There have been mighty changes since Pepys went to Sir William Rider's gardens at Bethnal Green and found there "the largest quantity of strawberries I ever saw, and very good." Strawberries may still be found there in the cheap season, but not in the gardens. But though vanished has the rural aspect of the district familiar as the home of "The Blind Beggar," of the famous ballad,

"My father," she said, "is soone to be seene,
The seely blind beggar of Bednall Greene
That daylye sits begging for charitee;
He is the good father of pretty Bessee,"

and the area is now one of the closely-packed poverty spots of the metropolis, you will find more birds than in many a country lane. For here is Bird Fair, and here are the animals of the forest and the jungle - the lion, the leopard, and the tiger - and here on any Sunday of the year you may be invited to "step inside" and suit yourself with anything in the menagerie line that you may fancy - from a humming-bird to an elephant.

It was on a bright Sunday morning that my confrère and I passed the Standard Theatre, and, turning into the Bethnal Green Road, proceeded to edge our way through the most wonderful open-air market in the world. At eleven o'clock in the morning you get only a hint of what to expect at noon. From 12 to 1.30 the market is at its height. But it is well to start your tour of exploration much earlier if you wish to study the strange and varied scenes with the attention they deserve. At the top of the street by 11 o'clock there is already a religious service commencing. A man in a light suit is playing a cornet vigorously, and a little crowd gathers to listen to the performance. When the strains of the cornet cease, a quiet-looking gentleman in sombre raiment opens a black bag and takes out a hymn-book. This is the first hint you get that the cornet performance is not part of a secular entertainment.
A few paces away and the street begins to be closely lined with barrows and stalls, the stands of Cheap Jacks, the fancy carts of bird-sellers, refreshment stalls for the sale of eel jelly, apple fritters cooked while you wait, sweets, ices, and the favourite delicacies of the poor. The talking machine is in evidence on stand after stand, and the voices of the popular favourites, serious and comic, mingle with the trills of a myriad canaries. Coming along you will note that there are several vacant spaces between the barrows in the thoroughfare that leads direct to the great market. But each vacant space is reserved by a long strip of wood laid on the ground.

Here the enterprise of the alien immigrant leaps to the eyes. These spaces have, many of them, been reserved as early as 4 am by poor Jews newly arrived from the Pale of Settlement, driven by persecution or the calling out of the reserves from the land of the Czar. These men will stand patiently guarding the spot which is theirs by right of "the first comer." They have nothing as yet to sell themselves, so they sell the space. It is an object-lesson in liberty and equality under the Union Jack. An alien immigrant, within a few weeks of his arrival may be found selling the right to a strip of British territory to a native. An alien immigrant, who a month or two previously was being harassed by all the disabilities imposed by Holy Russia on those of his faith, may be seen in the Bethnal Green Road early on Sunday morning selling to an English hawker who has lived all his life in the "Green" the right to a "pitch" by the kerbstone. But the alien has worked and watched since dawn, and the native has slept till the sun was high.

There is this excuse for the native, that he would not have been able to do much business had he arrived before eleven, and an extra "lie in bed" on Sunday morning is such a regular habit with the true Briton that even in the common lodging-houses the inmates, are allowed greater latitude in the matter of quitting their bunks and cubicles. In Bethnal Green and Spitalfields, its elbow-jostling neighbour, I have often gone over the common lodging-houses after twelve o'clock on Sunday morning, and found many of the lodgers still dreaming peacefully between the sheets - perchance of happier days.

Along this portion of the Bethnal Green Road, until you get to Sclater Street, the trade is of the variety, not to say "fair" order. A negro is selling a marvellous tooth-paste. He brushes the teeth of little boys and girls, who submit gaily to the operation. That he uses the same brush for all in no way detracts from the children's evident enjoyment of assisting in the demonstration.

