulled down in 1849, and the present White Conduit Tavern was built upon a portion of its site.

²⁸ A frequent visitor at these gardens was the late George Cruikshank, and many subjects were transferred to his sketch book. He was so well known, as to become a sort of terror to the habitués of the place, and children were threatened, when fractious, "that if they made such ugly faces, Mr. Cruikshank would put them in his book."

CHAPTER VI

SADLER'S WELLS does not really feed the Fleet River, but I notice the spring, for the same reason that I noticed the White Conduit.

A very fair account of its early history is given in a little pamphlet entitled "A True and Exact Account of Sadlers Well: or the New Mineral Waters. Lately found out at Islington: Treating of its nature and Virtues. Together with an Enumeration of the Chiefest Diseases which it is good for, and against which it may be used, and the Manner and Order of Taking of it. Published for publick good by T. G. (Thomas Guidot) Doctor of Physick. Printed for *Thomas Malthus* at the *Sun* in the *Poultry*. 1684."

It begins thus: – "The New Well at *Islington* is a certain Spring in the middle of a Garden, belonging to the Musick House built by Mr. *Sadler*, on the North side of the Great Cistern that receives the New River Water near Islington, the Water whereof was, before the Reformation, very much famed for several extraordinary Cures performed thereby, and was, thereupon, accounted sacred, and called *Holy Well*. The Priests belonging to the Priory of *Clarkenwell* used to attend there, made the People believe that the virtues of the Waters proceeded from the efficacy of their Prayers. But upon the Reformation the Well was stopt up, upon a supposition that the frequenting it was altogether superstitious, and so, by degrees, it grew out of remembrance, and was wholly lost, until found out, and the Fame of it revived again by the following accident.

"Mr. *Sadler* being made Surveyor of the High Ways, and having good Gravel in his own Gardens, employed two Men to Dig there, and when they had Dug pretty deep, one of them found his Pickaxe strike upon some thing that was very hard; whereupon he endeavoured to break it, but could not: whereupon thinking with himself that it might, peradventure, be some Treasure hid there, he uncovered it very carefully, and found it to be a Broad, Flat Stone: which, having loosened, and lifted up, he saw it was supported by four Oaken Posts, and had under it a large Well of Stone Arched over, and curiously carved; and, having viewed it, he called his fellow Labourer to see it likewise, and asked him whether they should fetch Mr. *Sadler*, and shew it to him? Who, having no kindness for *Sadler*, said no; he should not know of it, but as they had found it, so they would stop it up again, and take no notice of it; which he that found it consented to at first, but after a little time he found himself (whether out of Curiosity, or some other reason, I shall not determine) strongly inclined to tell *Sadler* of the Well; which he did, one Sabbath Day in the Evening.

"*Sadler*, upon this, went down to see the Well, and observing the Curiosity of the Stone Work, that was about it, and fancying within himself that it was a Medicinal Water, formerly had in great esteem, but by some accident or other lost, he took some of it in a Bottle, and carried it to an Eminent Physician, telling him how the Well was found out, and desiring his Judgment of the Water; who having tasted and tried it, told him it was very strong of a Mineral taste, and advised him to Brew some Beer with it, and carry it to some Persons, to whom he would recommend him; which he did accordingly. And some of those who used to have it of him in Bottles, found so much good by it, that they desired him to bring it in Roundlets."

Sadler's success, for such it was, provoked the envy of others, and one or two satires upon the Wells were produced.

Soon after he opened the Wells, Evelyn visited them, as we read in his invaluable diary. "June 11, 1686. I went to see Middleton's receptacle of water ²⁹ and the New Spa Wells, near Islington." The Spring was still known as *Sadler's* up to 1697 as we find in advertisements in the *Post Boy* and *Flying Post* of June, in that year. But the "Musick House" seems to have passed into other hands, for in 1699 it was called "Miles's Musick House." They seem to have had peculiar entertainments here,

²⁹ The New River Head.

judging by an account in *Dawk's Protestant Mercury* of May 24, 1699. "On Tuesday last a fellow at Sadler's Wells, near Islington, after he had dined heartily on a buttock of beef, for the lucre of five guineas, eat a live cock, feathers, guts, and all, with only a plate of oil and vinegar for sawce, and half a pint of brandy to wash it down, and afterwards proffered to lay five guineas more, that he could do the same again in two hours' time."

That this was a fact is amply borne out by the testimony of Ned Ward, who managed to see most of what was going on in town, and he thus describes the sight in his rough, but vigorous language.

