## Explorations in Civilisation.

BEING THE LETTERS OF AN AUSTRALIAN IN EXILE.

[For The Bulletin.]

Rails came in from all points of the compass, and crossed over, and dived under our line, and went away in all directions, and came back again. The train ran through half-a-dozen miles of terraces and squalid streets, and thousands of chimney-pots, and crossed a muddy stream showing the flat, black beaches of ooze that belong to low tide. There were barges and warehouses sitting down in the mud, and riverside factories up to their knees in slime; and a yellow fog, that smelt like bad coffee, covered us. The train stopped, and the porters cried, "London Bridge."

So the miracles that brought me over 12,000 miles of sea had really happened, and this was London Bridge! It seemed such a weight of endeavor for such a light result.

Out of London Bridge again, and tremblingly—haltingly—to Cannon-street, the train feeling its way through the yellow mephitic fog. Once or twice the dense chokiness lifted, and then I saw in the wilderness of houses we passed that in London the usual style of measurement suffers a revolution. Elsewhere 3ft. is a yard, here a yard is a foot square, and the majority of the houses have no yards at all.

The train started out of Cannon-street again, and backed and filled through the murk for half an hour—then it stopped suddenly, and fog-choked voices croaked "Charing Cross!"

A porter gripped my bag, led me through the obscurity to a cab, and accepted the coppers I gave him as one to the manner born.

My ignorance had brought me back to Charing Cross, although I wanted to land in the city, but this mistake being explained, I took a hansom, and voyaged into the Strand. The outlook was all very gloomy—a fog of Egyptian darkness in places; in others a miasma only as thick as starlight. I saw a cross in the station-yard, pure white from the impurity of pigeon-droppings. The tower of St. Martin-in-the-fields whitened also with guano—all the ugly lines of fog-blackened architecture gradually disappearing under white manure. That is what antiquity is—mostly manure. There was a street as wide as the narrowest parts of George-street, Sydney; a thousand busses tied and tangled in the fog—their drivers becoming blastiferous, and not thankful, when the liftings of the fog came; there were hundreds of pigeons swooping down on the horse-manure, standing in the centre of the traffic—dodging horse hoofs and wheels with sideway flutterings, but never really taking fright, for they had that perfect hunger which casteth out fear. For the 150,000 dockers or so are not the only living things to whom fog brings starvation. There are the pigeons, and those starving gulls of the Thames whose crops are so empty in mid-winter that men standing on the embankment, and holding bread in one hand, capture the gull with the other.

Along the Strand, this dirty street reverberant to the hoof-beats of thousands of horses, the footways were lined at intervals with hawkers of various things for a penny, and their hands and faces were of the same flayed appearance and the same tint of chilblain red, I had seen at Dover.

As we went along, many churches grew out of the fog, and passed into obscurity again. St. Clement Danes I saw on one side, and Mary-le-Strand on another. Then came an idiotic memorial of a griffin blocking up the narrow lane the Strand is at the Law Courts. The griffin marked the site of Temple Bar; and near it is an old house, now a barber's shop, which is claimed to be the old palace of Wolsey and Henry VIII. It is a badly-built, narrow-passaged, low-roomed house; just about good enough for king or priest.

There were the offices of 200 newspapers, each of them as dreary as the Brisbane Daily Telegraph or the Hobart Mercury; strange street signs of "Fetter Lane," Peahen Court," "Wine Office Court" and "The Olde Cheshire Cheese," and then we were out of Fleet-street and ascending a little rise called Ludgate Hill. I thought Ludgate Hill *was* a hill.