A magnificent and highly-decorated sarsaparilla cart stands in the middle of the roadway at the end of the thoroughfare, and is neighboured by several attractive "stands," at which gentlemen in their shirt-sleeves are holding forth on the merits of their wares. And now we plunge into Sclater Street and wonder why the Birdcage Walk of the west, where never a bird-cage is visible, has not long ago surrendered its title to the Birdcage Walk of the east, where on Sunday nothing but bird-cages are to be seen from roofs to pavement in almost every house. At first you see nothing but the avenue of bird-cages. The crowd in the narrow street is so dense that you can gather no idea of what is in the shop-windows or what the mob of men crowding together in black patches of humanity are dealing in.
You press your way in and find that the shops are mostly packed with linnets, canaries, love-birds, Japanese nightingales, parrots, bird-cages and fittings, and all the necessaries and luxuries of pet-land. There are shops of all descriptions, but the bird industry predominates. Here along the kerb are hawkers, too. A man with a "spiteful sister" pantomime wig on is doing a roaring trade in fancy articles; a man dressed as a jockey is selling tips for the races. He presumes so far on the gullibility of his hearers as to assure them that he has left a racing stable by an early train and is to ride in the big event for which he is selling the stable secret. Here are barrows with limed twigs, with clods of turf for skylarks, and all kinds of bird-seeds set out for the fancy.

But it is in the roadway, in the densest part of the crowd, that you find the dominant note of the day's dealings. There you see everywhere little groups of men, each with a bird in a small cage, tied up in a blue bird's-eye pocket-handkerchief. The tying is all to one pattern. One side of the cage is open to the light, and the bird within is being eagerly examined by quiet connoisseurs. The fanciers, who bring their own birds to the fair and compare notes with acquaintances, do not say very much and are not very demonstrative. There is a reserved, almost melancholy, look on their faces. They suggest the patient listeners rather than the eager talkers. Most of them spend their leisure listening to their own birds or other people's.

Here is a typical unemployed. The poor fellow stands, the picture of hopelessness, offering his empty bird-cage for a few pence. There is a suggestion of Dickensian pathos about the shabby, gaunt-looking, but clean-faced man trying to sell the cage of the pet poverty compelled him to part with. Here are men with pigeons, and canary-sellers innumerable. When you buy a canary off the road hawker, he puts it in a little paper bag for you, and you carry it away as if it were a penny bun.

The main street of Bird Fair is narrow, and flanked with dingy but picturesque-looking houses of a bygone age.

Opposite one quaint, ramshackle house, that is hung to its roof with bird-cages and is entered through a grimy green door leading to a narrow, dark, mysterious-looking staircase, we may pause for a moment and gaze with interest. It was in this house that the men concerned in the great forged bank-note case used to meet and arrange the distribution of the "parcels of paper." One of the principal culprits, immediately after being sentenced, shot himself in his cell at the Old Bailey. It was in this house that the beefsteak-pie was prepared in which a loaded revolver, carefully secured from damage, was concealed. The pie was taken to the prisoner, who, as usual, was allowed until conviction to have his food sent in. He managed to extract the revolver and shoot himself with it. One looks at the dingy little house, and listens to the gay songs of the birds hanging outside it in every available foot of space, and the contrast between the sordid tragedy of one of its former tenants and the glad singing of the imprisoned birds suggests itself at once.

Close by is a famous bird shop, the proprietor of which has also, though not on view, a wonderful assortment of wild beasts always "on sale." On the little desk in his back room are invoices of lions coming from Africa, and elephants on the way from India, a telegram announcing the arrival at Liverpool of a consignment of apes, and letters from clients inquiring the lowest price of various Noah's Ark specialities, from a boa-constrictor to a giraffe, from a zebra to a polar bear. It is Sunday, and the proprietor is in the thick of the bird trade, and busy, but we shall come again another day and
wander about the yard and the stables at the back of the premises, and see a small zoo in the heart of Bethnal Green.

Turning out of Sclater Street into Cygnet Street, we are at once in the midst of a crowd which is gazing with open-mouthed interest at the champion lady fowl-seller of the world. Perched on the top of a cart, the lady, who is buxom and comely and seemingly of the Chosen People, is taking live fowl after live fowl from the crates and baskets which are piled around her and disposing of them rapidly. The way in which the lady handles her birds has been shown in my confrère's sketch. But I cannot do justice to the eloquence of her patter, or the daring originality with which she denounces the lack of pluck of the bystanders, when bids are not forthcoming as readily as she could wish. This lady claims to sell more fowls in this market and at the Caledonian Market than any other street dealer in England. If her success is in proportion to her eloquence I can quite believe it.

