

"THE DOSSER."

HOW AND WHERE HE LIVES.

THROUGH "DOSS-SHOPS" AND
RESTAURANTS.

(By our Special Reporter.)

It is a fact that one half of Adelaide does not know how the other half lives. What do the city magnates who live in mansions at Mount Lofty or in the suburbs know regarding Jimmy Nolan's abode (when he has one), or where "Dutchy Bill" partakes of his evening meal?

On Thursday last when the sun was sinking rapidly I was wandering aimlessly in the Botanic Park. The prospect before me was one that would have roused the enthusiasm of an artist. There was only one blot in the whole picture. That blot was "Flat-nosed Jack." He did not seem to harmonise with anything—least of all with the rubicund glow which suffused the sky. I have made a study of this class of man, and quickly sized him up. He was one of the great order of tatter-de-mansions, and more than that, he was a type. He was the type of a tramp who could find work, but did not wish to find it; who could work, but would not—at least not more than sufficed to keep himself from starvation, and enabled him to spend the night when it was rainy in one of the many "doss-houses" in Hindley-street.

"What ud I do, if yer give me a bob?" he asked, mechanically translating my question into the dosser's vernacular. "You give it ter me, and I'll tell yer," he said, with a sly smile, perhaps doubting if I really intended to do so.

His doubts having been dispersed, he said, "Well, mister, it's almighty good of you to help a chap who's down on his uppers. Well, a tanner will go for a slap-up meal, and another tanner for a bed. That's how I'll spend it. Not a tarding ter drink—so help me bob."

He assured me he had not the least objection to my accompanying him, and when I told him that I might possibly extend my subsidy by another "tanner" I found he could be quite eloquent.

He had been to the war, he told me, "but Lord bless yer, a cove can't find no work no'adays. (From another source I learnt that he had probably used the word "war" in mistake for "gaol.") Here's the place," he said at last. "They give yer a reg'lar fine doin' ter a tanner."

We entered a stuffy restaurant on the window of which appeared the alluring words, "Three courses for sixpence." As my friend sniffed the odors of the kitchen which permeated the building, a happy smile, indicative of future delectation, passed over his face. There was no doubt in my mind that he must have been genuinely hungry. For myself, I was content to remain a spectator.

I was amazed at the menu submitted. The first course consisted of soup—either pea soup or vegetable soup. Then came meat, and here the choice was such as is rarely afforded in a first-class restaurant. There was roast beef, roast mutton, roast pork (hot), cold beef, Irish stew, steak and onions, and hash, while potatoes, cabbage, and turnips were supplied ad libitum. The third course was represented by sago, custard, and Queen pudding and jam, or bread and butter, with two cups of tea. All this was provided for the sixpence.

"Nosey Jack" saw that I was surprised, and as he attacked his meal he said:—"I aint at all bad, is it, mister?"

The restaurant-keeper proved quite communicative. "We couldn't manage to give such a splendid meal," he told me, "but for the fact that we supply such a large quantity. Why, at one time we used to have 500 people dining here in a day, but now we don't have 100. It's competition has killed the business. When I started there were only three restaurants in Hindley-street; now there are 14. And people are so difficult to satisfy; the next thing they'll want is finger-bowls. Why, only the other day a man kicked up a fuss because we didn't give him pudding for breakfast. It's true that vegetables are cheap now, but meat is the big item, and the price of that is ruinous."

My friend's appetite led me to think that the restaurant-keeper was right when he said that the profits were very small. It was some time before he had finished, and I was glad at last to escape into the fresh air.

We then walked further down the street till we came to a house, before which there was a large lamp, the glass of which bore the words—"Beds—6d., 9d., and 1/."

"Well, mothaer," my friend said, addressing a woman who was seated in front of a table which bore a large number of candles in tin candlesticks, "I want a sixpenny bed." The woman nodded assent, and looked enquiringly at me, and I heard my friend whisper something about "The bloke wants ter look round." This apparently aroused her suspicions, because she turned to me and said—"You ain't the lodgin' house inspector, air ye?" I assured her I was not, and a smiling made her my friend.

Under the escort of this queer couple I inspected the rooms. There was accommodation altogether for 60 persons. The shilling beds were in little cubicles separately, or there were two of them in a small room. They also had better bed clothing than the sixpenny and ninepenny beds, of which there were from 10 to 15 in long dormitories. Some of the men had already gone to bed, and as we entered with the candle they turned and gazed at us in surprise. I left my friend to the tender mercies of the landlady after wishing him quiet repose.

Apropos of lodging-houses, I may remark that the Adelaide Board of Health is striving hard to keep them clean, and has already accomplished wonders. Previously, when vermin became very troublesome, the lodging-housekeeper would cover them up by putting a new paper over the old one. An inspector of the board was recently supervising the removal of the paper in a "doss-house." There were 17 thicknesses, and the final one was composed of issues of a local newspaper bearing the date of 1848! The Salvation Army renders much assistance to the "dossers." At the Army Citadel they can obtain clean beds at prices ranging from 3d. to 1/. Adjutant Rose conducted me over the premises, and I was astonished at the good accommodation offered and at the cleanliness and neatness which prevailed. The men can also obtain on the premises meals at a cost of 6d. each, or they can go into the refreshment-room and have coffee, buns, or cakes at a low charge. The place is admirably managed, and frequently the accommodation is fully availed of. In this direction the Army is undoubtedly doing splendid work.