

James Ewing Ritchie

**Days and Nights in London: or,  
Studies in Black and Gray**



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«Public Domain»

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# **Ritchie J. Ewing James Ewing Days and Nights in London; Or, Studies in Black and Gray**

## **PREFACE**

London has vastly altered since the Author, some quarter of a century ago, described some of the scenes which occurred nightly in its midst of which respectable people were ignorant, which corrupted its young men and young women, and which rendered it a scandal and a horror to civilisation itself. The publication of his work, “The Night Side of London” – of which nearly eight thousand copies were sold – did something, by calling the attention of Members of Parliament and philanthropists to the subject, to improve the scenes and to abate the scandal. As a further contribution to the same subject, the present volume is published. Every Englishman must take an interest in London – a city which it has taken nearly two thousand years to build; whose sons, to enrich which, have sailed on every sea and fought or traded on every land; and which apparently, as the original home and centre of English-speaking people, must grow with the growth and strengthen with the strength of the world.

Wrentham House, Hendon,  
*February, 1880.*

## I. – THE WORLD OF LONDON

London, for a “village,” as old Cobbett used to call it, is a pretty large one; and, viewed from the lowest stand-point – that of the dull gospel according to Cocker – may well be described as truly wonderful. It eats a great deal of beef, and drinks a great deal of beer. You are staggered as you explore its warehouses. I stood in a granary the other day in which there were some eighty thousand sacks of wheat; and in the Bank of England I held in my hand, for a minute – all too brief – a million of pounds. It is difficult to realise what London is, and what it contains. Figures but little assist the reader.

Perhaps you best realise what the city is as you come up the Thames as far as London Bridge. Perhaps another way is to stand on that same bridge and watch the eager hordes that cross of a morning and return at night, and then, great as that number is, to multiply it a hundredfold. A dozen miles off gardeners tell you that there are plants that suffer from London air and London fog. Indeed it is difficult to say where London begins and where it ends. If you go to Brighton, undoubtedly it is there in all its glory; when yachting far away in the western islands of Scotland and the Hebrides, the first signature I found in the strangers’ book at a favourite hotel was that of Smith, of London. There he was, as large as life, just as we see him any day in Cheapside. One bitter cold winter day I revisited, not exactly my childhood’s happy home, but a neighbouring sea port to which I was once much attached. “Oh,” said I to myself, as I rushed along in the train, “how glad people will be to see me; how bright will be the eyes into which I once loved to look, and how warm the clasp of the hand which once thrilled through all my being!” Alas! a generation had risen who knew not Joseph. I dined sadly and alone at the hotel, and after dinner made my way to the pier to mingle my melancholy with that of the melancholy ocean. The wind was high; the sand in clouds whirled madly along the deserted streets. At sea even nothing was to be seen; but at the far end of the pier, with his back turned to me, gazing over as if he wanted to make out the coast of Holland – some hundred and fifty miles opposite – was a short man, whom I knew at once from his apoplectic back – Brown, of Fleet Street – come there all the way from the congenial steak puddings and whisky toddy of The Cheshire Cheese for a little fresh air! I felt angry with Brown. I was ready almost to throw him over into the raging surf beneath, but I knew that was vain. There were “more to follow.” Nowadays London and London people are everywhere. What is London? It covers, says one, within a fifteen-miles’ radius of Charing Cross, so many hundred square miles. It numbers more than four million inhabitants. It comprises a hundred thousand foreigners from every quarter of the globe. It contains more Roman Catholics than there are in all Rome; more Jews than there are in all Palestine; and, I fear, more rogues than there are even in America. On a Sunday you will hear Welsh in one church, Dutch in another, the ancient dialect of St. Chrysostom in another; and on a Saturday you may plunge into low dancing-houses at the East-End which put to shame anything of the kind in Hamburg or Antwerp or Rotterdam. In many of the smoking-rooms bordering on Mark Lane and Cheapside you hear nothing but German. I know streets and squares inhabited by Dutch and German Jews, or dark-eyed Italians, or excitable Frenchmen, where is as little understood as Sanscrit itself. At any moment I like I can rush away from all European civilisation, and sit in a little room and smoke opium with the heathen Chinese – whose smile all the while is “childlike and bland” – as if I were thousands of miles away. On the other side of St. Paul’s I have supped with hundreds of thieves at a time, who carry on their work as if there was no such institution as that of the police; I have listened to the story of the crowded lodgers, and I can believe anything you like to tell me of the wealth, of the poverty, of the virtue, of the vice of London. People say the metropolis has seven thousand miles of streets. I have no doubt it has. People say it has on Sunday sixty miles of shops open, and they may be right; at least I have neither the time nor the inclination to test these figures. It also rejoices, I hear, in as many public-houses as, if set in a line, would reach from Charing Cross to Portsmouth. The people of London read or write in the

course of a year as many as two hundred and forty millions of letters. All these letters are written, all these public-houses supported, all these streets lined with houses inhabited by men who more or less are connected with the city. It is there they live, if they sleep fifty miles away, and it is a hard life some of them have assuredly. A little while ago a poor woman was charged with pawning shirts entrusted to her to make by an East-End merchant clothier. The woman pleaded that her children were so hungry that she was tempted to pawn some of the work in the hope of being able to redeem it by the time the whole was completed. The work was machine-sewing. She hired the machine at half-a-crown a week, and was paid by the prosecutor a shilling a dozen for his shirts.

The tongue that Shakespeare spake

“Nonsense,” said the magistrate; “that is only a penny each.”

“And that is all it is, sir,” said the poor woman.

“And you have to work a long day to make twelve. And is it really a fact,” said the magistrate, turning to the merchant clothier, “that this kind of work has fallen into such a deplorable condition that you can get it done at so poor a rate?”

“Your worship,” was the reply, “if I wanted a hundred hands at the price I could get ’em by holding up my finger.”

Nowhere does life run to such extremes; – nowhere is there such pauperism as in London; nowhere is there such wealth; nowhere does man lift a sublimer face to the stars; nowhere does he fall so low. In short, London may be described as “one of those things which no fellah can understand.”

