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CHAPTER XXV.

STOCKWELL AND KENNINGTON.

Kennington Common—Execution of the Scottish Rebels—"Jemmy" Dawson—Meeting of the Chartists in 1848—Large Multitudes addressed by Whitefield—The Common converted into a Park—St. Mark's Church—"The Horns" Tavern—

Kennington Park, which stretches for some distance along the Kennington Road, and lies to the east of the Oval, was known as Kennington Common till only a few years ago, when it was a dreary piece of waste land, covered partly with short grass, and frequented only by boys flying their kites or playing at marbles. It was encircled with some tumble-down wooden rails, which were not sufficient to keep donkeys from straying there. Field preachers also made it one of the chief scenes of oratorical display. It consisted of about twenty acres. It was suddenly seized with a fit of respectability, and clothed itself around with elegant iron railings, its area being, at the same time, cut up by gravel walks, and flower-beds, and shrubberies. It also engaged a beadle to look after it. And so it became a park, and—it must be owned—an ornament to the neighbourhood.

The Common is described in the "Tour round London," in 1774, as "a small spot of ground on the road to Camberwell, and about a mile and a half from London. Upon this spot is erected the gallows for the county of Surrey; but few have suffered here of late years. Such of the (Scottish) rebels as were tried by the Special Commission, in 1746, and ordered for execution, suffered at this place; amongst whom were those who commanded the regiment raised at Manchester for the use (service) of the Pretender." In fact, very many of those who had "been out" in the Scottish rising of the previous year here suffered the last penalty of the law. Among them were Sir John Wedderburn, John Hamilton, Andrew Wood, and Alexander Leith, and also two English gentlemen of good family, named Towneley and Fletcher, who had joined the standard of "Bonny Prince Charlie" at Manchester. (fn. 5) Wood, it is said, bravely drank a glass to the "Pretender's" health on the scaffold. Others engaged in the same cause also suffered here; among them Captain James (or, as he is still called, "Jemmy") Dawson, over whose body, as soon as the headsman's axe had done its terrible work, a young lady, who was attached to him tenderly, threw herself in a swoon, and died literally of a broken heart. The event forms the subject of one of Shenstone's ballads:—

"Young Dawson was a gallant boy,  
A brighter never trod the plain;  
And well he loved one charming maid,  
And dearly was he loved again. . . .

"The dismal scene was o'er and past,  
The lover's mournful hearse retired;  
The maid drew back her languid head,  
And, sighing forth his name, expired."

Dawson and eight others were dragged on hurdles from the new gaol in Southwark to Kennington Common, and there hanged. After being suspended for three minutes from the gallows, their bodies were stripped naked and cut down, in order to undergo the operation of beheading and embowelling. Colonel Towneley was the first that was laid upon the block, but the executioner observing the body to retain some signs of life, he struck it violently on the breast, for the humane purpose of rendering it

