

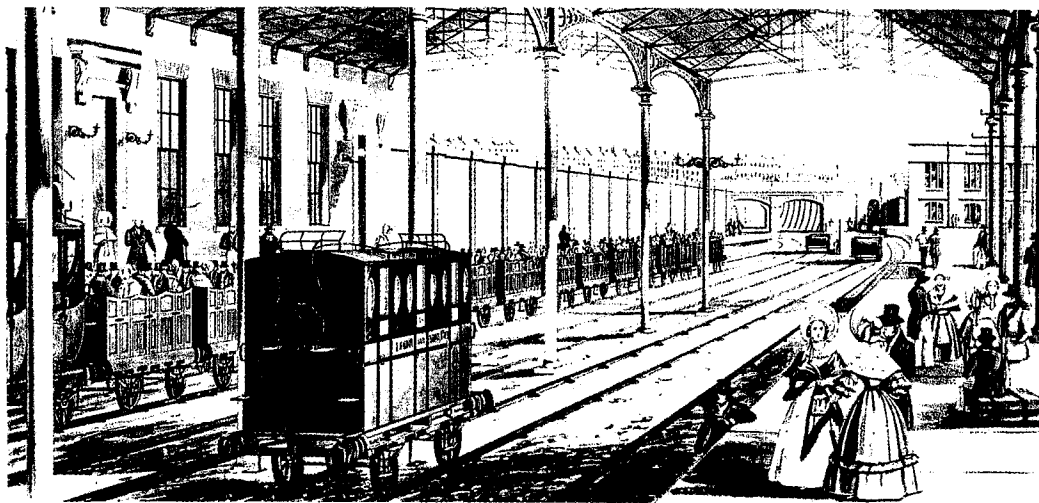
## 'Confused Treasures of Iron and Wildernesses of Bricks' 1834-1886

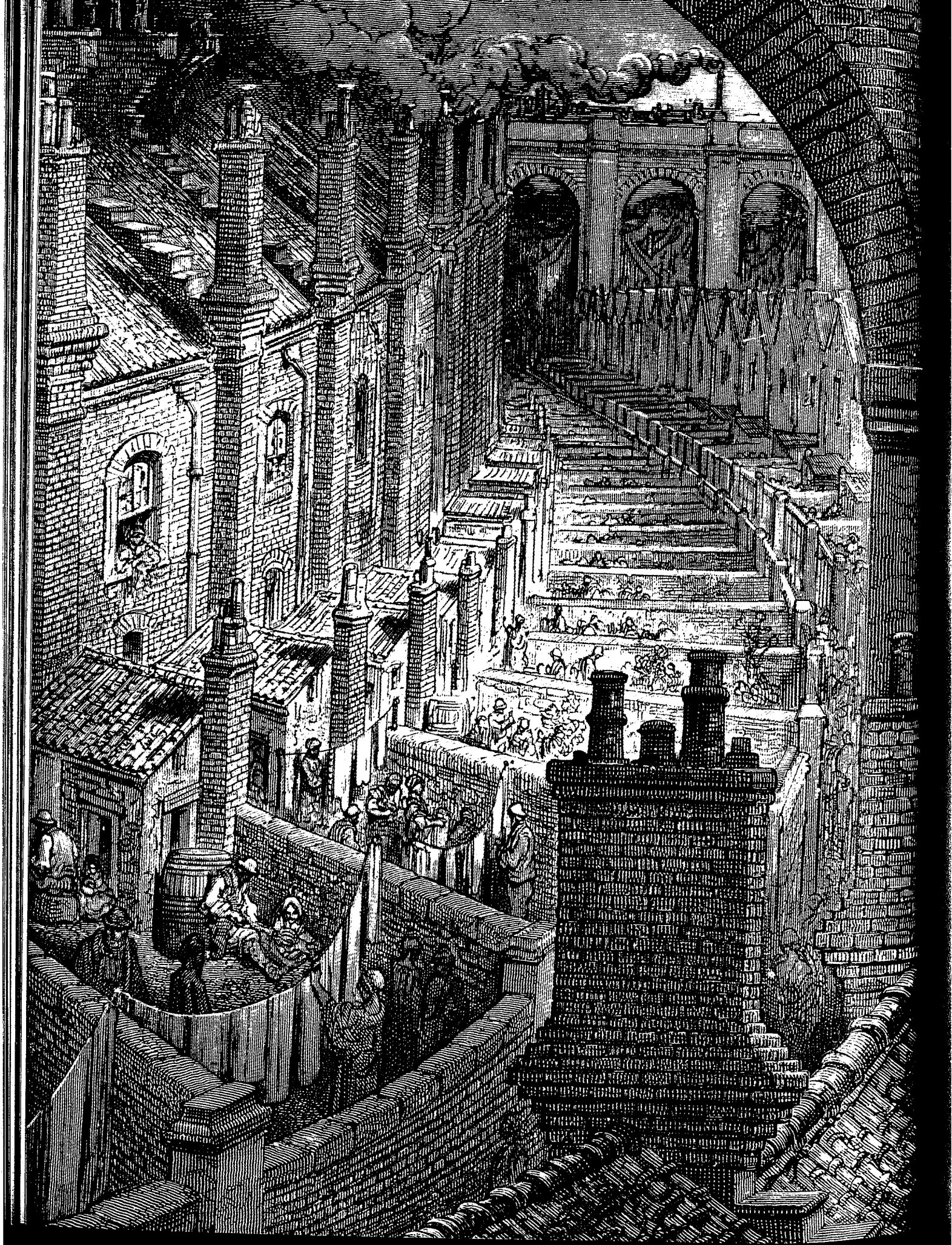
In 1834 – the year in which King William IV arbitrarily dismissed Lord Melbourne's administration and Joseph Aloysius Hansom introduced his 'Patent Safety Cab' to a curious public – work began on the London and Birmingham Railway under the direction of Robert Stephenson.

The success of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, opened four years before, had provoked that 'railway mania' which was soon to sweep across the country, inducing Parliament to sanction hundreds of thousands of miles of rail before Victoria had been three years a queen, making some men millionaires, devouring the fortunes of others, and altering the appearance and character of London for ever. 'What a gulf between now and then,' says one of Thackeray's characters. '*Then* was the old world . . . But your railroad starts a new era . . . We who lived before railways and survive out of the ancient world, are like Father Noah and his family out of the Ark.'

The London and Birmingham Railway cut through the northern suburbs, past its depot at Camden Town to its terminus in Euston Square where, as a fitting tribute to the solidity of Stephenson's enterprise, an enormous Doric arch designed by Philip Hardwick was erected at the entrance to this the first of London's main terminal stations.

Euston Station, c. 1838: a train at the departure platform, and the arrival platform.