In beauty London now may almost vie with fair bewitching Paris. In all other respects it leaves it far behind. It is the brain of England, the seat of English rule, whence issue laws which are obeyed in four quarters of the globe, and the fountain of thought which agitates and rules the world. London is the head-quarters of commerce. Tyre and Sidon and Carthage, the republics of Italy, the great cities of the Hanseatic Confederation, Flemish Ghent or Bruges, or Antwerp or busy Amsterdam, never in their canals, and harbours, and rivers, sheltered such burdened argosies; in their streets never saw such wealthy merchants; in their warehouses never garnered up such stores of corn and wine and oil. London prices rule the globe, and are quoted on every exchange. It is a city of contrasts. It has its quarters where pale-eyed students live and move and have their being, and factories where the only thought is how best to drag out a dull mechanical life. It has its underground cells where misers hide their ill-gotten gains, and its abodes of fashion and dissipation where the thoughtless and the gay dance and drink and sing, as if time past taught them no lesson, and as if time to come could have no terrors for them. It is a city of saints and sinners, where God and Mammon have each their temples and their crowds of worshippers. Here lie in wait the traffickers in men’s bodies and souls; and here live those whose most anxious care is how best to assuage the pangs of poverty, how best to cure the delirium of disease, how most successfully to reclaim the fallen and the prodigal, how most assiduously to guard the young from the grasp of the destroyer – how, in the language of the poet, to “allure to brighter worlds and lead the way.” If there be a fire in Chicago, a famine in India, a tornado in the West Indies, a wail of distress from the North or the South, or the East or the West, London is the first city to send succour and relief.

In speaking of London we sometimes mean Smaller London and sometimes Greater London. To avoid confusion we must clearly understand what is meant by each. Smaller London comprises 28 Superintendent Registrars’ Districts, 20 of them being in Middlesex, 5 in Surrey, and 3 in Kent; viz. Kensington, Chelsea, St. George, Hanover Square, Westminster, Marylebone, Hampstead, Pancras, Islington, Hackney, St. Giles, Strand, Holborn, London City, Shoreditch, Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, St. George in the East, Stepney, Mile End and Poplar in Middlesex; St. Saviour, Southwark, St. Olave, Southwark, Lambeth, Wandsworth, and Camberwell in Surrey; and Greenwich, Lewisham, and Woolwich in Kent. It had an estimated population in the middle of 1878 of 3,577,304. Greater London comprises in addition to the above 14 Superintendent Registrars’ Districts, 6 of them

being in Middlesex, 4 in Surrey, 2 in Kent, and 2 in Essex; viz. Staines, Uxbridge, Brentford, Hendon, Barnet, and Edmonton in Middlesex; Epsom, Croydon, Kingston, and Richmond in Surrey; Bromley and Bexley in Kent; and West Ham and Romford in Essex. It comprises the whole of Middlesex, and such parishes of Surrey, Kent, Essex, and Herts as are within 12 miles of Charing Cross. These additional districts had an estimated population of 872,711 in the middle of the year 1878, so that Greater London has therefore at the present time a population of 4,450,015. The population of the United Kingdom in the middle of 1878 was estimated at 33,881,966. Greater London had therefore considerably more than an eighth of the population of Great Britain and Ireland, and more than a sixth of the population of England and Wales. This large population is constantly and rapidly increasing; the estimated increase in 1878 being 82,468. It is important to note that the increase is not equal in all parts. The population is decreasing within the City; within Smaller London it goes on increasing but at a decreasing rate, and in the outer ring the population increases steadily at an increasing rate. The population of the outer circle has increased more than 50 per cent. in the last ten years.

Even in its narrowest definition – as the small plot of ground between Temple Bar and Aldgate pump – what a history London has! Of what scenes of glory and of shame it has been the theatre! What brave men and lovely women have played their part, heroic or the reverse, upon its stage! When the City's greatest architect dug deep into the earth to build the foundations of his matchless cathedral, he laid bare the remains of nations and generations that one after another had held the City as its own. First he uncovered the graves of the early medieval Londoners; then he came to the remains of our Saxon forefathers, of Ethelbert and St. Augustine; next were found the remains of Romans and ancient Britons, and last of all were found the mouldering remains of those who knew not Cæsar and the city they call Rome. Again, the London of Victoria faintly resembles the London of Queen Anne, as faintly perhaps as does the Jerusalem of to-day represent the city in which our Saviour dwelt. No wonder that our old chroniclers romanced not a little, and that many of them did believe, as Geoffrey of Monmouth writes, that London was founded by Brute, a descendant of Eneas, eleven hundred years before Christ, and that he called it Troy Novant, whence came the name of the people to be called Trinobantes. Equally widespread and equally unfounded was the belief that from London were shipped away eleven thousand – some say seventy thousand – British virgins (as an admirer of the virtues of my countrywomen I stick to the highest figure) – whose bones may yet be seen in Cologne – to the British warriors compelled to settle in Armorica. What is clear, however, is that in London Diana had a temple, that the Saxons won the city from the Britons, that the Tower of London is one of the oldest buildings in Christendom, and that here Roman and Dane, and Saxon and Norman have all more or less left their mark. Our early monarchs trembled as they saw how the great city grew. When that slobbering James came to the throne – whom his courtiers denominated the British Solomon – of whom bishops and archbishops testified that his language was that of inspiration, he exclaimed, "England will shortly be London, and London England," as he saw how people were adding house to house and street to street, and flocking to them from all parts of England and Scotland; yet the London of the Stuarts, neither in extent or magnificence or wealth, bore the faintest resemblance to the London of to-day.

Londoners are well looked after in the matter of taxes. The ratable value of the metropolis, or rather the district of the Metropolitan Board, is £23,960,109. Last year it raised in this way £477,835. The School Board rate was something similar. Besides, there is a sewer rate of twopence in the pound; a paving, watering, etc. rate of probably ninepence; a lighting rate of threepence; then there are rates to pay interest on the debts of extinct paving trusts; a rate for baths and wash-houses, police rate and county rate, making a total of almost five shillings and sixpence in the pound on the value of a house. While it has an excess of beer-shops, gin-palaces, and music-halls, it has a great deficiency as regards church and chapel accommodation. In Inner London it is calculated 955,060 sittings are required. In Larger London the deficiency, it is estimated, is much more.

