

DIME MUSEUMS.

FROM A NATURALIST'S POINT OF VIEW.

ON the morning after my arrival on American soil, in order to deliver the opening course of the Lowell lectures in Boston, I set out to investigate the city, which was unknown to me except through the mediumship of a map. Starting from the Brunswick, I naturally gravitated into Washington Street, and worked my way slowly along, feeling every now and then as if I were in Paris, and strolling along the Boulevards. So strong was the resemblance that I scarcely started when I met an apparition.

Surely, I must be in Paris!

Has Time's dial receded twenty-five years? Is the Second Empire still in all its glory?

For here, stalking majestically along the street, and scarcely condescending to look to the right or left, is one of the Cent Gardes, resplendent in light blue tunic, plumed helmet, and silver bullion. Not only one of the Cent Gardes, but the tallest specimen of that gigantic corps that I ever beheld, as without his helmet he must have been at least seven feet high. Still, there was one detail of his uniform which I did not recognize as belonging to that of the Cent Gardes. Crossing his breast were two white belts, such as the British soldier used to wear when King Pipeclay reigned. As he drew nearer, words became visible upon his cross-belts, gradually resolving themselves into the name and address of a DIME MUSEUM. The man was evidently a professional giant, acting as an advertisement. Not in the least knowing what a Dime Museum might be, and indeed having very hazy ideas as to a "dime," I took the liberty of asking the giant for an explanation. He was very affable, as is usually the way with giants,

and the result was that I went to the exhibition of which he was a distinguished ornament.

It may, perhaps, smack of presumption for an Englishman to write an account of Dime Museums in an American publication. But in the first place, The Atlantic is largely read in England; and in the next place, the average American knows nothing of Dime Museums except by name. No one can traverse the principal streets without passing a Dime Museum, hearing unseen musicians in the glittering portico, and seeing the resplendently pictorial decorations which surround the entrance to the wonders within. After dark a Dime Museum would lose its self-respect if its façade were not lighted with as many electric lamps as would illumine an ordinary street. Then, the daily newspapers contain advertisements of Dime Museums, the type being of the most obtrusively conspicuous character, and sometimes occupying an entire page.

In England your genuine Londoner never visits the Tower, or ascends the Monument, or climbs into the ball of St. Paul's Cathedral; the resident in Oxford never explores the interiors of the colleges; and in America the Bostonian never goes to Bunker's Hill. On the same principle, the Americans, as a rule, know nothing of Dime Museums except the outside. They have a dim idea that such places are not quite respectable, and that they are impositions on the credulity of the public.

Now Dime Museums are perfectly respectable. It is of course impossible to exclude the rough or "rowdy" element from any place of public entertainment. But if a man should annoy the audience or any of the performers, he

would receive a stern warning to amend his behavior; and if he should repeat the offense, he would find himself suddenly ejected into the street. As to imposition, there certainly is a good deal of exaggeration, both in the pictorial advertisements without and the florid eloquence of the lecturer within. Nevertheless, there is usually something worth seeing, if one has an intelligent eye.

A Dime Museum is divided into two portions, quite independent of each other. One is a semi-theatre, in which are exhibited the usual variety entertainments, while the other is devoted to natural curiosities. It is only of the latter that I write.

Along the sides of the room is a platform about four feet high, and upon it are ranged the curiosities on exhibition. At stated intervals the lecturer of the establishment goes round the room, and delivers an oration upon each in succession. In some museums these lectures alone are well worth the dime. The orator's flights of eulogistic fancy, tempered with soul-rending pathos, are sometimes worthy of Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz in his best days, while the wealth of historical illustrations with which the orations are embellished could not have been excelled, or even equaled, by that distinguished barrister. It almost takes one's breath away to hear the Seven Wonders of the World, Archimedes, Helen of Troy, Milton, Shakespeare, Euclid, Solon, Cleopatra, Pythagoras, Kosciusko, George Washington (of course), Alfred the Great, Abraham Lincoln, Grace Darling, and Joan of Arc all employed within a quarter of an hour as illustrative of the contents of a Dime Museum. But beneath all this froth there is always something substantial and worthy of a naturalist's attention.

