

HENLEY-ON-THAMES.

BY "A THAMES LOUNGER."



Ⓞ F all England an American should not fail to see Henley. It comprises within itself the most characteristic and most varied of English scenery, the most delightful pastimes and the greatest contrasts to anything which he has either left behind him in the land of his birth or will find in other parts of Europe. Nothing is to be compared with the first week in July on the Thames, in a trip starting from Oxford or from the Lamb at Wallingford and finishing at the Red Lion, Henley, with the regatta and a final row down to Maidenhead, or, as will most likely be the case, with an extension of the trip to

Windsor. In such a panorama an American will see certainly, for one thing, a river life and a river scenery which have no parallel across the Atlantic. The Thames is to rivers what "The Sound" is to seas—peerless, and to all American rivers it is—the most graphic contrast.

Nature made it different. Man has successfully modified what nature made. The physical conformation of America precludes the possibility of the existence of similar material. The course of the historical developments of the two countries forecludes, at least for centuries to come, the modifications which man has developed here. In America nature has worked on a different and a larger plan.

There the courses of the mightier streams, like the Mississippi, flow through hundreds, almost thousands, of miles of wide and unpicturesque flats and gather their vast volume from a thousand mountain sources. In the lower parts they are all, or nearly all, large, wide and deep, cutting their channels, now this way and now that, through soft alluvial deposit. In their upper portions they are fierce leaping torrents, or when, like the Hudson, they are neither steep nor sluggish, they have sawn their way through huge mountain ranges whose gaunt and almost perpendicular sides yield a gloomy and sublime grandeur.

On the other hand the Thames winds its sinuous way for the most part through the ever-varying turns of a series of rolling hills of comparatively small proportions, yet hard enough in substance to say to it "Thus far thou shalt come and no farther"—the timbered and cultivated banks of which frame it to its water's edge with their varied hues, and its placidity reflects them as in a looking glass.

Its normal stream, at no time naturally violent, is trained almost to glassy stillness by a series of locks at intervals of three or four miles over all its course from Richmond upward, converting the river into a chain of elongated lakes, and, in its lower portion, stopping the inflow of the tide.

These locks are the favorite meeting place of all that great army who live upon the waters. There the general provider of all that to the water ways pertains sets up his tabernacle.

Men, barges, punts and rods and nets and flies,
This sage promoter of our sports supplies.

There the ever-present disciple of Isaac Walton, whose sport begins with the beginning year and never ends, throws the glittering fly, or hour by hour

Takes his silent stand intent,
His angle in his hand,

not to be disturbed save by an earthquake or by the unwieldy team

Which urge the pond'rous barge against the stream

Cleaving with heavy prow the tranquil tide.

Time worn and lichen stained, with the ivy-leaved snapdragon and many another

creeper hanging from their antique wails, these locks are the gathering point of an ever-varying fleet of passing boats, and of little hamlets of vari-patterned cottages which have grown up around them. They form picture upon picture of exquisite artistic merit and ever with them and in contrast to the deep, dark pen, which like a giant opens its cavernous mouth, receives into its gloomy portals, and closes on, "The skiff light dancing on the wave," is the bubbling waterfall over which the stream, held up above, glides down into the lower level in cascades,

Where the broad sunrise fills with deepening gold
Its whirlpools, where all hues do spread and quiver.

There also that product of the Thames, its native genii, the aquatic lounge most does congregate. Burly of form, muscular of development, sunburnt of countenance, much given to smoking the fragrant weed from the recesses of a meerschau pipe, at the locks he rests from his labors and hears the gossip of the river. He knows everybody and everybody knows him, for has he not swung his lusty arms and skimmed his outrigger, like a swallow, up and down the Thames these twenty summers past, and passed and re-passed every lock hundreds of times? Every locksmith knows him and every roadside inn, in all its courses, has had him for a welcome guest.

With such men the Thames becomes a fascination. Every day they can snatch from the serious business of life they are off to its waters. The Thames lounge may, in the intervals, be a busy scientific teacher, or an engineer all but buried in the pressure of weighty contracts, or he may be a literary Gideonite hewing the wood and drawing the water for a voracious and hardly grateful public; but be he what he may his one relaxation is his boat and his favorite haunts on the Thames.

Here lawyers safe from legal toils,
And peers released from duty,
Enjoy at once kind nature's smiles,
And eke the smiles of beauty.

And it is not surprising that over such men the Thames holds such a sway: setting aside the healthy exercise, the fresh air, the freedom, the lack of all the restraints of fashion in dress and meals, it appeals to all the artistic, historical and patriotic feelings of the educated man.