The number of police, according to the last return, was 10,336 in the metropolis, showing an increase of 0.5 per cent. over last year; and in the City 798, being seven over the last returns. The metropolitan police are in the proportion of one for every 397 of the population of the metropolitan police district; the City police of one for every 93 of the population, as enumerated on the night of the census of 1871. The cost of the metropolitan police was £1,077,399, of which 39.9 per cent. was contributed from public revenue; the cost of the City police was £85,231, towards which no contribution was made. From the criminal returns it appears that for the metropolitan police district, with the City, the number of known thieves and depredators, receivers of stolen goods, and suspected persons, was 2,715, or one in 1,431 of the population, showing an increase of 3.9 per cent. on the returns of the previous year. The rule which has been followed now for 14 years, that persons known to have been living honestly for one year at least subsequently to their discharge after any conviction, should not be returned in the class of known thieves and depredators, has been adhered to. The return of houses of bad character in the metropolis, exclusive of those of ill-fame and of those returned to Parliament under the Contagious Act, is 215, of which 66 are houses of receivers of stolen goods, showing a decrease of 22 in the year. The total number of cases tried at the Central Criminal Court was 10,151. From a classification of offences determined summarily we learn that there were 5,622 persons proceeded against in the City, of whom 1,093 were discharged, and the remainder convicted or otherwise dealt with. There were 191 offences against the Adulteration of Food Act in the metropolitan police district, 7 in the City; 5,874 against the Elementary Education Act, none in the City; 1,234 cases of cruelty to animals in the metropolitan district, 823 in the City; 33,520 persons were drunk and disorderly in the metropolitan district, 431 in the City, being an increase over the numbers for the last year of about 1,000 in the first instance, and 35 in the second.

From the prison returns we gather that the total of commitments to Newgate for the year ended September 29th, 1877, was 1,394 males, and 218 females, being in the case of the males a reasonable decrease from the last year's numbers; to Holloway, 1,896 males, 281 females, the latter returns including 841 males and 45 females to the civil side for debt. Under the heading of expenses we have £127 19s. for new buildings, alterations, etc., in Newgate; and in Holloway, £199; ordinary repairs in Newgate came to £149 11s. 4d., rent, rates, taxes, etc., £121 7s.; Holloway repairs, £121 4s. 5d., rent and taxes, £74 2s. 11d., with various other charges, making a total of expenses at Newgate of £6,514 5s. 3d.; Holloway, £10,314 9s. 9d. From the table of funds charged with prison expenses we learn that at Holloway the net profit of prisoners' labour was £2,038 1s. 9d. The county or liberty rates contributed £83 16s. 8d. to Newgate; the City rate was £5,632 1s. 3d., the latter rate was, in respect to Holloway, £6,239 5s. The Treasury paid £347 0s. 9d., proportion of the charge for convicted prisoners at Newgate, £1,438 17s. 6d. for those at Holloway.

The charitable contributions of England are to-day in excess of what the whole revenue of the British Crown was under the Stuarts, only two hundred years ago; over £600,000 per annum is derived from all such sources by the medical charities of London alone; more than 1,200,000 persons, exclusive of paupers, are annually recipient of assistance from those medical charities.

In other ways also is London truly wonderful. It seems as if the earth toiled and moiled to simply supply her wants. Sail up the Baltic and ask whither those vessels laden with tallow and corn and flax are steering, and the answer is, The Thames. Float down the Mediterranean, and the reply to the question would be still the same. Ascend the grand rivers of the New World, and the destination of the stores of beef and cheese and wheat is still the same. Canada supplies us with our deals; America with half our food; Australia with our wool; the Cape with our diamonds; the Brazils with coffee. Havannah sends her choice cigars, China her teas, Japan her lacquered and ingenious ware, Italy her silks; and from the vineyards of France, or the green hills that border the Rhine and the Moselle, we are supposed to draw our supplies of sparkling wine. Spain sends her sherry, Portugal her port. For us the spicy breezes blow soft on Ceylon's isle, the turtle fattens languidly under burning suns, the whale wallows in the trough of frozen seas, the elephant feeds in African jungles, and the ostrich darts as

an arrow across the plain. In the country village, in the busy mill, on sea or on land, it is the thought of London that fires the brain and fills the heart, and nerves the muscle and relieves the tedium of nightly or daily toil. As Cowper writes:

Where has commerce such a mart,  
So rich, so thronged, so drained, and so supplied,  
As London – opulent, enlarged, and still  
Increasing London? Babylon of old  
Not more the glory of the earth than she,  
A more accomplished world's chief glory now.

It is not our province to speculate as to the future. There are men who tell us that Babylon is about to fall, and that it is time for the elect to be off. It may be so. Time, the destroyer, has seen many a noble city rise, and flourish, and pass away; but London, it must be admitted nevertheless, never more truly in any sense deserves the epitaph of “wonderful” than at the present time.

## II. – THE AMUSEMENTS OF THE PEOPLE

The Middlesex magistrates have shut up the Argyle Rooms. Mr. Bignell, who has found it worth his while to invest £80,000 in the place, it is to be presumed, is much annoyed, and has, in some respects, reason to be so. Year after year noble lords and Middlesex magistrates have visited the place, and have licensed it. Indeed, it had become one of the institutions of the country – one of the places which Bob Logic and Corinthian Tom (for such men still exist, though they go by other names) would be sure to visit, and such as they and the women who were *habitués* will have to go elsewhere. It is said a great public scandal is removed, but the real scandal yet remains. It is a scandal that such a place ever flourished in the great metropolis of a land which professes Christianity – which pays clergymen and deans, and bishops and archbishops princely sums to extirpate that lust of the flesh and lust of the eye and pride of life, which found their lowest form of development in the Argyle Rooms. It was a scandal that men of position, who have been born in English homes and nursed by English mothers, and been consecrated Christians in baptism, and have been trained at English public schools and universities, and worshipped in English churches and cathedrals, should have helped to make the Argyle a flourishing institution. Mr. Bignell created no vice – he merely pandered to what was in existence. It was men of wealth and fashion who made the Argyle what it was. The Argyle closed, the vice remains the same, and it will avail little to make clean the outside of the whited sepulchre if within there be rottenness and dead men's bones. Be that as it may, there are few people who will regret the defeat of Mr. Bignell and the closing of the Argyle. It was not an improving spectacle in an age that has sacrificed everything to worldly show, and that has come to regard brougham as the one thing needful – as the outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace – as a charter of respectability to everyone who rides in it, whether purchased by the chastity of woman or the honour of man – to see painted and bedizened females, most of them

