

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, JANUARY 29, 1898.

How We Went To London.

The Personal Experience of a Member of the Canadian Jubilee Contingent.

By J. Scott Robinson, Col-Sergt. No. 9 Co., 68th Batt'n.

No. 2.

Near to midnight we arrived at London and in a sort of a nightmare marched to Chelsea Barracks, conscious of gas jets flaring upon curious faces crowding the sidewalk, and a mob of howling urchins and the beating of drums at the head of the hazy column. The drums ceased, the column wound about a corner, passed through a gateway where stood a sentry beneath a lamp which flashed upon his glittering bayonet. The detachment halted and the unreality of the scene increased. Men of every color, every size, every race, arrayed in an inconceivable variety of uniform crowded about us, talking animatedly in a confused mixture of bewildering jargons and rolling the whites of their shining eyes upon us. Burly English red-coats, huge Maoris in buff, gaunt Gourkhas and Sikhs in flowing garments and parti-colored turbans, raw boned negroes grinning and chattering, wiry little Chingalese in linen blouses, and dusky Dyaks gazing gravely at the strangers—all against the gloomy background of the great rambling barracks. Was the diamond jubilee a myth, and would this fantastic dream soon be dispersed by the sunbeams slanting through the windows of our Canadian homes?

We soon conformed ourselves to the novelty of the unique surroundings and soon it seemed the most natural thing in the world to chat at breakfast with the sergeant major of the "Royal Niger Constabulary"; afterward in the wash house to lend our soap and towel to an absent minded corporal of the "Hong Kong police"; take a stroll before dinner around the square with a sapper of the "Maltese Submarine Engineers", crack a joke with stooty bugler from Sierra Leone; dine with a lanky Non Com. of the "Cape Mounted Rifles" who could tell thrilling tales of "Dr. Jim's" raid, on one hand, and a valuable little "Head Hunter" from Borneo on the other; minister to the wants of some stirring black "Hausa" at the tea table and perhaps close the day by affriending glass and a cigarette with a convivial crony from the Punjab. We also attained to a degree of intimacy with the British soldiers; and fine whole-souled fellows they were too—profusely generous—nothing which could in any way express their goodwill toward us, or add to our comfort or pleasure was an inconvenience to them. They vied one with the other in their exertions to render our stay among them as enjoyable as possible. Regiments and individual soldiers alike lavished their hospitality upon us.

One evening under convoy of a loquacious corporal of the "Grenadier Guards," the circumference of whose chest equalled that of a good sized oil cask, I visited the "Knightsbridge" cavalry barracks, where, if I remember rightly, the "Scots" are quartered. In one of the commodious rooms through which my friend piloted me I saw standing at a table a very tall, powerfully built, distinguished looking gentleman stylishly attired in a frock coat, silk hat, and carrying a silver headed cane. He was engaged at that moment in consuming a "hap'orth" of cockles supplied by a cadaverous youth with a large basket. I thought he must be a visiting angler enjoying the novelty of a homely feast among the soldiers; or perhaps an officer making a bid for the good will of his men; and I questioned my guide as to the meaning of this rather odd proceeding. "I'm by the table" answered he, "oh 'es only corporal [so] and so of the "Life Guards." Then he explained that the "Guards" always walked out in that fashionable civilian costume.

During the mornings of the days which elapsed before the "Day of Days," we were marched about in "Battersea Park" rehearsing our part of the programme, but in the afternoon we were our own masters and utilized the short periods which were given us to the utmost advantage. London seemed to hold but one central point of interest; for at the "Tower" on the day after our arrival the Canadians seemed to

have gathered in toto. With the contents of this most renowned of prisons the merest child is familiar, and its thrilling history glows in the imagination of every school-boy. Suffice it here to say, that we gloat-ed over its relics of vanished generations and beheld in fancy scenes which even there can make the brain reel. In a confused dream of clanking chains, reeking blocks, grim visaged warders and with the groans of writhing victims ringing in our ears, a party of us left this gloomy monument to historic agonies, and found our way to the "Tower Bridge," from whose summit we described the neighbouring Dome of St. Pauls, and, hurriedly descending, set out in its direction. Threading our way through a maze of crooked streets, past quays adjoining great ware houses, we caught now and then a fleeting glimpse of the object of our quest, which seemed to be ever ascending before us. Finally in despair of attaining the desired goal, we asked a keen looking youth bearing an air of familiarity with this vicinity, if he could direct us to St. Pauls. "Never 'eard on no such place," responded this accomplished cockney, "but there's a church or something up there"—jerkng his thumb towards the next crossing—"that lots of people goes to see." We thanked him (after the substantial English manner of rendering thanks) and turned the corner. The breath left my body with a gasp. The stately Cathedral in all its solemn grandeur rose in majesty before me. We reverently ascended the steps and entered to behold the splendors which other eyes than mine have seen and more graphic pens portrayed.