"With much difficulty we crowded upstairs, where we soon got intelligence of the beastly scene in agitation. At last a table was spread with a dirty cloth in the middle of the room, furnished with bread, pepper, oil, and vinegar; but neither knife, plate, fork, or napkin; and when the beholders had conveniently mounted themselves upon one another's shoulders to take a fair view of his Beastlyness's banquet, in comes the lord of the feast, disguised in an Antick's Cap, like a country hangman, attended by a train of Newmarket executioners. When a chair was set, and he had placed himself in sight of the whole assembly, a live Cock was given into the ravenous paws of this ingurgitating monster."

In the same year, in his "Walk to Islington," Ward gives a description of the people who frequented this "Musick House."

" – mixed with a vermin trained up for the gallows,
As Bullocks³⁰ and files,³¹ housebreakers and padders.³²
With prize fighters, sweetners,³³ and such sort of traders,
Informers, thief-takers, deer-stealers, and bullies."

It seems to have been kept by Francis Forcer, a musician, about 1725, and the scene at the Wells is graphically described in "The New River, a Poem, by William Garbott."

"Through Islington then glides my best loved theme
And Miles's garden washes with his stream:
Now F – r's Garden is its proper name,
Though Miles the man was, who first got it fame;
And tho' it's own'd, Miles first did make it known,
F – r improves the same we all must own.
There you may sit under the shady trees,
And drink and smoak, fann'd by a gentle breeze;
Behold the fish, how wantonly they play,
And catch them also, if you please, you may,
Two Noble Swans swim by this garden side,
Of water-fowl the glory and the pride;
Which to the Garden no small beauty are;
Were they but black they would be much more rare:
With ducks so tame that from your hand they'll feed,
And, I believe, for that, they sometimes bleed.
A noble Walk likewise adorns the place,
To which the river adds a greater grace:
There you may sit or walk, do which you please,

³⁰ A hector, or bully.

³¹ A pickpocket.

³² A tramp.

³³ A Sharper.

Which best you like, and suits most with your ease.
Now to the Show-room let's awhile repair,
To see the active feats performed there.
How the bold Dutchman, on the rope doth bound,
With greater air than others on the ground:
What capers does he cut! how backward leaps!
With Andrew Merry eyeing all his steps:
His comick humours with delight you see,
Pleasing unto the best of company," &c.

But a very vivid description of Sadler's Wells is given in "Mackliniana, or Anecdotes of the late Mr. Charles Macklin, Comedian" in the *European Magazine* for 1801 (vol. xl. p. 16): —

"Being met one night at Sadler's Wells by a friend, who afterwards saw him home, he went into a history of that place, with an accuracy which, though nature generally denies to the recollection of old age in recent events, seems to atone for it in the remembrance of more remote periods.

"Sir, I remember the time when the price of admission *here* was but *threepence*, except a few places scuttled off at the sides of the stage at sixpence, and which was usually reserved for people of fashion, who occasionally came to see the fun. Here we smoked, and drank porter and rum and water, as much as we could pay for, and every man had his doxy that liked it, and so forth; and though we had a mixture of very odd company (for I believe it was a good deal the baiting place of thieves and highwaymen) there was little or no rioting. There was a *public* then, Sir, that kept one another in awe.

"Q. Were the entertainments anything like the present? A. No, no; nothing in the shape of them; some hornpipes and ballad singing, with a kind of pantomimic ballet, and some lofty tumbling — and all this was done by daylight, and there were four or five exhibitions every day.

"Q. How long did these continue at a time? A. Why, Sir, it depended upon circumstances. The proprietors had always a fellow on the outside of the booth, to calculate how many people were collected for a second exhibition, and when he thought there were enough, he came to the back of the upper seats, and cried out, 'Is *Hiram Fisteman* here?' This was the cant word agreed upon between the parties, to know the state of the people without — upon which they concluded the entertainment with a song, dismissed that audience, and prepared for a second representation.

"Q. Was this in Rozamon's time? A. No, no, Sir; long before — not but old Rozamon improved it a good deal, and, I believe, raised the price generally to sixpence, and in this way got a great deal of money."

Space prevents one going into the merits of the Theatre here, but it may not be out of place if I mention some of the singers, and actors, who have appeared on those boards — Joey Grimaldi, Braham, Miss Shields (afterwards Mrs. Leffler), Edmund Kean, the great traveller Belzoni, Miss Tree, Phelps, of Shakespearian fame, Marston, and others, testify to the talent which has had its home in this theatre. One peculiarity about Sadler's Wells Theatre was the introduction of real water as a scenic effect. It seems to have been first used on Easter Monday, April 2, 1804, in an entertainment called *Naumachia*. A very large tank was made under the stage, and filled with water from the New River; and in this tank mimic men o' war bombarded Gibraltar, but were repulsed, with loss, by the heroic garrison. Afterwards, it was frequently used for *Spectacles*, in which water was used as an adjunct.