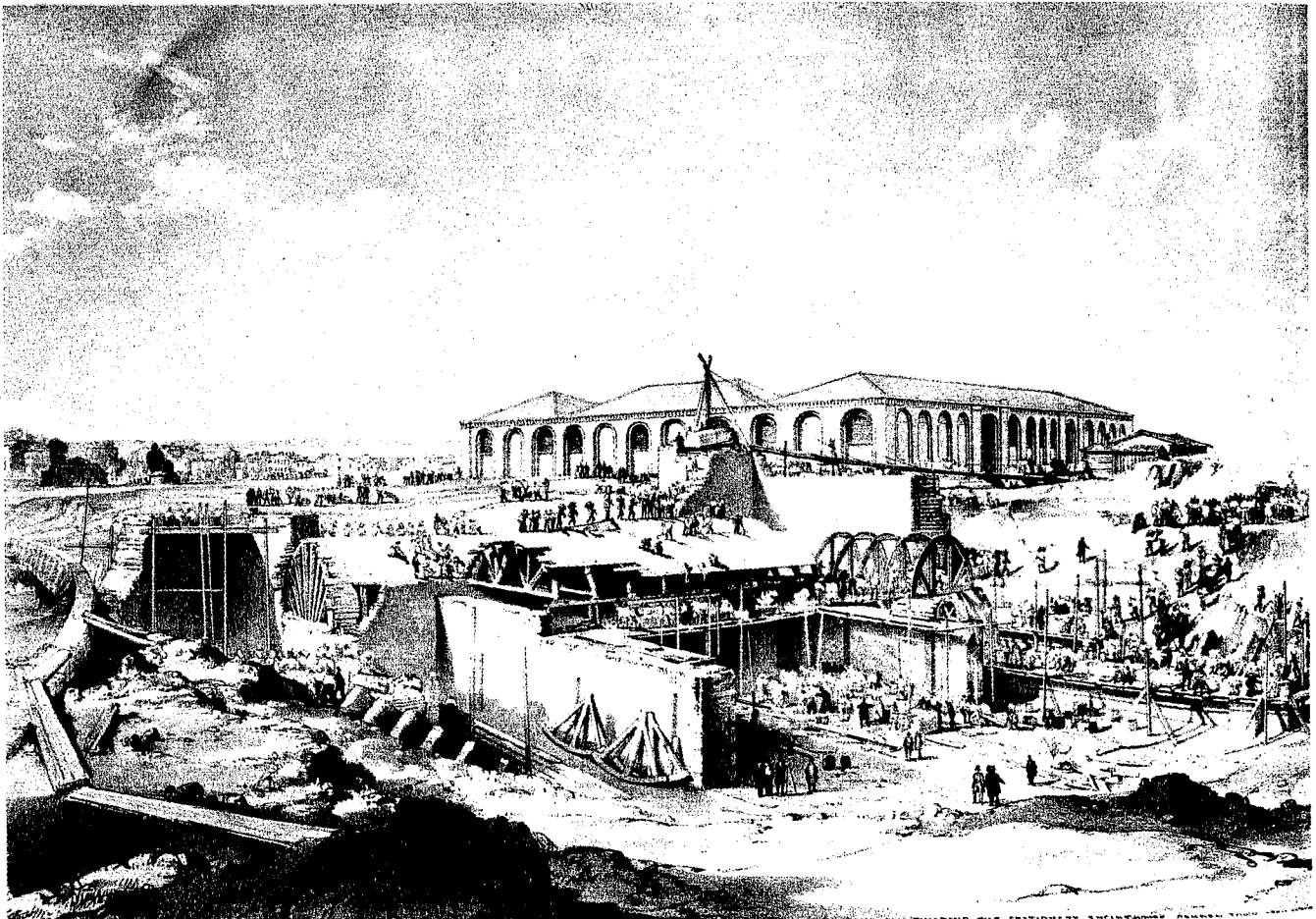




Euston was opened in 1838; but by then the London and Birmingham was not the only railway in London. A line from London to Greenwich had been in use for two years, and the London and Blackwall Railway's tracks already stretched to a terminus in Fenchurch Street. These were followed by lines to Croydon, Southampton, Hastings and Dover. Within the next few years several more terminal stations had followed Euston, most of them with large hotels adjoining.

Vast areas of London were transformed by this revolution in transportation. As early as 1844, when a London terminus for the Great Western Railway had been built in Bishop's Road, Paddington (plate 40), a foreign visitor noticed how a 'completely new and continually interesting district' had been called into life by its construction there. The same sort of development took place around the other main line stations as soon as they were constructed; and to make way for the tracks which led to them, rows of houses, streets and squares were demolished, scores of thousands of their inhabitants displaced. Twenty thousand people were obliged to abandon their homes by the building of the London and Birmingham Railway, most of them, unwilling to move far away, crowding into already overpopulated areas nearby, pouring in their hundreds into houses abandoned by the middle-classes who took advantage of the railway to move even further out from London's centre.

Excavations for the building of the *Scotsman's* engine house in Camden Town, 1839.



The railway companies had a legal responsibility towards the people whose homes they destroyed; but it was not always observed, and the new houses which were provided were frequently offered to tenants at rents they could not afford. Nine hundred houses were demolished by the North London Railway Company for the laying of two miles of track; and it was found beyond the Company's means to rehouse their occupants adequately.

In *Dombey & Son*, Dickens describes the metamorphosis of Camden Town, how houses were knocked down, streets broken through and stopped, deep trenches dug into the ground with enormous piles of soil thrown high above them, undermined buildings shored up. 'Here, a chaos of carts, overturned and jumbled together, lay topsy-turvy at the bottom of a steep, unnatural hill; there, confused treasures of iron soaked and rusted in something that had accidentally become a pond. Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere; thoroughfares that were wholly impassable; Babel towers of chimneys, wanting half their height; temporary wooden houses and ragged tenements, and fragments of unfinished walls and arches, and piles of scaffolding, and wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing.'

After Camden Town it was the turn of Barnsbury, of Praed Street and Charing Cross, of Pimlico, Southwark and the City. Acre upon acre of land was covered with iron rails, platforms, shunting yards and engine sheds, repair shops and ticket offices, refreshment rooms and coal bunkers. Curve after glass curve, the roofs of the new stations caracoled across the tracks. At Paddington, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, with help from Matthew Digby Wyatt and Owen Jones, enclosed the terminal of the Great Western with a vaulting expanse of wrought iron and glass, providing a suitably impressive adjunct for what was then the biggest and most expensive hotel in England. At King's Cross, Lewis Cubitt, younger brother of the builder, designed a complex of arcades, arched roofs, Venetian windows and a 120 ft. high clock tower to serve the patrons of the Great Northern, for whose additional convenience the adjoining hotel was opened in 1854. The Italianate structures of Blackfriars and Broad Street stations, Langley's additions to the white brick bays and pedimented front of Fenchurch Street, the quirkish buildings for the South Eastern Railway in Cannon Street, the extensive edifice put up for the London, Chatham and Dover Railway on the Grosvenor Estate beside the Grosvenor Hotel and named after the Queen, John Hawkshaw's Charing Cross Station and E. M. Barry's richly ornamented hotel in front of it, Sir George Gilbert Scott's vast hotel and station which towered in all their Gothic fancy and splendour over St Pancras, were all built between 1863 and 1886.<sup>1</sup>

The coming of the railways not only transformed the appearance of London; it altered its whole shape and character. The rich had always been

able to live outside the city centre and drive up each morning in their carriages, even though their coachmen were finding it more and more difficult to guide the horses through the congested traffic. The poor, on the other hand, had been constrained to live within walking distance of their work – walking distance being interpreted more generously than it is today: a four-mile tramp to work in the morning, and back again at night was not in the least uncommon. Horse-drawn omnibuses had made their appearance in London in 1829, but the fares demanded were far more than most clerical workers and nearly all manual ones could regularly afford. There was no such thing as a 2d fare before 1846: the cost of a ticket from the Yorkshire Stingo, near Paddington, to the Bank of England was a shilling; and from the Angel, Islington, to the Bank, sixpence.

Railway fares, on the other hand, were comparatively cheap, and trains were fast. As the suburban lines spread, so it later became possible for men to live at increasing distances from their work; and as new suburbs developed for the new railway-travelling public in such places as Norwood and Highgate, Sydenham, Walworth and Camberwell, so the decline of the City as a place of residence became almost complete.

London had already been growing fast before the railways came. In the first thirty years of the nineteenth century its population rose from 865,000 to one and a half million. 90,000 people crossed London Bridge every day in 1837. After the railways had made it possible for London to expand still further outwards, this increase in population was accelerated; almost half a million more people were to be counted living in and around the capital every ten years after 1841. Already by 1845 the congestion of traffic in the streets had become so serious that a Royal Commission was appointed to examine proposals for its relief. Central London was becoming chocked with its thousands of pedestrians, its carriages and carts, gigs, tilburies, phaetons, dogcarts, landaus and victorias, hansom cabs, broughams and growlers, its twenty thousand equestrians, the unnumbered animals bumping into each other on their way to Smithfield, the scores of horse-drawn omnibuses.

One of the most astonishing proposals for the relief of this congestion was put to the Royal Commission by Charles Pearson, the enterprising and enthusiastic Surveyor to the City of London. Pearson suggested that, since there was no longer any room for people to move about comfortably in London at street level, they should be transported beneath it. Objections to such a quixotic idea were immediate and numerous: the houses above the lines would collapse into the tunnels; digging holes in the ground for such a purpose must surely be against the laws of God; the Duke of Wellington's fear that



The first underground steam train: the inaugural trip on the first section of the Metropolitan Line from Edgware Road on 24 May 1862, before it was opened in 1863; the passengers included Gladstone and his wife.

one day a French army would arrive in London by train without anyone knowing it had landed, was widely shared. But Pearson persisted; and having persuaded several rich men in the City that the underground railway would prove immensely profitable, he had his way at last. It had been a long struggle, though, and by 1863 – when the North Metropolitan Railway Company on its opening day carried thirty thousand passengers in open trucks underground between Paddington and the City – Charles Pearson was dead.

Although thousands of poor families displaced by the building of the railways, and the simultaneous construction of new roads, were reluctant to move far from their former homes, the office worker and clerk, the skilled craftsman and Civil Servant, the schoolmaster and book-keeper joined the swelling exodus to those new housing estates which speculative builders were putting up in that haphazard and uncontrolled way that had long since determined the sprawling pattern of London's growth. Communities developed around the new outlying railway stations, at first no more than rows of villas, perhaps, but soon small towns with a life – if only a temporary life – of their own. In their outward appearances most of these new suburbs were sadly dispiriting. The houses were standardised and cheaply built, depressingly monotonous

in shape and tone, arranged in rows of terraces or cramped semi-detached pairs in neatly measured order. 'It is impossible,' said Disraeli, complaining of this dreary repetitious mediocrity, 'to conceive of anything more tame, more insipid, more uniform. Pancras is like Marylebone, Marylebone is like Paddington.' Tulse Hill he could have added was like Camberwell, Nine Elms like New Cross.

This development of Victorian suburbs did little, however, to allay the overcrowding in the slums of central London and the East End. In such districts as Shoreditch and St Giles's, Hackney and Bethnal Green, Lambeth, Bermondsey, Battersea and Whitefriars, in the rookeries of Whetstone Park and Hatton Garden where once great houses had stood, the squalor and congestion were appalling. Men and women intent upon reform worked hard to alleviate the suffering, but the numerous and unwieldy official organisations through which they had to work as often succeeded in thwarting their endeavours as in encouraging them. Outside the City, London was administered by over three hundred bodies, including seventy-eight parish vestries with indeterminate and ill-defined powers. There were Paving Boards and Sewage Commissioners, Boards of Surveyors and Committees of Health; but their individual and combined efforts were peculiarly unrewarding. St Pancras, for instance, had sixteen Paving Boards acting under twenty-nine Acts of Parliament: the bad paving in the parish was notorious. Even after central authorities like the Metropolitan Board of Works were created, the troubles experienced and obstructions encountered by such enlightened reformers as Lord Shaftesbury, Baroness Burdett-Coutts, Octavia Hill and the American merchant George Peabody, were daunting to all but the most patient and persevering spirit. Nor can it be said that the new 'model' blocks of flats and ranges of artisans' dwellings that occasionally resulted from this determined private philanthropy were much more cheerful than the slums they replaced. Usually constructed of a dark stock brick, which smoke and soot made darker still, with iron balcony railings, steep stone stairs and dismal asphalt courtyards, these Buildings seemed to some of their inhabitants more like prisons than houses. Somewhat less dreary were the model dwellings of Prince Albert's Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes whose first premises were erected at Bagnigge Wells. Yet even they were heavily pervaded with the atmosphere of the workhouse.