From the grim Traitors' Gate at the

Tower, whose portals for centuries closed on the martyr and the victim of faction and of religious persecution, to the farthest fanes of Oxford it teems with reminiscence. At one place he rows over the still standing black piles which mark, beneath the water, the work of the Roman engineers who first taught the Briton how to build. At another he passes the far-famed field of Runnymede, where the barons wrung from King John the Magna Charta on which were founded the liberties of the Western world. To-day he saunters through the gardens of that palace which the great Cardinal Wolsey built at Hampton Court, whose stately walls attest the magnificent taste of the great prelate. To-morrow he spends his leisure hours in the precincts of that huge pile, rich with the tradition of a thousand years, wherein the sovereigns of the realm have dwelt and held their court, Royal Windsor, or on the opposite bank he revisits the playfields of his early days at Eton.

Remembrance ever haunts the shores
Where Thames in summer wreaths is drest,

remembrances which have inspired every poet who has ever lived within the range of its influence.

Spenser loved

The silver-streaming Thames,
Whose rushy bank, that which the river hems
Ypainted all with variable flowers.

To Philip Sydney it was a perpetual pleasure which,

Upon its cheerful face joy's livery wore.

Pope spent years of his life in its neighborhood. The mystical Shelley wrote, while floating on its waters at Great Marlow, "The Revolt of Islam." Thomson made it the theme of his "Seasons" and drew much of his imagery from its surroundings; Scott owes to it one of the most charming chapters in "The Heart of Midlothian;" Dickens drew, again and again, its varied phases; it touched deep the nature-loving Wordsworth and Danvers wandered many a time and oft in

Its lofty woods and forests wide and long,
Adorned with leaves and branches fresh and green;
In whose cool bowers the birds with many a song,
Do welcome with their choir the summer's queen.

But, apart from these aspects and apart from its past or present commercial value as a great commercial waterway, its function now is in the main social, and for

that purpose it is by nature and by art most admirably fitted. As the exercise ground, in its lower reaches, of the great athletic clubs of the metropolis, and the arena on which the skill so acquired is tested, it is unsurpassed and unsurpassable. Whether it be the scholars of Eton, who on the birthday of George III. blossom out in their glossiest coats, their whitest waistcoats and their most dandified buttonholes, urging the *Thetis*, the *Defiance* and the *Monarch* to and fro to Surley Hall, or the gathered crowd of past students who at night watch the fireworks on the Brocas throw back their glittering sheen on its trembling breast or break their molten flakes of crimson and of emerald green against the gloomy background of the castle heights, or whether it be the undergraduates of Oxford and Cambridge who before the expectant millions ply "the measured pulse of racing oars," or the still more interesting tournament at Henley when Greek meets Greek and comes the tug of war—the Thames supplies the exactly suitable surroundings for the exact occasion.

Out of all which have developed year by year greater and greater numbers who fly to the Thames for their recreation, and with that growth has come into existence the most brilliant and luxurious fleet of boats which ever swam upon the waters, and the most pleasant opportunities of social intercourse which any country has ever possessed. Luxurious refinement has laid its hand on every phase and adjunct of the old riverside life.

The house where nut-brown ale inspired,
Where gray-beard mirth and smiling toil retired,

Where village statesmen talked with looks profound
And news much older than the ale went round,

has developed into the smart provincial inn, alive with the ever-passing medley of the water, and its erstwhile silent banks have become girdled with prim detached villas, the homes of the City Fathers, escaped from the metropolis where Stygian throats breathe darkness all day long.

Time was, and not long since, when all these pleasant windings were veritable sleepy hollows, undisturbed through centuries save by the greater events of national life or when sought for their very seclusion by the tempest-tossed and weary statesman or patriot, with whom it

has ever been a favorite resort. In the silent cloisters of Bisham lies Warwick the king maker, the last of the barons, made thrice familiar by the works of Shakespeare and of Bulwer Lytton. To Lady Place, by Hurley, Lovelace, the companion of Drake, retired after his life of toil and adventure in the Western Main, leaving descendants no less mindful of their duty, who were mainly instrumental in bringing over the great Prince of Orange at the Revolution, one of whose earliest nights in England was spent at Phyllis Court, the neighboring riverside estate. In the nearby village of Ruscombe, between Shiplake and Wargrave, lived, died and was buried the great Quaker whose name and memory will be revered as long as history records the life of the founder of the State of Pennsylvania.

At Henley lived, in that peaceful security which his own country refused him, Dumourez the Girondist, at one time an inmate of the Bastille as a firebrand whose political doctrines threatened the hateful tyranny of absolute monarchy, and, by the irony of fate, at a later time flying for his life before the no less bloodthirsty zeal of the revolutionary spirit he had evoked as too great a clog on the wheel of progress. And yet another whose peaceful career was passed in building up the material elements, and not in the fierce whirl of destroying the political, came here, as to contemplation's calm retreat, to end his busy days—Richard Jennings—the master builder of St. Paul's Cathedral.