After this digression let us follow the course of the River Fleet. Leaving St. Chad's Well, and before coming to Bagnigge Wells, there stood in Gray's Inn Road an old public-house called the Pindar of Wakefield, the pounder, or keeper of the pound at that town, the famous George à Green, who gave Robin Hood a notable thrashing, extorting from that bold outlaw this confession —

"For this was one of the best pinders
That ever I tryed with sword."

This old house was destroyed by a hurricane in November, 1723, when the two daughters of the landlord were killed by the falling walls. It was, however, at once rebuilt, and a public-house, bearing the same sign, exists at 328, Gray's Inn Road – most probably occupying the original site.

CHAPTER VII

BETWEEN this house, and Bagnigge Wells, was Bagnigge Wash, or Marsh, and Black Mary's Wells, or Hole. The etymology of this place is contested. In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1813, part ii. p. 557, in an "Account of various Mineral Wells near London," is the following: "Lastly, in the same neighbourhood, may be mentioned the spring or conduit on the eastern side of the road leading from Clerken Well to Bagnigge Wells, and which has given name to a very few small houses as *Black Mary's Hole*. The land here was, formerly, called Bagnigg Marsh, from the river Bagnigg,³⁴ which passes through it. But, in after-time, the citizens resorting to drink the waters of the conduit, which then was leased to one Mary, who kept a black Cow, whose milk the gentlemen and ladies drank with the waters of the Conduit, from whence, the wits of that age used to say, 'Come, let us go to Mary's black hole.' However, Mary dying, and the place degenerating into licentiousness, about 1687, Walter Baynes Esqre, of the Inner Temple, enclosed the Conduit in the manner it now is, which looks like a great oven. He is supposed to have left a fund for keeping the same in perpetual repair. The stone with the inscription was carried away during the night about ten years ago. The water (which formerly fed two ponds on the other side of the road) falls into the old Bagnigge river."

This etymon, however, is contested in a pamphlet called *An experimental enquiry concerning the Contents, Qualities, Medicinal Virtues of the two Mineral Waters of Bagnigge Wells, &c.*, by John Bevis, M.D. This pamphlet was originally published in 1767, but I quote from the third edition of 1819. "At what time these waters were first known cannot be made out with any degree of evidence. A tradition goes that the place of old was called Blessed Mary's Well; but that the name of the Holy Virgin having, in some measure, fallen into disrepute after the Reformation, the title was altered to Black Mary's Well, as it now stands upon Mr. Rocque's map, and then to Black Mary's Hole; though there is a very different account of these latter appellations; for there are those who insist they were taken from one Mary Woolaston, whose occupation was attending at a well, now covered in, on an opposite eminence, by the footway from Bagnigge to Islington to supply the soldiery, encamped in the adjacent fields, with water. But waving such uncertainties, it may be relied on for truth, that a late proprietor, upon taking possession of the estate, found two wells thereon, both steamed in a workmanlike manner; but when, or for what purpose, they were sunk, he is entirely ignorant."

But Black Mary's Hole, during the first half of the last century, had a very queer reputation. There was a little public-house with the sign of "The Fox at Bay," which probably had something to do with the numerous highway robberies that occurred thereabouts.

In Cromwell's "History of Clerkenwell," pp. 318, 319, we hear of the last of Black Mary's Hole. He says, "Beneath the front garden of a house in Spring Place, and extending under the foot-pavement almost to the turnpike gate called the Pantheon Gate, lies the capacious receptacle of a *Mineral Spring*, which in former times was in considerable repute, both as a chalybeate, and for its supposed efficacy in the cure of sore eyes... About ten years back, when Spring Place was erected, the builder removed every external appearance of Walter Baynes's labours, and converted the receptacle beneath into a cesspool for the drainage of his houses. The spring thus degraded, and its situation concealed, it is probable that the lapse of a few more years would have effaced the memory of it for ever, had not an accident re-discovered it in the summer of 1826. Its covering, which was only of boards, having rotted, suddenly gave way, and left a large chasm in the footpath. After some efforts, not perfectly successful, to turn off the drainage, it was then arched with brickwork, and a leaden pump placed over it, in the garden where it chiefly lies. But the pump being stolen during the following winter, the spring has again fallen into neglect, and possibly this page alone will prevent its being totally forgotten."