To begin with human curiosities: ethnology is almost always well represented, and I have noted the various races of men that have been exhibited

in one Dime Museum within two months. There have been Zulus. These are not, as some of the journalists have wickedly insinuated, Irish immigrants, cunningly painted and made up like savages. They are genuine Zulus; and though we need not believe the lecturer's statement that they fought under Cetewayo at Isandhwalu, and displayed prodigies of valor in order to free their country from British rule (here George Washington and Lexington come in with great applause), there is no doubt that they would prove terrible enemies in battle. Looking at their leaps and bounds, and listening to their yells and whistles and the rattling of their assagais against their shields, no one can wonder that English cavalry horses were at first afraid to face them. Their skill and strength in throwing the assagai are astonishing. One of them drove five assagais into a circle only six inches in diameter. There seemed scarcely space for the last, but, with a triumphant shout, "this gentleman," as the lecturer called him, sent the weapon crashing among its predecessors.

There were Fijians, a man and a woman. Physically, this is one of the finest races of mankind, and the two were very good specimens of it. The man might have served as a model for a Hercules, so massive were the muscles of his arms and shoulders.

Slightly darker than Spaniards, the Fijians have, as a rule, aquiline noses, high foreheads, and well-cut features generally. The hair is the most remarkable characteristic of the race. Long, wavy, and stiff, it radiates from the head in all directions, so that the face seems quite small. In their own land the Fijians dye and torture their hair into an infinite variety of forms, even more eccentric than Parisian ladies' head-dresses in the reign of Louis XV. No man can dress his own hair, and there are only a few who are experienced in the art. Therefore, these examples

of the race are perforce obliged to allow their hair to grow as Nature made it, which is fortunate, from the naturalist's point of view.

It seems a pity that this fine race should perish, but it has been gradually dwindling away ever since the white man set his foot upon the island group of Viti, and before many years have elapsed the Fijians will have passed from the earth as completely as the Tasmanians. Before the white man visited them they were all cannibals, broken up into antagonistic tribes always at war with each other, so that no man held his life safe from one hour to another. Even in peace the details of their domestic life were such that no one would dare to print them. It is a benevolent dream to think that education can elevate any savage race to the level of the white man, and the Fijians must yield to the beneficently inexorable law which compels a lower race to give way to a higher. So, having this fact in my mind, I was very glad to see examples of this splendid but doomed race, and felt that I owed an obligation to the Dime Museum.

India was represented by a company of Nautch girls, whose long, straight hair, slight bodies, and delicate limbs afforded a bold contrast to the massive proportions of the Fijians.

As a sort of Indian offshoot, Ceylon sent representatives in a group of men, women, and children, whose placidly composed demeanor and power of sitting still and doing nothing appeared quite strange when opposed to the occasional laughter of the Fijians and the noisy restlessness of the Zulus. The Cingalese never laughed, but only smiled benignantly, exchanging a few low words at long intervals. One of them was quite a pretty little woman, with a childlike sweetness of aspect. She had a baby about two years old, — a most comical little boy, with his head closely shaven, except a tuft of black hair on the top.

Then there was the singularly interesting group of the Earthmen, a race of dwarfs inhabiting Central Africa, and so small that a full-grown man scarcely exceeds in height an ordinary English child six years of age. They are perfectly well formed, are yellow in color, have rather pleasing countenances, and their hair is close and woolly, like that of the Bosjesmans, whom they resemble in many respects.

Their pantomimic gestures were really wonderful. The chief among them, although of course he could not speak our language, gave a most vivid description of his journey to Europe. His first impressions of horses and carriages could not be mistaken for a moment, nor his picturing of railway traveling; the whistle and puffing of the engine, the rushing of trees past the windows, the plunge into a tunnel, and the stoppage at a station being told as clearly as if he had spoken the language of the audience. His best performance, however, was the description of the voyage. The unsteadiness of the deck, the whistle and shouts of the boatswain, and the sing-song of the sailors were reproduced with astonishing fidelity. Then he exhibited symptoms of uneasiness; staggered about the imaginary deck, clutching at imaginary ropes; and finally collapsed over a chest, in helpless apathy.