Henley itself, this special site which fate reserved for the most brilliant and widely known of the social functions of the Thames, was, until the development of this modern phase of outdoor life and the establishment of it as the headquarters of metropolitan rowing contests, one of the very sleepest of the many old-fashioned little towns with which the Middle Ages had studded the course of the stream. Once only does it even appear to have been awake, but that was a stirring time in England, when the thunderous cannon of Oliver Cromwell tore down its streets and its sons girt on the sword to strike for freedom—such they were of old, "whose tempered blades dispersed the shackles of usurped control and hewed them link from link." After that the sleep of Rip Van Winkle fell upon the place. So sleepy and so empty

were its deserted streets that its inhabitants

Not till the shades of evening deeper spread
Would know if half the town be quick or dead.

I remember it in those days spared by
the reformer's scythe of the Municipal
Reform bill, which had left it like a short
ear of corn beneath the reaper's hook, so
insignificant was it; still glorying in its
unreformed corporation, its procession to
church of aldermen, whose

Arms impressive folded on each breast
Secured the brodered mantle on the chest;
While one preceded them, bedecked in purple
robe,
Whose lace-bound hat would cover Herschel's
globe;

its no less picturesque and wonderful
beggar-hunting beadle:

No squalid mortal this, but one whose frame
And sturdy limbs an iron strength proclaim,
And scarce the scarlet of his cape outvied
The unchanging red which every feature dyed,
And its still more antiquated bellman,

His trusty steed astride,
His seat unfirm, his legs distended wide,
His staff relinquished for a pond'rous bell,
Of sound possessed to ring creation's knell.

Then the only life of the week was the
market huckster whose voice rose from
treble to a scream discoursing on the
merits of his merchandise; and its only
annual excitement was the Statute Fair,
whereat the yearly hiring and letting of
service took place:

There carters, shepherds, threshers, herdsmen

The various emblems of their art displayed,
The carter's hat coarse whipcords did adorn,
The threshers bore a sheaf of ripened corn,
With hair of kine the herdsman's was o'er
spread

And fleecy honors decked the shepherd's head.

Now all is changed, but not destroyed;
the lethargy of the coaching and early
railway days has passed, the Great West-
ern Railway has brought it all within an
easy distance of London and fashion has
claimed it for her own.

Surely never did nature unconsciously
work out a more charming arena for
youth and beauty to disport in than Hen-
ley; no labored structure of ancient
Rome could equal the amphitheatre which
nature has erected on the hill sides be-
tween which the Thames picks its way
from Wargrave to Maidenhead: now ris-
ing over the river in abrupt cliffs by wood-
crowned heights o'erhung, where fir and
larch and beach are careless flung, and
again retiring in graceful curves and

gently-undulating outlines, leaving be-
tween the river and the hills a fringe of
meadows of such greens as no other
country can spread to soothe the jaded
eye. Floating on the edge the water lily
raises to the light his silver chalice, the
yellow iris springs from its clustered
spears like a golden butterfly, the purple,
loose strife bends before the wind his
tapering head; the sturdy dock, dyed with
all the tints which scarlet and sienna to
his greens can add, stands stiffly in his
pride; the hawthorn unfolds its fragrant
blossoms to the wandering winds; the
wild rose spreads his prickly tendrils,
laden with their delicate burden of color
or of berry; the polled willows in coat
of gray stand in ranks, the silent senti-
nels of the water way; the poplar rears its
head in graceful pride, his silver-lined
leaves sparkling against the more sombre
elm or the deeper shades of the "Lord
of the Woods"—the long-surviving oak,
the heron flaps his lazy wing aloft; the
graceful swan breasts the mimic wave
like a brave gallion; the startled moor-
hen, screeching, leaves her trail upon the
feathered waters; the sleepy and familiar
duck, head under wing, floats on the flood;
the dragon fly, on gossamer wings, speeds
his swift course; the skimming swallow
o'er the surface flies; the church bells
ever and anon fall in sweet cadence on
the ear, and over all

A stormless sky of spotless azure hangs
Its cloudless concave like a waveless sea.

