

STEPHEN LEACOCK

MY

DISCOVERY OF

ENGLAND

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Introduction of Mr. Stephen Leacock Given by Sir Owen Seaman on the Occasion of His First Lecture in London

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: It is usual on these occasions for the chairman to begin something like this: "The lecturer, I am sure, needs no introduction from me." And indeed, when I have been the lecturer and somebody else has been the chairman, I have more than once suspected myself of being the better man of the two. Of course I hope I should always have the good manners—I am sure Mr. Leacock has—to disguise that suspicion. However, one has to go through these formalities, and I will therefore introduce the lecturer to you.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is Mr. Stephen Leacock. Mr. Leacock, this is the flower of London intelligence—or perhaps I should say one of the flowers; the rest are coming to your other lectures.

In ordinary social life one stops at an introduction and does not proceed to personal details. But behaviour on the platform, as on the stage, is seldom ordinary. I will therefore tell you a thing or two about Mr. Leacock. In the first place, by vocation he is a Professor of Political Economy, and he practises humour—frenzied fiction instead of frenzied finance—by way of recreation. There he differs a good deal from me, who have to study the products of humour for my living, and by way of recreation read Mr. Leacock on political economy.

Further, Mr. Leacock is all-British, being English by birth and Canadian by residence, I mention this for two reasons: firstly, because England and the Empire are very proud to claim him for their own, and, secondly, because I do not wish his nationality to be confused with that of his neighbours on the other side. For English and American humourists have not always seen eye to eye. When we fail to appreciate their humour they say we are too dull and effete to understand it: and when they do not appreciate ours they say we haven't got any.

Now Mr. Leacock's humour is British by heredity; but he has caught something of the spirit of American humour by force of association. This puts him in a similar position to that in which I found myself once when I took the liberty of swimming across a rather large loch in Scotland. After climbing into the boat I was in the act of drying myself when I was accosted by the proprietor of the hotel adjacent to the shore. "You have no business to be bathing here," he shouted. "I'm not," I said; "I'm bathing on the other side." In the same way, if anyone on either side of the water is unintelligent enough to criticise Mr. Leacock's humour, he can always say it comes from the other side. But the truth is that his humour contains all that is best in the humour of both hemispheres.

Having fulfilled my duty as chairman, in that I have told you nothing that you did not know before—except, perhaps, my swimming feat, which never got into the Press because I have a very bad publicity agent—I will not detain you longer from what you are really wanting to get at; but ask Mr. Leacock to proceed at once with his lecture on "Frenzied Fiction."

I. The Balance of Trade in Impressions

FOR some years past a rising tide of lecturers and literary men from England has washed upon the shores of our North American continent. The purpose of each one of them is to make a new discovery of America. They come over to us travelling in great simplicity, and they return in the ducal suite of the Aquitania. They carry away with them their impressions of America, and when they reach England they sell them. This export of impressions has now been going on so long that the balance of trade in impressions is all disturbed. There is no doubt that the Americans and Canadians have been too generous in this matter of giving away impressions. We emit them with the careless ease of a glow worm, and like the glow-worm ask for nothing in return.

But this irregular and one-sided traffic has now assumed such great proportions that we are compelled to ask whether it is right to allow these people to carry away from us impressions of the very highest commercial value without giving us any pecuniary compensation whatever. British lecturers have been known to land in New York, pass the customs, drive uptown in a closed taxi, and then forward to England from the closed taxi itself ten dollars' worth of impressions of American national character. I have myself seen an English literary man,—the biggest, I believe: he had at least the appearance of it; sit in the corridor of a fashionable New York hotel and look gloomily into his hat, and then from his very hat produce an estimate of the genius of America at twenty cents a word. The nice question as to whose twenty cents that was never seems to have occurred to him.

I am not writing in the faintest spirit of jealousy. I quite admit the extraordinary ability that is involved in this peculiar susceptibility to impressions. I have estimated that some of these English visitors have been able to receive impressions at the rate of four to the second; in fact, they seem to get them every time they see twenty cents. But without jealousy or complaint, I do feel that somehow these impressions are inadequate and fail to depict us as we really are.

Let me illustrate what I mean. Here are some of the impressions of New York, gathered from visitors' discoveries of America, and reproduced not perhaps word for word but as closely as I can remember them. "New York", writes one, "nestling at the foot of the Hudson, gave me an impression of cosiness, of tiny graciousness: in short, of weeness." But compare this—"New York," according to another discoverer of America, "gave me an impression of size, of vastness; there seemed to be a bigness about it not found in smaller places." A third visitor writes, "New York struck me as hard, cruel, almost inhuman." This, I think, was because his taxi driver had charged him three dollars. "The first thing that struck me in New York," writes another, "was the Statue of Liberty." But, after all, that was only natural: it was the first thing that could reach him.

Nor is it only the impressions of the metropolis that seem to fall short of reality. Let me quote a few others taken at random here and there over the continent.

"I took from Pittsburg," says an English visitor, "an impression of something that I could hardly define—an atmosphere rather than an idea."

All very well, But, after all, had he the right to take it? Granted that Pittsburg has an atmosphere rather than an idea, the attempt to carry away this atmosphere surely borders on rapacity.

"New Orleans," writes another visitor, "opened her arms to me and bestowed upon me the soft and languorous kiss of the Caribbean." This statement may or may not be true; but in any case it hardly seems the fair thing to mention it.

"Chicago," according to another book of discovery, "struck me as a large city. Situated as it is and where it is, it seems destined to be a place of importance."

Or here, again, is a form of "impression" that recurs again and again—"At Cleveland I felt a distinct note of optimism in the air."