³⁴ Otherwise the Fleet.

Still following the Fleet to its outfall, we next come to Bagnigge Well, a chalybeate spring, first used medicinally, and then, like all these Spas, merely as a promenade, and place of out-of-door recreation.

Originally, this spring probably belonged to the Nunnery at Clerkenwell, and may possibly be the "Rode Well" mentioned in the Register of Clerkenwell. But we are indebted to Dr. Bevis, from whose pamphlet I have already quoted, for a history of its modern rise and development ([p. 38](#)).

"In the year 1757, the spot of ground in which this well is sunk was let out to a gentleman curious in gardening, who observed that the oftener he watered his flowers from it the worse they thrived. I happened, toward the end of that summer, to be in company with a friend who made a transient visit to Mr. Hughes, and was asked to taste the water; and, being surprised to find its flavour so near that of the best German chalybeates, did not hesitate to declare my opinion, that it might be made of great benefit both to the public and himself. At my request, he sent me some of the water, in a large stone bottle, well corked, the next day; a gallon whereof I immediately set over a fire, and by a hasty evaporation found it very rich in mineral contents, though much less so than I afterwards experienced it to be when more leisurely exhaled by a gentle heat. Whilst this operation was carrying on, I made some experiments on the remainder of the water, particularly with powdered galls, which I found to give, in less than a minute, a very rich and deep purple tincture to it, that lasted many days without any great alteration. I reported these matters to Mr. Hughes, but, soon after, a very dangerous illness put a stop to my experiments, which I did not resume for a considerable time, when the proprietor called, and told me his waters were in very great repute, and known by the name of Bagnigge Wells; which I remembered to have seen in the newspapers, without so much as guessing it had been given to these springs. Mr. Hughes took me to his wells, where I was not a little pleased with the elegant accommodations he had provided for company in so short a time."

The house attached to the Spa is said to have been the residence of Nell Gwyn, but tradition has assigned her so many houses; at Chelsea, Bagnigge Wells, Highgate, Walworth, and Filberts, near Windsor – nay, one enterprising tradesman in the Strand has christened a milk shop "Nell Gwyn's Dairy," and has gone to some expense, in pictorial tiles, to impress on passers-by the genuineness of his assertion.

Still, local tradition is strong, and, in a book called "The Recreations³⁵ of Mr. Zigzag the elder" (a pseudonym for Mr. John Wykeham Archer, artist and antiquary), which is in the Library of the City of London, and which is profusely "Grangerised" by the author, is a small water colour of Bagnigge House, the reputed dwelling of Nell Gwyn, which I have reproduced in outline, and on this drawing is a note, "Moreover several small tenements at the north end of the Garden were formerly entitled Nell Gwynne's Buildings, which seems to verify the tradition."³⁶

But the evidence is all of a *quasi* kind. In the long room, supposed to have been the banqueting room, was, over the mantel, a bust, an *alto relievo*, of a female, supposed to be Nell Gwyn, and said to be modelled by Sir Peter Lely, enclosed in a circular border of fruit, which, of course, was at once set down as a delicate allusion to the actress's former calling of orange wench in the theatres. The bust and border were painted to imitate nature, and on either side were coats of arms – one the Royal arms, and, on the other side, the Royal arms quartered with others, which were supposed to be those assumed by the actress. When the old house was pulled down, the bust disappeared, and no one knows whither it went.

I give a quotation from the *Sunday Times*, July 5, 1840, not as adding authority, or weight, to the idea that Bagnigge House was Nell's residence, but to show how deeply rooted was the tradition.

³⁵ These papers appeared in the *Illustrated Family Journal*.

³⁶ In Cromwell's "History of Clerkenwell," p. 322, we read, "In memory of its supposed proprietor, the owner of some small tenements near the north end of the gardens styled them 'Nell Gwynn's Buildings;' but the inscription was erased before 1803."

