



"I PEEPED THROUGH THE CURTAINS."

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The Works of
George W. M. Reynolds

Lady Saxondale's
Crimes

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the following day, at about eleven o'clock, the marquis, Constance, and Mary Anne took a kind leave of the Marshalls and embarked on board the steam-vessel for Calais. They experienced no molestation of any kind, nor did it appear that their movements were watched by spies. From Calais the journey was immediately pursued to Paris, and on the day after their arrival in the sovereign city of France, they repaired to the British ambassador's chapel to pass through the matrimonial ceremony. The chaplain proved to be the same who had pronounced the marriage blessing — what a mockery it was — upon the Marquis of Villebelle and his first wife. The circumstance of the former marriage was at once remembered by the reverend gentleman, and the marquis assured him that there existed no impediment to a second alliance. This averment was sufficient, — the social position of the marquis, and the fact that he had recently been appointed to a diplomatic situation at the Spanish court, being considered ample guarantees for his respectability and honour. The ceremony was therefore solemnized, and Constance now called herself Marchioness of Villebelle.

In the afternoon she wrote a long letter to Juliana, which she directed to Saxondale House, not thinking that her mother would after all have persevered in the originally contemplated visit into Lincolnshire. Early the next morning the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle, attended by Mary Anne, and by a valet whose services had been engaged on sufficient recommendation, set out on their journey toward the Spanish frontiers, and in due time they reached the city of Madrid without experiencing any more adventures worthy of narration.

CHAPTER XXII

THE RECREATIONS AND THE HORRORS OF LONDON LIFE

It was about half-past nine o'clock in the evening that Lord Harold Staunton, having dined quietly at his own lodgings in Jermyn Street, sauntered forth with his cigar, and passing down the Haymarket, he encountered his friend Lord Saxondale.

"I was just going up to your place, Harold," said the dissipated young nobleman. "I thought perhaps you would want company, and we might make another night of it together."

"Upon my word, Edmund," observed Staunton, as the former took his arm and walked on with him, "you are wonderfully unconcerned at what took place yesterday."

"Ah! about Constance? Well, what does it matter, so long as she marries the marquis? Give me a light for my cigar."

"But they say that the marquis is already married," returned Harold. "I have heard your mother herself say so."

"Oh, my mother will say anything when it suits her purpose," exclaimed Lord Saxondale. "I suppose she didn't want Constance to marry this Frenchman, and so she invented that tale."

"But if it should happen to be true," said Lord Harold. "What then? Now, to tell you the truth, — no matter what I myself may be, — I should be furiously indignant against any one who dared to inveigle away a sister of mine."

"What would you have me do?" demanded Saxondale.

"Why, hasten after the fugitives, to be sure, see that they are really married, and if so, obtain proofs from the marquis that it is all a calumny about his former alliance, and if he

can't or won't give you satisfaction in this way, then you must seek it in another."

"What! shoot him through the head, and so make my sister a widow at once?" ejaculated Saxondale, by no means relishing the advice he had just received. "Come, come, Harold, you know very well that I am no coward, but it would be the height of folly to rush madly into such a scrape as this. Besides, a man who is descended from ancestors in the time of the Tudors can't place himself on a level with a beggarly French marquis —"

"But I, Edmund," interrupted Staunton, with some degree of bitterness, "though belonging to a family as ancient as your own, put myself on a level the other day with an obscure artist, who could scarcely be called a gentleman, — much less a nobleman."

"Well, if you were fool enough, my dear Harold, to let my precious lady-mother hurry you into that unpleasant business, I can't help it. It's no reason why I should be equally imprudent."

"I see that the less we talk upon this subject, the better," observed Staunton. "But wasn't this resolution of your mother's to rush off into Lincolnshire somewhat sudden?"

"It was. But I don't bother myself much about her. Come, what are we going to do to-night? I am in the humour for amusement. To-morrow I have got an appointment with Marlow and Malton about having all my debts paid, and settling about a good monthly allowance till I come of age; so I have every reason to be in the best possible spirits."