This same note of optimism is found also at Toledo, at Toronto—in short, I believe it indicates nothing more than that some one gave the visitor a cigar. Indeed it generally occurs during the familiar scene in which the visitor describes his cordial reception in an unsuspecting American town: thus:

"I was met at the station (called in America the depot) by a member of the Municipal Council driving his own motor car. After giving me an excellent cigar, he proceeded to drive me about the town, to various points of interest, including the municipal abattoir, where he gave me another excellent cigar, the Carnegie public library, the First National Bank (the courteous manager of which gave me an excellent cigar) and the Second Congregational Church where I had the pleasure of meeting the pastor. The pastor, who appeared a man of breadth and culture, gave me another cigar. In the evening a dinner, admirably cooked and excellently served, was tendered to me at a leading hotel." And of course he took it. After which his statement that he carried away from the town a feeling of optimism explains itself: he had four cigars, the dinner, and half a page of impressions at twenty cents a word.

Nor is it only by the theft of impressions that we suffer at the hands of these English discoverers of America. It is a part of the system also that we have to submit to being lectured to by our talented visitors. It is now quite understood that as soon as an English literary man finishes a book he is rushed across to America to tell the people of the United States and Canada all about it, and how he came to write it. At home, in his own country, they don't care how he came to write it. He's written it and that's enough. But in America it is different. One month after the distinguished author's book on *The Boyhood of Botticelli* has appeared in London, he is seen to land in New York very quietly out of one of the back portholes of the Olympic. That same afternoon you will find him in an armchair in one of the big hotels giving off impressions of America to a group of reporters. After which notices appear in all the papers to the effect that he will lecture in Carnegie Hall on "Botticelli the Boy". The audience is assured beforehand. It consists of all the people who feel that they have to go because they know all about Botticelli and all the people who feel that they have to go because they don't know anything about Botticelli. By this means the lecturer is able to rake the whole country from Montreal to San Francisco with "Botticelli the Boy". Then he turns round, labels his lecture "Botticelli the Man", and rakes it all back again. All the way across the continent and back he emits impressions, estimates of national character, and surveys of American genius. He sails from New York in a blaze of publicity, with his cordon of reporters round him, and a month later publishes his book "America as I Saw It". It is widely read—in America.

In the course of time a very considerable public feeling was aroused in the United States and Canada over this state of affairs. The lack of reciprocity in it seemed unfair. It was felt (or at least I felt) that the time had come when some one ought to go over and take some impressions off England. The choice of such a person (my choice) fell upon myself. By an arrangement with the Geographical Society of America, acting in conjunction with the Royal Geographical Society of England (to both of whom I communicated my proposal), I went at my own expense.

It is scarcely feasible to give here full details in regard to my outfit and equipment, though I hope to do so in a later and more extended account of my expedition. Suffice it to say that my outfit, which was modelled on the equipment of English lecturers in America, included a complete suit of clothes, a dress shirt for lecturing in, a fountain pen and a silk hat. The dress shirt, I may say for the benefit of other travellers, proved invaluable. The silk hat, however, is no longer used in England except perhaps for scrambling eggs in.

I pass over the details of my pleasant voyage from New York to Liverpool. During the last fifty years so many travellers have made the voyage across the Atlantic that it is now impossible to obtain any impressions from the ocean of the slightest commercial value. My readers will recall the fact that Washington Irving, as far back as a century ago, chronicled the pleasure that one felt during an Atlantic voyage in idle day dreams while lying prone upon the bowsprit and watching the dolphins leaping in the crystalline foam. Since his time so many gifted writers have attempted to do the same

thing that on the large Atlantic liners the bowsprit has been removed, or at any rate a notice put up: "Authors are requested not to lie prostrate on the bowsprit." But even without this advantage, three or four generations of writers have chronicled with great minuteness their sensations during the transit. I need only say that my sensations were just as good as theirs. I will content myself with chronicling the fact that during the voyage we passed two dolphins, one whale and one iceberg (none of them moving very fast at the time), and that on the fourth day out the sea was so rough that the Captain said that in forty years he had never seen such weather. One of the steerage passengers, we were told, was actually washed overboard: I think it was over board that he was washed, but it may have been on board the ship itself.

I pass over also the incidents of my landing in Liverpool, except perhaps to comment upon the extraordinary behaviour of the English customs officials. Without wishing in any way to disturb international relations, one cannot help noticing the rough and inquisitorial methods of the English customs men as compared with the gentle and affectionate ways of the American officials at New York. The two trunks that I brought with me were dragged brutally into an open shed, the strap of one of them was rudely unbuckled, while the lid of the other was actually lifted at least four inches. The trunks were then roughly scrawled with chalk, the lids slammed to, and that was all. Not one of the officials seemed to care to look at my things or to have the politeness to pretend to want to. I had arranged my dress suit and my pyjamas so as to make as effective a display as possible: a New York customs officer would have been delighted with it. Here they simply passed it over. "Do open this trunk," I asked one of the officials, "and see my pyjamas." "I don't think it is necessary, sir," the man answered. There was a coldness about it that cut me to the quick.

But bad as is the conduct of the English customs men, the immigration officials are even worse. I could not help being struck by the dreadful carelessness with which people are admitted into England. There are, it is true, a group of officials said to be in charge of immigration, but they know nothing of the discriminating care exercised on the other side of the Atlantic.

"Do you want to know," I asked one of them, "whether I am a polygamist?"

"No, sir," he said very quietly.

"Would you like me to tell you whether I am fundamentally opposed to any and every system of government?"

The man seemed mystified. "No, sir," he said. "I don't know that I would."

"Don't you care?" I asked.

"Well, not particularly, sir," he answered.

I was determined to arouse him from his lethargy.

"Let me tell you, then," I said, "that I am an anarchistic polygamist, that I am opposed to all forms of government, that I object to any kind of revealed religion, that I regard the state and property and marriage as the mere tyranny of the bourgeoisie, and that I want to see class hatred carried to the point where it forces every one into brotherly love. Now, do I get in?"

The official looked puzzled for a minute. "You are not Irish, are you, sir?" he said.

"No."

"Then I think you can come in all right," he answered.