It is a portion of the "*Maximms and Speciments of William Muggins, Natural Philosopher, and Citizen of the World*" —

"Oh! how werry different London are now to wot it war at the time as I took my view on it from the post; none of them beautiful squares and streets, as lies heast and west, and north of the hospital, war built then; it war hall hopen fields right hup to Ampstead an Ighgate and Hislington. Bagnigge Well stood by itself at the foot of the hill, jist where it does now; and then it looked the werry pictur of countryfiedness and hinnocence. There war the beautiful white washed walls, with the shell grotto in the hoctagon summer house, where Nell Gwynne used to sit and watch for King Charles the Second. By the by, a pictur done by a famous hartist of them days, Sir Somebody Neller I thinks war his name, represents the hidetical ouse (it war a fine palace then) with the hidetical hoctagon summer house, with the beautiful Nelly leaning hout of the winder, with her lilly white hand and arm a-beckoning, while the King is seed in the distance galloping like vinking across the fields a waving his hat and feathers; while a little page, with little tobacker-pipe legs, in white stockings, stands ready to hopen a little door in the garden wall, and let hin the royal wisitor, while two little black and tan spanels is frisking about and playing hup hold gooseberry among the flower beds.

That ere pictur used to hang hup in the bar parlor; its wanished now – so are the bust as were in the long room; but there's another portrait pictur of her, all alone by herself, done by Sir Peter Lely, still to be seen. (This here last coorosity war discovered honly a year or two ago, rolled hup among sum rubbige in the loft hunder the roof.)"

The old house, however, was evidently of some importance, for, over a low doorway which led into the garden, was a stone, on which was sculptured a head in relief, and the following inscription —

X

THIS IS BAGNIGGE

HOUSE NEARE

THE PINDAR A

WAKEFIELDE

1680

thus showing that the Pindar of Wakefield was the older house, and famous in that locality. This doorway and stone were in existence within the last forty years, for, in a footnote to page 572 of the *Gentleman's Magazine* of June, 1847, it says, "The gate and inscription still remain, and will

be found, where we saw them a few weeks since, in the road called Coppice Row, on the left going from Clerkenwell towards the New Road."

The following illustration gives Bagnigge Wells as it appeared at the end of last century.

We have read how these gardens were first started in 1757, but they soon became well known and, indeed, notorious, as we read in a very scurrilous poem called "Bagnigge Wells," by W. Woty, in 1760 —

"Wells, and the place I sing, at early dawn
Frequented oft, where male and female meet,
And strive to drink a long adieu to pain.
In that refreshing Vale with fragrance fill'd,
Renown'd of old for Nymph of public fame
And amorous Encounter, where the sons
Of lawless lust conven'd – where each by turns
His venal Doxy woo'd, and stil'd the place
Black Mary's Hole— there stands a Dome superb,
Hight Bagnigge; where from our Forefathers hid,
Long have two Springs in dull stagnation slept;
But, taught at length by subtle art to flow,
They rise, forth from Oblivion's bed they rise,
And manifest their Virtues to Mankind."

The major portion of this poem (?) is rather too *risque* for modern publication, but the following extract shows the sort of people who went there with the view of benefiting their health —

"Here ambulates th' Attorney looking grave,
And Rake from Bacchanalian rout uprose,
And mad festivity. Here, too, the Cit,
With belly, turtle-stuff'd, and man of Gout,
With leg of size enormous. Hobbling on,
The Pump-room he salutes, and in the chair
He squats himself unwieldy. Much he drinks,
And much he laughs to see the females quaff
The friendly beverage. He, nor jest obscene,
Of meretricious wench, nor quibble quaint,
Of prentic'd punster heeds, himself a wit
And dealer in conundrums, but retorts
The repartee jocosely. Soft! how pale
Yon antiquated virgin looks! Alas!
In vain she drinks, in vain she glides around
The Garden's labyrinth. 'Tis not for thee,
Mistaken nymph! these waters pour their streams," &c.

And in the prologue to "Bon Ton: or *High Life* above Stairs," by David Garrick, acted at Drury Lane for the first time, for the benefit of Mr. King, in 1775, not much is said as to the character of its frequenters.

"Ah! I loves life and all the joy it yields,
Says Madam Fupock, warm from Spittlefields.

Bon Ton's the space 'twixt Saturday and Monday,
And riding in a one-horse chaise on Sunday,
'Tis drinking tea on summer's afternoons
At Bagnigge Wells, with china and gilt spoons."

CHAPTER VIII

THE gardens were pretty, after the manner of the times; we should not, perhaps, particularly admire the formally cut lines and hedges, nor the fountain in which a Cupid is hugging a swan, nor the rustic statuary of the haymakers. Still it was a little walk out of London, where fresh air could be breathed, and a good view obtained of the northern hills of Hampstead and Highgate, with the interlying pastoral country, sparsely dotted with farmhouses and cottages. The Fleet, here, had not been polluted into a sewer as it was further on, and there were all the elements of spending a pleasant, happy day, in good air, amid rural scenes.

