Flesherton Advance.

"TRUTH BEFORE FAVOR."—"PRINCIPLES NOT MEN."

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The Streets o' London Town

As Seen and Portrayed for The Advance by Inspector Campbell.

The naming of the streets of London is entirely different from what it is in Canada and American cities. There, a street has only one name, no matter how long it is. Here it is different. The streets are not straight, as in the newer and younger cities, and at every turn of the street it takes a new name. Thus, from Charing Cross to St. Paul's the same street has three names: Strand, Fleet Street and Ludgate Hill. Up them in order let us go. First, it is well to understand what a London omnibus is, for "a London omnibus is an institution by itself." Not to say that similar omnibuses are nowhere else to be seen. In many places they are, but in no other place have they become a necessity, as here. The streets are narrow. The traffic is enormous. No trams, electric or otherwise, are allowed in the old city. The omnibus is the chief conveyance of passengers in all directions. The fare is about a penny a mile—many long distances only a half-penny. The hansom and cab relieve the pressure on the 'bus to some extent, but the lowest fare on these is a shilling, hence only the wealthy use them, except for long distances and out-of-the-way places. The omnibus is much like one of the large closed-in 'busses often seen at home connecting hotels and stations, only at the rear is a winding stair, up which, from the left to the right, passengers ascend to seats on the top. These seats are generally six or seven in number, each holding two, so that twelve or fourteen persons may comfortably be seated outside. Around the outer margin of the carriage is, of course, a railing two or two and a half feet high, to prevent accidents. Within the omnibus on either side is a seat lengthwise, so that in all from twenty to thirty persons may occupy seats at the same time. The windows below are fastened—built solidly in the walls, in fact, and not like ours, easily opened for ventilation. The outside seats are provided with rubber knee rugs for protection and warmth during inclement weather. All London omnibuses are drawn by two horses, and good horses they usually are. In this country the law of the road for passing vehicles is, "Keep to the left"—not the right, as with us; so on the left side of the streets the stream of vehicles is going in the same direction as the rider, while on the right it flows in the opposite direction.

Now, having changed 'busses at Charing Cross, and taking one of the elevated seats on top, the stranger has a capital opportunity for "taking in" the sights along the way. The front seat near the driver is to be preferred, for no man is more willing to answer questions and to give information on any point of interest along the route than a London omnibus driver. As a class they seem to take a peculiar pleasure in pointing out the glories of their beloved city. Before entering the Strand from Trafalgar Square many places are pointed out which are historically associated with the ancient city of Westminster, for, not until we reach Fleet street are we in Old London. The view overlookfng Whitehall and the Parliament buildings is probably the best. To the north is the National Gallery, with its large collection of valuable paintings, both British and foreign, and to the north-east is the church of St Martin's in the-Fields, where the notorious Nell Gwynne was buried. Around here, also, are some of the largest hotels and theatres in the city. Passing down the Strand, the guide points out dozens of places whose names are singularly familiar, but the half of which I could not now even name. It was but a little to the north, in Maiden Lane and neighboring streets, that such great scholars and literateurs as Porson, Pope, Congreve, Yonge, Johnson, Boswell, Goldsmith, Garrick, and Voltaire, when a refugee, were wont to rendezvous. The ground is truly classic. Not far off, on the north side, is Covent Garden, now famous as one of the best markets in London, where the best classes of the retailers and citizens get their supplies daily. The fruit and flower market is busy every day, and the display one of the finest of the kind anywhere. The prices, too, are about the highest. Saturday is about the best time to see the whole market one seething mass of jabbering humanity; the best hour of the day is between 5 and 6 in the morning. A visit to Covent Garden market at this time will not soon be forgotten. To the right, at the foot of Southampton street, on the Thames embankment, is the Egyptian obelisk, known as Cleopatra's Needle. This ancient granite monolith is eight feet square at the base and 70 feet high, very like in appearance and size to the sister column which graces Central Park, New York city. Farther down to the left is Drury Lane theatre, so famous in the literary life of the past, and almost opposite is Somerset House, one of the finest buildings of the kind in London. Somerset House has a history which dates back to the time of Lord Protector Somerset in the early Stuart times, but it has been rebuilt and reconstructed until little of the earlier building remains. It is now occupied by government offices of one kind or another, among which are the Audit office, Inland Revenue office and the office of the Registrar-General of Births, Marriages and Deaths. King's College and school also occupy a portion of Somerset House. In this school many of the finest British statesmen and scholars received their early training. Not far below Somerset House the Strand divides into two, the middle space being occupied by three buildings, a church at each end with an opera comique between. On the north side of the Strand here are the famous Inns-of-Court—a beautiful and artistic series of structures extending a considerable distance back, but all connected fer the convenience of the administration of the law. Here we had the pleasure of being courteously shown by liverled servants into galleries where we could witness the manner in which the different courts were conducted in England. Strange, but perhaps the most interesting suit in progress then was a divorce case in middle class life. The minuteness of the details of evidence brought out by the cross examination of some of the witnesses by the legal luminaries was ludicrous in the extreme to the uninitiated. It seemed cruel to probe so deeply into, perhaps, the greatest heart sorrow of human suffering, but in the interest of justice and morality it may be necessary.

