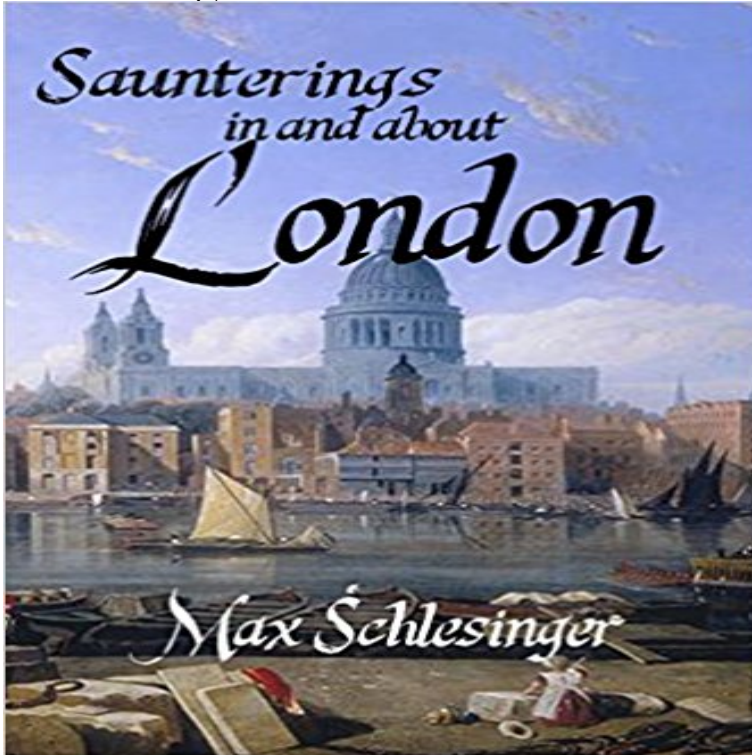


## Saunterings in and about London



A mature consideration of the London houses shows, that the strength of the fortification is in exact proportion to the elegance and value of the house and its contents. The poor are satisfied with a wooden stockade; the rich are safe behind their iron chevaux de frise, and in front of palaces, club-houses, and other public buildings, the railings are so high and strong as to engender the belief that the thieves of England go about their business of housebreaking with scaling-ladders, pick-axes, guns, and other formidable implements of destruction. Every Englishman is a bit of a Vauban. Not only does he barricade his house against two-legged animals of his own species, but his mania for fortification extends to precautions against wretched dogs and cats. To prevent these small cattle from making their way through the railings, the Englishman fills the interstices with patent wire-net work, and the very roofs are frequently divided by means, of similar contrivances. Vainly will cats, slaves of the tender passion, make prodigious efforts to squeeze themselves through those cruel, cruel walls, and vainly do they, in accents touching, but not harmonious, pour their grief into the silent ear of night. Vainly, I say, for an Englishman has little sympathy with love in a garret; and as for love on the roof, he scorns it utterly. We now approach the street-door, and put the knocker in motion. Do not fancy that this is an easy process. It is by far easier to learn the language of Englishmen than to learn the language of the knocker; and many strangers protest that a knocker is the most difficult of all musical instruments. It requires a good ear and a skilful hand to make yourself understood and to escape remarks and ridicule. Every class of society announces itself at the gate of the fortress by means of the rythm of the knocker. The postman gives two loud raps in quick succession; and for the visitor a gentle but

peremptory tremolo is de rigueur. The master of the house gives a tremolo crescendo, and the servant who announces his master, turns the knocker into a battering-ram, and plies it with such goodwill that the house shakes to its foundations. Tradesmen, on the other hand, butchers, milkmen, bakers, and green-grocers, are not allowed to touch the knocker—they ring a bell which communicates with the kitchen. All this is very easy in theory but very difficult in practice. Bold, and otherwise inexperienced, strangers believe that they assert their dignity, if they move the knocker with conscious energy. Vain delusion! They are mistaken for footmen. Modest people, on the contrary, are treated as mendicants. The middle course, in this, as in other respects, is most difficult. Two different motives are assigned for this custom. Those who dislike England on principle, and according to whom the very fogs are an aristocratic abuse, assert that the various ways of plying the knocker are most intimately connected with the prejudices of caste. Others again say, that the arrangement is conducive to comfort, since the inmates of the house know at once what sort of a visitor is desiring admittance. As for me, I believe that a great deal may be said on either side; and I acknowledge the existence of the two motives. But I ought to add, that in new and elegant mansions the medieval knocker yields its place to the modern bell. The same fate is perhaps reserved for the whole of the remainder of English old-fogyism. There are spots of decay in these much vaunted islands; and now and then you hear the worm plainly as it gnaws its way. I wish you the best of appetites, honest weevil! We cross the threshold of the house. Sacred silence surrounds us—the silence of peace, of domestic comfort, doubly agreeable after a few hours walk with the giddy turmoil of street life. And with peace there is cleanliness, that passive virtue, the first the stranger learns to love in the English people, because it is the first which strikes h

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