The place, however, rapidly became a disreputable *rendezvous*, and we get an excellent glimpse of the costumes of *circa* 1780 in the two following engravings taken from mezzotints published by Carington Bowles; although not dated, they are of that period, showing the Macaronis and Belles of that time. The first is called "The Bread and Butter Manufactory,³⁷ or the Humours of Bagnigge Wells," and the second "A Bagnigge Wells Scene, or no resisting temptation," which gives a charming representation of the ultra fashion of dress then worn.

Yet another glance at the manners of the time is afforded by the boy waiter, who hurries along with his tray of tea-things and *kettle of hot water*.³⁸

And there was good music there, too – an organ in the long room, on which Charles Griffith performed, as may be seen in the accompanying illustration. The name of Davis on the music books, is that of the then proprietor, and the lines underneath are parodied from Dryden's "Song for St. Cecilia's day, 1687."

"What passion cannot music raise and quell!
When Jubal struck the corded shell,
His listening brethren stood around,
And, wondering, on their faces fell."

It went on with varying fortunes, and under various proprietors. First of all Mr. Hughes, then, in 1792, Davis had it; in 1813 it was in the hands of one Salter; in 1818, a man named Thorogood took it, but let it to one Monkhouse, who failed, and it reverted to Thorogood. Then came as tenant, a Mr. Chapman, who was bankrupt in 1833, and, in 1834, Richard Chapman was proprietor. I fancy he was the last, as public house, and gardens, combined.

Mr. William Muggins, before quoted, laments its decadence thus: "Besides the whitewashed walls, and hockagon shell grotto, there war the tea garden, with its honey suckle and sweet briar harbours, where they used to drink tea hout of werry small cups, and heat the far famed little hot loaves and butter; then there war the dancing plot, and the gold and silver fish ponds, and the bowling green, and skittle alley, and fire work ground hall so romantic and rural, standing in the middle of a lot of fields, and shaded around with trees. Now it's a werry different concern, for it's surrounded with buildings – the gardens is cut hoff to nuffin, and the ouse looks tumble down and miserable." That was in 1840.

It was about this time that a song appeared in "The Little Melodist," 1839 – dilating on the delights of the neighbourhood of Islington, and the first verse ran thus:

"Will you go to Bagnigge Wells,
Bonnet builder, O!

³⁷ An allusion to the hot buttered rolls, which were in vogue there.

³⁸ See p.89

Where the Fleet ditch fragrant smells,
Bonnet builder, O!
Where the fishes used to swim,
So nice and sleek and trim,
But the pond's now covered in,
Bonnet builder, O!

Punch, too, when it was young, and had warm blood coursing through its veins, visited Bagnigge Wells, and recorded the visit in its pages (Sept. 7, 1843). After a description of the walk thither, it says, "We last visited Bagnigge Wells about the beginning of the present week, and, like many travellers, at first passed close to it without seeing it. Upon returning, however, our eye was first arrested by an ancient door in the wall over which was inscribed the following: – ³⁹

"This inscription, of which the above is a *fac simile* was surmounted by a noseless head carved in stone; and, underneath, was a cartoon drawn in chalk upon the door, evidently of a later date, and bearing a resemblance to some of the same class in Gell's 'Pompeii.' Underneath was written in letters of an irregular alphabet, 'Chucky' – the entire drawing being, without doubt, some local pasquinade.

"Not being able to obtain admittance at the door, we went on a short distance, and came to the ruins of the ancient 'Wells,' of which part of the banqueting room still exists. These are entirely open to the public as well as the adjoining pleasure grounds, although the thick layer of brick-bats with which they are covered, renders walking a task of some difficulty. The adjacent premises of an eminent builder separate them by some cubits from the road of Gray's Inn, near which, what we suppose to be the 'Well' is still visible. It is a round hole in the ground behind the ruins, filled up with rubbish and mosaics of oyster shells, but, at present, about eighteen inches deep.

"It is very evident that the character of Bagnigge Wells has much altered within the last century. For, bearing that date, we have before us the 'Song of the 'Prentice to his Mistress' in which the attractions of the place are thus set forth: —

"Come, come, Miss Priscy, make it up,
And we will lovers be:
And we will go to *Bagnigge Wells*,
And there we'll have some tea.
And there you'll see the ladybirds
All on the stinging nettles;
And there you'll see the water-works,
And shining copper kettles.
And there you'll see the fishes, Miss,
More curious than whales;
They're made of gold and silver, Miss,
And wag their little tails.' ⁴⁰

"Of the wonders recounted in these stanzas, the stinging nettles alone remain flourishing, which they do in great quantity. The Waterworks are now confined to two spouts and a butt against the

