

A LONDON BIRD AUCTION

THE QUEEN MARKET NEAR BISHOPSGATE STREET, WITHOUT.

SUNDAY MORNING SIGHTS IN WHITE-CHAPEL—A SONGBIRD FOR A MERE SONG—A VERITABLE FAIR.

Of the curious sights of London none is more interesting than the bird auction near Bethnal Green. This takes place every Sunday morning, beginning shortly after 10 o'clock and finishing at 1; or, to be more exact, when the "pubs" open. Public houses are kept closed during the forenoon, opened at 1 o'clock, closed again at 3, and reopened for the rest of the day and night at 5. Where the bird auctions are held extends over three long blocks. Turning to the right from Bishopsgate Street, at the terminus of the Great Eastern Railroad, you enter Anchor Street, where the show begins; then go through Slater, Hare, Bacon, and adjoining long blocks of streets, the occupants of the grim, dark houses of which are bird fanciers.

From early morning, from the north, south, east, and west of London, can be seen men, singly or by twos and threes, accompanied by dogs, some muzzled, others in leashes, but all going in one direction, to the bird auction district, adjoining Whitechapel. Way out of London from Hammersmith, Richmond, Sydenham, are costermongers riding on their queer little barrows, driven by swift-going, patient little donkeys who jog along contentedly, carrying two and even more burly men, smoking clay pipes. These barrows are piled up high with bird cages, covered over with canvas. The men hold or carry in their arms dogs of every description, many indeed being valuable animals, such as collies, spaniels, Skye and Scotch terriers, the now-all-the-fashion sleek-skin and intelligent fox terrier, and delicate lap and pet dogs. Where these dogs come from one may imagine, but few but the costers can tell.

Later in the morning can be seen well-dressed men driving smart horses to traps and other vehicles. Some of the men have the jaunty air of sporting men. Others have the appearance of sedate business men, many that of clerks. When they all reach Bishopsgate Street, the sight becomes interesting and amusing. The Englishmen are born drivers and all seem to have a love for animals and birds. The price of good, lively, strong ponies, averaging from £5 to £10, makes it an easy matter for men to possess one. The price of a sleek, bright-eyed, nimble, strong little donkey that can trot along carrying a load seemingly out of all proportion to its strength is only £2, or about \$10.

Bishopsgate Street, Without, is one of London's remarkable thoroughfares. Week days it is thronged from morning to late at night with workmen, women, and children, clerks, porters, small tradesmen, and a vast horde of humanity jostling each other. The roadway is jammed with omnibuses, drays, cabs, hansoms, carts, and costermongers' wagons. At different crossings, policemen stand assisting pedestrians over and regulating traffic. To cross Bishopsgate Street requires skill and coolness, and it is wonderful how few accidents occur. To see men, women, and children darting across that thoroughfare is a sight to study. If it rains, as it usually does, and the street is muddy, none escapes being sprinkled from head to foot with a thin, spreading, yellow mud. Sometimes you get a good splashing in the face, which for the moment blinds you, but everybody seems accustomed to this and none seems to worry about it. Bishopsgate Street, Without, is to London what the Bowery is to New-York. Here, however, are what are not to be seen on the Bowery, numbers of meat, sausage, and pudding shops. For 1 penny you get a large smoking-hot savoy sausage and a chunk of good white bread, or a large slice of raisin dumpling, or a bowl of good peasoup. For 2d. to 4d. you get three large slices of excellent roast beef, mutton, veal, or pork, with bread and vegetables. Many women and children daily crowd these shops and get their sixpenny dinners, which they carry away in baskets. A sixpenny dinner is certainly a good, plain, ample meal, which includes a great slice of pudding.

On Sunday Bishopsgate Street is still a busy thoroughfare. It is at the junction of Bishopsgate Street, Without, and the Great Eastern Railroad terminus that the great throng of men and boys turn into Anchor Street, where, at the junction of Slater Street, the so-called bird auction is. This is a rendezvous also for dealers in dogs, chickens, geese, ducks, rabbits, and rats.

