

THE COLLECTOR, IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD

(BEING NO. XVIII OF 'THE COLLECTOR' SERIES.)

THEY were in St. Paul's Churchyard, the Collector and She-who-must-be-obeyed. A fur coat was at the root of it, and the Collector, as purse-bearer and guardian angel, had been dragged from his lair in pursuit of the garment.

Regent Street and Oxford Street had displayed their wares in vain. She-who-must-be-obeyed had ideas as to quality as compared with price that had discomfited several suave gentlemen in frock coats, and astonished them with her knowledge of market values.

The lady was obviously from the country, but in her provincial seclusion it was evident she had reckoned up such matters to the very shilling.

'We will go to St. Paul's Churchyard,' she declared, and within the shadow of Wren's masterpiece they now stood. The lady was keenly alive to the shop-window display, and the Collector thoughtful and dreamy.

'How do you think that coat would do? It's a little less than what I was prepared to give; but if it doesn't look too mean and shabby, I might have it.'

'You look charming in anything,' murmured the Collector. But the mean subterfuge of saving his purse by gross flattery was ignored by his daughter.

'The best economy is certainly not always in buying low-priced goods,' was her wise remark. 'They may have something better, so we'll just step in and see,' and she promptly entered the shop, followed by the Collector.

'You know,' she added as they were greeted by an obsequious shop-walker; 'you said that little book you have in your pocket, the one you gave three shillings for at the shabby old bookstall, was worth a couple of pounds, so there's absolutely one pound seventeen shillings to the good, and that will help nicely with the coat money.'

This parting shot left the Collector more thoughtful than ever.

While the lady was attended by a noble looking damsel, whose mission in life was to glorify her employer's goods, the Collector engaged himself with the shop-walker.

'You are in a most interesting situation. I mean topographically and historically, not commercially, for I have come to the conclusion we now stand upon the site of the shop of John Clarke "at the sign of the Golden Viol." The Collector stepped backward a pace to give full emphasis to this thrilling announcement.

The Shop-walker was not paralysed by it, but politely said, 'Indeed, sir.' He added, 'The shop was Messrs. Draper & Co. before we took it five years ago. We made extensive alterations and improvements, but if Messrs. Clarke I think you said, ever had it, it was before my time.'

'Before your time, man! I should think it was. Why, John Clarke was publishing music books in the seventeenth century. His son, Jeremy Clarke, the famous musician, shot himself in the room upstairs on the 1st of December, 1707.'

'Very sad; I have not heard of the circumstance, - or of the gentleman,' remarked the Shop-walker.

'It was on account of a love affair,' said the Collector sentimentally, 'She was beautiful, and above him in station, and musicians were not thought very much of in those days. But surely you have heard of his anthems and his works in the old plays and operas?'

'No, sir; I am sorry for my ignorance.'

'He was joint-organist with William Croft at St. Paul's here, and was buried in the crypt,' continued the Collector. 'You must know his anthems,' he reiterated.

'I am afraid I don't, sir; I belong to a small religious body, and we use Moody and Sankey.' The Shop-walker, who, like the wedding guest, 'heard the loud bassoon,' was becoming uneasy. He was divided by his duty in respect to the constant 'Sign, please,' from his juniors and his politeness to a gentleman whose daughter was evidently anxious to spend any sum between twelve and twenty guineas on a fur coat.

This modern successor to the Ancient Mariner, he felt, had the power to 'hold him with his glittering eye' as effectively as the original old man of the poem; he must, therefore, perforce, listen.

'Well, young man, if you will allow an old man to so address you, I must tell you some interesting facts regarding St. Paul's Churchyard and its associations that you appear to be ignorant of.'

The Shop-walker groaned, but trained in politeness, he suffered otherwise in silence.

'You must realize,' began the Collector, 'that from the earliest period the intellectual life of London centred round St. Paul's. Not always the St. Paul's we now see out of your doorway, but the earlier building which was destroyed by the great fire of London in 1666. Even before that time music shops filled the north and west sides, and people went to hear the musical services of the church.