Born in a garret, in a kitchen bred,

driving up in broughams from St. John's Wood or Chelsea or Belgravia, with their gallants, or "protectors," to the well-known rendezvous, at a late hour, to leave a little later for the various oyster-rooms in the district, through a dense crowd of lookers-on, drunk or sober, poor or rich, old or young, as the case might be. In no other capital in Europe was such a sight to be seen. The lesson taught by such a spectacle was neither moral nor improving at first sight, and it was not well that a young, giddy girl, with good looks, and wishing, above all things, for fine dresses and gay society – sick at heart of her lowly home and the dreary drudgery of daily poverty – should there practically have learnt that if she could but make up her mind to give her virtue to the winds, there awaited her the companionship of men of birth and breeding and wealth, and the gaudy, if short-lived, pomps and splendours of successful vice. It is true that in the outside crowd there were, in rags and tatters, in degradation and filth, shivering with cold, pale with want, hideous with intemperance and disease, homeless and friendless and destitute, withered hags old before their time, whom the policeman shrank from touching as he bade them move on, who once were the admired of the Argyle, and the pets and *protégées* of England's gilded youth; and here and there in the crowd, with boots in holes and broken hat, and needy coat buttoned as far as possible to the chin to conceal the absence of a shirt, with hands thrust in empty pockets, sodden in face and feeble of limb, were men who had been hauled from the Argyle to Bow Street and the gaol. It is true thus side by side were the bane and the antidote; but when did youth, flushed with wine and pleasure, pause on the road to ruin? Young says:

All men think all men mortal but themselves,

and in like manner each man or woman in the glow of youth feels confident that he or she can never fall, and thus rushes madly on, ignoring the eternal truth that there is a Nemesis ever tracking

the steps of the wrongdoer, one from whose grasp we can never escape, that the pleasures of sin are but for a season, and that the wages of sin are death. By the beery dissipated crowd outside, I say, this obvious fact had been lost sight of. What they wanted to see was the women and the men as they turned out into the streets or drove away. Well, that sight exists no longer, and to a certain extent it is a gain. The Haymarket in these latter days was very different and a much more sober place than it was when the Marquis of Waterford played his drunken pranks at Bob Croft's, or when the simple Windham was in the habit of spending his time and wasting his money and degrading an honoured name at such a place as Barns's or The Blue Posts. Men not far advanced in life can remember the Piccadilly Saloon, with its flashy women and medical students and barristers from the Temple, and men about town and greenhorns from the country – who in the small hours turned out into the streets, shouting stentorously, “We won't go home till morning,” and putting their decision into execution by repairing to the wine and coffee rooms which lined both sides of the Haymarket and existed in all the adjacent streets. In some there was a piano, at which a shabby performer was hired to keep up the harmony of the evening and to give an appearance of hilarity to what was after all a very slow affair. In others the company were left to their own resources. At a certain hour the police inspector, with a couple of constables, would look in, and it was comic to see how unconscious he was apparently that every trace of intoxicating drink had been removed, as nothing remained on the tables but a few harmless cups of coffee. It was not till the industrious world had risen to the performance of its daily task that the rag-tag and bob-tail of the Haymarket retired to roost; and by the time that earls and holy bishops and godly clergy were ready to drive down the Haymarket to take part in meetings at Exeter Hall to send the Gospel to the heathen abroad, not a trace was left of the outrageous display the night before of the more fearful and sadder forms of heathenism at home. Undoubtedly the Haymarket thirty or forty years ago was an awful place; undoubtedly it will be a little quieter now that the Argyle Rooms are closed, and as the glory of Windmill-street has fled. Undoubtedly we have gained a great deal externally by magisterial action. Yet it is evident we need something more than magisterial sanction for the interference of the police. I am not partial to the men in blue. I doubt their efficacy as agents for moral reform or the introduction of the millennium. They can remove the symptoms, but they cannot touch the disease. It seems to me that they often interfere – especially in the case of poor women – when there is no occasion to do so; and no one, when it is requisite, can be more stolidly blind and deaf and dumb than your ordinary policeman. Police surveillance must mean more or less police bribery. It was once my fate to live in a country town and to belong to a library, which was also supported by the superintendent of police. On one occasion I had a book which had previously been in that gentleman's hands. In opening it a letter fell out addressed to him. I did what I ought not to have done, but as it was wide open, I read it, as anyone would. It was from a publican in the town, begging the superintendent's acceptance of a cask of cider. Of course, on the next licensing-day no complaint would be heard as to the character of that house. A journeyman engineer, in his “Habits and Customs of the Working Classes,” gives us similar testimony as he describes a drinking party during prohibited hours disturbed by the appearance of a policeman, but reassured when told by the landlord that he is one of “the right sort;” which means, continues the author, that “he is one of that tolerably numerous sort who, provided a publican ‘tips’ them a ‘bob’ occasionally, and is liberal in the matter of drops of something short when they are on night duty, will not see any night-drinking that may be carried on in his establishment as long as it is done with a show of decency.” I need say no more on that head; human nature is the same all the world over. Out of the heart are the issues of life, and no policeman or magistrate can make a drunken people sober, or a low, sordid, and sensual race of men and women noble and pure in thought and beautiful in life. For that we look to the Christian Church in all its branches. To its ministers especially we appeal. Let them leave theological wrangling, and the cloister where no living voice is heard, and the well-lined study in which human nature, when it puts in an appearance, has learned to assume a decent and decorous mask, and see what are the amusements of the people, not so much

on the Sabbath-day, but on the week-night. The Argyle was but one place out of many. In our great cities there are tens of thousands who live only for amusement, whether they be the working classes or in the higher walks of life. A glance at some of these places of resort may help us to understand what are the amusements of the people, and whether the Church does well and wisely in stamping them with her approval, or regarding them with her frown. It is how a man spends his money, and not how he makes it, that is the true index to his character. It is really impossible to imagine amusements more foolish or more indicative of a low tone of mind morally and intellectually than those which are most patronised at the present day. What pleasure can there be in watching a man walking for a bet, or in a woman risking her neck on a trapeze? Yet thousands go to see such a sight. Even the theatres delight in displays equally revolting, perhaps more so from a moral point of view.

When General Grant was in Moscow lately, an acrobat placed four bottles on a high table, and on top of these a chair, which he balanced sideways while he stood on his head on one corner of it. He kept repeating this, adding one chair at a time, until he got five on top of each other, and still showed no signs of stopping; but General Grant got up and walked away, saying he would rather read the death in the papers than witness it. Our music-hall audiences are far more appreciative of the amusements provided for them.