"I recollect you told me how you reduced your mother to submission. You have to thank me for putting you in possession of that secret."

"And so I do thank you, my dear Harold. It was most fortunate, the discovery of that Spanish costume. Ah, you should have seen how queer my mother looked the moment I told her of it. But what are we going to do, I again ask? Suppose we take a look in at the Cider Cellar."

"With all my heart," responded Harold. "I feel rather dull and out of sorts this evening, and shall be glad of some rational kind of amusement. I am in no humour for getting into disturbances with the police, or losing money at the gambling-table, and therefore I will gladly adopt your suggestion."

The two young noblemen sauntered toward Maiden Lane, in the immediate vicinage of Covent Garden. A lamp over an ample doorway, and bearing the words "Cider Cellar" upon the glass, denoted their destination. Descending a spacious staircase, into a region which, though beneath the level of the ground, had nothing of subterranean gloom about it, they threaded a well-lighted passage, and entered a large room, which we purpose to describe for the benefit of those readers who may not be as familiar with the place as were Staunton and Saxondale.

Although approached by this subterranean passage, the room itself — or, indeed, it deserves the denomination of a hall — is nearly as lofty as the house to which it is attached, or any of the adjacent tenements. Its length and width are in due proportion with its height, and it has altogether a cheerful and handsome appearance. The decorations are simple, but in the best possible taste. There is a fine mirror at each extremity, and in the evening the place is completely flooded with the lustre of numerous gas-lamps. Three parallel lines of tables run the whole length of the immense apartment, and at the farther end a platform is raised for the chairman, the pianist, and the vocalists engaged to contribute to the entertainment of the company. As a matter of course the assemblage is somewhat of a miscellaneous character, for there may be seen the polished gentleman and the consummate snob, the unassuming visitor, as well as the insufferable coxcomb, the well-to-do tradesman and the debauchee aristocrat, together with a pretty tolerable sprinkling of the class known as "gents." But the place is eminently respectable, and is conducted with a degree of decorum which prevents the developments of snobbism and gentism from proving a source of general annoyance. On each side of the three lines of tables the company are seated, and there is as miscellaneous an assortment of beverages as of guests. Some may be seen drinking wine, others spirits and water; others are slaking their thirst with malt liquors, draught or bottled, while others again are expanding into the complacent good-humour produced by peculiar compounds known in that region by the name of "seductives." Some may be seen partaking of suppers, which are served up with most agreeable promptitude after the order is once given, and in a way to tempt the most fastidious appetite. The

staple commodity for these little refectons appears to be the Welsh rabbit, but devilled kidneys, scalloped oysters, chops, and steaks, accompanied by baked potatoes, likewise receive considerable patronage. Almost everybody appears to smoke at the Cider Cellar, and it is the sole business of one of the waiters to hand around a box of Havana's choicest produce. By the way, speaking of waiters, we may add that the attendance is unexceptionable.

At the table on the platform may be seen the chairman with the official hammer in his hand. On his right and left are the vocalists who contribute to the entertainment of the evening. Let it not be supposed that these are mere pot-house singers who give their services in consideration of their supper and their grog; they are of a much higher class, well known in the musical world, and engaged at handsome salaries by the spirited proprietor of the Cider Cellar. The pianist too is a remarkable character in his way, not merely with the somewhat singular appearance made by his white hair, his coloured glasses, and his black moustache, but by his professional talent.

The entertainment generally commences at about ten o'clock in the evening, and up to eleven there is an almost uninterrupted succession of songs. At this hour the apartment is sure to be well filled, and a sort of sensation begins to take place. Those who possess watches look at them with the air of persons who evidently know that some particular treat is at hand; and those who are not fortunate enough to own these indicators of time, anxiously ask the possessors thereof "whether it is eleven yet?" Several of the guests leave their seats in order to get nearer to the platform; Welsh rabbits and devilled kidneys are suffered to get cold, while the supper eaters catch the infection of the general excitement and look toward the platform with as much eagerness as if the curtain of a theatre were about to draw up and reveal the scenic attractions of the stage.