These tiny specimens of mankind are sufficiently interesting in themselves, but exhibitors can never be content without injuring by exaggeration the real value of their natural curiosities. I scarcely know whether indignation or amusement predominated, when I went to the Dime Museum in which the Earthmen were being exhibited. At the entrance was a very fair model of the empty white-ant hill, which serves as their usual habitation. Near it were two objects. One bore a label stating that it was the mantle by which the Earthmen disguise themselves when hunting the lion, while the other was described as

one of their weapons. Now the "mantle" was a "tappa," or bark-cloth robe, made in the South Sea Islands, and the "weapon" was part of a whale's rib.

Another example of an abnormal race was Krao, the little Burmese hairy girl, who was most absurdly advertised as the "Missing Link" between man and monkey.

As to the sensational accounts, and still more sensational lithographs and posters, which purport to describe her capture, parentage, and the habits of her kinsfolk, the reader is at liberty to believe as much as he likes. Still, Krao is interesting as a member of one of the hairy races that are found in several parts of the globe, especially in Asia; but there is nothing about her or them which shows any relationship to the monkey tribe. The only monkey-like characteristic which can be seized upon is that the hair of the fore-arm points upwards, and that of the upper-arm downwards.

Next may be taken examples of abnormal individuals, without any question of race. Of fat boys and women, living skeletons and bearded ladies, there is always a stock on hand. As to the last, they are generally liable to suspicion, as small-featured and heavily-bearded men have deceived the public by allowing their hair to grow, and making themselves up as women. But genuine specimens are not uncommon, and there was no doubt as to the individual whom I saw. I afterwards ascertained that she had been married for several years. Such ladies, unlike Rosalind and Celia, might very well swear by their beards, and be forsworn.

Next in order come those unfortunate individuals who have either been born without limbs, or have been accidentally bereft of them, and yet contrive to perform many tasks which are considered as the special province of the hands.

There are armless men and women who can write and even draw fairly with

the pen or pencil held in the mouth, while others can do the same with the toes. I do not look upon these persons as merely sights to amuse the curious, but as persons to be honored for their victory over untoward circumstances, which would have crushed those of less courage and perseverance.

At the Dime Museum to which our azure and silver giant belonged I saw a very remarkable young woman of twenty-two, or thereabouts. She had arms, but they were quite useless, and her hands were shriveled and turned inwards. So she had trained her feet and toes to do almost everything which can be accomplished by hands and fingers, and I only wish that I could write as well with my fingers as she did with her toes. I happened to be in the place during an intermission in the performances, and had an opportunity of watching her without appearing to do so.

Seated on a chair, she picked up a closed desk, opened it, and took out some writing-paper. Then she took a portable inkstand out of its compartment, held it with the toes of the left foot, and with those of the right unscrewed the top as rapidly as I could do with my fingers. Then, with the left foot, she took up a pen and placed it between the first and second toes of the right foot. She then tried the nib, dipped the pen in the ink, and began to write a letter. Not only could she write, but she could play the piano, with her feet! Toes cannot, of course, be made as long as fingers, however carefully they may be trained, and therefore their span of the keys is necessarily small. But Miss Sturgeon — for such is her name — played several airs, Silver Bells among them, with much taste.

While looking at this performance, I felt quite humiliated. Why have I allowed my toes to degenerate into mere vulgar instruments of locomotion, when they are capable of so much more? Their development as fingers does not pre-

clude their ordinary use, for I met Miss Sturgeon on her way to the Dime Museum, and she walked like any other young woman.

I am told that she is thoroughly well educated, is a graduate of one of the ladies' colleges, and receives pupils. But she can earn so much more by exhibiting her powers in public than by teaching that for the present she has chosen the former mode of living. To such persons the Dime Museum is a positive Providence.