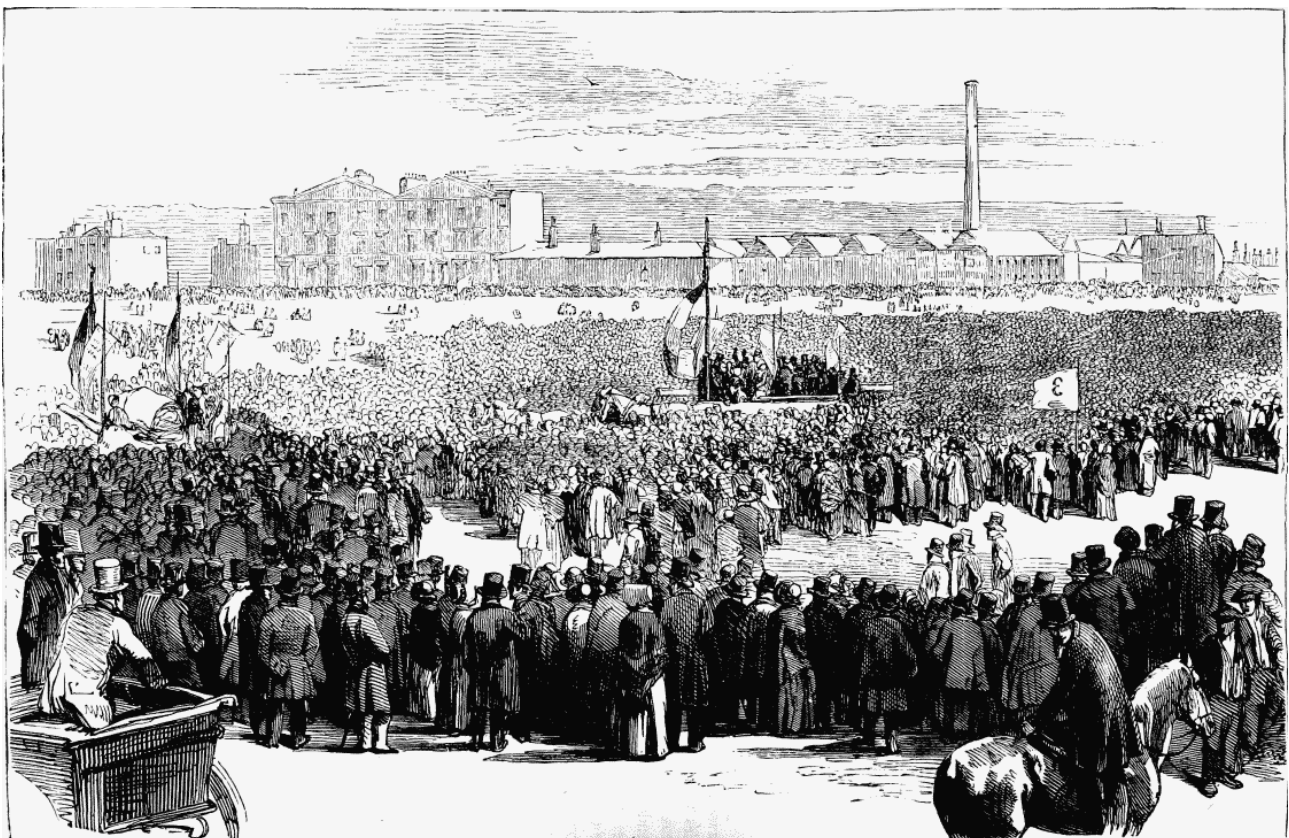
quite insensible for the remaining portion of the punishment. This not having the desired effect, he cut the unfortunate gentleman's throat. The shocking ceremony of taking out the heart and throwing the bowels into the fire was then gone through, after which the head was separated from the body with a cleaver, and both were put into a coffin. The rest of the bodies were thus treated in succession; and on throwing the last heart into the fire, which was that of young Dawson, the executioner cried, "God save King George!" and the spectators responded with a shout. Although the rabble had hooted the unhappy gentlemen on the passage to and from their trials, it was remarked that at the execution their fate excited considerable pity, mingled with admiration of their courage. Two circumstances contributed to increase the public sympathy on this occasion, and caused it to be more generally expressed. The first was, the appearance at the place of execution of a youthful brother of one of the culprits, of the name of Deacon, himself a culprit, and under sentence of death for the same crime, but who had been permitted to attend the last scene of his brother's life in a coach along with a guard. The other was the fact of a young and beautiful woman, to whom Dawson had been betrothed, actually attending to witness his execution, as stated above.

Most of the rebel lords, and of the others who had borne a share in the Scottish rising of 1745, and who were found guilty of treason, were executed on Tower Hill, as already stated. (fn. 6) Their heads, as well as the heads of those executed here, were afterwards set up on poles on the top of Temple Bar, (fn. 7) where we have already seen them bleaching in the sun and rain. Here also was hung the notorious highwayman, "Jerry Abershaw;" his body being afterwards hung in chains on a gibbet on Wimbledon Common.

In the spring of 1848, just after the Revolution which drove Louis Philippe from Paris, Kennington Common obtained a temporary celebrity as the intended rallying-point of the Chartists of London, who, it was said, were half a million in number; but of this number only about 15,000 actually assembled; had the half a million met, it would have required nearly ten times the space of Kennington Common! On the 10th of April the great meeting came off; they were to march thence in procession to Westminster, in order to present a monster petition in favour of the six points of the charter, signed by six millions. But measures were prudently taken by the Government; the Bank and other public buildings were strictly guarded; the military were called out, and posted in concealed positions near the bridges; and 170,000 special constables were enrolled, among whom was Louis Napoleon, the future Emperor of France. On the eventful day the working men who answered to the call of their leaders—Feargus O'Connor and Ernest Jones—were found to be scarcely 50,000, and these gentlemen shrank from a contest with the soldiery. So the crowd broke up, and the petition was presented peaceably.

"Modern times," writes Mr. W. Johnston, in his "England as it is," "have afforded no such important illustration of the prevailing tone and temper of the British nation, in regard to public affairs, as was presented to the world by the circumstances of the metropolis during the eventful 10th of April, 1848. That day was, in the British Island, the culminating point of the revolutionary progress which, within a period of little more than two months, had shaken almost every throne of Continental Europe. In England nothing was shaken but the hopes of the disaffected. From one end of Europe to the other, the 10th of April was looked forward to by the partisans of revolution as the day which was to add London to the list of capitals submitting to the dictation of the mob. The spirit of revolt had run like wildfire from kingdom to kingdom, and capital to capital. Paris, Vienna, Naples, Berlin, Dresden, Milan, Venice, Palermo, Frankfort, and Carlsruhe, had all experienced the revolutionary shock, and none had been able completely to withstand it. Now came the turn of London, the greatest capital of all—the greatest prize that the world could afford to revolutionary adventure—the most magnificent prey to the bands of the plunderers who moved about from one point of Europe to another, committing robberies under the name of revolution. London withstood the shock, and escaped without the slightest injury. Even the wild spirit of revolt, made drunk by the extraordinary success it had achieved throughout Continental Europe, was frozen into fear by the calm, complete, and stern preparation which was made to encounter and to crush it. The spirit of Wellington was equal to the occasion, and seemed to pervade the might and the energy of the vast metropolis of England while that veteran was at the head of the