The chairman now announces that "Mr. Ross will appear in his favourite character of Sam Hall." Then ensues a tremendous clapping of hands and thumping of knuckles upon the table, so that the glasses all seem as if suddenly attacked with St. Vitus's dance, and even the huge metal jugs of hot water appear inclined to perform a fandango. In the midst of this hearty tumult the vocalist whose name

elicited the applause appears from behind a screen, dressed as a ragged, dirty, wretched-looking man, with a battered hat on his head, a pipe in his hand, and his countenance made up to an expression of a dark, dismal, but at the same time fierce despair. This is the personification of Sam Hall, the hero of the song. He is supposed to be a man condemned to die, and the whole performance constitutes a tremendous illustration of the horrors experienced by the mind of a doomed being. It is no exaggeration to declare that this is perhaps the most terrific revelation of what fancy might depict as passing within the walls of a condemned cell that it is possible to conceive. All the power of the *artiste* is thrown into the impersonation of his ideal character, and the effect upon the larger portion of the company is immense. True it is that some few individuals, of the snob and the gent class, incapable of being affected by the awful solemnity of the scene, behold only a ludicrous representation therein, and exhibit their vile taste by means of laughter. But with the generality of the spectators the feeling is one of the profoundest awe. Though the performer be chiefly noted as a first-rate comic singer, yet there is no comedy in his personification of Sam Hall; it is all tragedy, — deep, appalling, stupendous tragedy. The illimitable horror alternating with darkest despair that he throws into his features rivets the gaze and seizes upon the mind as if with a spell. The man who is opposed to the punishment of death beholds in that scene an unanswerable argument in support of his philanthropic views; while the individual who has previously cherished the revolting prejudice in favour of the capital penalty must, if he have any feeling at all, retire from that scene with a changed opinion.

Such is a description of the Cider Cellar, and an outline of the entertainments that may be met with there. It was in this place that Lord Harold Staunton and Lord Saxondale whiled away a couple of hours on the evening of which we are speaking. Staunton—who, though a thorough rake and an unprincipled profligate, nevertheless had some generous qualities—was much moved by the impersonation of Sam Hall, but Saxondale, who had not a single kindly feeling, was one of the few that upon this occasion had the bad taste to laugh. But then he was not merely devoid of

the feeling, but likewise of the capacity to comprehend the deep tragic meaning of the scene.

On issuing forth from the Cider Cellar, Lord Harold Staunton and Lord Saxondale walked slowly on, exchanging their remarks upon all that had taken place. The clock of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, was proclaiming the hour of midnight,—much too early for these scions of the aristocracy to think of retiring to rest as yet. They paused in Covent Garden, and deliberated what they should do to amuse or divert themselves.

"I tell you what, Edmund," said Lord Harold, "an idea has suddenly struck me. I was reading in the newspaper this morning something about the low dens and lodging-houses in certain streets at no great distance. What say you? Shall we go and pay them a visit?"

"I don't much fancy it," replied Saxondale, "for I think we are pretty sure of getting into a scrape,—perhaps robbed and well thrashed. Not that I am a coward, you know, Harold, but —"

"You like to be safe," and there was a tinge of a sneer in Staunton's accents. Then he immediately added, "We should want a guide, and might therefore take a policeman with us. There goes one at this moment."

The two young noblemen accordingly hastened after the constable who was proceeding ahead, and he, hearing hasty footsteps behind, quickly looked back. At once recognizing Staunton and Saxondale, who were frequently getting into disturbances with the police, the officer drew his truncheon, telling them "that he knew them well and they had better mind what they were about." This made Saxondale laugh heartily with continuous cachinations of his cracked voice. But Lord Harold speedily convinced the constable that their object was on this occasion pacific. The officer accordingly put back his truncheon, and Staunton proceeded to explain the object he and his companion had in view.