The journey from Liverpool to London, like all other English journeys, is short. This is due to the fact that England is a small country: it contains only 50,000 square miles, whereas the United States, as every one knows, contains three and a half billion. I mentioned this fact to an English fellow passenger on the train, together with a provisional estimate of the American corn crop for 1922: but he only drew his rug about his knees, took a sip of brandy from his travelling flask, and sank into a state resembling death. I contented myself with jotting down an impression of incivility and paid no further attention to my fellow traveller other than to read the labels on his luggage and to peruse the headings of his newspaper by peeping over his shoulder.

It was my first experience of travelling with a fellow passenger in a compartment of an English train, and I admit now that I was as yet ignorant of the proper method of conduct. Later on I became fully conversant with the rule of travel as understood in England. I should have known, of course, that I must on no account speak to the man. But I should have let down the window a little bit in such a way as to make a strong draught on his ear. Had this failed to break down his reserve I should have placed a heavy valise in the rack over his head so balanced that it might fall on him at any moment. Failing this again, I could have blown rings of smoke at him or stepped on his feet under the pretence of looking out of the window. Under the English rule as long as he bears this in silence you are not supposed to know him. In fact, he is not supposed to be there. You and he each presume the other to be a mere piece of empty space. But let him once be driven to say, "Oh, I beg your pardon, I wonder if you would mind my closing the window," and he is lost. After that you are entitled to tell him anything about the corn crop that you care to.

But in the present case I knew nothing of this, and after three hours of charming silence I found myself in London.

II. I Am Interviewed by the Press

IMMEDIATELY upon my arrival in London I was interviewed by the Press. I was interviewed in all twenty times. I am not saying this in any spirit of elation or boastfulness. I am simply stating it as a fact—interviewed twenty times, sixteen times by men and twice by women. But as I feel that the results of these interviews were not all that I could have wished, I think it well to make some public explanation of what happened.

The truth is that we do this thing so differently over in America that I was for the time being completely thrown off my bearings. The questions that I had every right to expect after many years of American and Canadian interviews failed to appear.

I pass over the fact that being interviewed for five hours is a fatiguing process. I lay no claim to exemption for that. But to that no doubt was due the singular discrepancies as to my physical appearance which I detected in the London papers.

The young man who interviewed me immediately after breakfast described me as "a brisk, energetic man, still on the right side of forty, with energy in every movement."

The lady who wrote me up at 11.30 reported that my hair was turning grey, and that there was "a peculiar languor" in my manner.

And at the end the boy who took me over at a quarter to two said, "The old gentleman sank wearily upon a chair in the hotel lounge. His hair is almost white."

The trouble is that I had not understood that London reporters are supposed to look at a man's personal appearance. In America we never bother with that. We simply describe him as a "dynamo." For some reason or other it always pleases everybody to be called a "dynamo," and the readers, at least with us, like to read about people who are "dynamos," and hardly care for anything else.

In the case of very old men we sometimes call them "battle-horses" or "extinct volcanoes," but beyond these three classes we hardly venture on description. So I was misled. I had expected that the reporter would say: "As soon as Mr. Leacock came across the floor we felt we were in the presence of a 'dynamo' (or an 'extinct battle-horse' as the case may be)." Otherwise I would have kept up those energetic movements all the morning. But they fatigue me, and I did not think them necessary. But I let that pass.

The more serious trouble was the questions put to me by the reporters. Over in our chief centres of population we use another set altogether. I am thinking here especially of the kind of interview that I have given out in Youngstown, Ohio, and Richmond, Indiana, and Peterborough, Ontario. In all these places—for example, in Youngstown, Ohio the reporter asks as his first question, "What is your impression of Youngstown?"

In London they don't. They seem indifferent to the fate of their city. Perhaps it is only English pride. For all I know they may have been burning to know this, just as the Youngstown, Ohio, people are, and were too proud to ask. In any case I will insert here the answer I had written out in my pocket-book (one copy for each paper—the way we do it in Youngstown), and which read:

"London strikes me as emphatically a city with a future. Standing as she does in the heart of a rich agricultural district with railroad connection in all directions, and resting, as she must, on a bed of coal and oil, I prophesy that she will one day be a great city."

The advantage of this is that it enables the reporter to get just the right kind of heading: **PROPHESIES BRIGHT FUTURE FOR LONDON**. Had that been used my name would have stood higher there than it does to-day—unless the London people are very different from the people in Youngstown, which I doubt. As it is they don't know whether their future is bright or is as dark as mud. But it's not my fault. The reporters never asked me.

If the first question had been handled properly it would have led up by an easy and pleasant transition to question two, which always runs: "Have you seen our factories?" To which the answer is:

"I have. I was taken out early this morning by a group of your citizens (whom I cannot thank enough) in a Ford car to look at your pail and bucket works. At eleven-thirty I was taken out by a second group in what was apparently the same car to see your soap works. I understand that you are the second nail-making centre east of the Alleghenies, and I am amazed and appalled. This afternoon I am to be taken out to see your wonderful system of disposing of sewerage, a thing which has fascinated me from childhood."

Now I am not offering any criticism of the London system of interviewing, but one sees at once how easy and friendly for all concerned this Youngstown method is; how much better it works than the London method of asking questions about literature and art and difficult things of that sort. I am sure that there must be soap works and perhaps a pail factory somewhere in London. But during my entire time of residence there no one ever offered to take me to them. As for the sewerage—oh, well, I suppose we are more hospitable in America. Let it go at that.

I had my answer all written and ready, saying:

"I understand that London is the second greatest hop-consuming, the fourth hog-killing, and the first egg-absorbing centre in the world."

But what I deplore still more, and I think with reason, is the total omission of the familiar interrogation: "What is your impression of our women?"