Sometimes, instead of being mulcted of limbs, the abnormal individual is gifted with one limb, or more, in excess of the usual number. For example, a "Three-Legged Man" was exhibited during my stay in Boston, and was pictorially represented as possessing three symmetrical legs in a row, all the three being fashionably attired. Suspecting what the third leg might be, I went to see the man. As I had anticipated, he had a third leg, but it was useless, shriveled, and so small that it could be easily concealed. Physiologically considered, it is an interesting fact, but by no means an uncommon one, and I possess a work in which several similar cases are figured.

A much more striking example of abnormal humanity was the "Elastic-Skinned Man," a case which I believe to be unique. To all appearances, there was nothing to distinguish this rather good-looking man from any one whom you might encounter in the street. But his skin appeared to have no connection with the body, and to be as elastic as India rubber. He would pull his nose until it was seven or eight inches in length. He would seize the skin of his chest with both hands, draw it upwards, and veil his face with it. He would draw the skin of his knee forwards, twist it like a rope, and then tie it in a knot. This exhibition was not a very pleasing one, but, from a physiological point of view, it was most curious.

Another remarkable freak of nature

was seen in a girl of about twelve years of age whose knees were reversed, so that when she sat in a chair her toes could rest on her shoulders. She was perfectly formed in other respects. Ordinary walking was impossible, but she could scuttle over the ground and run upstairs with wonderful speed, going on all fours, after a fashion of her own.

Giants and dwarfs afford examples of the extremes of human dimensions. Chang, the Chinese giant, whom I knew well when he was a neighbor of mine, was lately at this Dime Museum, while "Major Nutt," the erst rival of General Tom Thumb, is permanently attached to it as keeper of a ticket office.

Abnormal animals may also be seen. An "Eight-Hoofed Horse" was advertised, and of course I went to see it, thinking that it might be a mere imposition. The proprietor kindly had it brought out of the stall for me, and I examined it carefully. It really had two hoofs on each foot, the inner hoof being rather smaller than the outer, and not quite reaching the ground.

To the physiologist this animal is of very great value. Perhaps the reader may not be aware that the horse of the present day is the last of a regularly ascending series of forms. The first horse which geologists have discovered was scarcely larger than a terrier dog, and had five toes on each foot. Then, throughout successive geological epochs, the animal became larger in size and the hoofs fewer in number, until the one-hoofed horse of the present day was developed. In this particular animal we have a singularly interesting instance of "throwing back" to an ancestry of almost incredibly remote date. This phenomenon of throwing back is familiar to the breeders of fancy rabbits. No matter how pure the breed of the parents may be, and how long their pedigrees, a young one will occasionally be born which is in all respects like the common brown rabbit of the fields.

Some animals become abnormal, not by the multiplication of existing organs, but by deprivation of normal characteristics. For example, a "Hen with a Human Face" was exhibited, and was pictorially represented as possessing a symmetrical female face, with human nose, lips, eyes, and forehead, and nicely parted hair. A single glance at the bird showed that its head and feet were unable to secrete horn, and that therefore it had neither beak nor claws. The total absence of the beak gave a curious aspect to the bird, and a very vivid imagination might trace a distant resemblance to the face of a battered Dutch doll.

Such imperfect birds are not uncommon; but as they cannot scratch up food for themselves, nor pick it up if found, they are as a rule killed as soon as hatched.

Physiology was relieved by optical and other illusions.

There was, for example, Dr. Lynn's "Thauma," which made such a sensation at the Crystal Palace, Sydenham. There was also a very ingenious "Living Mermaid." The upper portion was enacted by a young girl, while the artificial tail was behind the scenes, worked by a hidden confederate, and reflected towards the audience by an arrangement of mirrors. Similar mirrors were employed in the "Talking Head," the "Three-Headed Nightingale," and cognate exhibitions. I was much amused to see the "Invisible Lady" of my early childhood resuscitated; and indeed this department of the Dime Museum very much reminded me of the extinct Adelaide Gallery and Polytechnic.

Fashion rules in Dime Museums as elsewhere. Two years ago there was a demand for white elephants. It soon died away, and I could find only two "stuffed skins" as relics; one was made of canvas, and the other was evidently the skin of a huge pig. Here would have been a splendid field for the late

Charles Waterton, who told the authorities of the British Museum that if they would give him the skins of two cows and a calf he would make a better elephant than any in their collection.