resisting power. . . . The 10th of April seemed, as if by mutual consent, to be the day of trial between the rival forces of revolution and of authority, and it then plainly appeared, without any actual collision, that the revolutionists had no chance. All their points of attack had been anticipated. Everywhere there was preparation to receive them, and yet nothing was so openly done as to produce a sense of public alarm. London was armed to the teeth: and yet, in outward appearance, it was not changed. The force that had been prepared lay hushed in grim repose, and was kept out of sight. The revolutionary leaders were, however, made aware of the consequences that would ensue if they went one step beyond that which the authorities deemed to be consistent with the public safety. Foolish and frantic though they were in their political talk, they were not so mad as to rush upon certain destruction. They gave up the conflict; and from that day the spirit of revolution in England drooped and died away. The political conspirators against existing authority failed utterly, not because they were destitute of the enthusiasm meet for such an occasion, or that there were no real grievances in the condition of the people which called for redress, but because the nation had common sense enough to perceive that the ascendancy of such desperate adventurers would make matters worse than better. It was not that the Londoners had no taste for political improvement, but it was that they had a very decided distaste for being robbed. Not only was all the intelligence, the organisation, and the resource of the country arrayed in opposition to the mode of political action which the revolutionists of Europe had adopted, but the familiar instincts of the hundreds of thousands who had property to guard and hearths to preserve inviolate arrayed them in determined resistance to mob violence, whatever might be the avowed object to which that violence should be directed." Thus, in the words of the Times, "The great demonstration was brought to a ridiculous issue by the unity and resolution of the metropolis, backed by the judicious measures of the Government, and the masterly military precautions of the Duke of Wellington, though no military display was anywhere to be seen."



THE CHARTIST MEETING ON KENNINGTON COMMON, 1848. (*From a Contemporary Print.*)

During the holiday season, Kennington Common in the last century was an epitome of "Bartlemy Fair," with booths, tents, caravans, and scaffolds, surmounted by flags. It also had one peculiarity, for, as we learn from "Merrie England in the Olden Time," it was a favourite spot for merryandrews, and other

buffooneries in open rivalry, and competition with field-preachers and ranters. It was here that Mr. Maw-worm encountered the brickbats of his congregation, and had his "pious tail" illuminated with the squibs and crackers of the unregenerate.

During the year 1739, when the south of London was a pleasant country suburb, George Whitefield preached frequently on this common, his audience being generally reckoned by tens of thousands. In his "Journal," under date May 6th in that year, he thus remarks: "Preached this morning in Moorfields to about 20,000 people, who were very quiet and attentive, and much affected. Went to public worship morning and evening, and at six preached at Kennington. But such a sight never were my eyes blessed with before. I believe there were no less than 50,000 people, near fourscore coaches, besides great numbers of horses; and what is most remarkable, there was such an awful silence amongst them, and the word of God came with such power, that all, I believe, were pleasingly surprised. God gave me great enlargement of heart. I continued my discourse for an hour and a half; and when I returned home, I was filled with such love, peace, and joy, that I cannot express it." On subsequent occasions Mr. Whitefield mentions having addressed audiences of 30,000, 20,000, and 10,000 on this same spot. The example thus set by Whitefield was soon afterwards followed by Charles Wesley, with an equal amount of fervour. In June, 1739, Charles Wesley being summoned before the Archbishop of Canterbury to give an account of his "irregularity," he was for a time greatly troubled; but Whitefield, whom he had consulted for advice in this emergency, told him, "Preach in the fields next Sunday; by this step you will break down the bridge, render your retreat difficult, or impossible, and be forced to fight your way forward." This counsel was followed, for in Charles Wesley's diary, June 24th, 1739, occurs this passage:—"I walked to Kennington Common, and cried to multitudes upon multitudes, 'Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.' The Lord was my strength, and my mouth, and my wisdom."