That's where the reporter over on our side hits the nail every time. That is the point at which we always nudge him in the ribs and buy him a cigar, and at which youth and age join in a sly jest together. Here again the sub-heading comes in so nicely: THINKS YOUNGSTOWN WOMEN CHARMING. And they are. They are, everywhere. But I hate to think that I had to keep my impression of London women unused in my pocket while a young man asked me whether I thought modern literature owed more to observation and less to inspiration than some other kind of literature.

Now that's exactly the kind of question, the last one, that the London reporters seem to harp on. They seemed hipped about literature; and their questions are too difficult. One asked me whether the American drama was structurally inferior to the French. I don't call that fair. I told him I didn't know; that I used to know the answer to it when I was at college, but that I had forgotten it, and that, anyway, I am too well off now to need to remember it.

That question is only one of a long list that they asked me about art and literature. I missed nearly all of them, except one as to whether I thought Al Jolson or Frank Tinney was the higher artist, and even that one was asked by an American who is wasting himself on the London Press.

I don't want to speak in anger. But I say it frankly, the atmosphere of these young men is not healthy, and I felt that I didn't want to see them any more.

Had there been a reporter of the kind we have at home in Montreal or Toledo or Springfield, Illinois, I would have welcomed him at my hotel. He could have taken me out in a Ford car and shown me a factory and told me how many cubic feet of water go down the Thames in an hour. I should have been glad of his society, and he and I would have together made up the kind of copy that people of his class and mine read. But I felt that if any young man came along to ask about the structure of the modern drama, he had better go on to the British Museum.

Meantime as the reporters entirely failed to elicit the large fund of information which I acquired, I reserve my impressions of London for a chapter by themselves.

III. Impressions of London

BEFORE setting down my impressions of the great English metropolis; a phrase which I have thought out as a designation for London; I think it proper to offer an initial apology. I find that I receive impressions with great difficulty and have nothing of that easy facility in picking them up which is shown by British writers on America. I remember Hugh Walpole telling me that he could hardly walk down Broadway without getting at least three dollars' worth and on Fifth Avenue five dollars' worth; and I recollect that St. John Ervine came up to my house in Montreal, drank a cup of tea, borrowed some tobacco, and got away with sixty dollars' worth of impressions of Canadian life and character.

For this kind of thing I have only a despairing admiration. I can get an impression if I am given time and can think about it beforehand. But it requires thought. This fact was all the more distressing to me in as much as one of the leading editors of America had made me a proposal, as honourable to him as it was lucrative to me, that immediately on my arrival in London;—or just before it,—I should send him a thousand words on the genius of the English, and five hundred words on the spirit of London, and two hundred words of personal chat with Lord Northcliffe. This contract I was unable to fulfil except the personal chat with Lord Northcliffe, which proved an easy matter as he happened to be away in Australia.

But I have since pieced together my impressions as conscientiously as I could and I present them here. If they seem to be a little bit modelled on British impressions of America I admit at once that the influence is there. We writers all act and react on one another; and when I see a good thing in another man's book I react on it at once.

London, the name of which is already known to millions of readers of this book, is beautifully situated on the river Thames, which here sweeps in a wide curve with much the same breadth and majesty as the St. Jo River at South Bend, Indiana. London, like South Bend itself, is a city of clean streets and admirable sidewalks, and has an excellent water supply. One is at once struck by the number of excellent and well-appointed motor cars that one sees on every hand, the neatness of the shops and the cleanliness and cheerfulness of the faces of the people. In short, as an English visitor said of Peterborough, Ontario, there is a distinct note of optimism in the air. I forget who it was who said this, but at any rate I have been in Peterborough myself and I have seen it.

Contrary to my expectations and contrary to all our Transatlantic precedents, I was not met at the depot by one of the leading citizens, himself a member of the Municipal Council, driving his own motor car. He did not tuck a fur rug about my knees, present me with a really excellent cigar and proceed to drive me about the town so as to show me the leading points of interest, the municipal reservoir, the gas works and the municipal abattoir. In fact he was not there. But I attribute his absence not to any lack of hospitality but merely to a certain reserve in the English character. They are as yet unused to the arrival of lecturers. When they get to be more accustomed to their coming, they will learn to take them straight to the municipal abattoir just as we do.

For lack of better guidance, therefore, I had to form my impressions of London by myself. In the mere physical sense there is much to attract the eye. The city is able to boast of many handsome public buildings and offices which compare favourably with anything on the other side of the Atlantic. On the bank of the Thames itself rises the power house of the Westminster Electric Supply Corporation, a handsome modern edifice in the later Japanese style. Close by are the commodious premises of the Imperial Tobacco Company, while at no great distance the Chelsea Gas Works add a striking feature of rotundity. Passing northward, one observes Westminster Bridge, notable as a principal station of the underground railway. This station and the one next above it, the Charing Cross one, are connected by a wide thoroughfare called Whitehall. One of the best American drug stores is here situated. The upper end of Whitehall opens into the majestic and spacious Trafalgar Square. Here are grouped in

imposing proximity the offices of the Canadian Pacific and other railways, The International Sleeping Car Company, the Montreal Star, and the Anglo-Dutch Bank. Two of the best American barber shops are conveniently grouped near the Square, while the existence of a tall stone monument in the middle of the Square itself enables the American visitor to find them without difficulty. Passing eastward towards the heart of the city, one notes on the left hand the imposing pile of St. Paul's, an enormous church with a round dome on the top, suggesting strongly the first Church of Christ (Scientist) on Euclid Avenue, Cleveland.

But the English churches not being labelled, the visitor is often at a loss to distinguish them.

A little further on one finds oneself in the heart of financial London. Here all the great financial institutions of America—The First National Bank of Milwaukee, The Planters National Bank of St. Louis, The Montana Farmers Trust Co., and many others,—have either their offices or their agents. The Bank of England—which acts as the London Agent of The Montana Farmers Trust Company,—and the London County Bank, which represents the People's Deposit Co., of Yonkers, N.Y., are said to be in the neighbourhood.