Imagine a good-looking Jewess, plump and smiling, with dark glossy hair, a man's cap on her head, a big kiss curl on her forehead, her arms bare to the elbows, dangling her fowls aloft, patting them, kissing them, describing them, shouting at them, shouting at the crowd, and selling her birds with marvellous rapidity, and you have the regular Sunday morning scene at the corner of Cygnet Street. In the crowd are one or two poorer Jewesses, apparently waiting for a slack moment to bid. The Jewesses buy their fowls alive and take them to a Kosher slaughter-house near at hand to be killed. In two of the neighbouring streets there is a live fowl market which lasts from early morning till late on Sunday afternoon.

Through a street where everybody seems to be selling scrap-iron, old door-knockers, keys, bolts, brass plates, and goods of general rustiness, past another street where there is a busy trade in goats and goat-chaises, and where cats are also on sale, and we come to the great Sunday morning bicycle market. The stranger coming suddenly upon the scene would imagine that members of a big bicycle club out for a club run had suddenly stopped and dismounted. All along the kerb and down the centre of the road are lines upon lines of bicycles, and by each bicycle, supporting it, stands the owner.

As a matter of fact, the bicycles have all been ridden here for the purposes of sale. There are hundreds of young fellows of limited means in search of a bicycle who flock to this market on Sunday morning in the hope of picking up a bargain. Close to the bicycle market is the dog market. Against the closed shops and the houses are lines of men, each with a pet dog under his arm. The whole roadway is full of dog-dealers. On the kerb is a basket of puppies. We see mastiffs, retrievers, greyhounds, pugs, terriers of all descriptions, Dalmatians, Borzois, sheep-dogs, Blenheim, and some splendid specimens of the dog for which Bethnal Green was long famous - the toy bull-terrier.

One man one dog is the general rule, and when an omnibus comes along, and the crowd divides to let it pass, it is as though a network of dog-leashes spanned each side of the way.

At the corner of a street leading out of the dog-market a trap is drawn up, and the tail-board is packed with cages of rats. The proprietor proclaims that he has the best rats.
in London, four a shilling. He has many customers amongst the doggy men. His method of "serving" the rats is this. He takes a stout paper bag, opens it, and holds it in one hand. He thrusts the other hand into the cage, grips a rat by the tail, pulls it out swiftly, swings it round, and drops it into the bag. He swings the rat round to prevent it biting him.

The Sunday trade of the busy area is at its height at 1 o'clock. After that the crowd gradually grows less and less, and shortly after two the streets begin to assume more and more their normal aspect, though the bird-cages remain in evidence during the greater part of the day.

If we wandered round Bethnal Green on a week-day we should find it a busy working centre. Here the boot-making industry flourishes, and a portion of the furniture trade is carried on. There are many home industries here, some peculiar to the neighbourhood, and the most interesting of these is the hand-loom industry of the old Spitalfields weavers, which is still to be found in Bethnal Green. But before we visit a Spitalfields hand-loom in Bethnal Green let us pass through Sclater Street, now sleepy-looking and almost deserted, and accept the courteous invitation of the dealer in every kind of animal, "from a humming-bird to an elephant," to go over his stockyard.

We enter cautiously what is apparently an ordinary yard with sheds and stables. The reason for our caution is that a local friend who accompanies us tells us that one day he went in casually, and was alarmed to find that a small leopard had got loose and was gambolling in the sunshine. The leopard made friendly advances by putting his paws on the visitor's chest. The leopard is not loose to-day, but we find one in a cage in a stable, and close at hand a young lion fast asleep. In the same stable are a number of monkeys, and the proprietor of the wild beast depot obligingly catches one of them in a net to show us how they are "handled" when a customer comes in and wants one. These monkeys are "guaranteed" as pets for a lady, and the price is about three pounds apiece.

Sometimes there are baby monkeys here on sale, and there is a pathetic story of how a wicked tiger one day managed to secure a dear little baby monkey for its lunch. In another shed are some curious wild asses and some pretty little ponies intended for the circus market. It is not the season yet for the big beasts, who are generally timed to arrive in the summer, the English winter and spring not being favourable to four-footed alien immigrants from the tropics. But this menagerie in a back-yard in Bethnal Green is a surprise to the stranger, even as it appears in the slack season.