³⁹ See ante-p. 84

⁴⁰ With all due deference to *Punch*, I think his version is slightly, only slightly, inaccurate. I have before me five copies, two MS. and three printed, all of which run — "Come, prithee make it up, Miss, And be as lovers be, We'll go to Bagnigge Wells, Miss, And there we'll have some tea. It's there you'll see the Lady-birds Perch'd on the Stinging Nettles; The Chrystal water Fountain, And the Copper, shining Kettles. It's there you'll see the Fishes, More curious they than Whales, And they're made of Gold and Silver, Miss, And wags their little tails. Oh! they wags their little Tails— They wags their little Tails Oh! they're made of gold and silver, Miss, and they wags their little Tails. Oh! dear! Oh! la! Oh! dear! Oh! la! Oh! dear! Oh! la! Oh! dear! Oh! la! How funny!"

adjacent building; and the gold and silver fishes separately, in the form of red herrings and sprats, have been removed to the stalls in the neighbourhood, with a great deal more of the wag in the dealer, than in themselves.

"The real Bagnigge Wells, where company assemble to drink, at the present day, is next door to the ruins. The waters are never drank, however, now, without being strongly medicated, by a process carried on at the various brewers and distillers of the Metropolis: without this, they are supposed, by some classes, to be highly injurious. Their analysis have produced various results. Soda has been detected in one species, analogous to the German *Seltzer*, and designated 'Webb's'; others contain iron in appreciable quantities, and institute a galvanic circle, when quaffed from goblets formed from an alloy of tin and lead: in some constitutions quickening the circulation, and raising the animal temperature – in others, producing utter prostration.

"Flannel jackets, and brown paper caps appeared to be the costume of the valetudinarians who were drinking at the Wells, during our stay. We patronized the tepid spa by ordering 'Sixpennyworth warm,' as the potion was termed in the dialect of Bagnigge, for the purpose of drawing the proprietor into conversation. But he was, evidently, reluctant to impart much information, and told us nothing beyond what we already knew – a custom very prevalent at all the springs we have visited.

"Lodgings, provisions, clothing, &c., are to be had at low rates in the neighbourhood, and there are several delightful spots in the vicinity of Bagnigge Wells.

"The Excursion to Battle Bridge will be found highly interesting, returning by the Brill; and, to the admirers of nature, the panorama from the summit of King's Cross, embracing the Small Pox Hospital, and Imperial Gas Works, with the very low countries surrounding them, is peculiarly worthy of especial notice."

Two years previous to this notice, there was a paragraph in the *Times* (April 6, 1841) which shows how the Wells had fallen into decadence.

"The Old Grotto, which had all the windows out, and was greatly dilapidated, and the upper part of the Garden Wall, was knocked down by some persons going along Bagnigge Road, early this morning."

The old place had fulfilled its mission. It had ministered to the recreation and amusement, harmless, or otherwise, of generations of Londoners, and it came to final grief, and disappeared in 1844. Its name is still preserved in "The Bagnigge Wells" Tavern, 39, King's Cross Road, and that is all the reminiscence we have of this once famous place of recreative resort.

CHAPTER IX

A LITTLE farther on, it washed the walls of Cold Bath Fields Prison, the *House of Correction*, and we get a view of it in Hone's "Table Book,"⁴¹ p. 75. Here he says,

"In 1825, this was the first open view, nearest London, of the ancient River Fleet: it was taken during the building of the high arched walls connected with the House of Correction, Cold Bath Fields, close to which prison the river ran, as here seen. At that time, the newly erected walls communicated a peculiarly picturesque effect to the stream flowing within their confines."

This "House of Correction" was indebted for its birth to the famous John Howard, who had made an European tour, not to mention a home one, inquisitorially inspecting prisons. We all know the result of his labours; how he exposed abuses fearlessly, and made men's hearts soften somewhat towards those incarcerated.

Howard, writing in 1789, held that capital punishment should be abolished except for *murder*, *setting houses on fire*, and for *house breaking, attended with acts of cruelty*. And speaking of his Penitentiaries, he says:

"To these houses, however, I would have none but old, hardened offenders, and those who have, as the laws now stand, forfeited their lives by robbery, house breaking, and similar Crimes, should be committed; or, in short, those Criminals who are to be confined for a long term or for life..."