This particular part of London is connected with the existence of that strange and mysterious thing called "the City." I am still unable to decide whether the city is a person, or a place, or a thing. But as a form of being I give it credit for being the most emotional, the most volatile, the most peculiar creature in the world. You read in the morning paper that the City is "deeply depressed." At noon it is reported that the City is "buoyant" and by four o'clock that the City is "wildly excited."

I have tried in vain to find the causes of these peculiar changes of feeling. The ostensible reasons, as given in the newspaper, are so trivial as to be hardly worthy of belief. For example, here is the kind of news that comes out from the City. "The news that a modus vivendi has been signed between the Sultan of Kowfat and the Shriek-ul-Islam has caused a sudden buoyancy in the City. Steel rails which had been depressed all morning reacted immediately while American mules rose up sharply to par."... "Monsieur Poincar, speaking at Bordeaux, said that henceforth France must seek to retain by all possible means the ping-pong championship of the world: values in the City collapsed at once."... "Despatches from Bombay say that the Shah of Persia yesterday handed a golden slipper to the Grand Vizier Feebli Pasha as a sign that he might go and chase himself: the news was at once followed by a drop in oil, and a rapid attempt to liquidate everything that is fluid..."

But these mysteries of the City I do not pretend to explain. I have passed through the place dozens of times and never noticed anything particular in the way of depression or buoyancy, or falling oil, or rising rails. But no doubt it is there.

A little beyond the city and further down the river the visitor finds this district of London terminating in the gloomy and forbidding Tower, the principal penitentiary of the city. Here Queen Victoria was imprisoned for many years.

Excellent gasoline can be had at the American Garage immediately north of the Tower, where motor repairs of all kinds are also carried on.

These, however, are but the superficial pictures of London, gathered by the eye of the tourist. A far deeper meaning is found in the examination of the great historic monuments of the city. The principal ones of these are the Tower of London (just mentioned), the British Museum and Westminster Abbey. No visitor to London should fail to see these. Indeed he ought to feel that his visit to England is wasted unless he has seen them. I speak strongly on the point because I feel strongly on it. To my mind there is something about the grim fascination of the historic Tower, the cloistered quiet of the Museum and the majesty of the ancient Abbey, which will make it the regret of my life that I didn't see any one of the three. I fully meant to: but I failed: and I can only hope that the circumstances of my failure may be helpful to other visitors.

The Tower of London I most certainly intended to inspect. Each day, after the fashion of every tourist, I wrote for myself a little list of things to do and I always put the Tower of London on it. No doubt the reader knows the kind of little list that I mean. It runs:

1. Go to bank.
2. Buy a shirt.
3. National Picture Gallery.
4. Razor blades.
5. Tower of London.
6. Soap.

This itinerary, I regret to say, was never carried out in full. I was able at times both to go to the bank and buy a shirt in a single morning: at other times I was able to buy razor blades and almost to find the National Picture Gallery. Meantime I was urged on all sides by my London acquaintances not to fail to see the Tower. "There's a grim fascination about the place," they said; "you mustn't miss it." I am quite certain that in due course of time I should have made my way to the Tower but for the fact that I made a fatal discovery. I found out that the London people who urged me to go and see the Tower had never seen it themselves. It appears they never go near it. One night at a dinner a man next to me said, "Have you seen the Tower? You really ought to. There's a grim fascination about it." I looked him in the face. "Have you seen it yourself?" I asked. "Oh, yes," he answered. "I've seen it." "When?" I asked. The man hesitated. "When I was just a boy," he said, "my father took me there." "How long ago is that?" I enquired. "About forty years ago," he answered;

"I always mean to go again but I don't somehow seem to get the time."

After this I got to understand that when a Londoner says, "Have you seen the Tower of London?" the answer is, "No, and neither have you."

Take the parallel case of the British Museum. Here is a place that is a veritable treasure house. A repository of some of the most priceless historical relics to be found upon the earth. It contains, for instance, the famous Papyrus Manuscript of Thotmes II of the first Egyptian dynasty—a thing known to scholars all over the world as the oldest extant specimen of what can be called writing; indeed one can here see the actual evolution (I am quoting from a work of reference, or at least from my recollection of it) from the ideographic cuneiform to the phonetic syllabic script. Every time I have read about that manuscript and have happened to be in Orillia (Ontario) or Schenectady (N.Y.) or any such place, I have felt that I would be willing to take a whole trip to England to have five minutes at the British Museum, just five, to look at that papyrus. Yet as soon as I got to London this changed. The railway stations of London have been so arranged that to get to any train for the north or west, the traveller must pass the British Museum. The first time I went by it in a taxi, I felt quite a thrill. "Inside those walls," I thought to myself, "is the manuscript of Thotmes II." The next time I actually stopped the taxi. "Is that the British Museum?" I asked the driver, "I think it is something of the sort, sir," he said. I hesitated. "Drive me," I said, "to where I can buy safety razor blades."

After that I was able to drive past the Museum with the quiet assurance of a Londoner, and to take part in dinner table discussions as to whether the British Museum or the Louvre contains the greater treasures. It is quite easy any way. All you have to do is to remember that The Winged Victory of Samothrace is in the Louvre and the papyrus of Thotmes II (or some such document) is in the Museum.

The Abbey, I admit, is indeed majestic. I did not intend to miss going into it. But I felt, as so many tourists have, that I wanted to enter it in the proper frame of mind. I never got into the frame of mind; at least not when near the Abbey itself. I have been in exactly that frame of mind when on State Street, Chicago, or on King Street, Toronto, or anywhere three thousand miles away from the Abbey. But by bad luck I never struck both the frame of mind and the Abbey at the same time.