But now we are at Temple Bar and we enter Fleet Street. Time and space will not allow details. Suffice to say that this is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, publishing street in the world. I suppose every form of newspaper, magazine, pamphlet, book or folio is produced or re-produced here daily. From this street come most of the great English newspapers and magazines, illustrated and otherwise. Then are, of course, some notable exceptions. At length Ludgate Circus is reached, and after a short ascent of a few hundred yards St. Paul's Cathedral rears its massive pillared dome heavenward right in front. The omnibus turns to the right down Cannon Street to Queen Victoria Street, up which, at no great distance, is the Mansion House, the Royal Exchange and the Bank of England. Here, taking leave of our driver and rewarding him with a "bob," which he gratefully accepts, another omnibus is boarded going again west but along a totally different route. The streets now traversed in order are Poultry, Cheapside, Newgate, Holborn Viaduct, Holborn, High Holborn, New Oxford, and Oxford westward to the Marble Arch, at the corner of Hyde Park. The best known of these streets are of course Cheapside, made immortal by Cowper in his celebrated John Gilpin—a story so well known and so universally admired that comment is superfluous. Next to Cheapside in interest is Newgate Street, on account of the famous old prison, and behind it the Old Bailey. The prison even now looks terribly grim and depressing, a fitting emblem, perhaps, of the feelings which must take possession of the fettered prisoners within. The scenes that were enacted here in "the hanging days" of Old London must have been tragic in the extreme. They are yet spoken of by those acquainted with the history with a sort of subdued horror. All the streets above named are really one, with very little deviation or turn, and all are busy with that traffic which can be seen in London alone. From the Marble Arch one can turn northwestward along the Edgeware Road, also noted in the history of London, or southeastward along Park Lane to Piccadilly, thence eastward along this busy thoroughfare to Regent Street, which crosses these streets northward from near Charing Cross. One other street must be taken with these to get the group of streets which enjoy the distinction of being the busiest in London, indeed in the world; this is King William Street, which leads from the Bank over London Bridge. If you wish to get rapidly over any of these streets during the busier hours of the day, then you must take patience in your pocket and hope in your hand—hope that you have no train to catch in a limited time. For the traffic here is a thing by itself. There is nothing like it that I have seen, and no greater amusement was afforded me than watching it from some vantage point, generally the top of an omnibus. It were vain, I fear, to attempt to give you an idea of this traffic. Take the Strand and Fleet street, for example. To St Paul's from Charing Cross is nearly a mile in length. The streets, though not so wide as in New York and Toronto, are still of respectable width. The sidewalks are also in most places from 6 to 10 or 12 ft wide. This space then, along its whole width and length, is, one would think inextricably crowded with people, horses, vehicles, including every sort imaginable, all moving in one direction or the other. On the footwalks men, women and children, of all classes, conditions, aspects—well dressed, ill-dressed, happy, unhappy, stolidly indifferent, are jostling each other as they pass or repass, each bent upon some object unknown to and uncared for by the rest. Between the sidewalks on the north side all horses and vehicles are heading for St. Paul's, and on the south side for Charing Cross. A break in the continuity of this living, moving mass is scarcely seen, except at the cross streets, when tributary streams of people and vehicles are as anxiously waiting to cross as the others are to go on. At these cross streets may always be witnessed what I think one of the sights of London. Unless some system were adopted to regulate so immense a traffic in such small space, the streets would soon become hopelessly blocked for a mile—perhaps miles back each way, until it would take hours, as it does sometimes, in spite of the greatest precautions, to get the mass again started on its way. At all the busy crossings, or "circuses"—the name given when a number of streets converge, for, in very few places are the streets at right-angles as with us—are stationed, two, four, six or more policemen—generally one for each street—who are placed there just to regulate the traffic. These men are usually picked from the best in the force and are admirably adapted for their difficult task. They are tall, handsome, cool-headed men—men to command respect, even without the authority of law. Hence the average Englishman, who always has great respect for law and order, rarely if ever questions the wisdom or authority of the officers. These policemen simply stand before one of these streams of vehicles, and at once, without question or argument, the whole stream comes to a standstill, till the congestion along a cross street, whether of pedestrion or vehicles, is relieved. The officer then moves aside and the traffic resumes its march as if nothing had happened. Here is where patience is needed, and indeed exercised, for I have yet to see one person who did not seem to take a philosophical view of the situation and decide to make the best of it. After viewing the management of the traffic of London at London Bridge, at the Bank, on Cheapside and on the Strand, I do not wonder that Von Moltke declared, after he had been shown everything of importance in the city, that the most wonderful thing he had seen was the handling of the traffice at the foot of Cheapside. Foreigners find it hard to understand how a British police officer with no symbol of authority visible—the London policemen carries his baton under his coat—secures a degree of peace and harmony which can usually be secured elsewhere only by a show of arms or other sign of legal strength. The explanation lies, it seems to me, in the British citizen himself. He loves fair play. He exacts the penalty of violated law, therefore, as a rule, he obeys law. He recognizes that all under the flag have equal rights, and that the business of one man is just as important to that man as his own is to him. The dignity and majesty of the law are supreme in his eyes, hence he is willing for the good of all to obey the officers whom he himself has placed in authority.

One other thing I must say for the London police. They are apparently at home as to the location of every street, terrace, square, lane, road or avenue in the city, or at least within a considerable distance from their "beat." I do

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