Just now there is a run upon tattooed men and women — I beg their pardon, "Princesses." The fashion was set a few years ago by a man who exhibited himself under the name of Captain Costentenus, and who was covered from head to foot with drawings of elephants, monkeys, cats, birds, snakes, and other living creatures, in blue, the intermediate spaces being variegated in red. He represented himself as being a Greek Albanian who was living in Chinese Tartary, and was thus tattooed as a punishment for rebellion against the Emperor! This ingenious story is illustrated by highly colored woodcuts, in which Costentenus is shown lying on his back, bound to a tree, while a South American maiden (in Chinese Tartary!) is kneeling gracefully beside him, and tattooing him with an arrow!

As I write, there are in Boston Dime Museums three tattooed persons, one man and two women. Judging from his decorations, the man seems to be patriotically pious. The front of his body is emblazoned with the Genius of America hovering over a spread eagle, while his arms and legs are covered with groups of American flags and similar designs. His entire back is occupied by a picture of the Crucifixion and the inscription "Mount Calvary"!

One of the women is a remarkable example of the tattooer's art. Patriotism is exemplified by spread eagles, the Genius of Liberty, and any number of American flags; sentiment is symbolized by sailors taking affectionate leave of the girls they are going to leave behind them; while art is perpetuated by Raphael's St. Michael, the Apollo Sauroctonus, and other well-known paintings and statues. Scarcely a square eighth of an inch of skin is unmarked, and the

result is that the tattooed portions look exactly as if they were clad in figured blue and red silk. Indeed, this woman appears much more fully clad than the conventional page of a theatre. She told me that the operation, which was performed with No. 12 needles fixed on handles, was exceedingly painful, especially near a bone. But she had no wish to magnify her sufferings for the sake of effect, and said that after a while the monotonous pricking induced drowsiness, and that she was half unconscious for a considerable portion of the time. She remarked that in America tattooing has one advantage, namely, that the mosquitoes will not touch the marked portions of the skin.

There are also exhibitors of out-of-the-way accomplishments. There is, for example, the "Champion Paper-Cutter

of America," who drapes his stall with ample lace-like curtains and wreaths cut out of white paper. There is the "Champion Whittler of America," who cuts long chains and a variety of elaborate designs out of solid wood, using only a penknife. There is a worker in filigree, who will take a coil of gilt wire, and with a small pair of round-nosed pliers will make you a bracelet, a brooch, a necklace, or other ornament to order, in a wonderfully short space of time.

All this, and much more, can be seen for a dime. You may go in when you like, and stay as long as you like. You are at liberty to ask questions, and if they be reasonable you will receive satisfactory answers. Those who want only amusement can find it, and those who wish for information can always obtain it.

J. G. Wood.

MODERN VANDALISM.

"THE feudal and monastic buildings of Europe, and still more the streets of her ancient cities, are vanishing like dreams; and it is difficult to imagine the mingled envy and contempt with which future generations will look back to us who still possessed such things, yet made no effort to preserve, and scarcely any to delineate, them."

Mr. Ruskin wrote this in 1870. During the fifteen years which have passed since then, despite much talk to the contrary, everything has been done to increase the odium which posterity is to throw upon us. In profession, we of to-day are all Crusaders, burning to defend the places made sacred by the picturesqueness or associations of the past. In deed, we are almost all Goths and Vandals, ruining them without mercy. While the men who are to come will judge us by our actions, we judge our-

selves by our words. Because the speech of a few is fair, we fancy that all must be right with the many. Because more is being said and written about art than ever has been before, we think that the feeling for it must be greater in like proportion. In a word, we mistake our sowing of good seed for the reaping of a fruitful harvest. Once in a while, however, we are reminded that all is not so well as it seems. In the United States, within the last ten years, art schools have been established by hundreds. But when it came to finding out what they accomplished, by an art competition instituted by Harper and Brothers, the result was shown to be just nothing. In England, benevolent men, strong in their own faith, think to refine the lower classes by the influence of art and by making their surroundings beautiful. But even as they put