"Well, my lords," replied the policeman, "I am just this minute going off duty, and if you will tell me where you will be in about half an hour, I will just slip on a plain coat and hat and come and join you."

Staunton intimated that they would walk about Covent Garden and smoke their cigars. The officer accordingly went his way, and true to his promise, he reap-

peared in plain clothes at the expiration of the time specified.

"Now, my lords," he said, "I will take you first of all to a kinchin-ken."

"And what the deuce is that?" inquired Saxondale.

"It's a place where boys and gals live together. It's kept by a woman and her two daughters,—a precious rum lot, I can tell you. The woman's a hempen widder —"

Again an explanation was demanded.

"It means, my lord, that her husband was hung. He was a cracksman — that means a burglar — by profession, and one of the most desperate willains that ever lived. It's a matter of ten year ago that he was tucked up, and his old 'oman took to keeping a kinchin-ken. Her name is Burley, — Mother Burley they call her. Her daughters ain't the most moral young women in the world, as your lordships may suppose. They have both got their fancy-men, — reglar rum 'uns. Biddy Burley, the eldest, is the blowen of Mat the Cadger, and Polly Burley, the youngest, has Spider Bill for her flash man. These chaps are the greatest thieves in London, and have been a many times on the everlasting staircase, — that means the treadmill."

While the police constable was thus running on with the details of his information relative to the Burley family, he had conducted the two noblemen away from Covent Garden, into a dark, narrow, sinister-looking street leading out of Drury Lane. As they passed along, they suddenly came upon an individual who was leaning with his back against the closed gateway of a wheelwright's workshop, as appeared by the white letters painted on the doors, and on which a light from the window of the opposite house was streaming full. The man leaning there was respectably dressed, and was smoking a cigar. The policeman stopped short, and said to him, "Well, Harry, watching this place still, eh?"

"Yes, and likely to watch it too," was the response. "Uncommon tedious work, I can tell you. But stay, the door's opening."

As he thus spoke he kept his eyes fixed on the opposite house whence the light was streaming. The constable and the two noblemen looked in the same direction. The light now disappeared from the window, the sound of bolts drawing back and a chain let down continued to be heard

for a few moments, then the door opened, and an old man of very sordid and sinister appearance came forth. He threw a glance across the narrow street at the group assembled opposite his door, and gave a low mocking laugh which sounded horrible as a death-rattle. Closing the door, the old man proceeded along the street, and the individual who had been addressed by the name of Harry at once followed him.

"What's all this mean?" asked Lord Saxondale of the constable guide after a few moments' silence.

"That place," answered the police officer, pointing to the dwelling whence the old man had issued, "is a receiving-house for stolen goods, and that old feller is the receiver himself. We call him a fence, and he's one of the sharpest in London. The man Harry that I spoke to and that's gone after him is an officer of the detective force, and he will follow the old fence wherever he goes, no matter how long he may be absent. There's three of the detectives that's appointed for this special service, — to keep watch night and day, and they take their turns. This has been going on for the last five months, and will cost the county a precious sum of money."

"But can't they bring anything positive home to the old man, so as to get him punished at once?" asked Staunton.

"No. Since he's been watched he takes too good care of that," replied the constable. "Besides, that's not so much the object, although of course if there was a cause he would very soon be took up. The chief object is to force him out of the neighbourhood, and make him break up his establishment."

"I was not aware that the police commissioners possessed such power," observed Lord Harold.

"Power?" echoed the constable. "Bless your lordship, the commissioners can do anything. And so can us constables too for that matter," added the officer, with a laugh, "for we know very well that the magistrates are sure to take our part, unless it's something very outrageous indeed. But even then there's generally a loophole found for us to creep out of. This way, my lords, and here we are."

While thus speaking, the constable had led the two noblemen around a turning into another street of even a more sinister appearance than the one they had just quitted, and they had halted at the door of one of the blackened

cutthroat-looking houses that formed the street. The constable knocked at the door, but some minutes elapsed ere it was opened, and during this interval the sounds of numerous juvenile voices reached their ears from within, resembling the uproarious mirth of a school that is breaking up for the holidays.