We unfortunately had with us, one of those creatures who seemed to be contrived for the express purpose of marring the solemnity of any impressive occasion in the person of an unappreciative companion. He yawned constantly and stared vacantly at objects whose very names are enough to make the pulse leap. Finally we eluded him but to our unspeakable horror we found him again, seated upon the tomb of Lord Collingwood, beating his heels against its sacred sides and actually chewing tobacco! "What one of your musty old corpses is buried there" he said pointing to the tomb of Nelson. We told him. "Oh yes? England expects every man to do his duty," he returned; with infinite disgust we retraced our steps, and ascended to the "Whispering Gallery" which afforded our unimaginative friend the most intense satisfaction. We saw too, Westminster Abbey; but in a manner that was nothing short of maddening. Its consecrated interior was possessed at that time by a garrulous mob who jostled one another against the monuments of departed worthies and stood unfeelingly upon the spot where lay immortal ashes. I could have cried aloud at the sight of a man scuffling over the name of Dickens. No opportunity for reflection in the midst of that chattering babel. Only a cursory glance at the last resting places of the great of England's dead. At the entrance of the royal tombs the departure of a verger was announced like that of a ferry-boat, every five minutes. The gates closed behind us and the verger puffed away in convoy of his fleet of curiosity seekers, touching at various points of interest on the voyage and keeping up a clatter like a maxim gun the while. From tomb to tomb we were dragged, hurried from chamber to chamber, dashing headlong after the verger in order to be on the scene of action when he opened fire upon each particular object and finally were thrust rudely out of the gate to make room for another horde.

We "did" London at a breakneck pace and, after a fashion, saw a vast quantity of the treasures it contains; saying one to another "Brethern, the time is short." In the course of these few hours, we swept in a feverish haste, past London land marks of english history. By the way, those structures of the smoky metropolis of the world, present in their substance, a different aspect than when the imagination throws about their pictorial representations

a halo of glory. In fact, from Westminster Abbey down to the Tower Bridge, but newly completed, they need, all of them, a bath. Of course Westminster wouldn't receive a moments consideration if it did not bare upon its hoary sides the moss grown impress of the corroding finger of time; but such an architectural infant as St. Pauls ought really to have a clean face. Being less than two hundred and fifty years old, with its hypocritically ancient expression conferred by a grinning coat of soot, it seems to be obtaining veneration under false pretenses.

The sun rose in a misty nimbus, on the morning of June 22nd and its earliest beams lit up the busy figures of the entire contingent engaged in scouring and pipe

burst forth in a resounding shout, which must have well nigh broken upon the slumbers of the mighty dead who rest within the Cathedral vaults from the accomplishment of labors, which have made secure the foundations of the Empire of her, for whom went up this thunderous acclaim.

It is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous, and leaving the sublime we fared its autonym in the comments of the denizens of dives and hovels, who crowded bare headed, and in rags the line of the procession along the sunny side of the river. The return march, making in all nearly nine hours on parade, was a severe strain, and when we formed up in the Barrack Square many a man toppled over from sheer exhaustion. It is however to the



claying with a tireless energy, till at seven o'clock, we stood immaculate on parade. The particulars of the ensuing procession it is vain to reiterate; but the one event to which all preceding were subordinate, and those following formed an anti-climax—the culminating point—dwarfs almost to insignificance the splendor of many another imposing scene. Standing near the great concourse of prelates and dignitaries assembled on the steps of St. Pauls, we awaited with bated breath the advent of the Queen. The brilliant cavalcade streamed past us but only received a casual glance as we eagerly strained our eyes for a first glimpse of her. Troop after troop rattled by. Great captains and famous rulers rode proudly on but almost unheeded. At last the faint murmur of distant cheering greeted our anxious ears, increasing in volume, coming nearer, ever nearer, till mid a roar as of a descending avalanche, appeared the little woman, before whom every knee in a quarter of the globe must bow. She looked at us smilingly and in response every bosom heaved, every eye kindled, and every face, white, black, or yellow, glowed with an expression of fervid loyalty. I suppose it was loyalty, but whatever it was, its shock thrilled along every nerve and quickened every fibre in our beings. And yet she didn't look a Queen; there was on her sorrow worn face no traces of the royal beauty of Louise or Eugenie, nor did her person display aught of the haughty dignity or the imperious mien of Catherine or Elizabeth, her great predecessor; but to us she was the personification, the embodiment of the empire, upon whom its uniting bonds, though touching at no other point of mutual interest, are in her firmly welded together.

The escort of Princes sweeping by dispersed themselves about her; and there rolled forth from that grand choir, the sounding strains of the hymn of thanks-giving for the reign of her, whom but now our eyes had seen. The air trembled with its swelling echoes, which reverberating through space must have smote upon the very gates of heaven. To its grand Amen ensued a hush profound, broken by the clash of pealing bells, launching forth upon the waiting air their chime of gladness.