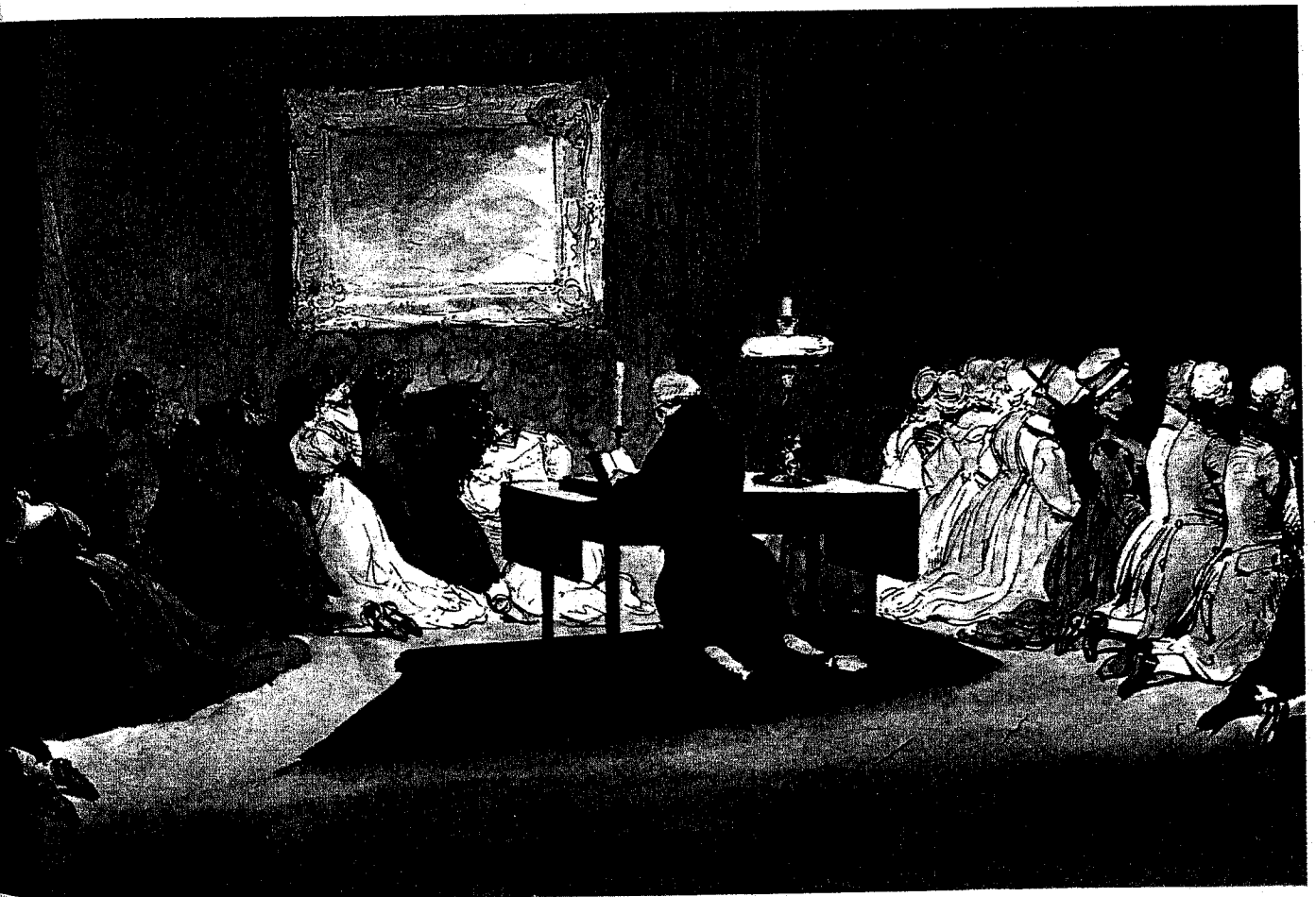
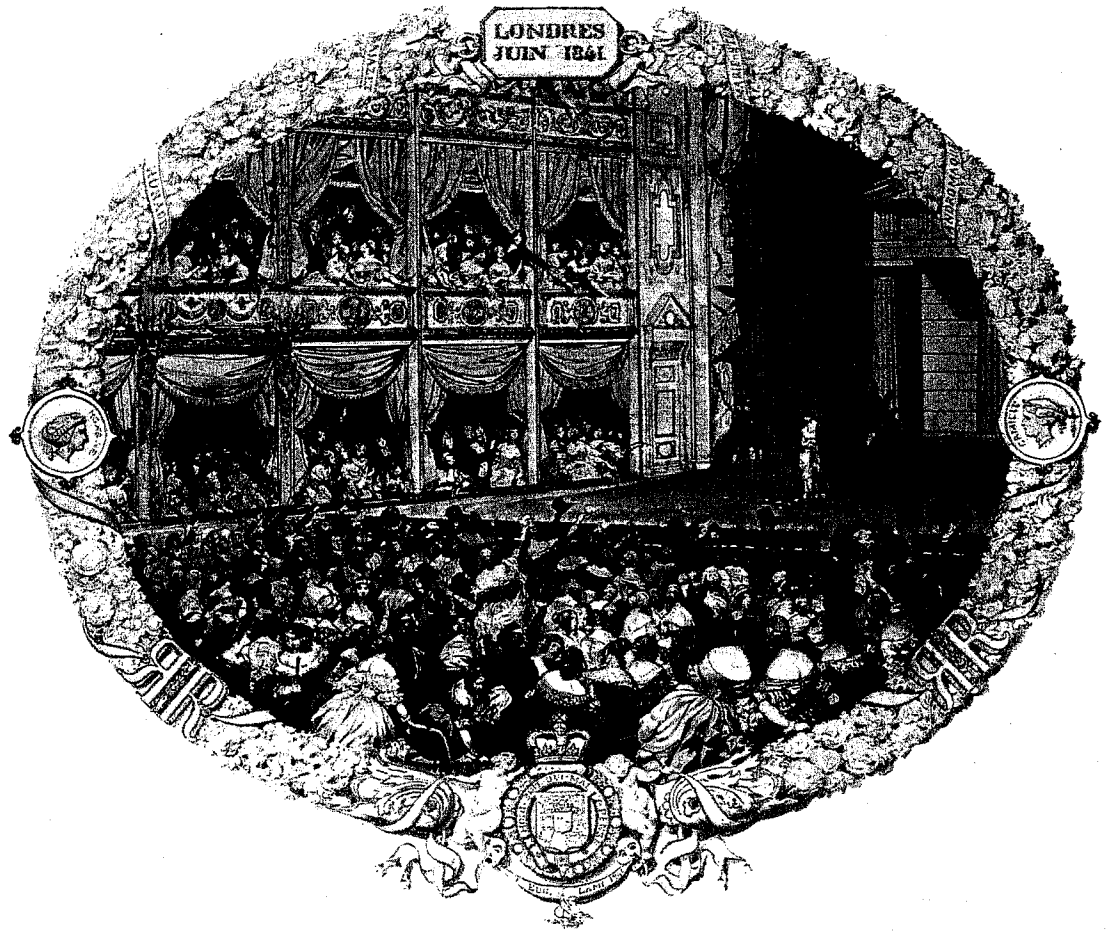
At least they had better sanitation; and that was a great deal. For London's drainage system and water supply outside the City, had become, by the middle of the nineteenth century, not merely scandalously inadequate but a constant threat to health and life. Cholera was almost as common as once the plague had been.