At length the door was opened by an ill-looking bloated young woman, of about five and twenty. Her hair seemed in as much disorder as if she had been creeping through a hedge; a dirty, faded cotton gown hung loosely upon her, and being open in front, left her coarse bosom indecently exposed. She evidently had no stays on, and indeed appeared to have no undergarments of any kind. Her dirty stockings were dangling down, and her feet were thrust into an old pair of shoes trodden at the heels, so that they pattered on the floor like clogs when she walked. She held a candle in her hand, and had a half-tipsy look, as if she had been disturbed in the midst of a revel. She however immediately recognized the policeman; but not the least abashed nor troubled — on the contrary, with immense effrontery — she asked him, with a horrible imprecation, what he wanted.

"Just to show these gentlemen your place, Biddy," replied the constable.

"That's all gammon," answered the woman. "You're arter some of the kinchins —"

"'Pon my honour I'm not," rejoined the officer. Then in a whisper aside to the noblemen, he said, "You had better give Biddy Burley a tip, my lords."

Saxondale, who was always ready to flash his money ostentatiously, drew out his purse and gave the woman a sovereign, at sight of which her countenance cheered up wondrously, and she said, "My eyes! you are swell coves, and no mistake. Come in, and you shall see the ken."

The two noblemen and the police constable passed into the house, and found themselves in a narrow passage that went perceptibly sloping down toward a staircase at the end. All this time the sounds of voices had continued to be heard in unabating uproariousness. Shouting, screaming, laughing, swearing, singing, and quarrelling seemed to be going on in every part of the house, as if it were a veritable pandemonium of little demons. Biddy Burley shut the street

door, and throwing open one leading into the ground floor front room, said, "Here's some swell coves come to see the place. But they doesn't belong to the 'Ligious Track S'iety, cos they're smoking cigars and doesn't wear white chokers."

"So much the better. I can't abear them sneaking, snivelling, canting chaps which only comes to see the young gals in bed, and makes a pertence of 'stributing their papers."

This last speech emanated from the lips of an elderly woman of enormous corpulency, and whose immense bloated face, watery eyes, husky voice, and general appearance too well betokened a life of habitual intemperance. She was lolling in a half-tipsy state in a large armchair, and the constable, in a whisper to the two noblemen, made them aware that she was the mistress of the den. The younger daughter — whose appearance so much resembled the elder's that it requires no special description — was seated next to the mother, and a dozen ragged, dirty, squalid-looking, half-naked boys and girls were placed around a rickety old table, on which were bottles, jugs, quart-pots, pipes, cigars, tobacco, and cards. The ages of these children averaged from nine to sixteen; vice was indelibly stamped upon their countenances. A few had been naturally good-looking, but it required an almost microscopic eye to discern the traces thereof beneath the grime that masked the features of some, and the bold traits of habitual profligacy, intemperance, and dissipation which characterized others. The room was miserably furnished; the walls and ceiling were so completely blackened with smoke and dirt that the place looked like a sweep's abode, and the crazy boards that formed the floor, sinking beneath the feet, produced gurgling, plashy, slushy sounds, as if the planks rested upon a bed of thick slime and mud. Such indeed, to a certain extent, was the case; for in consequence of bad drainage — or perhaps the absence of all drainage whatsoever — the refuse water could not flow off and collected in the foundations of the house. The atmosphere was sickly in odour and stifling in heat, — it was actually pestilential; and after merely glancing around this room, the two noblemen were constrained to step back into the passage with the intention of leaving the loathsome den at once.

"You'd better see it all, my lords, now that you're here,"

whispered the constable. "This scene is nothing to what you'll find up-stairs. Come, Bidy, lead the way and show the light."