The stage, I have said, may not escape censure. It has its illustrious exceptions, but, as Mr. Chatterton has shown us, Shakespeare means bankruptcy, and the majority of adaptations from the French are, it is admitted on all hands, not of an improving character. The way also in which the powers of the licenser are administered is, to say the least, puzzling. It is impossible to represent some subjects on the stage without injury to the morals and the manners of the spectators. In Mr. Arthur Matthison's adaptation of "Les Lionnes Pauvres," the sin of adultery was, it is true, held up to execration; but the license was withheld because it was deemed undesirable to turn the English theatre into a spectacular divorce court. Another prohibited play was founded on "La Petite Marquise," in which faithlessness to the marriage vow becomes a fine art, and virtue and honour and purity in woman is held up to ridicule. A lady who has married a man very much her senior, is represented as encouraging the advances of a seducer, who, when she throws herself in his arms, to avoid the expense of having to keep her, sends her back to her husband; and yet the man who forces this filth on the stage complains that he is badly treated, and questions whether the world has ever given birth, or ever will give birth, to any conception as obscene as that of the old man in "The Pink Dominoes" – a play which, it must be remembered, has had a most successful run upon the stage. At the theatre, the same writer observes, "I have beheld a young man hidden in a chest spring out upon a woman half dressed, while from her lips broke words I shudder to repeat. In peril I have watched with bated breath an attempt to commit a rape elaborately represented before the public. In 'Madame! attend Monsieur,' I have seen a woman take a shirt in one hand, and a shift in the other, and, standing in the very centre of the stage, walk up to the float, deliberately put the two together, then with a wild shriek, etc.;" and here the writer stops short. No one, of course, expects people will stop away from the theatre; but why cannot the tone of the place be a little higher, and the whole style of the amusement more worthy of a civilised community? Why cannot we have a less liberal display of legs and bosoms, and more generally in the matter of wit? There have always been admirers of good acting. Why should they be ignored, and the stage lowered to the level of the country bumpkin, the imbecile youth of the day, and his female friends?

### III. – OUR MUSIC-HALLS

I fear the first impression made upon the mind of the careful observer is that, as regards amusements, the mass of the people are deteriorating very rapidly, that we are more frivolous and childish and silly in this way than our fathers. One has no right to expect anything very intellectual in the way of amusements. People seek them, and naturally, as a relief from hard work. A little amusement now and then is a necessity of our common humanity, whether rich or poor, high or low, sinner or saint; and of course, in the matter of amusements, we must allow people a considerable latitude according to temperament and age and education, and the circumstances in which they are placed. In these days no one advocates a Puritanical restraint and an abstinence from the pleasures of the world. We have a perfect right to everything that can lighten the burden of life, and can make the heart rejoice. It was not a pleasant sign of the times, however, when the people found an amusement in bull-baiting, cock-fighting, boxing, going to see a man hanged; nor is it a pleasant sign of the times when, night after night, tens of thousands of our fellow-countrymen are forced into shrieks of laughter by exhibitions as idiotic as they are indecent. A refined and educated people will seek amusements of a refining character. If the people, on the contrary, rejoice in the slang and filthy innuendoes, and low dancing and sensational gymnastics of the music-hall, what are we to think? The music-hall is quite an invention of modern days. In times not very remote working men were satisfied with going into a public-house – having there their *quantum suff.* of less adulterated beer than they can get now – and sometimes they got into good society at such places. For instance, we find Dr. Johnson himself a kind of chairman of an ale-house in Essex Street, Strand, where, for a small fee, you might walk up and see the Doctor as large as life and hear him talk. At a later day the bar-parlour, or whatever it might be called, of the public-house, was the place in which men gathered to talk politics, and to study how they could better themselves. When Bamford, the Lancashire Radical, came to town in 1817, the working men were principally to be found discussing politics in all the London public-houses. One such place he visited and describes: “On first opening the door,” he writes, “the place seemed dimmed by a suffocating vapour of tobacco curling from the cups of long pipes, and issuing from the mouths of the smokers in clouds of abominable odour, like nothing in the world more than one of the unclean fogs of the streets, though the latter were certainly less offensive and probably less hurtful. Every man would have his half-pint of porter before him; many would be speaking at once, and the hum and confusion would be such as gave an idea of there being more talkers than thinkers, more speakers than listeners. Presently, ‘order’ would be called, and comparative silence restored; a speaker, stranger, or citizen would be announced with much courtesy or compliment. ‘Hear, hear, hear,’ would follow, with clapping of hands and knocking of knuckles on the tables till the half-pints danced; then a speech with compliments to some brother orator or popular statesman; next a resolution in favour of Parliamentary reform, and a speech to second it; an amendment on some minor point would follow; a seconding of that; a breach of order by some individual of warm temperament, half-a-dozen would rise to set him right, a dozen to put them down; and the vociferation and gesticulation would become loud and confounding.” Such things are out of fashion nowadays. Political discussion requires a certain amount of intellectual capacity. In London there are but few discussion forums now, and the leading one is so fearfully ventilated and so heavily charged with the fumes of stale tobacco and beer, that it is only a few who care to attend. I remember when there were three very close together and well attended. I remember also when we had a music-hall in the City. It was not a particularly lively place of resort. We used to have “The Bay of Biscay” and “The Last Rose of Summer,” and now and then a comic song, while the visitor indulged in his chop or beef-steak and the usual amount of alcoholic fluid considered necessary on such occasions. But now we have changed all that, and the simple-hearted frequenter of Dr. Johnson’s Tavern half-a-century

back would be not a little astonished with the modern music-hall, which differs *in toto caelo* from the public-house to which in old-fashioned days a plain concert-room was attached.

A glance at the modern music-hall will show us whether we have improved on our ancestors. In one respect you will observe it is the same. Primarily it is a place in which men and women are licensed to drink. The music is an after-thought, and if given is done with the view to keep the people longer in these places and to make them drink more. Externally the music-hall is generally a public-house. It may have a separate entrance, but it is a public-house all the same, and you will find that you can easily go from one to the other. In the music-hall itself the facilities for drink are on every side. There are generally two or three bars at which young ladies are retained to dispense whatever beverages may be required. In the stalls there are little tables on which the patrons of the establishment place their glasses of grog or beer. A boy comes round with cigars and programmes for sale. All the evening waiters walk up and down soliciting your orders. It is thus to the drink, and not to the payment made for admission, that the proprietor looks to recoup himself for his outlay – and that is considerable. A popular music-hall singer makes his forty pounds a week; not, however, by singing at one place all the week, but by rushing from one to the other, and the staff kept at any music-hall of any pretensions is considerable. Internally, the music-hall is arranged as a theatre – with its stage, orchestra, pit, galleries, and boxes.