In the first place, the water supply was both inadequate and impure. Thousands of people collected their meagre and tainted supplies as their

34. Mlle Rachel's farewell benefit at Her Majesty's Theatre, June 1841, by E. Lami.

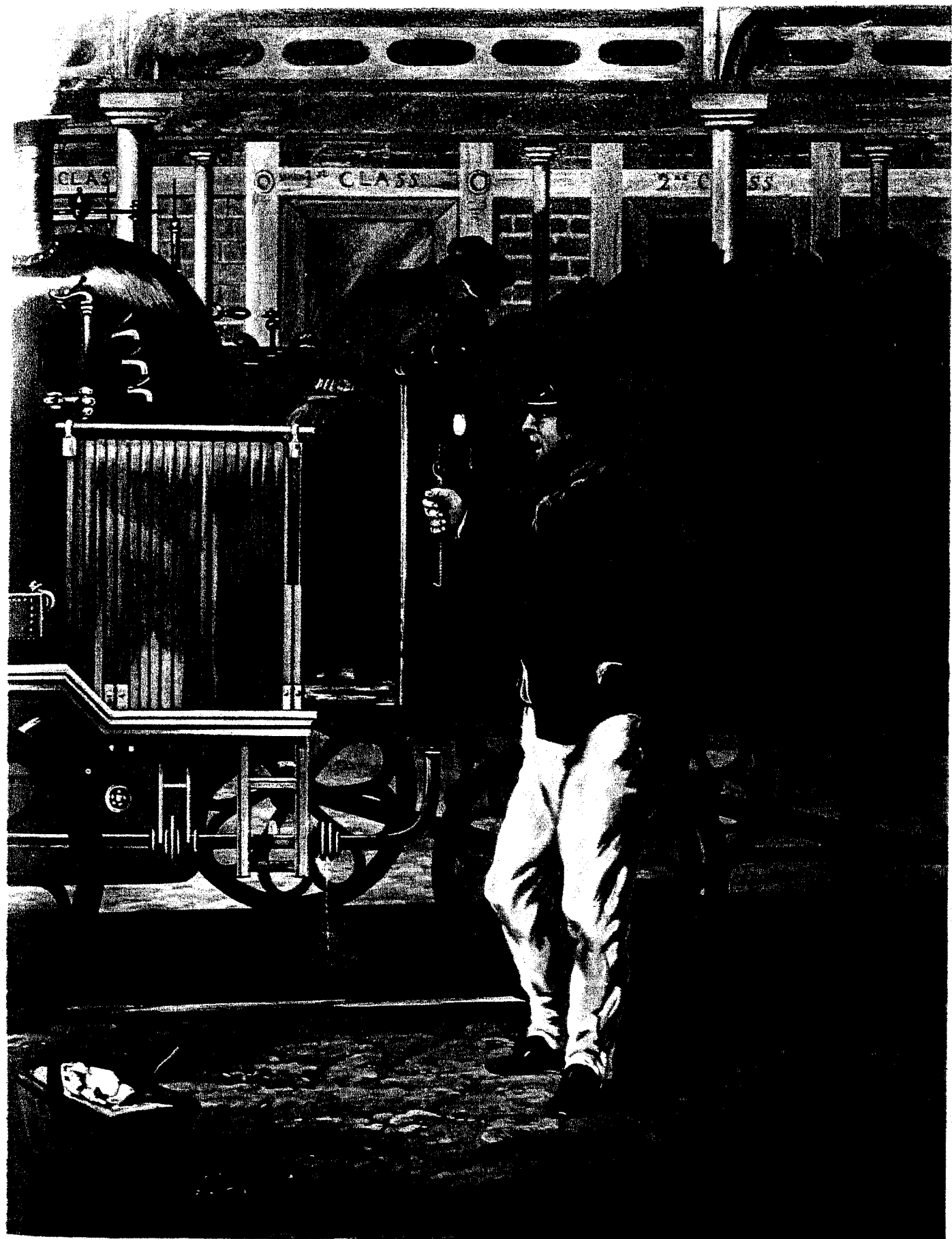
35. Evening prayers in an upper-class home: lithograph after E. Lami, 1829.

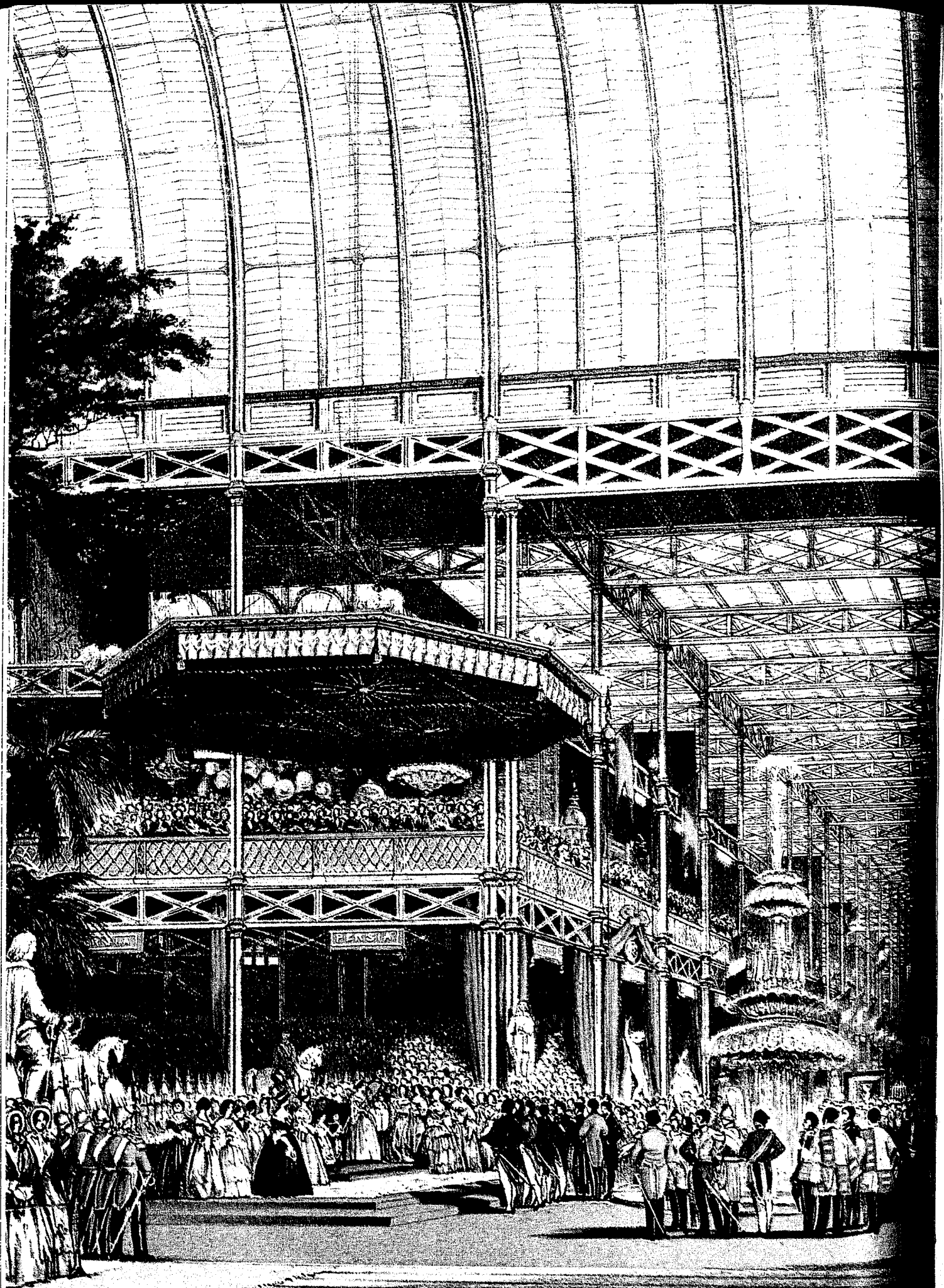
36. (*overleaf*) Contrasts in transport—aquatints of the driver of 1832 and the driver of 1852.

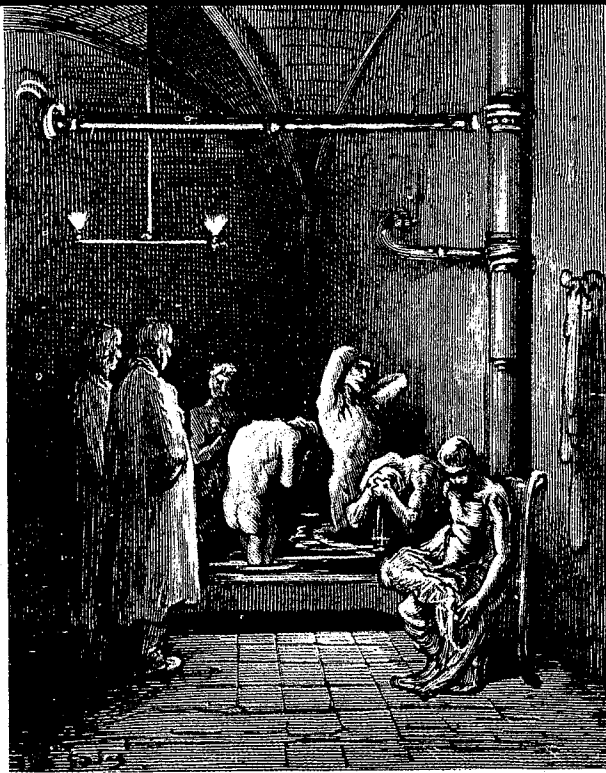




RENTAL







A public bath house: engraving by Doré.

ancestors had done for centuries, filling their bowls and fish kettles from the public standpipes in the streets, one pipe commonly serving for as many as sixteen houses and being turned on for only a few minutes once a week. Those who paid for a piped supply from one or other of the nine water companies were only sure of obtaining it for about eight or nine hours a week. Most of London's water still came from the Thames, polluted though it was by outfall from the sewers, including the now subterranean Fleet, by stable dung, rotten sprats, guano, and by quantities of rubbish and offal thrown into it even at this late period from slaughter-houses, knackers' yards, tanneries and tar works. The colour of the river was a greeny black, its consistency so thick that each time the tide went down a greasy, foul-smelling scum was deposited over the mud. In the hot dry summer of 1858 it was impossible to cross Westminster Bridge without a handkerchief pressed closely over nose and mouth, impossible to take a trip on a river steamer without feeling sick, impossible to breathe in the House of Commons until the windows had been covered with curtains soaked in chloride of lime.