'As a consequence the churchyard was filled during certain times with professional musicians and amateurs or lovers of music.

'There were any number of snug little taverns, where choristers, organists, and their friends met to gossip about matters musical, over, be it remembered, sundry bottles of sack and mugs of brown ale.

'We may picture the hanging signs creaking in the wind, so thick they must have been that it became a difficult matter to pick out any particular one from the grove. You must know, my dear fellow, that signs and emblems over shops were useful; and if you sent an unlettered servant for a particular article, he need not try to read the shop-keeper's name, or trade, but the signs of a golden harp or viol or even a gilt gridiron at once directed him to shops that dealt in musical wares, or ironmongery, as the case might be.

'I wonder how many virginals, spinets, harpsichords, and music-books perished in that great fire within a few yards from where we are standing? Pepys tells us that scarcely a boatfull of rescued household goods but contained a virginal.' The Collector shook his head over the lost treasures in music-books.

'Musical works of which not a single copy now remains must have fed the flames. Some of these publications which escaped the fire are excessively scarce, merely because so many copies were destroyed in the conflagration.

'But the churchyard recovered itself, and reinstalled the music business. Those fellows of that distant time watched the clearing away of the *débris*, the pulling down of old St. Paul's, the slow erection of the new building, and must have duly noted Sir Christopher Wren on his daily visits to see how matters progressed.

'Let us recall,' went on the Collector, who were keeping music-shops in St. Paul's Churchyard - in the shadow of that most noble fane,' pointing through the doorway.

'We need not go so far back as to include John Pyper at "The Cross Keies," who issued that rare book *Parthenea Inviolata*, of which but a single copy remains, and that in America.

Nor need we mention George Latham and Matthew Lownes, both of whom, at "The Bishop's Head," published rare musical works before the fire. We may turn to later music-sellers, Richard Meares, for example, father and son of the same Christian names. They were musical-instrument makers and dealers, and came into St. Paul's Churchyard from Leaden-hall Street. Their sign was

"The Golden Viol and Hautboy," and I should imagine they took over the shop of John Hare, who I am convinced - in fact, have proof - took over John Clarke's business; consequently the particular shop we are now standing in. They merely added a hautboy to the sign already erected by Clarke, and there you are!"

The Collector was so pleased with this discovery that he paused to chuckle, and the Shop-walker, seizing the opportunity, rapidly scribbled his initials on customers' bills that his junior assistants respectfully offered him. But the Collector, having got his wind again, attacked him once more.

'In the first decade of the eighteenth century Mr. Handel was a frequent afternoon visitor to the shop of Meares, and the latter published several of Handel's early works. The musical houses of entertainment, as I have before hinted, were pretty numerous about here. The Queen Anne Tavern was one of the principal ones, and the proprietor was cunning enough to have provided a harpsichord for general use. Here Mr. Handel and others came to try over their own and other musicians' compositions.

'Printed music was to be had anywhere in the churchyard, either bought or borrowed, and was tried over on the tavern harpsichord.

'I might tell you a good deal about John and Joseph Hare, who as I suppose, held this shop after Clarke, and before Meares, but I refrain.'

The Shop-walker appeared relieved, and again signed several bills which were respectfully pressed upon his notice.

'I must tell you,' continued the Collector, 'about John Young, who had a shop at the west end of St. Paul's Churchyard, at the west corner of London House Yard. He was here in the latter years of the seventeenth century, and published many interesting books, of which few now remain. I have traced about fifteen of his publications from old advertisements, and of these I don't believe a single copy now exists.

'His sign was "The Dolphin and Crown." 'Before I go further I must tell you that from the ranks of the music-seller have come forth many clever and noteworthy musicians. Dr. Benjamin Cooke, for instance, was the son of a music-seller of the same Christian name, near Covent Garden. Jeremy Clarke, as I told you before, who shot himself upstairs, was another. Sir George Smart, of a later date, another, and I might quote a hundred more of greater or lesser merit.