The long suspense terminated, the pent up emotions of the overwrought multitude

credit of the adherents of "Our Lady of the Snows," that the heat had no such effect upon any of their members. During the course of the march we had longed unspeakably for a sight of the old Barracks; in fact, I at one time whispered to my neighbour, "If I don't see it before very many minutes the Scotsman will take home one dead Canadian." But its long delayed enclosure reached, the mounted officers held a prolonged conference as to the correct method of dismissing us. Having satisfied themselves on this point, our colonel trotted with maddening deliberation along the column, and told our Sergeant Major to march off the Canadians to their private parade and dismiss them. "March off to their private parade," Not he! The old Sergeant Major usually a stickler for military precision without the formality of a prefatory "Canadians!" neglecting even to take a pace to his left front, and place both hands on his capacious stomach as was his wont in giving a command, then and there, to the great astonishment of the colonel, yelled out as loud as his dry throat and parched tongue would permit, "Rightturndismiss" and in the same breath "Boy give me a bottle of beer" to a small boy with a big basket who stood at hand, prepared to turn to his private account our raging thirst.

The Military Review at Aldershot and the colossal Naval Display at Spithead presented themselves to us with the same aspect as to the generality of beholders. The same thrill of awe swept over us as we gazed upon the might of England's power, and the same throb of pride sent the blood surging to our finger tips, when we realized that we individually composed a particle, however insignificant, of the stupendous structure of the empire. But there transpired one little incident, which, though not in any way pertinent to the review, or affecting in any wise the destinies of the Empire, was amusing and somewhat instructive. It happened thus: One of the "Hausas," who are without doubt the most depraved specimens of humanity this globe can furnish, having just enough more intelligence than a monkey to be proportionately more repugnant, had in the saloon of the boat, in which we were taken around the fleet absorbed an incredible amount of liquid refreshment, and strewed about the floor the remains of

his carcass. Calling loudly upon a steward for another bottle, it was given him unopened. To this the dusky reveller took exception, and the busy waiter told him he had not time to open any more for him.

"You got no time to wait on me" returned this son of darkness swelling with indignation,—"Not me! why I'm a Colonial!"

Colonial! almost screamed the furious waiter, "Colonial!" "Hang your black face, your no Colonial, your a n-i-g-g-e-r!" with so meaning an air, and so fierce an emphasis on his last opprobrious epithet, that the "Nigger" shrunk in terror beneath the table. The steward informed me in confidence shortly afterwards that "if that shrivelled up monkey 'ad giv'im any of 'iz guff, 'ed 'ave slung 'im hover-board."

This Englishman however was a notable exception, for the majority of them, male and female evinced a maudlin affection for these degrading creatures, who thereby become possessed of such an inordinate vanity as to become positively intolerable. They would daily array their ugly carcasses in their finest uniforms, thrust their "swagger sticks" beneath their arms to strut back and forth for all the world like a peacock with his tail spread, in rear of the massive iron railings, which separated the barracks grounds from the street. Nothing seemed to afford them such supreme complacency, nor in fact ministered so much to the edification of a curious throng, who struggled from morn till night for a coveted place at the bars. They however one and all, every variety of "niggers" (as we generally christened all whose hue was anything deeper than swarthy) expressed as devoted a loyalty, as keen a love for the empire as ourselves, and were highly incensed at the faintest reflection upon their zeal in its welfare. What a truly wondrous assemblage was this! Representatives differing as widely as the climes from which they gathered, yet all under the same dominion, all acknowledging the same sovereign sway, and all professing a loyalty to an undefined something; but between the various kindred who comprise that something, existing a relation scarce more cordial than mutual distrust.

Of the many delightful sessions we spent in company with our new found friends, of the thousand and one interests noteworthy in any other connection which transpired daily, of the hearty receptions tendered as by persons of all ranks, in every situation, the hospitality of the public, the munificent entertainments of corporations and private concerns, and the profuse expressions of affection for our people which met us on every hand, of all these I can only make a bare mention, and pass on to the closing day, of a period which must ever tower above the greater part of the memories of a life time. Early on the morning of the day which marked our departure, we were marched to Buckingham Palace and there after the customary salute due His Royal Highness, we filed past the Prince of Wales, and received from his hand the coveted piece of bronze. I cannot speak for my comrades, but I never felt so utterly insignificant, as when passing that distinguished company group-ed about the Prince. My knees knocked together, as he with a smile reminiscent of many a pleasant hour spent in my society, handed me the nation's souvenir. Taking it, I saluted, I know not how, and hastened from the august presence. Noble Lords and high born dames, eyed us narrowly as we passed, and the burden of the knowledge, that the impression we were their making upon those minds, must pass to a greater or less degree for that of our entire people was overpowering, and the relief when the trial was ended, inexpressible. With the bestowal of the medals closed our kaleidoscopic view of the brilliant events of the grand celebration of the Diamond Jubilee. A rapid march to Euston; a swift journey to Liverpool; "Auld Lang Syne;" and we found the "Scotsman" ploughing through the stormy waters of the "Irish Sea" and all that remained visible to us of the stage whereon had been enacted so many vivid scenes, were the hazy outlines of the mouth of the Mersey.

Did it ever occur to you whose hair is thin and constantly falling off that this can be prevented? Hall's Hair Renewer is a sure remedy.