LONDON IS HOME TO NEW ZEALANDERS

(By O. A. Gillespie)

THAT firm, enveloping hand which is British hospitality has been extended to our soldiers in England. Famous writers and journalists (perhaps with an eye to "copy") have been conducting them on tours of London. That is only the beginning. Briton's sons from overseas will be as welcome as they were during the last war; just as the residents of Britain gathered us into their homes, so will our men of the 2nd Echelon feel the warmth of their hospitality—a warmth which grew with the years until, when the war ended, parting from them was like a family farewell.

Let me recall one personal instance of this hospitality. When my first leave came, I gave my destination as London; for that great city was all I wished to see. Through the open window of the train which slid noisily between grim lanes of buildings, I had my first smell of the city — a magic perfume compounded of fog and tobacco smoke, petrol fumes and cheap scent, dust, and a hint of frost. I have never forgotten it to this day. In that indigo night I glimpsed the Tower Bridge and thought of Whistler, and I thought, late that night as I went to sleep for the first time for a year in a real bed, that in the morning I would realise a dream and see Westminster Abbey.

Heart of Empire

Westminster Abbey! The very heart of Empire. Here was history tabulated by tombs and memorials to those great names which have added to the pageant of centuries. Voices were like a gentle wind eddying through a forest of beams of mellow light from the richly stained windows. I wanted to fall on my knees. Instead I returned to the main entrance to buy a guide-book — the entrance through which Kings of England have passed for hundreds of years to their crowning and anointing.

As I asked for the booklet someone at my elbow said, "You are a stranger here. Will you allow me to be your guide?"

He was an elderly man—a bachelor. He waited there, he told me later, until he saw an overseas soldier who was obviously visiting London for the first time so that he could offer his services. But he was more—he was one of Britain's vast army of humble hosts. Too old for service, he did what he could in his modest way as guide and friend to the men from "down under." Few residents, I think, knew more about London, from its obvious sights such as the Guildhall, the National Gallery, St. Paul's Cathedral, and the Tower to the narrow alleys and byways within the old city walls.

History in Stone

We did the Abbey thoroughly. My new friend made history a living book. Before we entered, he showed me where the two Watling Streets of Roman times met to ford the River Thames near what is now Westminster Bridge. Together we saw the burial place of 13 English Kings—the Henrys, the Jameses, the Williams, the Edwards, and the Charleses who lie beneath that magnificent roof whose slim supporting columns rise and are lost in the dim light, like gothic trees in a conventional forest. We saw the tombs of Spencer, Dryden and Garrick; of Johnson, Browning and Tennyson; of Handel and Dean Stanley; of the two Pitts and Canning and many other famous statesmen. We looked on the last resting place of Newton, Ben Jonson, Robert Stephenson, and Charles Darwin and others of that famous host whom the centuries have gathered there (and where the Unknown Soldier has since been laid). For the first time I saw the historic Stone of Scone, so like many another piece of rock, though none other in the whole world has known such history or travels. I stood a little to the west of the Western Front of the Abbey, where Caxton set up his first printing press in the Almony; I was shown where the Abbot's prison once stood, where Raleigh spent his last hours before that spacious Elizabethan life was ended on the block.

What a moving thing History becomes when one walks and talks in the shadow of those grey masses where our men of adventure and spirit lived out their full lives. But those ghosts are the spirit of England; and my guide lived in that peopled past.

Through many a winding street he led me to the Church of St. Bartholomew —a church which for many years was partly a stable—to look on the famous weeping stone; and to fragments of the old Roman Wall which the centuries have reduced to absurdity of defence as the city has risen heavenwards about its crumbling stones. Out to Smithfield Market we went, to see the Martyrs' Stone. Here, enclosed by buildings where miles of carcases (including much New Zealand beef and mutton), hung in chilly uniformity, is the granite pillar to mark where men and women were burned at the stake as our nation moved through those fierce hates and controversies which ultimately welded it to one great Commonwealth.