The woman accordingly conducted the visitors into a back room, the aspect of which was as horrible as that of the other. Here there was a fire, and a dozen boys and girls, of the same description as the first lot seen by the visitors, were engaged some in drinking and card-playing, and others in cooking things for their supper. Sausages, bits of fish, tripe, and slices of liver were all frying together in one enormous pan; while in a pot — or, rather, caldron — cow-heels, more tripe, trotters, chitterlings, and other abominations purchased from the cat's meat shop were stewing together. The boys and girls hushed their uproarious mirth (as had been the case in the other room) on the appearance of the two noblemen with the constable. They recognized the last-mentioned individual, and some of them began to what they termed "chaff him," — giving utterance to horrible imprecations and disgusting obscenities as glibly and as unconcernedly as if these phrases formed necessary integral parts of the English language. We cannot of course sully our pages therewith, but we may record the sense and tendency of some of the characteristic observations.

"Hullo, you Peeler! what d'ye come here for?" demanded a girl of about sixteen, and who, though half-naked, was utterly unabashed. "If you're looking arter me you'll catch a rum 'un, for I'm blowed if I don't spile that precious face of yourn."

"He don't come for me," said a youth as thin as a skeleton, horribly squalid, and clothed in rags, so that his frightful emaciation was painfully visible; "cos why I've took never a fogle all day, have I though? That's all! No, I'm sniggered if I'm wanted this time."

"I'll tell'ee what, Peeler," said another boy, "if you've come to ax about my karricter I must refer you to the beak which sent me to the everlasting stepper six months ago. Oh, won't he speak a jolly good word for me, — that's all."

"Come, I say, you Polly," cried an urchin of nine, with a face like a monkey, and addressing the officer in a shrill voice, "it isn't me that's in trouble, be it now? You can't say as how I'm a cross-cove, though you chaps does swear

to anything. Crikey, how them Pollies does swear, my eye!"

"Don't bully the poor man," observed another juvenile tatterdemalion, who was eating a baked potato; "he's a good feller in his way. Here, old chap, have some of this here murphy? It's deuced good, if the butter wasn't rank. Ah! you Pollies doesn't get sich nice things as we does. You're poor, you be, poor devils!"

"Tip us your mawley, Peeler," squeaked forth another urchin, with a shock of hair like a piece of a carriage-mat, "and let's see that you're not nosing on us. Don't be afeard to come near me. I won't knock yer down, I won't."

"Kim aup, Peeler, what air ye arter here? Tell us, there's a good chap, and ve von't be too 'ard upon yer. But no lies, mind, no lies, or I'm blowed if I'll put aup vith it for one," — and this was said by the smallest boy in the whole company.

"What'll you give me, you Bobby, you," cried a girl whose age certainly was not above ten, but who seemed amazingly sharp, "if I tell yer how much I got by filching yesterday and to-day? Nineteen ankerchers, seventeen purses, forty-two gold snuff-boxes, and a big lump of cheese."

At this sally of thieves' wit there was an uproarious outburst of laughter on the part of the whole juvenile crew, in the midst of which the visitors quitted the room. But as they ascended the dirty, rickety, narrow staircase, — still conducted by Bidley Burley, — the shouts of mirth from the back room appeared to follow them, until those sounds were lost in another tempest of uproar which emanated from the upper part of the house.

Bidley Burley conducted the two noblemen and the constable into the front room on the first floor, and there indeed a strange and revolting spectacle met the eye. The floor was strewn with rotting rags as completely as a stable is littered with straw or an uncleansed pigsty is ankle-deep in filth. There was not a vestige of furniture in the place. A solitary candle burned in the chimney. The atmosphere was hot and stifling, as well as of the most fetid odour. It struck with a sickly taste to the tongue, and at once produced a nausea and heaving at the stomach. Those who have never visited such a place can form no idea of the loathsomeness of the heavy stagnant air; it seemed to be

compounded solely of fetid breaths. The exhalations of putrid fever were nothing to it. And there, in that room, were crowded some fifteen or sixteen boys and girls, of the same gradation of ages and of the same stamp and description as those previously seen. Some few were stretched upon the mass of putrid rags, sleeping soundly despite the noise made by the others who were awake. These latter were romping and frolicking at the moment when the visitors entered, but they left off to stare at "the swell coves," and then to chaff the policeman. Thus was it that persons of both sexes were accustomed to herd and huddle together in that vile den, each paying twopence a night for the accommodation.