"Kennington Common," wrote Thomas Miller, in his "Picturesque Sketches in London," published in 1852, "is but a name for a small grassless square, surrounded with houses, and poisoned by the stench of vitriol works, and by black, open, sluggish ditches; what it will be when the promised alterations are completed, we have yet to see." That the place, however, has since become completely changed in appearance we need scarcely state, for it was converted into a public pleasureground, under the Act 15 and 16 Vict., in June of the above-mentioned year. It now affords a very pretty promenade. What was once but a dismal waste, some twenty acres in extent, is now laid out in grass-plats, intersected by broad and well-kept gravelled walks bordered with flower-beds. A pair of the model farm-cottages of the late Prince Consort were erected in the middle of the western side, near the entrance, about the year 1850. More recently, in addition to the improvements effected by the change of the Common to an ornamental promenade, a church, dedicated to St. Agnes, was built on the site of the vitriol works.

On the first formation of the "park," the sum of £1,800 annually was voted by the Government; but this sum was subsequently reduced, until, in the year 1877, it was only £1,370; and these reductions had been made although there had been an increase in the total sum devoted to public parks.

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On the southern portion of the Common, on the upper part of a small triangular plot of ground, separated from the larger portion of the Common by the road to Brixton and the Camberwell New Road, stands St. Mark's Church, the second of the district churches erected in this parish. What is now the site of the church was formerly the spot where the gallows were erected for the execution of criminals; and it is rendered more interesting by its being the actual spot where many of the unfortunate adherents to the expatriated family of the Stuarts fell a sacrifice to their principles, as we have stated above. In preparing the foundation of the church, the site of a gibbet was discovered; and a curious piece of iron, which it is supposed was the swivel attached to the head of a criminal, was turned up a foot or two below the surface.

St. Mark's Church, which was finished in 1824, from the designs of Mr. D. Roper, consists of two distinct

portions. The body of the edifice is a long octagon—a parallelogram, with the corners cut off. The eastern end is brought out, to form a recess for the communion-table, and to the western end is attached the tower, sided by lobbies, containing staircases to the galleries; and the whole is fronted by a portico, formed of four columns, supporting an entablature of the Greek Doric order, finished with a pediment. The tower, which is square and massive, is surmounted by a circular structure, composed of fluted Ionic columns, and finished with a plain spherical cupola, on the apex of which is a stone cross of elegant design. The main portion of the church is constructed of brick, and has stone pilasters attached to the piers between the windows, which are singularly plain and uninteresting. The interior of the church, beyond its elliptically-coved ceiling, ornamented at intervals with groups of foliage, contains nothing to call for special remark.

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Opposite the western gates of the park, and at the entrance to Kennington Road, is the "Horns Tavern." It stands at the junction of the roads leading to London and Westminster Bridges; and the assembly-rooms adjoining have for many years been a great place for public meetings. There is nothing, so far as we are aware, to connect this inn with such ceremonies as those formerly enacted at Highgate (fn. 8) and at Charlton, (fn. 9) in which, as we have shown, the "horns" played such a conspicuous part; it may have been that a former landlord was desirous of emulating the reputation enjoyed by his professional brethren at Highgate.

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Before closing this chapter, we may remark that the maypole nearest to the metropolis that stood longest within the memory of the editor of the "Beauties of England and Wales," was near Kennington Green, at the back of the houses at the south-west corner of the Workhouse Lane, leading from the Vauxhall Road to Elizabeth Place. The site was then nearly vacant, and the maypole stood in the field on the south side of the Workhouse Lane, nearly opposite to the "Black Prince" public-house. It remained there till about the year 1795, and was much frequented, particularly by the milkmaids, on May-day. The maypoles in the country were the scenes of much simplicity of rural manners and innocent mirth and enjoyment; but those set up near London, it is to be feared, were provocative of far more boisterous rudeness. In 1517 the unfortunate shaft, or maypole, gave rise to the insurrection of that turbulent body, the London apprentices, and the plundering of the foreigners in the City, whence it got the name of Evil May-day. "From that time," writes the author of "Merrie England in the Olden Time," "the offending pole was hung on a range of hooks over the doors of a long row of neighbouring houses. In the third year of Edward VI., an over-zealous fanatic, called Sir Stephen, began to preach against this maypole, which inflamed the audience so greatly that the owner of every house over which it hung sawed off as much as depended over his premises, and committed piecemeal to the flames this terrible idol!" Like the morris-dancers, and the hobby-horse, and other much-applauded merriments of Old England, the maypole in the end has become a thing of the past, for they were put down or allowed to pass into oblivion.

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#### Footnotes

1. See Vol. II., p. 436.
2. See ante, p. 225.
3. See Vol. V., p. 260.
4. See Vol. III., p. 165.
5. See ante, p. 58.
6. See Vol. II., p. 95.
7. See Vol. I., p. 28.
8. See Vol. V., p. 413.

9. See ante, p. 233.
  10. See Vol. IV., p. 77.
  11. See Vol. III., p. 188.
  12. See Vol. V., p. 531.
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