I have said that one of the staple industries of Bethnal Green is boot-making, and the trade is carried on in great warehouses and by small makers innumerable. But the most interesting industry of the district is the hand-weaving, which has survived from the old days of the Huguenots. As you wander about the Green you will notice in almost every street a long landscape window, which you find in no other part of London except Spitalfields. These windows are the famous "weavers' lights," and have been specially constructed that the light shall fall on the whole of the loom while the weaver is at work.
Many of these rooms are now occupied merely as living rooms, and in some the old window has been greatly altered and modernised, but we shall find weavers still at work in rooms that have remained as they were in the day when the revocation of the Edict of Nantes sent the French refugees flying to London, and they formed a little colony in Spitalfields and Bethnal Green. There are many descendants of the original Huguenots still living about here, but they are so English now that they cannot speak a word of French, or even pronounce their own names in the French fashion.

We climb up a rickety staircase in a little side-street, push up a trap-door in the floor, and we are in a weaver's room. Here we find Silas Marner at work at a loom which he tells us is one of those originally brought from France. He has his written instructions from a city firm before him, and is making a wonderful combination of orange and blue. The old weaver is garrulous and glad to give information. I look at the loom and mention that the beam is suggestive of capital punishment, and he informs me with a grim smile that on this very loom a weaver hanged himself. "It wasn't at all uncommon for a weaver to do that," he says; "I suppose it was because the beam was so handy."

Most of the few weavers who are still to be found here have come from Braintree or the neighbourhood, for the industry went there after it left Spitalfields, and has now come back to London.

In another house, where I fancy the "Spitalfields weaver" did a little dog-fancying as well, I remarked on the shape of the window. "Ah!" said the weaver, "that's why there's been nothing but weavers in a house of this sort for hundreds of years. A weaver will pay more for it than anybody else because o' the light. But you wouldn't believe it that when I first come here my landlord wanted to make me pay the light-tax because it used to be in the old agreements. But I knew that 'ad all been abolished long ago, and I told him so. I dare say there's weavers paying it still, through ignorance."

Many of the old looms have gone, though the weavers' lights still remain in the houses. The trade has become slacker and slacker, the old weaver has taken the last journey or gone to the poor-house, and the loom has frequently been broken up and used as firewood in the days of winter chill and destitution.

Leaving the old Spitalfields weaver of Bethnal Green, and passing through a street of industrial dwellings now occupied principally by Russian Jews who work at the bootmaking and furnishing trades, we enter a house in a street which has also fallen to the alien immigrants. Here again the inhabitants are Russian Jews. We enter one of the rooms and find several Jewish women at tailoring work. In one of the back rooms is a bed with the mattress pushed up against the wall and hidden by a brilliant Eastern covering that suggests the "Arabian Nights" at once. This curious arrangement gives the room the appearance of an apartment in the harem, and the bed divan might be the Sultana's lounge.

But the occupants are hard-working alien immigrants, and the women can scarcely speak a word of English. One of them tells me in German that she came from Kishineff after the massacre. I ask her if she likes London, and she tells me that all she has seen of it is the street in which she lives and the ghetto market in which she
buys her provisions. Many of these people, unless they carry work home to the manufacturers, live for years in London and never go beyond the Jewish quarter. From the alien quarter we make our way through squalid side-streets almost without a sign of life long, monotonous, alike in every detail, and dreary beyond everything - and we come out into the busy thoroughfare of the Cambridge [Heath] Road. Here at the corner stands a row of old houses rich in historic interest, the existence of which is probably unknown to the majority of Londoners.

For this quaint little row of old-world houses constituted the kennels of King Charles II. The rooms above in which his kennelmen and the huntsmen lived are as they were in the Merry Monarch's day. Thirteen years ago you could look from the street into the actual kennels in which the dogs of His Majesty lay. The kennels have been built in by a brick back, which was necessary to sustain the structure, which was becoming so dangerous that the end house had to be taken down and a modern building erected in its place. But all the others stand as they were, and it is only thirteen years ago that the kennels themselves were hidden from the public view by the brick bank. This part of the Cambridge Road was known until quite recently as Dogs' Row, and old Bethnal Greenites still sometimes call it by that name. The King's kennels were established here because of their convenient situation, Dogs' Row being on the road to Epping Forest, where the Merry Monarch used to hunt.

A few steps from the old-world houses that still stand as a record of England in the days of the Restoration and we are in the high tide of modern London's seethe and roar. The Mile End Road lies before us, running through Alien-Land to the quick-beating heart of the capital of the British Empire.