“Don’t you think,” said the manager of one of the theatres most warmly patronised by the working classes, to a clerical friend of mine, “don’t you think I am doing good in keeping these people out of the public-houses all night?”

My clerical friend was compelled to yield a very reluctant assent. In the case of the music-hall nothing of the kind can be said in extenuation. It is only a larger and handsomer and more attractive kind of drinking shop. In one respect it may be said to have an advantage. Mostly of a night, about the bars of common public-houses and gin-palaces, there are many unfortunate women drinking either by themselves or with one another, or with their male companions. In the music-hall “the unfortunate female” element – except in the more central ones, where they swarm like wolves or eagles in search of their prey – is absent, or, at any rate, not perceptible. The workman takes there his wife and family, and the working man the young woman with whom he keeps company. There can be no harm in that? you say. I am not quite sure. Let me give one case as an illustration of many similar which have come under my own observation.

A girl one evening went with a friend, an omnibus conductor, to a music-hall. She was well plied with drink, which speedily took an effect on her brain, already affected by the gas and glare, and life and bustle of the place. The girl was a fine, giddy, thoughtless girl of the maid-of-all-work order. In the morning when she awoke she found herself in a strange room with her companion of the preceding night. What was the result? She dared not go back to her place. She was equally afraid to go home. I need not ask the reader to say what became of her. Let him question the unfortunate women who crowd the leading thoroughfares of a night how they came to be what they are. It is a fact, I believe, that no censorship is applied to music-hall performances, and that the only censorship is that of the audience. The audience, be it remembered, begins to drink directly the doors are opened, and remains drinking all the time till they are closed; and you may be sure that in a mob of two, or sometimes, as is the case, three thousand people, that the higher is the seasoning and the lower the wit, and the more abundant the *double entendre*, the greater is the applause, and the manager, who sits in an arm-chair at the back of the orchestra and in front of the audience, takes note of that. In the days of the Kembles, Mrs. Butler notes how the tendency of actors was not so much to act well as to make points and bring down the house. Especially does she deplore Braham’s singing as much to be censured in this respect, and as unworthy of his high powers and fame. In the music-hall this lower style of acting and singing becomes a necessity. The people go to be amused, and the actor must amuse them. If he can stand on his head and sing, immense would be the applause. If he is unequal to this, he must attempt something equally absurd, or he must have dogs and monkeys come

to his aid; and perhaps after all he will find himself outrivalled by a Bounding Brother or a wonderful trapeze performer. If the music-hall proprietor in a northern city had prevailed on Peace's mistress, Miss Thompson, to have appeared on his stage, what a fortune he would have made.

The other night I went into one of the largest of our music-halls, not a hundred miles away from what was once Rowland Hill's Chapel. There must have been more than three thousand people present. Not a seat was to be had, and there was very little standing room. I paid a shilling for admission, and was quite surprised to see how entirely the shilling seats or standing places were filled with working men, many of whom had their wives and sweethearts with them. The majority, of course, of the audience was made up of young men, who, in the course of the evening spent at least another shilling in beer and "baccy." In these bad times, when people, in the middle ranks of life are in despair at the hard prospect before them, here were these working men spending their two hundred pounds a night at the least at this music-hall.

When I managed to squeeze my way in it was about the hour of ten, when men who have to get up early to work ought to be in bed. The performances were in full swing, and the enthusiasm of the audience, sustained and stimulated by refreshment, was immense. A female or two were the worse for liquor, but otherwise by that time the intoxicating stage had not been gained. After some very uninteresting bicycling by riders in curious dress, a man disguised as a nigger sang a lot of low doggerel about his "gal." In the course of his singing he stopped to tell us that his "gal" had a pimple and that he liked pimples, as they were signs of a healthy constitution. He then, amidst roars of laughter, pretended to catch a flea. He liked fleas, he said; a flea came in the daylight and looked you in the face like a man as it bit you; but a bug he hated. It crawled over your body in the dark and garroted you. Then he went on to speak in a mock-heroic style of the rights of women. He "spotted" some naughty ones present – an allusion received with laughter. He loved them all, male or female, married or single, and advised all the young men present to get married as soon as possible and then hang themselves. Ballet dancing of the usual character followed, and I came away.

It is said a paper recently sent a special correspondent to describe a London music-hall; the description was refused admission into the paper on the ground of indecency, and I can well believe it.

As to the profit made by the music-halls there can be no doubt. Take for instance the London Pavilion. I find the following newspaper paragraph: Sir Henry A. Hunt, C.B., the arbitrator in the case of the London Pavilion Music Hall, has sent in his award. M. Loibl claimed £147,000 for the freehold and goodwill, the building being required for the new street from Piccadilly to Oxford Street. The award is £109,300. The freehold cost M. Loibl £8,000, and his net profits in 1875 were £10,978; in 1876, £12,083; and in 1877, £14,189. Let me give another illustration. When the proprietor of Evans' Supper Rooms was refused his license, his loss was estimated at £10,000 per annum. It surely evidently is more ready to pay liberally for the gratification of its senses, than for the promotion of its virtues.

## IV. – MORE ABOUT MUSIC-HALLS

The journeyman engineer tells us one day as he was walking along with a mate in the country, he spoke of the beauty of the surrounding scenery and of the magnificent sight which met their eyes. “Oh, blow the sights of the scenery,” said his companion, “the sight for me is a public-house.” It is the same everywhere. I was once travelling in a third-class carriage from Newry to Belfast, when I heard the most atrocious exclamations from a party of young men seated at the other end, all offering to break each other’s heads in the name of the Holy Father. On my intimating that it was a pity young men should thus get into that state to a respectable farmer by my side, his only reply was, “Sure, what’s the good of a drop of drink if it don’t raise something?” Once upon a time I spent a Sunday in a little village inn in North Wales. To my disgust there stumbled into the little parlour a young man, dressed respectably, who had evidently been heavily drinking. As he lay there with his stertorous snore, all unconscious of the wonder and the beauty of the opening day, it seemed to me that it was a sad misuse of the term to say, as his friends would, that he had been in search of amusement. As a reverend divine took his seat in a train the other day there stumbled into it a couple of young fellows, one with his face very much bruised and cut about – who soon went off to sleep – while his companion explained to the minister that they had both of them been enjoying themselves. In the more densely populated and poorer districts of the metropolis there is an immense deal of this kind of enjoyment.

