
THE BEAUTIES OF LONDON FOGS.

Now that November has come once more with its fogs, and with the absolutely futile, but apparently never to be ended plans for their abolition, the truly enlightened individual begins at last to find the streets of London not only endurable, but delightful.

This sentence may, perhaps, arouse astonishment and dissent in the mind of the Philistine. I do not, however, address my remarks to him, nor shall I degrade myself by appealing to the intelligence of the man of Gath.

Here let me stop to apologise to the descendants, if there be any, of the original men of Gath.

We have adopted the word Philistine from the jargon of ignorant, beer-swilling, tobacco-puffing German students, who are in the habit of affixing to the few among their compatriots who condescend to shave and wash their faces, various opprobrious epithets, among others, the name of Philistine.

The Philistines were, in reality, a most interesting and remarkable race, it is generally thought, of Aryan origin, who maintained a brave and successful struggle against the encroaching bands of Jews who invaded their territory, and it is sad, indeed, to think of the fate that has overtaken their name and country.

But to resume. The people who secretly admire oleographs but publicly applaud pastels, who go to art furnishers and wear impossible clothes, talk foolishly about the hideousness of London in winter, and go so far as to maintain that London is only tolerable in the spring and early summer.

Now I have seen these people strolling past Turner's masterpieces with looks of more or less dissembled aversion on their faces, and anon I have seen them hustling one another for front places to view the "Derby Day" of Mr. Frith, and I am well aware that in their case expostulation would avail nothing. I shall, therefore, address myself to the enlightened reader, and ask him to join with me in praising London fogs.

And firstly, they delight me by the strangeness and mystery with which they invest the most familiar scenes. I may, in this, be peculiar, but I confess I prize mysteriousness as one of the most precious possessions left to us. I have always wished to make the acquaintance of the man in Edgar Allan Poe's story who kept his shutters continually closed, slept by day, and took his walks by night. And when I have a house of my own, I intend to follow his example. In a fog everything is transfigured and idealised. Crudeness and vulgarity are softened away, and dullness acquires unexpected distinction.

A brooding tranquility pervades all things, and we ourselves, wrapped round with cloud and secrecy, and removed from the prying eyes of men, with our own thoughts for companions, move onwards as through endless space.

If a man ever thinks at all, and some men do, he would then think, and think profitably. And thus it is that the dwellers in misty and in mountainous regions are ever given to thought, or to what some call, ignorantly, dreaming.

The infinite is brought closer to them; they see less of the absurdity and hear less of the chatter of fools, and they profit by it. In ancient Ireland, the draoi or druid, who was the wise man and mystic dreamer, travelled invisibly, "swift as the clear, cold wind of spring," and often have I wished for the same power, if only to escape for a while into the region of undisturbed and unruffled thought. Failing the gift of invisibility, I repeat, a London fog is the next most precious gift to wearied mortals. May we have many of them in the coming winter!

Has my reader ever noticed the incongruity which exists between our stiff and stark modern streets and the climate we live in? Has it never struck him that rectangularity and severity of outline are ludicrous against a background of mist and cloud? I confess that, to me, the streets of London are places to be shunned except when the kindly fog pulls over them its fantastical, all-obscuring, and all varying veil.

Then for a short time one can in fancy walk through the streets trod by one's ancestors, and the secret of the ages of faith and wonder seems half revealed. Our old churches are the few remnants we have left of those marvellous times; but in the glare of a summer's day, how strange, abandoned, and stared out of countenance they look!

Their friends have all left them; their new neighbours know them not. Mammon looks down upon them superciliously from the height of his lordly temples, and the houses which once clustered round with kindly and sympathetic looks have given place to the repulsiveness and inhumanity of the modern shop.

Mist and fog alone can restore them to their past, and give them a brief forgetfulness of the sordid and irreverent present.

But if we would understand them as they were once understood, we must enter them, and while, like incense clouds, the mist rises to the roof, and hangs over the altar, we may dream of days when the money-changer had not yet set up his table in the sanctuary, nor the *bourgeois* taken up his abode in the palace.

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