But the Londoners, after all, in not seeing their own wonders, are only like the rest of the world. The people who live in Buffalo never go to see Niagara Falls; people in Cleveland don't know which is Mr. Rockefeller's house, and people live and even die in New York without going up to the top of the Woolworth Building. And anyway the past is remote and the present is near. I know a cab driver

in the city of Quebec whose business in life it is to drive people up to see the Plains of Abraham, but unless they bother him to do it, he doesn't show them the spot where Wolfe fell: what he does point out with real zest is the place where the Mayor and the City Council sat on the wooden platform that they put up for the municipal celebration last summer.

No description of London would be complete without a reference, however brief, to the singular salubrity and charm of the London climate. This is seen at its best during the autumn and winter months. The climate of London and indeed of England generally is due to the influence of the Gulf Stream. The way it works is thus: The Gulf Stream, as it nears the shores of the British Isles and feels the propinquity of Ireland, rises into the air, turns into soup, and comes down on London. At times the soup is thin and is in fact little more than a mist: at other times it has the consistency of a thick Potage St. Germain. London people are a little sensitive on the point and flatter their atmosphere by calling it a fog: but it is not: it is soup. The notion that no sunlight ever gets through and that in the London winter people never see the sun is of course a ridiculous error, circulated no doubt by the jealousy of foreign nations. I have myself seen the sun plainly visible in London, without the aid of glasses, on a November day in broad daylight; and again one night about four o'clock in the afternoon I saw the sun distinctly appear through the clouds. The whole subject of daylight in the London winter is, however, one which belongs rather to the technique of astronomy than to a book of description. In practice daylight is but little used. Electric lights are burned all the time in all houses, buildings, railway stations and clubs. This practice which is now universally observed is called Daylight Saving.

But the distinction between day and night during the London winter is still quite obvious to any one of an observant mind. It is indicated by various signs such as the striking of clocks, the tolling of bells, the closing of saloons, and the raising of taxi rates. It is much less easy to distinguish the technical approach of night in the other cities of England that lie outside the confines, physical and intellectual, of London and live in a continuous gloom. In such places as the great manufacturing cities, Buggingham-under-Smoke, or Gloombsbury-on-Ooze, night may be said to be perpetual.

I had written the whole of the above chapter and looked on it as finished when I realised that I had made a terrible omission. I neglected to say anything about the Mind of London. This is a thing that is always put into any book of discovery and observation and I can only apologise for not having discussed it sooner. I am quite familiar with other people's chapters on "The Mind of America," and "The Chinese Mind," and so forth. Indeed, so far as I know it has turned out that almost everybody all over the world has a mind. Nobody nowadays travels, even in Central America or Thibet, without bringing back a chapter on "The Mind of Costa Rica," or on the "Psychology of the Mongolian." Even the gentler peoples such as the Burmese, the Siamese, the Hawaiians, and the Russians, though they have no minds are written up as souls.

It is quite obvious then that there is such a thing as the mind of London: and it is all the more culpable in me to have neglected it in as much as my editorial friend in New York had expressly mentioned it to me before I sailed. "What," said he, leaning far over his desk after his massive fashion and reaching out into the air, "what is in the minds of these people? Are they," he added, half to himself, though I heard him, "are they thinking? And, if they think, what do they think?"

I did therefore, during my stay in London, make an accurate study of the things that London seemed to be thinking about. As a comparative basis for this study I brought with me a carefully selected list of the things that New York was thinking about at the moment. These I selected from the current newspapers in the proportions to the amount of space allotted to each topic and the size of the heading that announced it. Having thus a working idea of what I may call the mind of New York, I was able to collect and set beside it a list of similar topics, taken from the London Press to represent the mind of London. The two placed side by side make an interesting piece of psychological analysis. They read as follows:

THE MIND OF NEW YORK

What is it thinking?

1. Do chorus girls make good wives?
2. Is red hair a sign of temperament?
3. Can a woman be in love with two men?
4. Is fat a sign of genius?

THE MIND OF LONDON

What is it thinking?

1. Do chorus girls marry well?
2. What is red hair a sign of?
3. Can a man be in love with two women?
4. Is genius a sign of fat?

Looking over these lists, I think it is better to present them without comment; I feel sure that somewhere or other in them one should detect the heart-throbs, the pulsations of two great peoples. But I don't get it. In fact the two lists look to me terribly like "the mind of Costa Rica."

The same editor also advised me to mingle, at his expense, in the brilliant intellectual life of England. "There," he said, "is a coterie of men, probably the most brilliant group East of the Mississippi." (I think he said the Mississippi). "You will find them," he said to me, "brilliant, witty, filled with repartee." He suggested that I should send him back, as far as words could express it, some of this brilliance. I was very glad to be able to do this, although I fear that the results were not at all what he had anticipated. Still, I held conversations with these people and I gave him, in all truthfulness, the result. Sir James Barrie said, "This is really very exceptional weather for this time of year." Cyril Maude said, "And so a Martini cocktail is merely gin and vermouth." Ian Hay said, "You'll find the underground ever so handy once you understand it."

I have a lot more of these repartees that I could insert here if it was necessary. But somehow I feel that it is not.

IV. A Clear View of the Government and Politics of England

A LOYAL British subject like myself in dealing with the government of England should necessarily begin with a discussion of the monarchy. I have never had the pleasure of meeting the King,—except once on the G.T.R. platform in Orillia, Ontario, when he was the Duke of York and I was one of the welcoming delegates of the town council. No doubt he would recall it in a minute.