'The son of John Young was Talbot Young and he was an excellent violinist, for his period. He had been a choir boy along with Maurice Greene, and these two, along with some others, held weekly musical meetings in a room over John Young's shop. These meetings became so famous that they had to remove to larger premises again and again. Commenced about 1724, they developed into a great social function, where the best talent was secured. Good for trade, my dear fellow. John Young and all the other music-sellers in St. Paul's Churchyard benefited.

'A wealthy amateur hearing a piece nicely performed, must perforce have it himself to try over.

'The concerts, commenced over the music-shop, and, continued in taverns, stayed many years.

'I suppose you know, my young friend, how popular catches and glees were in the eighteenth century. Catch-writing and composition, both of which required witty treatment, was a skilled amusement of such men as Henry Purcell, Dr. Blow, and a host of minor men. Personal allusion was frequently the theme, and too frequently, I may add *sotto voce*, a coarse wit, which would not do for present-day audiences. But many are quite delightful. Take this catch, upon the same John Young and his son Talbot. It is frequently quoted from the 1726 edition of *The Pleasant Musical Companion*, but I have it in the earlier sixth edition, published by John Young, and dated 1720.

'The music is by Dr. Caesar, a musician of whose works we know little. It runs thus:-

*You scrapers that want a good fiddle well strung,
You should go to the man that is old while he's Young,*

*But if this same fiddle you fain would play bold,
You must go to his son, who'll be Young when he's old.
There's old Young and young Young, both men of renown.
Old sells, and young plays the best fiddle in town.
Young and old live together, and may they live long.
Young to play an old fiddle, Old to sell a new song.*

I have not yet discovered when the music trade absolutely drifted away from St Paul's Churchyard. The last survivor of the music shop here was Thomas Edward Purday, who was at 50 St Paul's Churchyard in 1855, and perhaps a few years later.

'But to revert back to the eighteenth century. There was Daniel Wright, junr., who was here in and about 1740 at the "Violin and Flute," on the north side. Also a few years later than this, Robert Thompson, a musical-instrument maker and seller, who chiefly made violins, and who published several minor works. But of a later date the chief music-seller of this quarter was Peter Thompson, his sons and grandsons. Peter Thompson set up at the west side, as the sign of the "Violin, Hautboy, and German Flute," about 1750, and commenced publishing flute and violin tutors, also sets of country dances. I'll show you one which I picked up only about an hour ago.'

And the Collector, with glee, produced from his pocket an oblong leather-covered volume. 'These, my dear sir, are getting very rare. Look at the delightful frontispiece of eighteenth-century couples dancing. This, as you see, was published by Peter Thompson at the address I mentioned. Peter was succeeded by his two sons, Charles and Samuel, and they carried the business much further, and published many important works, including a number of old English operas. Charles died, and his widow took his place, so the firm now stood, from about 1780 to 1794, as Samuel, Ann, and Peter Thompson, the Peter being a grandson of the original Peter. Then Henry Thompson got the business, and finally, about 1806, it was taken over by Purday & Button, and finally Button & Whitaker, who were great publishers. The Whitaker was John the composer, who died in 1847.

'But,' as the Collector saw a look of weariness steal over the much-injured Shop-walker's face. 'I am afraid I weary you.'

'Not at all,' said the Shop-walker, bravely. He was, however, relieved by the coming forward of the lady upon whom was a fur coat of dazzling beauty.

'How do you like this, father? It's fifteen guineas. I suppose you won't mind; I like it better than the twelve-guinea one.'

Of course, the Collector did not mind. As he told his daughter, it would not matter if he did. 'Don't be silly,' said that lady, turning away to confer regarding details of delivery with the lady assistant.

The Collector was busy counting one-pound treasury notes.

'And now let's find some nice place for lunch,' was the lady's remark.

FRANK KIDSON.