"The *Penitentiary houses*, I would have *built*, in a great measure, *by the convicts*. I will suppose that a power is obtained from Parliament to employ such of them as are now at work on the Thames, or some of those who are in the county gaols, under sentence of transportation, as may be thought most expedient. In the first place, let the surrounding wall, intended for full security against escapes, be completed, and proper lodges for the gate keepers. Let temporary buildings, of the nature of barracks, be erected in some part of this enclosure which would be wanted the least, till the whole is finished."

This was a portion of his scheme, and he suggested that it should be located, where it was afterwards built, in Cold Bath Fields – because the situation was healthy, that good water could be obtained from the White Conduit, as the Charter House no longer required that source of supply, it being well served by the New River Company – that labour was cheap – and so was food, especially the coarse meat from the shambles at Islington.

The prisoners were to have separate cells, so as to prevent the promiscuous herding of all, which had previously produced such mischievous results, and these cells were to be light and airy. The convicts of both sexes were to *work*, and their food was to be apportioned to the work they had to do. Also – a very great step in the right direction – they were all to wear a prison uniform. Howard, philanthropist as he was, was very far from lenient to the rogue. He was fully aware of the value of *work*, and specially provided that his rogues, in their reformation, should pass through the purifying process of hard labour. In later times, the way of transgressors was hard in that place, and it became a terror to evildoers, being known by the name of the *English Bastille* – which, however, amongst its patrons, was diminished, until it finally was abbreviated into "the Steel" by which name it was known until its abolition.⁴²

This cognomen was so well known, that, in 1799, a book was written by "A Middlesex Magistrate" entitled "The Secrets of the English Bastille disclosed" – which was a favourable story of the management of the prison in Cold Bath Fields. Still, it was the subject of a Parliamentary inquiry, as we find in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1798-9, under date of Dec. 31, 1798, p. 398, that, in the

⁴¹ See next page.

⁴² J. T. Smith in his "Vagabondiana," ed. 1815-1817, p. 51, alludes thus to the prison: "Perhaps the only waggery in public-house customs now remaining, is in the tap room of the Appletree, opposite to Cold Bath Fields Prison. There are a pair of hand cuffs fastened to the wires as bell-pulls, and the orders given by some of the company, when they wish their friends to ring, are, to 'Agitate the Conductor.'"

House of Commons, Sir Francis Burdett gave notice of his intention of moving, at some future day, for a report relative to the system practised in the prison, called the House of Correction, Cold Bath Fields, with regard to the persons therein confined.

In the "Parliamentary History of England," vol. xxxiv. p. 566, we learn that on Mar. 6, 1799, Mr. W. Dundas moved that a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the state of his Majesty's prison in Cold Bath Fields, Clerkenwell, and report the same, as it shall appear to them, together with their opinion thereupon, to the House; and a Committee was appointed accordingly. Unfortunately, the pages of what, afterwards, become *Hansard's*, do not record the result.

But in the *Annual Register* for the same year on Dec. 21st there was a long report respecting it during a debate on the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act. Mr. Courtenay said, that, "having visited the prisons, he found the prisoners without fire, and without candles, denied every kind of society, exposed to the cold and the rain, allowed to breathe the air out of their cells only for an hour, denied every comfort, every innocent amusement, excluded from all intercourse with each other, and, each night locked up from all the rest of the world. He supposed it was scarcely necessary to inform the House, that the prison of which he had been speaking, was that in Cold Bath Fields, known by the name of the Bastille." There was a lot more nonsense of the same type talked by other M.P.'s and, it is needless to say, that the exaggerated statements were anent a political prisoner – who afterwards suffered death for treason. And in the remainder of the debate even the very foundation for the libel was destroyed. It is a curious fact, that people have an idea that political prisoners, who have done as much harm to the commonweal as they have the possibility of doing, are to be treated daintily, and with every consideration for their extremely sensitive feelings. We, perhaps, in these latter days, may read a profitable lesson in the suppression of treason, from the proper carrying out of the sentences legally imposed upon those who resist the law out of pure malice (legal).

In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1796, is the following letter to —

Dec. 10, 1795.

Mr. Urban. — Your respect for the memory of Mr. Howard, will induce you to insert the inclosed view of the House of Correction for the County of Middlesex, formed principally on his judicious suggestions. It is situated on the North side of London, between Cold Bath Fields, and Gray's Inn Lane. The spot on which it is erected having been naturally swampy, and long used for a public lay-stall, it was found prudent to lay the foundation so deep, and pile it so securely, that it is supposed there are as many bricks laid underground as appear to sight. What is more to the purpose, the internal regulations of this place of security are believed to be perfectly well adapted to the salutary purposes to which the building is appropriated.

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