But in England the King is surrounded by formality and circumstance. On many mornings I waited round the gates of Buckingham Palace but I found it quite impossible to meet the King in the quiet sociable way in which one met him in Orillia. The English, it seems, love to make the kingship a subject of great pomp and official etiquette. In Canada it is quite different. Perhaps we understand kings and princes better than the English do. At any rate we treat them in a far more human heart-to-heart fashion than is the English custom, and they respond to it at once. I remember when King George—he was, as I say, Duke of York then—came up to Orillia, Ontario, how we all met him in a delegation on the platform. Bob Curran—Bob was Mayor of the town that year—went up to him and shook hands with him and invited him to come right on up to the Orillia House where he had a room reserved for him. Charlie Janes and Mel Tudhope and the other boys who were on the town Council gathered round the royal prince and shook hands and told him that he simply must stay over. George Rapley, the bank manager, said that if he wanted a cheque cashed or anything of that sort to come right into the Royal Bank and he would do it for him. The prince had two aides-de-camp with him and a secretary, but Bob Curran said to bring them uptown too and it would be all right. We had planned to have an oyster supper for the Prince at Jim Smith's hotel and then take him either to the Y.M.C.A. Pool Room or else over to the tea social in the basement of the Presbyterian Church.

Unluckily the prince couldn't stay. It turned out that he had to get right back into his train and go on to Peterborough, Ontario, where they were to have a brass band to meet him, which naturally he didn't want to miss.

But the point is that it was a real welcome. And you could see that the prince appreciated it. There was a warmth and a meaning to it that the prince understood at once. It was a pity that he couldn't have stayed over and had time to see the carriage factory and the new sewerage plant. We all told the prince that he must come back and he said that if he could he most certainly would. When the prince's train pulled out of the station and we all went back uptown together (it was before prohibition came to Ontario) you could feel that the institution of royalty was quite solid in Orillia for a generation.

But you don't get that sort of thing in England.

There's a formality and coldness in all their dealings with royalty that would never go down with us. They like to have the King come and open Parliament dressed in royal robes, and with a clattering troop of soldiers riding in front of him. As for taking him over to the Y.M.C.A. to play pin pool, they never think of it. They have seen so much of the mere outside of his kingship that they don't understand the heart of it as we do in Canada.

But let us turn to the House of Commons: for no description of England would be complete without at least some mention of this interesting body. Indeed for the ordinary visitor to London the greatest interest of all attaches to the spacious and magnificent Parliament Buildings. The House of Commons is commodiously situated beside the River Thames. The principal features of the House are the large lunch room on the western side and the tea-room on the terrace on the eastern. A series of smaller luncheon rooms extend (apparently) all round about the premises: while a commodious bar offers a ready access to the members at all hours of the day. While any members are in the bar a light is kept burning in the tall Clock Tower at one corner of the building, but when the bar is closed the light is turned off by whichever of the Scotch members leaves last. There is a handsome legislative chamber attached to the premises from which—so the antiquarians tell us—the House of Commons

took its name. But it is not usual now for the members to sit in the legislative chamber as the legislation is now all done outside, either at the home of Mr. Lloyd George, or at the National Liberal Club, or at one or other of the newspaper offices. The House, however, is called together at very frequent intervals to give it an opportunity of hearing the latest legislation and allowing the members to indulge in cheers, sighs, groans, votes and other expressions of vitality. After having cheered as much as is good for it, it goes back again to the lunch rooms and goes on eating till needed again.

It is, however, an entire exaggeration to say that the House of Commons no longer has a real share in the government of England. This is not so. Anybody connected with the government values the House of Commons in a high degree. One of the leading newspaper proprietors of London himself told me that he has always felt that if he had the House of Commons on his side he had a very valuable ally. Many of the labour leaders are inclined to regard the House of Commons as of great utility, while the leading women's organizations, now that women are admitted as members, may be said to regard the House as one of themselves.

Looking around to find just where the natural service of the House of Commons comes in, I am inclined to think that it must be in the practice of "asking questions" in the House. Whenever anything goes wrong a member rises and asks a question. He gets up, for example, with a little paper in his hand, and asks the government if ministers are aware that the Khedive of Egypt was seen yesterday wearing a Turkish Tarbosh. Ministers say very humbly that they hadn't known it, and a thrill runs through the whole country. The members can apparently ask any questions they like. In the repeated visits which I made to the gallery of the House of Commons I was unable to find any particular sense or meaning in the questions asked, though no doubt they had an intimate bearing on English politics not clear to an outsider like myself. I heard one member ask the government whether they were aware that herrings were being imported from Hamburg to Harwich. The government said no. Another member rose and asked the government whether they considered Shakespere or Moliere the greater dramatic artist. The government answered that ministers were taking this under their earnest consideration and that a report would be submitted to Parliament. Another member asked the government if they knew who won the Queen's Plate this season at Toronto. They did,—in fact this member got in wrong, as this is the very thing that the government do know. Towards the close of the evening a member rose and asked the government if they knew what time it was. The Speaker, however, ruled this question out of order on the ground that it had been answered before.

The Parliament Buildings are so vast that it is not possible to state with certainty what they do, or do not, contain. But it is generally said that somewhere in the building is the House of Lords. When they meet they are said to come together very quietly shortly before the dinner hour, take a glass of dry sherry and a biscuit (they are all abstemious men), reject whatever bills may be before them at the moment, take another dry sherry and then adjourn for two years.

The public are no longer allowed unrestricted access to the Houses of Parliament; its approaches are now strictly guarded by policemen. In order to obtain admission it is necessary either to (A) communicate in writing with the Speaker of the House, enclosing certificates of naturalization and proof of identity, or (B) give the policeman five shillings. Method B is the one usually adopted. On great nights, however, when the House of Commons is sitting and is about to do something important, such as ratifying a Home Rule Bill or cheering, or welcoming a new lady member, it is not possible to enter by merely bribing the policeman with five shillings; it takes a pound. The English people complain bitterly of the rich Americans who have in this way corrupted the London public. Before they were corrupted they would do anything for sixpence.

This peculiar vein of corruption by the Americans runs like a thread, I may say, through all the texture of English life. Among those who have been principally exposed to it are the servants,—especially butlers and chauffeurs, hotel porters, bell-boys, railway porters and guards, all taxi-drivers, pew-openers, curates, bishops, and a large part of the peerage.