A couple of minutes' survey of the disgusting scene was quite sufficient for Staunton and Saxondale. They experienced a horrible sickness at the stomach, and their very clothes appeared to creep upon them, as if alive with vermin. Bidley Burley offered to show them the rest of the house, but they were quite satisfied with what they had already seen, and Staunton having given her a guinea on his own account for her trouble, the visitors lost no time in issuing from the den.

"Widder Burley and her daughters," said the constable, as they proceeded along the street, "drives a roaring trade with them boys and gals. Why, would you believe it, my lords, she's got at least seventy or eighty of 'em in that house of only six rooms. The whole place swarms with thieves as plentiful as vermin, and it's supported too by thieving. There isn't a morsel of food or a drop of drink that goes into that place that's bought with honest money. Perhaps your lordships think that it's the only place of the sort? Well, I can tell you there's hundreds of such cribs in London, and that isn't even the worst. Down in Whitechapel and over in the Mint, there's worse still. But now, if your lordships like, I will take you into a lodging-house for grown-up people, — tramps, thieves, beggars, and what not."

Lord Saxondale at first positively refused the constable's proposal, but Lord Harold, feeling some curiosity on the subject, accepted it, and succeeded in overruling his companion's scruples. They did accordingly visit a low lodging-house in the same neighbourhood, but we need not follow

them throughout their investigation. A few particulars will suffice. The house was a large one, in the occupation of a ruffian-looking fellow, who had to pay a very high rent to the principal landlord; and in order to do this, he had to make the most of the premises. The original landlord had a dozen such houses, and rolled in his carriage. His tenants being so highly rented could not afford, even if they felt inclined, to expend any money upon the improvement of the houses; consequently it was not altogether their fault if those dens were of the most loathsome and unwholesome description, with no drainage, no ventilation, and wretchedly supplied with water, which was also unfit to drink. But let us look inside the particular house which the two noblemen visited on the night in question. In every room the lodgers were crowded together. There was a sort of attempt at a distinction of beds, but there were no bedsteads, — merely a number of dirty straw mattresses stretched upon the floor, each provided with one coarse horse-cloth coverlid. These were filthy to a degree, and swarming with vermin. The beds — if they deserved the denomination — had but an interval of about a foot between them, and what with being trodden down and therefore made to encroach even upon that limited space, and what with the coverlids spreading over or tossing about, being kicked off in consequence of the heat, the floor of every room appeared to be completely covered with this wretched bedding. Whole families — consisting for instance of father, mother, and two or three children — occupied one bed; grown-up brothers and sisters slept together; fathers and daughters, mothers and sons — all adults — were similarly situated. But we can proceed no further; the picture is too hideous to be dwelt upon. Those of our readers, however, who have never visited such frightful dens, may rest assured that none of their details are here exaggerated. Indeed, it would be impossible to find any terms sufficiently hyperbolic to transcend the stern reality of the abhorrent truths.

Lord Harold Staunton and Lord Saxondale liberally rewarded the policeman for having accompanied them in these visits, and they made the best of their way, the one to Jermyn Street, the other to Park Lane, to put off the raiment which they had on, and which appeared to cause the most unpleasant sensations. We need scarcely add that

these clothes were never worn again, but were given to their valets to be got rid of according as they might think fit.

In our former works especially devoted to the description of the mysteries of London life, we have introduced our readers to low dens of the same description as these of which we have now been writing, but we do not consider that we are to be blamed on the score of repetition or supererogation. We purposely and with studied intent recall public attention again and again to the horrible abodes which poverty is compelled to seek, where vice lurks, and where crime conceals itself. For we boldly and unhesitatingly charge to the account of our legislators and rulers the existence of those sinks of abomination.