London's "Tubes"

Down underground we went to look on an old water-gate on the Thames where Charles II. merrily took barge from Whitehall in the long ago. A dank place it was, with only wet and dripping stones which once echoed to the chatter of the minxes and foppish courtiers who surrounded him. Electric trains now speed under the bed of the river through giant steel tubes which give their name to the greatest underground railway service in the world. That same Tube service runs far below the teeming city like an enormous rabbit warren, spreading in every direction to transport London's millions at the rate of two millions a day.

We made frequent use of it, swiftly travelling through those giant pipes instead of taking taxis which dawdled at every street crossing, to reach churches, old palaces, art galleries and buildings whose associations help to weave the historical fabric which is our very being as a people. Such small things my newfound friend pointed out to me—a small brass triangle embedded in the surface of an intersection in Oxford Street where Tyburn stood and the populace gathered to witness public executions. A turnpike remained there until 1829. We looked at name plates on houses where famous men had lived. We climbed the staircase of old, half-timbered houses in High Holborn—clutching a rope in place of bannisters—for this man knew his way into the oddest and most interesting corners. We wandered through the Inns of Court, and in the little gardens there all noise of the passing traffic of Fleet Street goes by unheard, so quiet it is among the trees. Over five centuries ago the Knights Templar worshipped in one of the chapels whose oaken benches have been polished by use through all those thousands of days.

The Cheshire Cheese

I tasted my first lark, steak, kidney and mushroom pie in Ye Old Cheshire Cheese, the most famous restaurant in Fleet Street, and afterwards walked through cellars whose beams had been charred and blackened by the Great Fire of London. I tasted French delicacies in *Le Petit Riche*, where symmetrical potted shrubs stood round the entrance like green candles in the narrow streets of Soho, district of quaint restaurants.

Together we mounted to the tops of buses for excursions to the outskirts of London—to Hampton Court, scene of such magnificence in Cardinal Wolsey's day and where Henry VIII.'s gusty laughter echoed through the vast banqueting hall. We strolled under massive chestnut trees where Henry and other kings took the air and planned and intrigued for England. We journeyed to St. Albans to view the magnificent cathedral there; to stand in a meadow where battles of the Wars of the Roses were fought five hundred years ago. Here, too, England's third printing press brought light to those who sought enlightenment in an era of awakening.

So the first week of my first leave went by. It was typical of many more I was to spend with other new friends in all parts of England and Scotland, learning by actual association to add to history which had been memorised only by dates.

THE BATTLE OF MARATHON

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Rout of the Persians

Against the perfect discipline of the Greeks the Persians were decimated. Their individual courage, their agility, and their light weapons, were useless against the compact bodies of Greeks, all working in concert.

Just before evening the Persians fled and were pursued to the water's edge. Here the Greeks lost more men than during the afternoon's battle, trying to hold back the galleys.

Datis endeavoured to avenge himself by sailing round to attack the City of Athens itself, direct, but Miltiades anticipated the move and Datis finally withdrew when he saw an army ready to meet him.

The dead were still on the ground and the battle scarcely over when two thousand Spartan spearmen arrived at the end of a three-day 150-mile march.

Armoured as they were, the Greek soldiers had suffered little. The Athenians lost 192 men to the 6,400 left on the field by Datis.

Thus ended one of the brightest days in the bright history of Athens. Although Athens was sacked nine years later by Xerxes, the legend of Persian invincibility had been shattered, and Greece was free to develop a civilisation which has been admired by the world for twenty-four hundred years since then, and free to set up memorials which still remind the world of its debt of gratitude to the men of Marathon.

Asia had dominated the world, with its tyranny, and its superstitions. Now Greece was free to create a democratic tradition which no nation has been ashamed to follow. The legend of Asiatic power was dispelled.

Whatever strange edifices have since been built upon them, the foundations of Europe were truly laid at Marathon.

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