The terrible ravages that have been made by the Americans on English morality are witnessed on every hand. Whole classes of society are hopelessly damaged. I have it in the evidence of the English themselves and there seems to be no doubt of the fact. Till the Americans came to England the people were an honest, law-abiding race, respecting their superiors and despising those below them. They had never been corrupted by money and their employers extended to them in this regard their tenderest solicitude. Then the Americans came. Servants ceased to be what they were; butlers were hopelessly damaged; hotel porters became a wreck; taxi-drivers turned out thieves; curates could no longer be trusted to handle money; peers sold their daughters at a million dollars a piece or three for two. In fact the whole kingdom began to deteriorate till it got where it is now. At present after a rich American has stayed in any English country house, its owners find that they can do nothing with the butler; a wildness has come over the man. There is a restlessness in his demeanour and a strange wistful look in his eye as if seeking for something. In many cases, so I understand, after an American has stayed in a country house the butler goes insane. He is found in his pantry counting over the sixpence given to him by a Duke, and laughing to himself. He has to be taken in charge by the police. With him generally go the chauffeur, whose mind has broken down from driving a rich American twenty miles; and the gardener, who is found tearing up raspberry bushes by the roots to see if there is any money under them; and the local curate whose brain has collapsed or expanded, I forget which, when a rich American gave him fifty dollars for his soup kitchen.

There are, it is true, a few classes that have escaped this contagion, shepherds living in the hills, drovers, sailors, fishermen and such like. I remember the first time I went into the English countryside being struck with the clean, honest look in the people's faces. I realised exactly where they got it: they had never seen any Americans. I remember speaking to an aged peasant down in Somerset. "Have you ever seen any Americans?" "Nah," he said, "uz eard a mowt o' 'em, zir, but uz zeen nowt o' 'em." It was clear that the noble fellow was quite undamaged by American contact.

Now the odd thing about this corruption is that exactly the same idea is held on the other side of the water. It is a known fact that if a young English Lord comes to an American town he puts it to the bad in one week. Socially the whole place goes to pieces. Girls whose parents are in the hardware business and who used to call their father "pop" begin to talk of precedence and whether a Duchess Dowager goes in to dinner ahead of or behind a countess scavenger. After the young Lord has attended two dances and one tea-social in the Methodist Church Sunday School Building (Adults 25 cents, children 10 cents—all welcome.) there is nothing for the young men of the town to do except to drive him out or go further west.

One can hardly wonder then that this general corruption has extended even to the policemen who guard the Houses of Parliament. On the other hand this vein of corruption has not extended to English politics. Unlike ours, English politics,—one hears it on every hand,—are pure. Ours unfortunately are known to be not so. The difference seems to be that our politicians will do anything for money and the English politicians won't; they just take the money and won't do a thing for it.

Somehow there always seems to be a peculiar interest about English political questions that we don't find elsewhere. At home in Canada our politics turn on such things as how much money the Canadian National Railways lose as compared with how much they could lose if they really tried; on whether the Grain Growers of Manitoba should be allowed to import ploughs without paying a duty or to pay a duty without importing the ploughs. Our members at Ottawa discuss such things as highway subsidies, dry farming, the Bank Act, and the tariff on hardware. These things leave me absolutely cold. To be quite candid there is something terribly plebeian about them. In short, our politics are what we call in French "people."

But when one turns to England, what a striking difference! The English, with the whole huge British Empire to fish in and the European system to draw upon, can always dig up some kind of political topic of discussion that has a real charm about it. One month you find English politics turning on the Oasis of Merv and the next on the hinterland of Albania; or a member rises in the Commons

with a little bit of paper in his hand and desires to ask the foreign secretary if he is aware that the Ahkoond of Swat is dead. The foreign secretary states that the government have no information other than that the Ahkoond was dead a month ago. There is a distinct sensation in the House at the realisation that the Ahkoond has been dead a month without the House having known that he was alive. The sensation is conveyed to the Press and the afternoon papers appear with large headings, THE AHKOOND OF SWAT IS DEAD. The public who have never heard of the Ahkoond bare their heads in a moment in a pause to pray for the Ahkoond's soul. Then the cables take up the refrain and word is flashed all over the world, The Ahkoond of Swat is Dead.

There was a Canadian journalist and poet once who was so impressed with the news that the Ahkoond was dead, so bowed down with regret that he had never known the Ahkoond while alive, that he forthwith wrote a poem in memory of The Ahkoond of Swat. I have always thought that the reason of the wide admiration that Lannigan's verses received was not merely because of the brilliant wit that is in them but because in a wider sense they typify so beautifully the scope of English politics. The death of the Ahkoond of Swat, and whether Great Britain should support as his successor Mustalpa El Djin or Kamu Flaj,—there is something worth talking of over an afternoon tea table. But suppose that the whole of the Manitoba Grain Growers were to die. What could one say about it? They'd be dead, that's all.

So it is that people all over the world turn to English politics with interest. What more delightful than to open an atlas, find out where the new kingdom of Hejaz is, and then violently support the British claim to a protectorate over it. Over in America we don't understand this sort of thing. There is naturally little chance to do so and we don't know how to use it when it comes. I remember that when a chance did come in connection with the great Venezuela dispute over the ownership of the jungles and mud-flats of British Guiana, the American papers at once inserted headings, WHERE IS THE ESSIQUIBO RIVER? That spoiled the whole thing. If you admit that you don't know where a place is, then the bottom is knocked out of all discussion. But if you pretend that you do, then you are all right. Mr. Lloyd George is said to have caused great amusement at the Versailles Conference by admitting that he hadn't known where Teschen was. So at least it was reported in the papers; and for all I know it might even have been true. But the fun that he raised was not really half what could have been raised. I have it on good authority that two of the American delegates hadn't known where Austria Proper was and thought that Unredeemed Italy was on the East side of New York, while the Chinese Delegate thought that the Cameroons were part of Scotland. But it is these little geographic niceties that lend a charm to European politics that ours lack forever.

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