To see the people enjoying themselves, I went the other night down the Whitechapel and Commercial Road district. As I turned the corner of Brick Lane I asked a tradesman of the better class if he could direct me to a very celebrated music-hall in that neighbourhood. “It is over that way,” said he with a strong expression of disgust. “It’s a regular sink of iniquity,” he added. As I was not aware of that, I merely intimated my regret that it was so largely patronised by working men, and that so much money was thus wasted, which might be applied to a better purpose. “Well, you see,” said my informant, “they don’t think of that – they know there is the hospital for them when they are ill.” On my remarking that I was going to Brick Lane prior to visiting the music-hall, he intimated that I had better button up my coat, and when I said that when out on such expeditions as I was then engaged in, I never carried a watch and chain worth stealing, he remarked that if the people did not rob me, at any rate they might knock me down. However, encouraged by his remarks that the people were not so bad as they were, I went on my way.

Apparently the improvement of which my informant spoke was of a very superficial character. Coming from the Aldgate Station at the early hour of six, I found every drinking shop crammed, including the gaudy restaurant at the station, and descending to the filthiest gin-palace, there were the men drinking, and if they were not drinking they were loafing about in groups of by no means pleasant aspect. When at a later hour I returned, the sight was still sadder, as hordes of wild young girls, just emancipated from the workshop, were running up and down the streets, shrieking and howling as if mad. As most of the shops were then closed, the streets seemed almost entirely given over to these girls and their male friends. In the quarter to which I bent my steps the naval element was predominating, and there were hundreds of sailors cruising, as it were, up and down, apparently utterly unconscious that their dangers at sea were nothing to those on land. Men of all creeds and of all nations were to be encountered in search of amusement, while hovered around some of the most degraded women it is possible to imagine – women whose bloated faces and forms were enough to frighten anyone, and to whom poor Jack, in a state of liquor, is sure to become a prey. To the low public-houses of this district dancing-rooms are attached, and in them, as we may well suppose, vice flourishes and shows an unabashed front. I must say it was with a feeling of relief that I found a harbour of refuge in the music-hall. Compared with the streets, I must frankly confess it was an exchange for the better. On the payment of a shilling I was ushered by a most polite attendant into a very handsome hall, where I had quite a nice little leather arm-chair to sit in, and where at my ease

I could listen to the actors and survey the house. The place was by no means crowded, but there was a good deal of the rough element at the back, to which, in the course of the evening's amusement, the chairman had more than once to appeal. From the arrangements made around me, it was evident that there was the same provision which I have remarked elsewhere for the drinking habits of the people. There was a side bar at which the actors and actresses occasionally appeared on their way to or from the stage, and affably drank with their friends and admirers. The other day I happened to hear a thief's confession, and what do you think it was? That it was his mingling with the singers off the stage that had led to his fall. He was evidently a smart, clever, young fellow, and had thought it a sign of his being a lad of spirit to stand treat to such people. Of course he could not afford it, and, of course, he had a fond and foolish mother, who tried to screen him in his downward career. The result was he embezzled his employer's money, and, when that was discovered, imprisonment and unavailing remorse were the result. To the imagination of raw lads there is something wonderfully attractive in the music-hall singer, as, with hat on one side and in costume of the loudest character, and with face as bold as brass, he sings, "Slap, bang! here we are again!" or takes off some popular theatrical performer or some leading actor on a grander stage. On the night in question one singer had the audacity to assume as much as possible the character of the Premier of our day, not forgetting the long gray coat by which the Earl of Beaconsfield is known in many quarters. Comic singing, relieved by dancing, seemed to be the staple amusement of the place, and when one of the female performers indecently elevated a leg, immense was the applause. All the while the performances were going on, the waiters were supplying their customers with drink, and one well-dressed woman – evidently very respectable – managed a couple of glasses of grog in a very short while. But mostly the people round me were quiet toppers, who smoked and drank with due decorum, and who seemed to use the place as a kind of club, where they could sit comfortably for the night, and talk and listen, and smoke or drink, at their pleasure. It is hardly necessary to say that the majority of the audience were young men. The attendance was not crowded. Perhaps in the east of London the pressure of bad times is being felt. The mock Ethiopian element, next to the dancing, was the feature of the evening's amusements which elicited the most applause. It is a curious thing that directly a man lampblacks his face and wears a woollen wig, and talks broken English, he at once becomes a popular favourite.

A few nights after I found myself in quite another part of London – in a music-hall that now calls itself a theatre of varieties. It was a very expensive place, and fitted up in a very costly manner. You enter through an avenue which is made to look almost Arcadian. Here and there were little rustic nooks in which Romeo and Juliet would make love over a cheerful glass. Flunkeys as smart almost as Lord Mayors' footmen took your orders. It was late when I put in an appearance, and it was useless to try and get a seat. It was only in the neighbourhood of the refreshment bar that I could get even standing room, and being a little taller than some of the stunted half-grown lads around me, could look over their heads to the gaudy and distant stage. I did not hear much of the dialogue. Old Astley, who years before had lived in that neighbourhood, and knew the art of catering for the people, used to remark when the interest of the piece seemed to flag, "Cut the dialogue and come to the 'osses," and here the stage direction evidently was to set the ballet-girls at work, and it seemed to me that the principal aim of the piece was to show as many female arms and legs as was possible. I am not of Dr. Johnson's opinion that it is indecent for a woman to expose herself on the stage, but I was, I own, shocked with the heroine of the evening, whose too solid form in the lime-light – which was used, apparently, to display all her beauties – was arrayed in a costume, which, at a distance, appeared to be of Paradisaical simplicity, more fitted for the dressing-room of the private mansion than for the public arena of the stage. There was, I doubt not, animated dialogue, and the swells in the stalls, I daresay, enjoyed it; but for my shilling I could see little, and hear less; and weary of the perpetual flourish of female arms and legs, I came away. What I did most distinctly hear were the orders at the bar for pale ale and grog, and the cry of the waiter, as he pushed on with his tray well filled, of "By your leave," to the crowd on each side – all of whom had, of course, a cigar or short pipe in

their mouths, and were evidently young men of the working class. That evening's amusement, I am sure, must have taken some two or three hundred pounds out of their pockets. But I saw no one the worse for liquor, though the public-houses all round were crowded with drunken men and women; for the morrow was Sunday, and who can refuse the oppressed and over-taxed working man his right to spend all his week's wages on a Saturday night?