A few years before this, in 1849, the disgraceful state of London's drainage system – if so noisome a collection of leaking pipes, uncovered cess-pits, stinking gullies, rotting privies and gas-filled sewers could be called a system at all – combined with the disgusting state of its 218 acres of shallow and overcrowded burial grounds, and with the pall of smoke-filled, disease-spreading fog that hovered in the streets, produced a most fearful outbreak of cholera which at the height of its virulence killed four hundred people a day. Most of these victims were in the slums where the foulest, most appalling

conditions were to be found, where in the rookery of St Giles's nearly three thousand people were crammed into less than a hundred houses and were almost suffocated by their own sewage.

Although London's drainage system had been much improved by the end of the century, for the very poor the squalid conditions imposed by overcrowding remained as before and in some parts of the capital, according to Lord Shaftesbury, were actually aggravated. In a single nine-bedroomed house in Spitalfields, for example, as late as the 1880s, there were sixty-three people living with only nine beds between them. A Royal Commission on Housing reported on privies being shared by numerous households and overflowing for months on end; in some parts of London they were actually 'used as sleeping places by the houseless poor'.

'That great foul city of London,' John Ruskin cried out in anguish in the 1860s, ' - rattling, growling, smoking, stinking - ghastly heap of fermenting brickwork, pouring out poison at every pore . . . '

It was not only the poor who suffered - although they, of course, suffered by far the worse. In the smartest and most expensive districts there were houses with defective drains which threatened the health of their inhabitants long after the campaign fought by the persistent and outspoken Edwin Chadwick had helped to reform the more outrageous of the abuses elsewhere. Belgrave and Eaton Squares, Hyde Park Gardens, Cavendish, Bryanston, Manchester and Portman Squares all stood over sewers which, in the words of an official report, abounded 'in the foulest deposits, in many cases stopping up the house drains and emitting the most disgusting effluvium'. Some of these sewers were so old that it was considered impossible to make any attempt to flush them for the removal of 'their most loathsome deposit', for that would 'have brought them down altogether'.

Typhus was a common disease amongst the upper-classes, even amongst the Royal Family. Queen Victoria's apartments at Buckingham Palace were ventilated through the common sewer; and in many other large houses swarms of rats came up from the sewers every night in their nocturnal search for food. Reports of children in well-to-do households being attacked in their nursery cots at night were not uncommon.

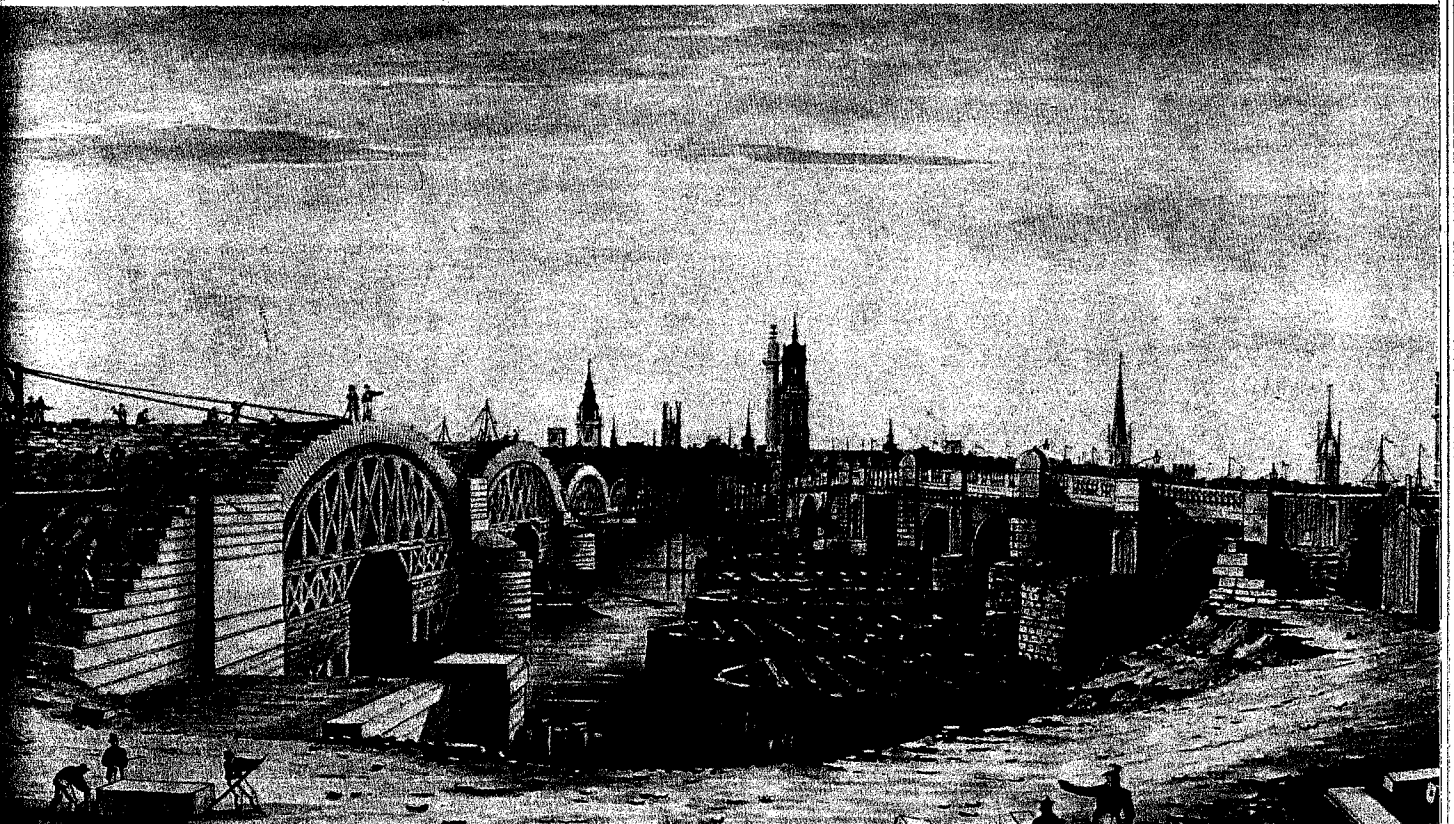
In the second half of the nineteenth century, the seemingly intractable problem of London's slums was to some extent alleviated by the replanning of London undertaken by the Metropolitan Board of Works, whose wide new roads, sorely needed for generations, cut through acres of slum buildings and swept them away. The pattern had been set in the 1830s and 1840s by the construction of the approaches to the new London Bridge which entailed demolition costs of one and a half million pounds, by the re-

organisation of Trafalgar Square which swept away the tangled slums known as Porridge Island around St Martin-in-the-Fields, by the remodelling of Liverpool Street, the rebuilding of Hungerford Market, the construction of Hungerford Bridge, and by the driving of New Oxford Street through part of the notorious rookery of St Giles's. Enormous as the sums spent on these endeavours were, however, they were little enough when compared with those afterwards spent by the Metropolitan Board of Works. For the Board was responsible not only for an extensive new main drainage system and the construction of the Victoria, Albert and Chelsea Embankments, but also for a complex of roads that were the pride of Victorian London: Victoria Street in Westminster and Queen Victoria Street in the City, Northumberland Avenue, Southwark Street, Charing Cross Road, and Shaftesbury Avenue.

Victoria Street cut through acres of slum west of the Abbey towards Victoria Station; Queen Victoria Street was the long eastern extension of a route that led from the Bank to Blackfriars Bridge and was then continued along the river by Victoria Embankment to the Houses of Parliament by Westminster Bridge; Northumberland Avenue, cutting through what had once been the gardens of Northumberland House, linked Charing Cross with Victoria Embankment by Hungerford Bridge; Southwark Street linked the approaches to London Bridge with Blackfriars Road; Charing Cross Road provided a new route northwards from Trafalgar Square; and Shaftesbury Avenue was an easier way of reaching Piccadilly from Holborn.

By the time the last of these two thoroughfares had been completed towards

Old London Bridge and its replacement under construction, 1828.