I had read in English books and papers of the readiness of the American to boast of his country. Well, he has a country worthy of boastfulness. Yet, as a braggart, he is several miles behind the English. How often has the Englishman in Australia spoken to me of Ludgate Hill, and Cheapside, and Fleet-street, and "*the* City" as if it were the finest and only city on earth. The "city" itself is not so wide as the "city" of Adelaide proper—its streets are small, winding, and returning on one another. The habit of saying "Paternoster Row" and "Cheapside," as if they were each places of sweetness and light, separated by shining streets like unto the streets of Jerusalem the Golden, made me believe, while in Australia, that London was really a beautiful city. But having seen, I am minded to say to every Englishman I meet: "Yes, not bad . . . but you should see the Sarah Sands hotel on the Sydney road at Brunswick. And you Englishmen can have no idea of what beauty is until you've been in Champion's right-of-way, off Flinders Lane."

However, I have discovered that Ludgate Hill ascent has on its left the old Bailey, leading to Newgate, and that at its top is St. Paul's—a truly marvellous building, whose height is lost by reason of it being surrounded by warehouses. St. Paul's Churchyard is the place of drapers—the home of rags. The church was built by Wren. The English Government promised to pay the architect £200 a year; but it had so many princes and clergy and other loafers to provide for that Wren's salary was never paid to time, and he only secured it as the result of a very enthusiastic and continuous pursuit.

St. Paul's is rapidly being whitened by the pigeons—as my cab drove into a bank of fog again, a hundred degenerate blue rocks flew from the roadway to the spring of the dome.

The cab-horse went on, feeling his way in the darkness; the fog lifted, and I saw a building looking more like a high wall than anything else. That was the Bank of England. Dead ahead, an imitation of the Madeleine at Paris, the Pantheon at Rome, and altogether a fine building—the Royal Exchange. And, to the right, an ugly non-descript house in stone, very like a flattened kind of Australian Church in Flinders-street. That was the Mansion House. From half-a-dozen points of the irregular central space streams of people poured into the street from below. These are the Vomitoria of the tube railways—the fine underground system of electrical transport which was initiated, and is owned, by Americans.

The cab drew off into fog again, the traffic increased and passed and went ahead, and lessened in volume, and swelled again, obedient to the signs of the policemen; and in five minutes more I had reached Bishopsgate-street, and my friend was saying, "At last, old man!" and making me promise to live at his diggings.

Then I went into Leadenhall-street to see another friend, and there were sounds of a brass band blaspheming against music somewhere. The fog lifted for quite ten minutes, so that the papers next day might say, "The weather was, as usual, true to precedent. True Englishmen could never be really satisfied unless there were fine days for all our great celebrations. The birthday of our late beloved Queen was always accompanied by clear skies, and it was quite in the natural order of things that the fog should rise for the Lord Mayor's Show." I might say here that "Queen's weather" on May 24 was owing to the fact of it being May 24—it is rarely an English newspaper talks of King's weather. The birthday of the present King is November 9, when there is no sun in London.

I waited for the procession to pass, and I saw the Lord Mayor's Show. Firstly, what is the "Lord" Mayor? The Mayor of London has less ostensible reason for existence than the Mayor of Melbourne, who, as Mayor, hasn't got much. The London County Council does almost all the municipal work, and of what remains the Lord Mayor doesn't do any. The Mansion House, by which name they style the pigeon-whited sepulchre, which is like a bad imitation of Dr. Strong's Church, Flinders-st., Melbourne, is not used for the Inspector of Nuisances, nor for the Health Office, nor for the Weights and Measures man—the three officials who, above all others, excuse the existence of such an ignorant body as the average class-elected, unpaid and cheap mayor and aldermen. The Mansion House is used only for social purposes. The Guildhall has become the official Town Hall, and there a little business is done, and more talk, and much guzzling. It is a sad thing to admit that this Guildhall was once a Trades Hall; but only the Employers' Unions met there. When the employees, in the active days of these guilds, tried a little combination, with the object of increasing wages and shortening hours, they were always encouraged in the good work with the lash, and the stocks, and a long, deep think in Gaol.

