

THE STREETS OF BROOKLYN.

Their Peculiarities and Populations.

MAIN STREET.

It is a peculiarity of Main street wherever you find a Main street, that it never is the main street. Doubtless it once *was* the main street, but cities grow, and men may come and men may go, while Main street sinks into the general rut of bye streets, and its place is usurped by upstart thoroughfares with no distinguishing name. So of Main street, Brooklyn. Time was when it occupied the place Fulton street holds now, and it is not impossible that the march of local improvement may again invest it with a factitious importance (as leading from somewhere to somewhere else). But at present there is not a street in this broad city of so little commercial or social importance as Main street.

To speak truth, it is an unsavory thoroughfare. Cologne itself, the city of seven distinct smells, can produce a thoroughfare to vie with Main street in all that is evil smelling and febrifacient—but Brooklyn can with difficulty do so. By day the garbage of a thousand tenement houses is thrown in the street; that is a physical disease. By night its corners are infested by loafers and its sidewalks peopled by ward politicians; that is a social disease. Altogether, as you might infer, Main street is in a bad way. And yet there are many good people who live in Main street, and many better people (in a social sense) who have lived in Main street, and can look back upon their tenement house experiences from the bow windows of their brownstone fronts. I was about to say that there are these of Main street who example all the Christian virtues, but I bethink me that most of its residents are Jews.

You shall walk up Main street, from Catherine Ferry, on the left hand side, and see more dusky loveliness than can be exhibited on any other thoroughfare in Old Isaac of York, who submitted to have his teeth pulled out one by one by infuriated horses, rather than give up a molly of his immense wealth to the rapacious King John, reminds me of a domestic comedy which erst happened in Main street. Situate in that dusky thoroughfare is the store—a clothing store, of course—of an elderly Hebrew, whom we will call Rabbi Ben Smith. Rabbi Ben Smith is a perfect type of his people; he has a hooked nose, a long beard, a keen, glittering, black eye, a bent form and bald head. Further, Rabbi Ben Smith is a penurious, old man, and has a lovely daughter. And while the old man is higgling for his price for some wretched castoff garment, the lovely daughter sits in the dim store languishingly fanning herself, watched over with jealous eyes by an ancient dame as yellow as the gold rings in her ears, or as the bandanna around her head.

Some little time ago, Rabbi Ben Smith got into trouble. He owed a heavy bill, and his hard hearted Christian creditors were clamorous for their money. Now, the Rabbi was known to be rich; to have many shekels "salted down" against a rainy day; but nevertheless he protested that he was unable to pay. S'help his God of Abraham, he said, he had not the money. The consequence was an execution. The Christians, this time, wanted their pound of flesh. But what was the astonishment of the Deputy Sheriff upon appearing with the warrant of execution, to find the store of Rabbi Ben Smith utterly denuded of its stock, and the lovely daughter wringing her hands with grief,

"What's all this, Benjamin?" said the officer. "Where are your goods? No trifling with the laws of the land, you know! Here is the warrant."

The old Jew moaned piteously. (The villain had had notice of the execution, and had moved all his goods to a neighbor's house by night.)

"Oh, s'help me, Mr. Williams," says he to the Sheriff. "I am too poor. I haf no goods. I haf been sick. And we had only one herring for breakfast—didn't we Rebecca?"

The lovely daughter sobbed an affirmative, and went on wringing her hands.

"Oh come," replied Williams, looking around him, "that's too thin. Fetch out your things, Rabbi; they must be somewhere around."

But with many pious asseverations the Jew solars his inability to pay or produce his goods.

"Very well, then," responded the officer, "I sha have to take an inventory of what you have left," and he looked around on the vacant benches and tables.

The Rabbi hastened to assist him, overboiling with nervous excitement, while the lovely daughter brightened up a little.

"Lend me your pencil, Rabbi," said William, bustling about, and pulling out his notebook.

Rabbi Ben Smith pulled out his pencil with trembling hands, believing his deliverance at hand. The officer took it and coolly put it in his pocket.

"That will do, Rabbi," he said, with a laugh. "That pencil will pay all you owe."

The Jew saw his mistake when it was too late. With the fondness of his tribe for display he had had inserted in the head of the gold pencil case a magnificent diamond, worth three times the amount of his debt.

"Oh, Mr. Williams, Mr. Williams," he cried, "give me my pencil. I will pay your ten hundred dollars, and get out of mine store."

And that night the store was stocked again, as usual, and the lovely daughter sat demure as ever, in the background, her eyes languishingly closed, and her little slippered foot peeping from under her silk dress.

Did it ever occur to you that every shelf of every second hand clothing store in Main street is replete with history? What has become, think you, of the gay dog who wore that uniform rusting on the top pale and anxious, but always proud and fond of his scapegrace husband—and died like a dog in the street. And where is the former owner of that lovely white satin dress, that would stand alone? That was a wedding dress, sure. And how about the navy uniform yonder, and the black dress suits and brocaded silks? Can you fancy the owners of all these fine things sinking into the second hand store and disposing of them for a mere song? But *Ca va la vie*, and your own wedding coat may be there, for aught I know.

And what of it? A gentleman well known in the theatrical world found himself once upon a time very short of money. (He has a house on the avenues now, and drives his team, the rogue.) So he took his watch to a pawnbroker's very stealthily, watching this way and that, lest he should be seen. And when he got there, lo! out came Joe Jefferson, folding up the little yellow ticket for his watch in broad daylight, and counting the money he had borrowed on it, coolly enough.

"Hilloa!" says Jefferson. "You here, C—?"

"Yes," replied the other, hesitatingly. "But for Heaven's sake don't call my name out so loud. I don't want any body to—"

"Oh, boah!" replied the comedian. (He was not the great Jefferson then, but a stock actor, and not infrequently short of ready money.) "What's the odds? It's perfectly fair and business like, isn't it? I have the watch—he has the money; he gets the watch, I get the money; I get the watch back again, and—"

"Not always, Joe," said our friend with a sigh. And passed up the Mont d'Piets.

There are no pawnshops in Main street, but their place is supplied for all practical purposes by the second hand clothing stores, of which there are certainly enough and to spare. The other industries represented in the street are those of the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker, with a slight tinge of the legitimate rum dealer and the illicit whisky distiller. But these are nothing of themselves. The life of Main street is the Catherine Ferry, and while that remains Main street will hold its own as a peculiar and distinctive thoroughfare.

FLANBUB.