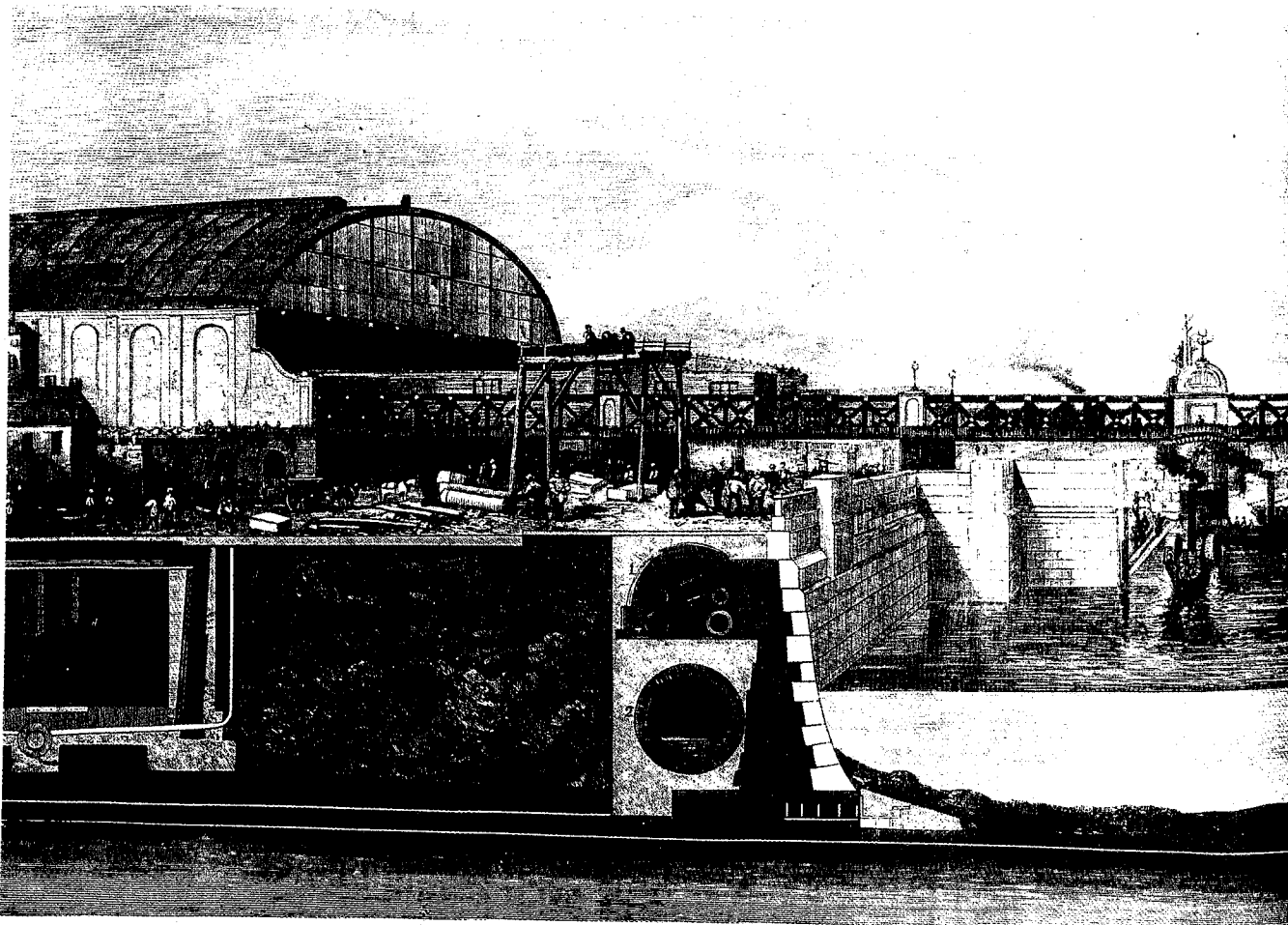


the end of the 1880's, London, with a population already approaching five millions, had extended to a size which would have been unthinkable even a hundred years before. 'Alexander's armies were great makers of conquests,' wrote Wilkie Collins in *Hide and Seek*, 'but the modern guerrilla regiments of the hod, the trowel and the brick-kiln, are the greatest conquerors of all, for they hold the longest the soil that they have once possessed . . . with the conqueror's device inscribed on it – *This ground to be let on building leases.*'

The thin lines of houses stretching out from the swollen centre had disappeared in a mass of building that covered the open spaces between them; the new communities which had grown up around the suburban railway stations had been enveloped by the spreading town as had the older country villages; the separate industrial centres along the river front were separate no more. Only here and there had a patch of common – once, perhaps, part of the shared land of a medieval community – or a public park, the sooty successor of an Elizabethan manor garden, managed to escape the builder's spade.

In the north the solid blocks of buildings had reached Hampstead, Highgate, Stroud Green and Stamford Hill, strongholds of the middle-class; in the west there was no open country now between Bayswater and Shepherd's Bush, or between Knightsbridge and Fulham; Bayswater and Notting Hill

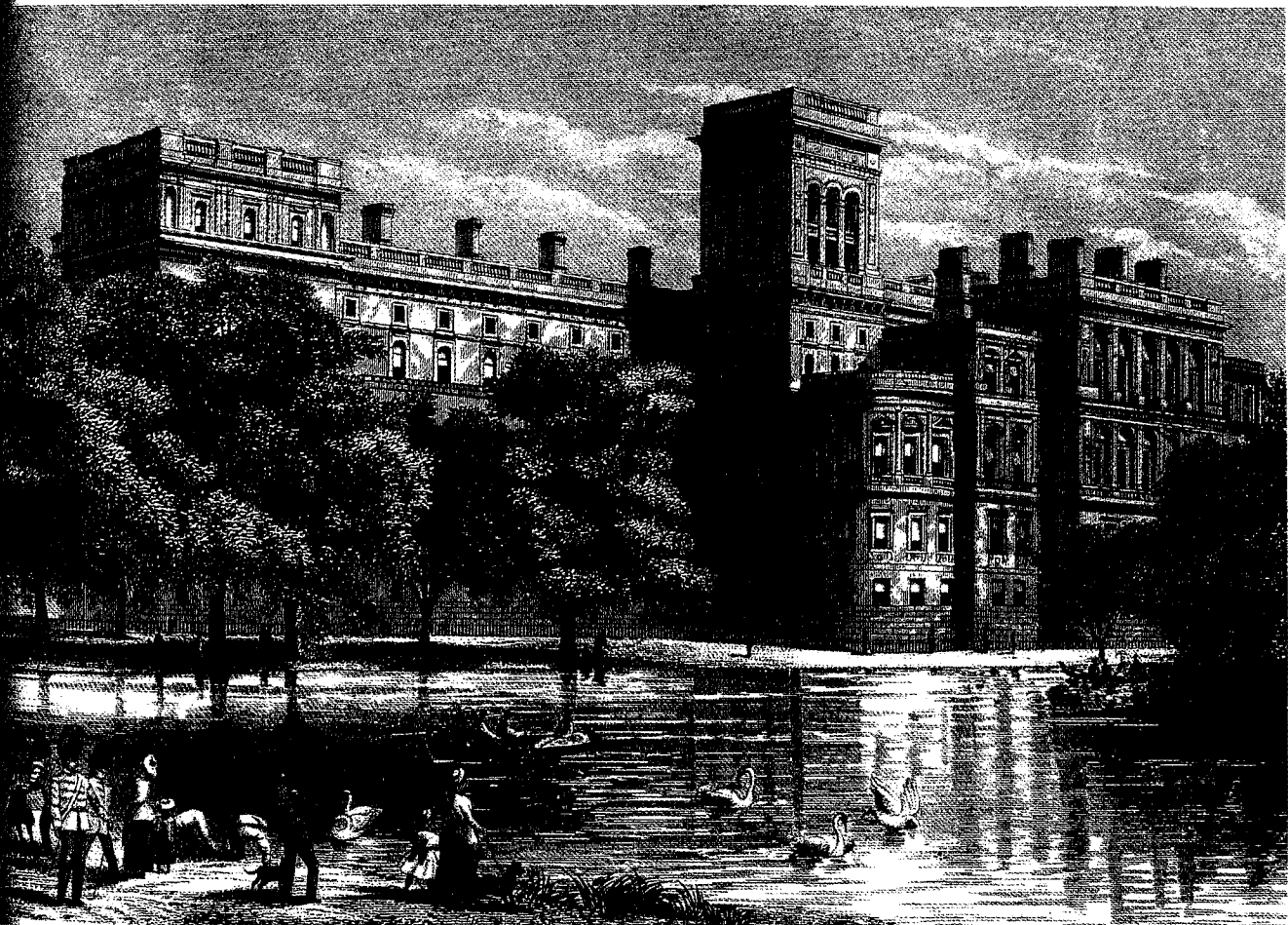
Sectional view of the Thames Embankment at Charing Cross, showing the Metropolitan Railway and the low level sewer, 1867.



had been early and densely built up, Hyde Park Gardens in 1836, Leinster Square, Princes Square and Lancaster Gate in the 1850s. To the south, beyond the solid arc of buildings from Wandsworth and Clapham and through Camberwell to Deptford, new lines of buildings were stretching out to Tooting, Dulwich and Brockley; the East End was expanding past Bethnal Green and Poplar to Mile End and Canning Town.

Inside this vast array of brick and stone, tile and slate, glass and iron, new public buildings had arisen on an unprecedented scale. Ragged schools and board schools, hospitals and prisons, mechanics' institutes, and warehouses, music-halls and gin-palaces, museums and lecture rooms, hotels and barracks, banks and insurance offices, churches and chapels, all appeared with so surprising a speed that every street was scarcely recognisable from one decade to the next. A huge new Post Office headquarters was built in St Martin-le-Grand in 1873, the Wool Exchange in Coleman Street in 1874, Knightsbridge Barracks in 1879, the City of London School in 1882, St Paul's School and Brompton Oratory in 1884,<sup>2</sup> an enlarged Stock Exchange in 1885,<sup>3</sup> the Guildhall School of Music and the Guildhall Art Gallery in 1886, G. E. Street's law courts in the Strand between 1874 and 1882;<sup>4</sup> a big new addition to the Admiralty begun in 1894, and an even larger War Office designed in 1898, added to the number of government buildings

George Gilbert Scott's palazzo for the Foreign Office.



between Charing Cross and Parliament Square, a part of Westminster already loaded with the massive weight of the Treasury completed in 1847, and George Gilbert Scott's cinquecento palazzo, the Foreign Office, finished in 1873.<sup>5</sup>

Down by the river, east of the Tower, a series of docks were built to replace or supplement those built during the Regency and no longer adequate: the Royal Victoria Dock in 1855, Millwall Dock in 1868, the South-West India Dock in 1870, the Royal Albert Dock in 1880, the Tilbury docks in 1886. The Blackwell Tunnel was opened in 1897, three years after Tower Bridge first raised its twin, thousand-ton bascules which have never since failed to swing upwards to allow ships to pass upstream between the Tower and Pickle Herring Stairs.