One night last winter I was at a meeting held in the Mission Hall, Little Wild Street, at which some three hundred thieves had been collected together to supper. One of them, who had seen the evil of his ways, said: "The greatest curse of my life was the music-halls. They have been the means of my ruin;" and the way in which that speech was received by his mates evidently testified to the fact that the experience of many was of a similar character. I said to him afterwards that I knew the music-hall to which he referred, and that I had calculated that on an average each man spent there two shillings a night. "Oh sir," was the reply, "I spent a great deal more than that of a night." If so, I may assume that he spent as much as four shillings a night – and that, as the place was his favourite haunt after office-hours, he was there every night in the week, this would make an expenditure of one pound four shillings – a sum, I imagine, quite as much as his wages as a poor clerk. What wonder is it that the silly youth became a thief, especially when the devil whispers in his ear that theft is easy and the chance of detection small? The one damning fact which may be charged against all music-halls is that their amusements are too high in price, and that every device is set to work to make people spend more money than the cost of the original admission. In the theatre you may sit – and most people do sit all the evening – without spending a penny. In the music-hall a man does not like to do that. He drinks for the sake of being sociable, or because the waiter solicits him, or because he has drunk already and does not like to leave off, or because he meets doubtful company at the bar, or because the burden of every song is that he must be a "jolly pal" and that he must enjoy a cheerful glass. I can remember when at one time the admission fee included the cost of a pint of beer or some other fluid. Now drink is an extra, and as the proprietor of the music-hall, to meet the competition all round him, has to beautify his hall as much as possible, and to get what he calls the best available talent, male or female – whether in the shape of man or ass, or dog or elephant, or monkey – he is of course put to a considerable extra expense; and that of course he has to get out of the public the best way he can. No one loves to work for nothing, and least of all the proprietor of a music-hall.

Talking of "pals" and "a cheerful glass" reminds me of a scene which made me sick at the time, and which I shall not speedily forget. On the night of the Lord Mayor's Show, I entered a music-hall in the north of London – in a region supposed to be eminently pious and respectable, and not far from where Hick's Hall formerly stood. As I saw the thousands of people pushing into the Agricultural Hall, to see the dreary spectacle of an insane walking match, and saw another place of amusement being rapidly filled up, I said to myself: "Well, there will be plenty of room for me in the place to which I am bound;" and it was with misgiving that I paid the highest price for admission – one shilling – to secure what I felt, under the circumstances, I might have had at a cheaper rate. Alas! I had reckoned without my host. The hour for commencing had not arrived, and yet the place was full to overflowing. Mostly the audience consisted of young men. As usual, there were a great many soldiers. It is wonderful the number of soldiers at such places; and the spectator would be puzzled to account for the ability of the private soldier thus to sport his lovely person did not one remember that he is usually accompanied by a female companion, generally a maid-of-all-work of the better class, who is too happy to pay for his aristocratic amusements, as she deems them, on condition that she accompanies him in the humble capacity of a friend. Soldiers, I must do them justice to say, are not selfish, and scorn to keep all the good things to themselves. As soon as they find a neighbourhood where the servant "gal" is free with her wages, they generally tell each other of the welcome fact, and then the Assyrian comes down like the wolf on the fold.

Well, to continue my story. On the night, and at the place already referred to, they were a very jolly party – so far as beer and "baccy" and crowded company and comic singing were concerned.

They had a couple of Brothers, who were supposed to be strong in the delineation of Irish and German character, but as their knowledge of the language of the latter seemed simply to be confined to the perpetually exclaiming “Yah, yah!” I had misgivings as to their talents in that respect, which were justified abundantly in the course of the evening. Dressed something in the style of shoeblacks, and wearing wooden shoes, which made an awful noise when they danced, the little one descends his long-lost elder brother, to whom his replies are so smart and witty that the house was in a roar of laughter, in which I did not join, as I had heard them twice already.

After they had finished we had a disgustingly stout party, who was full of praise of all conviviality, and who, while he sang, frisked about the stage with wonderful vivacity and with as much grace as a bull in a china-shop, or a bear dancing a hornpipe. As he sang, just behind me there was all at once a terrible noise; the chairman had to call out “Order,” the spectators began howling, “Turn him out;” the singer had to stop, the roughs in the gallery began to scream and cheer, and the bars were for a wonder deserted. In so dense a crowd it was so difficult to see anything, that it was not at once that I discovered the cause of the disorder; but presently I saw in one of the little pews, into which this part of the house was divided (each pew having a small table in the middle for the liquor) a couple of men quarrelling. All at once the biggest of them – a very powerful fellow of the costermonger type – dealt his opponent – a poor slim, weedy lad of the common shop-boy species – a tremendous blow. The latter tried to retaliate, and struggled across the table to hit his man, but he merely seemed to me to touch his whiskers, while the other repeated his blow with tremendous effect. In vain the sufferer tried to get out of the way; the place was too crowded, and with a stream of blood flowing from his nose he fell, or would have fallen, to the earth had not some of the bystanders dragged him a few yards from his seat. Then as he lay by me drunk, or faint, or both, unable to sit up or to move, with the blood pouring down his clothes and staining the carpet all round, I saw, as the reader can well believe, a commentary on the singer’s Bacchanalian song of a somewhat ironical character; but business is business, and at the music-hall it will not do to harrow up the feelings of the audience with such sad spectacles. Perfectly insensible, the poor lad was carried out, while a constable was the means of inducing his muscular and brutal-looking opponent to leave the hall. Order restored, the stout party bounded on to the stage, and the hilarity of the evening – with the exception of here and there a girl who, evidently not being used to such places, was consequently frightened and pale and faint for awhile – was as great as ever. The comic singer made no reference to the unfortunate incident; all he could do was to say what he had got by heart, and so he went on about the cheerful glass and the fun of going home powerfully refreshed at an early hour in the morning, and much did the audience enjoy his picture of the poor wife waiting for her husband behind the door with a poker, assisting him upstairs with a pair of tongs, and after she had got him sound asleep meanly helping herself to what cash remained in his pocket.

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