But what a show of birds! There is nothing like it in any other part of the world. It seemed the morning I was there as if all the varieties of the ornithological kingdom had been assembled together in these long, narrow, gloomy streets. From one store alone, which was four stories high, were hung from ground floor to roof hundreds of cages. The dingy, smoke-begrimed bricks were lined with long rows of cages filled with bright yellow canary birds; above were the brilliant-plumaged chaffinches, goldfinches, and bullfinches, then blackbirds, sand thrushes, starlings, linnets, skylarks by the hundred, and nightingales, all warranted to sing. This house was surrounded by a great crowd, and the proprietor and his half dozen assistants had all they could do to keep up with the purchasers. And how cheaply they went! Splendid full-sunged, healthy chaffinches, 6d. and 4d. each; linnets, 2d. and 3d.; beautiful full-fledged, full-sunged Holland canaries from 3s. to 4s.—those would cost twice that many dollars in New-York—hen canaries from 1d. to 6d. each; common canaries from 1s. to 2s. and 6d. each; splendid, healthy, full-sunged skylarks, starlings, thrushes, blackbirds, cage and all fixings, for from 3s. to 6s. each; nightingales in full song, cage and all, from 6s. to 10s. It was wonderful to see the commonest classes of men, bricklayers, and laborers buying birds. As the time passes by and the hour for opening the "pubs" came the excitement grew apace. I saw one man buy in twenty-five full-sunged, splendid canary birds for one guinea, or less than 75 cents apiece. He, however, was a dealer, and he had his assistants and trap, or open wagon, with him.

Fine, fat rabbits were sold at 9d. apiece, and at the close went down to 6d. Just think what an excellent dinner could be had for the small sum of 5d., as rabbit skins are readily sold for 1d. apiece. Fancy rabbits, lopped-eared, big, choice-breeding English hares that would make the sportsmen of Tuxedo Park envious, were sold by the brace and the dozen at extremely low prices. A dozen full-sized hares of great strength were sold for £1. The sales in geese, ducks, and other poultry was immense, chickens being sold at from 1s. to 1d. and 6d., ducks for less, and big, fat geese from 2s. to 3s.

Besides the small birds, there were large quantities of parrots, cockatoos, and all kinds of bright-plumaged speaking, swearing, laughing, singing birds. One parrot caught my eye. He was a handsome gray bird, with a laughing, saucy eye. As I looked up at him he laughed so heartily that I couldn't help laughing too. Then he stopped suddenly, looked very serious, as he said, in a clear voice: "Hello! What are you laughing at, you blawsted fool?" Of course, everybody laughed at me.

"Buy him, Sir?" asked the dealer. "H'll sell 'im dirt cheap. He can sing, swear, and play tricks. He's well worth 20 guineas; let you 'ave 'im, cage and hall, for 2 guineas. Oh! buy him, Sir. You can have him for 30s."

I had no money to spare for parrots. As I left the bird began to sing a lively, but not religious or strictly moral, song. In another house a dealer had a handsome collection of baboons, gray and ring-tailed monkeys. I was sorry to see many beetle-browed, cruel-faced Italians around the poor brutes, and it was curious to see the poor things bury their little heads in their hands and huddle, shivering, in a corner of their cages, as if in deadly fear of their natural-born enemy. Several were sold at prices ranging from £1 to £3, according to the size, beauty, and intelligence of the animal. In no case did the dealer come down in his prices, and it seemed to me as if the man himself had a loathing for those cruel-featured men, even lower and more brutal in appearance than the monkeys they bought. It was really sad to see the little things fairly cry as they were taken from their companions, who in turn would spring to the bars of their cages chattering loudly, and keep looking after those being taken away, with almost human sympathy.

"Yes," said the dealer. "I sell quite a number of monkeys every year to the Italians. I sold over a thousand last year. I know the poor things are cruelly treated and beaten to death at times, but what can I do? I get the best prices from the Italians, and the more that die the more I sell. The Italians have regular monkey schools and money school teachers as trainers in London, and get good prices for a well-trained, healthy monkey, but that takes time to accomplish, and many of the animals pine away and die, then others are killed, while a large number die from cold, consumption, and other diseases. Many a monkey that I have sold here is now traveling through the United States, and from what I can gather from the Italians they make quite a large sum of money for their owners. That's why there is such a demand for them."

The noisiest part of the quarter was where dogs were for sale. A negro had for sale two magnificent American bloodhounds. They were not his; he could not have bought them. They were sold to a steward of a nobleman, who had been robbed. The negro wanted £50 for the pair and would not take a penny less. He got it. Rat terriers were next in large demand, and it was indeed a matter of wonderment to me to see in the great Christian city of London, so splendidly policed, dog fanciers offering their dogs for sale and guaranteeing that they would kill so many rats a minute.

The sale of dogs was the quickest of all, and it was wonderful to see how even seemingly poor laborers paid fancy prices for savage, powerful, brutal-looking bulldogs.

"Them men, Sir," explained a dealer, "are striking dockers, poor fellows. They're all nearly starving, as you can see. They buy them dogs only for a little amusement. Poor men, Sir; like to have a little fun once in a while. That dog's a good 'un. I'll warrant him. I guess there will be a kind of a match around soon, as I hear that some of the dockers have got a little money now and they're going to enjoy it."