In 1834 the Palace of Westminster – that is to say the conglomeration of buildings, including the two Houses of Parliament, which had grown up around Westminster Hall on the site of the Saxon royal palace – was burned to the ground. Two workmen, anxious to get home, had overstoked a stove with wooden tallies for which the Clerk of the Works could find no other use. It was decided that the new building should be 'either Gothic or Elizabethan' and ninety-seven designs – only six of them Elizabethan – were submitted in the competition held the following year.

The drawings submitted by Charles Barry were chosen, though Barry, who had designed the Travellers' Club a few years before, would himself have preferred to work in an Italian style. But he had enlisted the help of the twenty-three-year-old Augustus Pugin, a passionate not to say fanatical devotee of Gothicism, whose beautiful, minutely detailed drawings were, it seems, what caught the imagination of the committee and largely determined their decision.

The collaboration was a rewarding one: Barry was a cautious, solid and matter-of-fact man whose character was ideally suited to dealing with obtuse committees and whose gift for planning ensured that, despite its picturesque appearance, the building was a practical one. Pugin was volatile, nervous, inclined to hysteria – he died insane at forty – a man whose agile imagination and inventive enthusiasm bestowed on Barry's massive form its colourful, intricate ornamentation.

Work began in 1840. Seven years later the House of Lords was finished, and 'nothing,' in Nathaniel Hawthorne's opinion, 'could be more magnificent and gravely gorgeous'. Five years after that the rest of the building was ready; the clock tower, known as Big Ben, was completed in 1858, the pinnacled Victoria Tower in 1860.

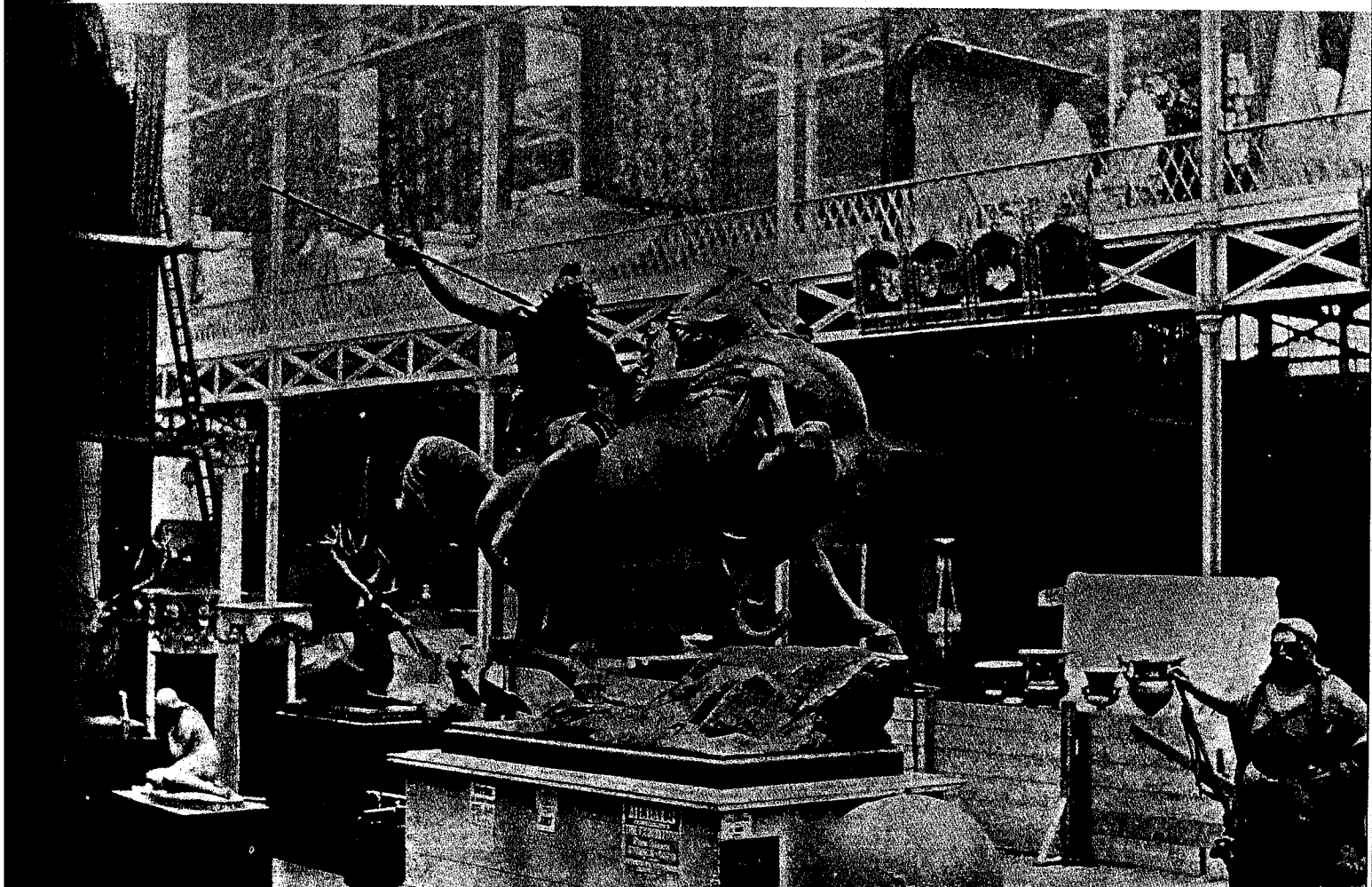
While the Palace of Westminster was nearing completion, another extraordinary masterpiece was rising in all its strange grandeur in Hyde Park – the Crystal Palace, a monumental structure of 4,000 tons of iron and 400 tons of glass, nearly two thousand feet long and over four hundred feet wide, the work of the Bedfordshire gardener who was to become Sir Joseph Paxton.

The Crystal Palace was designed to house the Great Exhibition of 1851, the exhibition which Prince Albert had proposed to a meeting of the Society of Arts two years before. At first a brick building had been preferred, but the lowest estimate submitted for its cost was £120,000, a figure which provided the numerous opponents of the Exhibition with fresh grounds for disapproval, so that when Paxton's drawing – modelled on the conservatory he had built for the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth – appeared in the *Illustrated London News*, the Exhibition Committee fell upon it eagerly and obtained a satisfactory tender of £80,000 for its construction.

By the end of 1850 well over two thousand workmen were engaged upon it, erecting its cast iron girders and wrought-iron trusses, its 30 miles of guttering, 200 miles of wooden sash bars and 900,000 square feet of glass.

But when it was finished, and had demonstrated its capacity to remain in one piece by surviving the vibrations set up by squads of soldiers jumping and stamping inside it and by quantities of round shot being rumbled over

A contemporary photograph of some of the sculpture exhibits at the Great Exhibition.



its wooden slatted floors; even when the right to print the catalogue had been sold for £3,200, and Messrs Schwebbe had secured the refreshment contract for £5,500, there were still many who insisted that the scheme was folly, that it could not but fail to lose money, that no good could possibly come of it since it was the brainchild of that Prince Albert. The number of foreigners, it was said, and provincial people arriving in London to see it would inevitably lead to 'confusion, disorder and demoralization, if not actual revolution . . . famine and pestilence'. The Treasury was unhelpful, Parliament dismissive.

Nevertheless, in May the Exhibition opened. Season tickets were three guineas for gentlemen, two guineas for ladies; no one without season tickets would be admitted to the opening ceremony at which the Queen, Prince Albert, the Prince of Wales, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Duke of Wellington would be among those present (plate 37). On the second day the entrance would be £1; on the fourth, 5s; thereafter from 5s. to 1s. depending upon the day of the week.

From the beginning the Exhibition was an astonishing success. Over six million people came to London to see it from all over the country and all over the world. Members of royal houses, and their uniformed suites, came from Germany; eight hundred agricultural labourers 'in their peasants' attire' came from Surrey and Sussex conducted by the clergy of their parishes; and whoever they were and from wherever they came, the visitors were all wonderfully impressed by the 19,000 exhibits arranged beneath the light blue framework and the glittering glass, the tall elm trees of the Park which the builders had not cut down but left to spread their leaves between the galleries.

The profits of the Exhibition were considerable. With these profits a long stretch of land was bought between Kensington Gardens and Cromwell Road on which were later built a number of museums, concert halls, headquarters of learned societies, colleges and schools, that paid an overdue tribute to Prince Albert's earnest faith, enthusiasm and enterprise.

