

# TO BUCKINGHAM PALACE AND BACK

WE did not interview J. W. Heenan when he returned from Buckingham Palace. We left him to the Prime Minister, to his family, to the daily newspapers. Then when we thought he had settled down, and that the crowded scenes and experiences of the last two months had fallen into some kind of order in his mind, we walked into his office and said this to him:

"Apart from your mission, which we don't ask you to discuss, what is the most vivid impression still in your mind after your first journey out of New Zealand?"

He thought for a while, then answered: "The heat of New York, the immense size and silence of Canterbury Cathedral, the friendliness of the human race."

So we started on those three topics. When he said that New York was hot did he mean unpleasantly hot, or just hotter than he expected?

"Something far worse than either of those. I thought I knew what humid heat was after Auckland. When I struck a heat-wave in London I realised that I'd felt nothing at all in Auckland. But when the thermometer rose to 90 degrees in New York, I sighed for the comparative coolness of London. I

don't know how to describe the heat of New York. It was not just unpleasant. It was melting and suffocating. I would go into a basement to escape the heat outside, and begin to forget it. But when I returned to the street it was like walking into an oven. With the towering buildings on either side the streets were just deep canyons filled with burning air. It made me really ill."

"Was it then you thought of Canterbury Cathedral, or did you feel its power when you first saw it?"

"When I saw it—or rather, when I entered. I'm not very religious, but something happened to me when I stood in the vast nave, walked on the ancient stones, and looked up at pillars and vaulted ceilings that had not changed for centuries."

"You found nothing like it in America?"

"Nothing of the same kind. But I did find one haven of rest there. I went to lunch with a couple of newspaper men at the Union League Club, an old-established institution formed at the time of the Civil War. It is a very exclusive conservative affair, furnished soberly but in excellent taste. All the servants without exception were Negroes, but there was an air almost of equality, and certainly of friendliness, between them and the club members. They had all been

there for years. The charm of the place was the air of tranquillity about it—no noise, no bustle, not a sound from outside. It was the quietest place I struck in the whole of the United States."

"You must have found some quiet clubs in Britain, too?"

"I did, but nothing quite like that place in New York. I was, of course, far too busy in London to look for such places or relax when I found them. I escaped once or twice with Robert Gibbings and Arthur Heighway among others, who knew exactly where to go to be quiet and to get good food at a reasonable price. But in general I was anchored to hotels."

## Loaves and Fishes

"How about the ordinary British public? Did rationing seem to you to be making life miserable for them?"

"Well, I spent most of my time in the West End of London, where conditions would seem not to be very difficult. But I would not have got the impression anywhere that the people lacked nourishment. They looked well, by which I mean well fed, and they were always cheerful. But that wasn't the whole tale. Thousands of them went out to eat, and as long as they had money they did fairly well. Beef and mutton were certainly scarce—sometimes I went a whole week without meat—but there was an abundance of good fish and, at hotels and restaurants, fowl. And there was one thing that filled me with delight as often as I saw it—real crusty bread. I used to love to crush the rolls in my hand just to hear them crackling. There were surprises in the fruit line too. I saw great quantities of cherries and strawberries—the latter better than ours in colour, size, and flavour. The best of them cost 3/6 a pound."

## Artists' Haunts

"Had you time to meet any of the artists and writers?"

"No time at all by day, but I did once or twice attend lunches and dinner parties at which the guests all belonged to that world. I was honoured myself by a very pleasant dinner at 'The Ivy', a well-known eating haunt of writers, artists, and actors. Among the guests were Epstein, Michael Sadleir, Hannen Swaffer (looking like a long-haired bishop) C. K. Ogden, the basic English exponent, Robert Gibbings, Martin Dent, the publisher, Richard Church, the poet, and several others. We talked of books and men over very good food and better wine, and if there's a better way of discussing such things I don't know what it is."

"You said that the friendliness of the human race had impressed you. Did that apply everywhere?"



J. W. HEENAN

*Heat in New York, silence at Canterbury, friendliness nearly everywhere*

"Nearly everywhere. You meet the other kind, too, of course. As for people in general, it astonished me to find how obliging they were, and how long some of them had remembered little courtesies I had occasionally been able to show them in the past. I think I found the longest memories among the Americans. You would have thought it was seven days instead of seven years since most of them had been in New Zealand. My chief trouble was to get away from them to do some work."

"You saw more of America than just New York?"

"I didn't see nearly as much as I should have liked to see, but I saw enough to make me think. I've already spoken about the heat of New York. The size, noise, and speed made almost as lasting an impression. Half of the visits I intended to make were quite impossible owing to the time it takes to get about. The traffic is so dense you are held up at every corner till the lights are clear. This means that it takes half an hour to walk six blocks. Fortunately there are 9,000 taxis in New York and they're about the cheapest things in America. In general I found the immensity of everything overwhelming, and even frightening, but the Empire State Building, though it is the tallest in the world, did not seem nearly so high as I expected. It is higher than Tinakori Hill, and over twice the height of Mount Victoria, but somehow or other it does not impress you as much as some of the smaller buildings. I thought the women of New York the best dressed I had ever seen. The new look did not seem new on them, but something they'd been born to."

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INSIDE CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

*"Pillars and vaulted ceilings unchanged for centuries"*