Anyhow, the Lord Mayor's procession was there, and it looked like the procession Fitzgeralds' Circus would be capable of after leaving Queensland and losing nearly all the circus in an old-man flood.

First there was a detachment of city police, and they were the best thing in the procession. (By the way, I never knew what a troop of perfect men and horses meant, until I came to London. And I have seen them only in Australia. When you look on two score of the mounted police forces of any of the Australias, you look on 80 of the finest perpendicular and horizontal animals that were ever born). Then came the Worshipful Company of Fanmakers—a collection of old, peaceful gentlemen who could not have made a fan to save their lives; the Worshipful Company of Glovers, Patten Makers, and of Stationers, each of them equally ignorant of gloves, pattens, and paper; the Worshipful Company of Innholders; some fire engines; a life-boat; and a car representing Australia, with some miners in red shirts and high boots, and a cocky farmer in a smock-frock. There were also the city sheriff with his Chaplain—or rather the Chaplain for the condemned—in a gilt coach with four horses, the retiring Lord Mayor, and finally, the new god Mayor, or Lord Mayor (although "god" sounds more respectful) in a state chariot apparently made of brass, and drawn by six horses. He was attended by his Chaplain (he must be a bad lot not to be able to behave himself properly for an hour without his chaplain) and his sword-bearer (there ain't no sword), and his mace bearer (there's no mace, either).

The six horses were each ridden by a postillion, but there was also a footman to lead each horse, and four tipstaffs—two walking on each side of the ridiculous band-waggon which the god Mayor calls his chariot. Lastly, three footmen stood up on the tailboard, and hung on to straps from the roof. I called out "Whip behind!" but the fat coachman, who drove the six horses which the six postillions drove, and the six footmen led, did not turn his head. Later on, I found that he couldn't.

He was an apoplectic man, and his face was nearly a foot wide. The pimples showed even under the powder that was plastered thickly on his face, and he looked as if he lived exclusively on beer and fat.

Later on, I saw the front of the procession, and there were in it knights in armor, and men in all kinds of mediæval dress. False-wigged, false-bearded, much-painted supers from the theatres were they. Their hair and beards and tin armor were ghastly frauds, the only particular in which they were naturally true to the time they represented was in their insanitariness. But the English are not a clean people *yet*—as a people; and speaking of them with an eye to Australian standards of cleanliness. A bath in every English, and for that matter, in every continental hotel, is an extra, and it is only the very modern private houses that contain baths. The Englishman's tub, as we read of it in the Englishman's novel, is a superstition; and if it weren't, what sort of a wash can a man have in a tub?

The procession done, I sought my Australian friend in Leadenhall-street. We had been outside the city limits, which are in that direction Camomile-street and Wormwood-street (suggesting a garden of herbs in the shadow of the ancient wall). I saw a shop there with a sign that stated "Smoked pig's chops" and "Boar's Head with pistachios" were served there; and then we went into the city again at Houndsditch, and past St. Botolph's, St. Mary Axe, and Alderman Walk, and came to the sign of the "Ship and Turtle." A notice therein stated that there was a "Turtle Crawl" at the rear. Another Lord Mayor's procession evidently, or a performance of McEacharn receiving his cheap title again.

We had lunch at the Ship and Turtle—an ordinary place of extraordinary charges, and run by the original 40 thieves and a brother of the impenitent malefactor. Turtle soup 5s. a plate, salmon 3s. a portion, and not much to talk about when you had them. Henceforth I shall keep my appetite for rare dishes for the places where the rare dishes grow. Townsville has the atmosphere for the eating of turtle steaks and *bêche-de-mer*.

"How many breads, sir?" said the waiter, preparing to write the items with a very short pencil on a very long slip of paper.

"Breads!"

"Yessir—breads, sir, an' butters, sir."

"Do you mean to tell me you want to know how many bites of bread I ate, and how many of those little pennyweight bits of butter?"

"Yessir—breads sir, and butters sir—'ow many, sir?"