The first of these cultural institutions to appear was an ugly utilitarian purple brick and terracotta building put up by Sir William Cubitt in 1856 as an art gallery and museum in Cromwell Road and afterwards partly replaced and partly absorbed by the Victoria and Albert Museum.<sup>7</sup> North of it, in 1867 – on the site of Gore House where Lady Blessington had held court with Count D'Orsay – was begun the Royal Albert Hall, a huge circular red brick building with a dome of glass and iron, reminiscent of an opera house at Dresden which had been designed by a German political refugee whose work Albert had greatly admired.<sup>8</sup> Standing facing the Albert Hall, and those numerous institutions which his vision had inspired, is the Prince's more personal memorial.



A state concert in the Albert Hall, 1873, lit by lime-light.

It was started in 1864, not finished until twelve years later, and described in 1882 as 'beyond question the finest monumental structure in Europe'. Certainly its designer, Sir George Gilbert Scott, who spent £120,000 on it, regarded it as his 'most prominent work'. His idea, he wrote, 'was to erect a kind of ciborium to protect a statue of the Prince . . . its special characteristic was that this ciborium was designed in some degree on the principles of the ancient shrines . . . These shrines are models of imaginary buildings such as had never in reality been erected; and my idea was to realise one of these imaginary structures with its precious metal, its inlayings, its enamels . . .'

A work of intricate craftsmanship in white Italian marble, bronze, wrought iron, granite, agate, onyx, jasper, cornelian and crystal, it has been variously condemned as grossly vulgar, impossibly sentimental and crudely eclectic. More temperately, though no less dismissively, a critic described it ten years after its designers' death, as 'an uncomfortable feat of engineering'. Now, a hundred years after its inception, its peculiar virtues are beginning to be admitted along with its High Victorian arrogance.

Beneath its Gothic gabled canopy and pinnacle is the fourteen-foot high wistfully contemplative figure of Prince Albert wearing the collar of a Knight of the Garter and the garter itself above the bulging calf of his bronze left leg. In his right hand he holds a book. Is it the Bible? awestruck children have



The Oxford Music Hall.

felt compelled to ask, looking up from the steps beneath. But no; it is the catalogue of the 1851 Exhibition, which was held close by the statue across the road to the east.

The huge glass conservatory in which the Exhibition was held was later moved across the river to Sydenham. Renamed Crystal Palace it was burned down in 1936, only its strange plaster prehistoric animals now surviving in Crystal Palace Park. But for eighty years it was the central feature of a new pleasure ground, a concert hall, theatre, menagerie, exhibition room, restaurant, and a favourite resort of the families of the middle-class and of the solid, skilled and comfortable workman.

Although it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that Charles Booth could suggest that the respectable and fully employed working-man's family in London ate meat and vegetables every day, never went hungry and had sufficient money left over for a Sunday outing, even in the 1850s there were thousands of skilled artisans who were able to share some of the comforts and a good deal of the security of the middle-class.

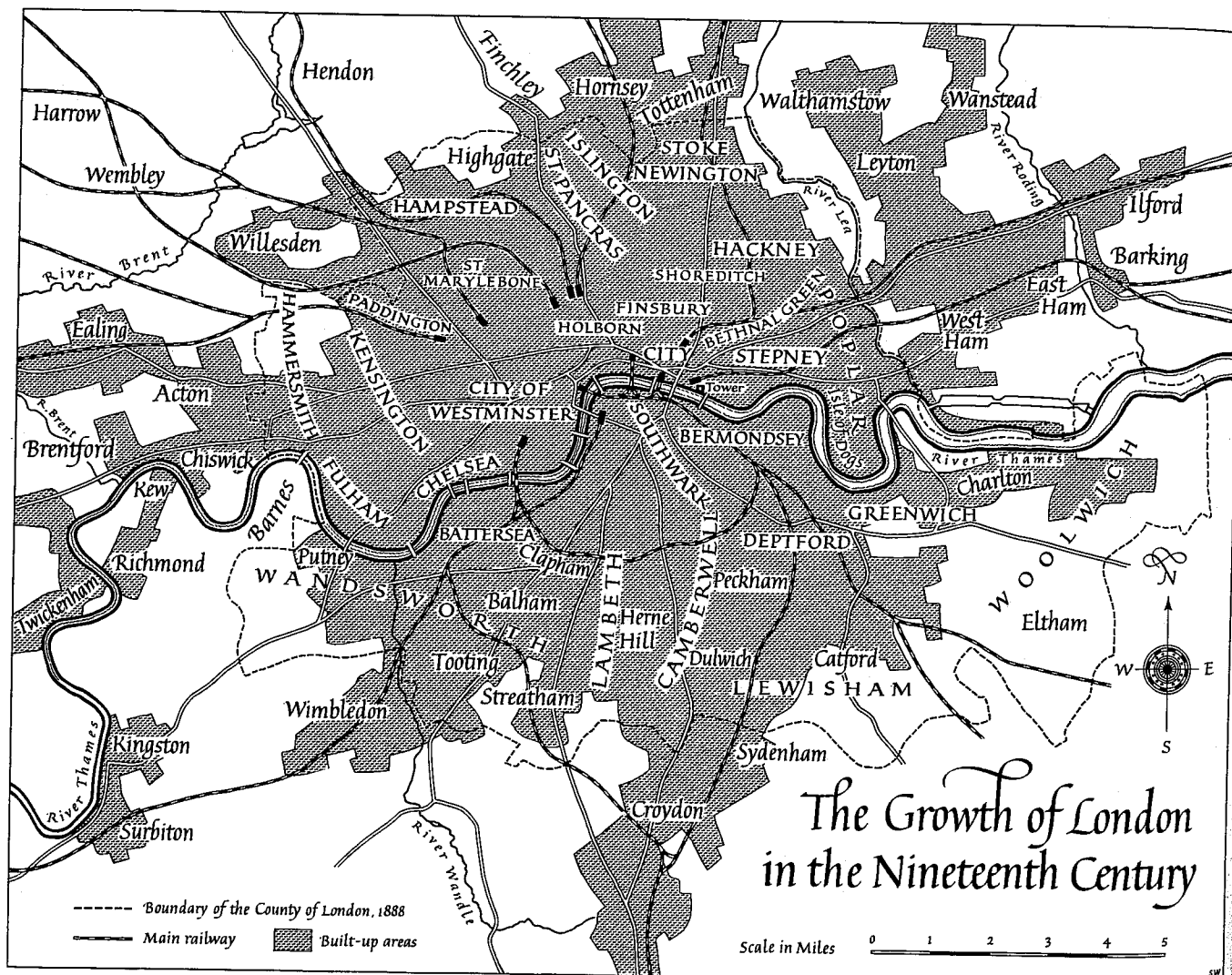
Masons and carpenters, workers in the metal and transport industries and in the clothing trade, watchmakers in Clerkenwell, makers of printing machinery in Southwark, of furniture in Oxford Street, railway engineers in Nine Elms and Kentish Town, workers in the chemical factories in Silvertown and Wandsworth, in the breweries on Bankside, and in the powder-mills at Isleworth and Enfield, fishermen and boat builders from Barking, compositors from Wandsworth, craftsmen in the china industries at Lambeth, silk workers from Bethnal Green, could all be found enjoying the air in the grounds of the Crystal Palace or walking there from the railway station.

Most of these men had to work long hours; few in the 1850s worked less than twelve hours a day, though by the 1890s they were more likely to be working nine. But they made the most of what spare time they had. The clerical worker in the City commonly worked even longer hours than these, for in few offices was there any regularly observed custom that the working day ended at a particular time, even though most offices were supposed to close at six o'clock: the clerk went home when his work was done, and not before. There was no early closing on Saturdays until 1863; nor were there any Bank Holidays. Yet the office worker and shop assistant, too, contrived to find time for pleasure.

They found time to go fishing at Richmond, or pigeon-flying at Battersea, to watch cricket at Islington or the Thames Regatta at Hammersmith, to go to the Flower Show at Chiswick, the Zoos at Walworth Manor House and in Regent's Park (plate 39).<sup>9</sup> They could take a cheap train ticket to places which their grandparents could never have hoped to see, or a steamboat down the river to Greenwich Fair.

In the evenings they might feel able to afford a meal out in a small chop-house where they could buy a plate of liver and bacon for tenpence (potatoes and bread 2d. extra), gooseberry pie for fivepence and a pint of stout for 4½d. They could spend the night and have breakfast at Anderton's Hotel in Fleet Street for no more than two shillings. They might go out to a theatre (a ticket in the gallery at Drury Lane could be had for 1s.), to a tea-garden, a music-hall (plate 43), the Panorama in Leicester Square, the Cosmorama in Regent Street, to Madame Tussaud's or to that metropolitan institution which the young Charles Dickens so much loved, Astley's in Westminster Bridge Road, home of melodrama, fireworks, acrobats, clowns and dancing horses.

Such diverse pleasures could also be enjoyed at Cremorne (plate 38), the successor, in King's Road, Chelsea, of the eighteenth-century pleasure gardens. Cremorne House, once the home of Lady Huntingdon, had been



bought by a Prussian baron of dubious repute who had opened the grounds for *fêtes champêtres*, dancing and balloon ascents. In 1849 it had come into the hands of a former headwaiter at the Albion who bought additional land, built a pagoda and two theatres, and entertained his patrons with all the delights of the fairground, with processions and tournaments, river pageants, and a dance floor capable of accommodating two thousand couples at once. For many other thousands of less fortunate Londoners, however, there could be no such pleasures at all.

Goodred's Royal Saloon, Piccadilly, 1833.