From the bridge which at Henley
throws its broad shadow on the subject
stream the scenery in either direction is, of
its kind, perfection. Westward, up stream,
are the wooded heights of Park Place,
where all, from the Tudoresque boat house
at the water's edge to the mock Roman
amphitheatre, formed of the ruins of Read-
ing Abbey, and the genuine druid's temple,
moved stone by stone from the island of
Jersey, mark the care and generosity with
which generations of its owners have
worked to make it the very abode of syl-
van bliss. The antique picturesqueness
of the Old Marsh Weir has gone, but
there still remains the wooden bridge zig
zaging across the Thames like a New
England fence, by which the barge horses
cross from the Berks side to the Oxford,
and vice versa.

Phyllis Court, too, has gone, but its
grounds remain and its past glory can be
measured by fragments. The terraced
walk by the river and the bowling green



“HERE THEY COME!”

attest a period of English country life not now frequently to be met with.

Below the bridge to the left lies the mansion of Fawley Court, one of the designs of Sir Christopher Wren, and its templed island made memorable as the starting place of the boat races, and beyond by Mill End the river's course sweeping eastward is stopped by the locks at Hambledon, where the woods of Remenham, mere remnant of the primeval forest, which Camden makes the "Abbot of St. Albans" guilty of destroying, cast their delightful shades. Nearer the river, on the flat of the valley on each side of the river, are meadows "daisy pied," the verdant altars on which are offered up those thousand sacrifices, the picnic's lunch which ever marks the Englishman in outdoor company; and whether seen at early dawn when the dappled sky is all gray with mists, the offspring of dull night, or in the lingering twilight of the early summer, so unfamiliar to the American,

When slow emerging, like a crystal shield,
The moon above the woods first stands revealed,
And throws o'er hill and rivulet and glade,
A flood of silver with a softer shade,

few districts offer such a delightful variety of typical English summer scenery as the Henley valley.

Whichever way the eye may bend,
Where'er the glance inquiring may descend,
Some pleasing prospect bounds the raptured
gaze,
And leads the soul through fancy's flowing
maze.
Seats, pastures, flocks and woods bedeck the
plain,
Whilst numerous islets break the river's chain,
And every view and every house conveys
Fresh food for wonder and fresh food for
praise.

As the gala, week approaches, every phase of the usual summer's life of the river intensifies. Mine hosts of the Red Lion and the Angel, famed riverside inns, glow with anticipations of the coming harvest; the houses of the private residents put on their gayest, the boat house becomes more and more thronged with sturdy sons of Anak preparing for the fray; the grand stand slowly raises its tell-tale frame and then "Not single spies but in battalions" come thither and take up their anchorage, of every form, hue, age and design, the smart and silent naphtha launches, the vigorous steamer cutter almost fit for a sea voyage, the luxurious house boat, more a floating palace of color and of

foliage than a boat; the more modest river barge made gay beyond recognition with awnings and with bunting; the pair-oared gig, rowed down from Oxford; the humble punt, the broad-sterned tub, the dancing canoe of home or Canadian pattern, light dancing on the quivering tide, the half-decked yacht-built sailing boats—these and a hundred more discharge their complement of youth and beauty or find for them within their luxurious cabins a temporary home. Society pours out her legions of fair women decked in hues and fashions 'twere profanity for the masculine mind to attempt to detail, there are sounds of revelry by night, when the merry laugh goes round, the twinkling light of a myriad fancy lamps flash in the rippling wave and the music of the light guitar is wafted on the breeze.

Hither, too, come by the hundred the youths typical of England's system of dealing with her hardy sons; here come the rising hope and the veteran oarsman, the hero of a hundred fights; hither come the pick of the Thames rowing clubs and of the two ancient universities to contest for the trophy of the regatta which carries with it the titular honor of the Head of the River, the Grand Challenge Cup; here the great public schools and college eights send their staunchest champions to compete for the coveted Ladies' Plate and the Visitors' Cup, and here the Silver Goblets and the Diamond Sculls call forth the personal prowess, in pairs and in single contests, of men whose names are familiar on the tongue as household words—Muttlebury, of Cambridge; Guy Nickalls, of Oxford; Psotta, of New York—but what need of details on such a well-known theme, such a thrice-told tale! The flashing oar, the well-fought contest, the rushing crowd of friends and partisans, the distribution of the prizes on the Lion Green, have they not been told a hundred times—they are but the results; the real secret of Henley's charm is the opportunity these contests give for social intercourse, joyous outdoor life, fresh air and fair scenes, than which no surroundings could be more happy or appropriate.

Adieu, then, Henley! thy lovely scenes, adieu!
Adieu, thy inns, thy glittering throngs, adieu;
Adieu, thy verdant meads, thy crystal tide;
Adieu, thy swans, which there majestic glide;
Adieu, thy noble bridge, whence oft my gaze
Has lingered in the sun's declining rays,
Adieu, all these! yet these must e'en remain
Imprest in amplest beauty on the brain.