"I don't know; you'd better average."

He averaged, with 10 per cent. on for the risk.

"I had two salts." I said, gravely.

"Two salts, sir?"

"Yes, and two peppers and two mustards."

"Peppers, sir, an' mustards we don't charge for."

I took the docket and moved towards the cash-desk.

He coughed. "Beg pardon, sir, forgotten somethin', sir."

I gave him fourpence.

"Thanky, sir," and he was gone to another customer.

The tip system is a curse in England—a curse which has become law, partly by reason of the studied carelessness of a leisured class with regard to the money it has never been asked to earn, and partly because the employer, recognising the existence of tips, engages waiters at no wages at all, leaving them to make a living by this organised blackmail of customers. Certain police-court evidence given in London during my visit showed that in many, and perhaps all, of the principal hotels and restaurants, the proprietors *charged* the waiters anything over £1 a week for the privilege of working, and, in some cases, insisted on a division of the tips, in addition! The injustice of this struck me at first, and then I "kicked" against it. Now, having things to do so much more important, I fall in with the rest, and tip for everything. A waiter opens the door—he expects a tip; he tells you the time, and waits for a tip; and, if you are busy, and therefore absent-minded, you pay the penny and go away a spineless worm, and not a man. There is nothing more lowering of self-respect than this continuous and shameless hunger for unearned pence.

After lunch, I had a drink in a place in Bishopsgate-street, which is an authentic palace of Richard III. A palace in those days was something like a small Ebenezer church, and must have been very uncomfortable to live in. It is used as a pub. and eating-house now.

Then I was introduced to a very circumspect English gentleman, who, I was told, would find the working capital for the property I had brought for flotation.

He was a middle-aged man, of that fairness of hair and beard so common in England. In youth and under sunlight that Norse fairness, and the skin that accompanies it, looks like the highest expression of energy, even if it isn't; in middle age or ill-health, when the life-light goes out of the eye, the blood from the cheek, and the nimbus from the hair, it looks more old and faded than ever does the faded brunette. And all the life and energy had gone out of the circumspect man, although he had an accession of thin excitement after the second whisky.

"Are you sure you can find the money, if the thing itself is all right?" I asked.

"Sure, sir—sure." He searched his breast-pocket for some papers that were not there. "No matter. Why, sir, I have during the last week closed up a matter of a million which I got for an Indian Railway Company on debentures."

That seemed satisfactory enough, and I was green enough to be pleased with the chances. We left the financial genius and walked to a narrow, crooked track called Old Broad-street. This is the place of the Australian—anywhere from here to Throgmorton-st. he may be found in various gilded bars where people do not swallow their drink like Christians, but block new drinkers by squatting, book-keeperwise, on tall, clerkly seats by the bar-counter, and there browsing over half a pint of stout, or a microscopic liqueur.

Those Australians who are not quite at the top of finance go to the "Fleapit," a dive-bar and billiard-room and restaurant under Broad-street House. In the boom times, there they drink champagnes; and in the slump—beer, if lucky. One of the little barmaids in the little bar, a really innocent barmaid, or one of the best imitations of innocence extant, said:

"You oughter 'ave seen this bar in the Westralian boom, you couldn't get near me then."

"May I now, baby?"

"Don't be stoopid. . . It was Idesick then—it's beer now."

I moved off, seeing a friend in the corridor.

"Don't go, fairy, I didn't mean it."

Fairy!!!

I met many men there—each with his mine to float, his specimens in some office or another, his voluminous reports in his pocket.

"No good now—but just you wait till the war's over."

They were all waiting for the war to end. Some waited month after month with billiard-cues in their hands; others made calendars of their glasses. And, in the natural order of things, not five per cent. of them could hope for success. Hope is a greater force than all the others. I thought these things as I left the "Fleapit," quite satisfied that my float was safe in the hands of the man who had found the million for that Indian railway.

Randolph Bedford.