

London from a 'Bus-Top

BY SYDNEY BROOKS

IT came rushing and rocking over Albert Bridge when I first saw it, and stopped within a yard of me, obedient to the distant command of an old woman and her basket. The conductor stepped down with the leisurely patience of one whose time belongs to the world; the passengers took it as the fortune of war, with scarcely a glance behind; and the tempestuous figure fifty yards away, loaded with the week's washing and flurried by some insoluble bonnet-strings, bore down in little waddling sprints upon the 'bus. She was relieved of her burden with the finish of a cotillon-leader, helped up the steps, and found or made an expansive seat inside. The conductor whistled, the brakes were loosened with a bang, and after a straining stamp or two the horses felt their load and started off.

It was the noise and briskness of the movement that decided me. In London, with a day on one's hands, one needs these outside promptings even to loaf with the right receptivity. And just where I stood, at the foot of Albert Bridge, it seemed particularly worth while. For Albert Bridge cuts into the heart of London's Montmartre, the imperishably alluring Chelsea, where in a mile and a half's walk you may wander down all English history from the Roman invasion, most of English literature, and much of whatever is best in modern English art. I was trying to picture it as it must have been when a rumor of the plague gave Pepys such a terrible fright, when More sang in the choir of the old church, when Charles II. and Nell Gwynn came over from Fulham to view the site of the Pensioners' Hospital, when Horace Walpole frisked off to Ranelagh from his father's house near by, when Franklin sailed from Blackfriars for a day's outing and swam back again, and when Chelsea was really a village of palaces, instead of a London suburb; I was wondering what Gay and Swift and Smollett

and Addison and Steele and Dr. Johnson would think of it could they revisit it as they used to; and I was particularly wondering what Carlyle would have said to the factory on the opposite bank—when the 'bus came. It was quite an ordinary 'bus, with its full equipment of primary colors and advertisements, and but for the accident of its having to wait for the washerwoman, might have swung idly out of my existence. The pause and the reason for it and that Chesterfield of a conductor, interested me if only by the flagrancy of their contrast to Broadway; something stirred in response to the stamping of the horses, and when the 'bus moved I was on it and climbing up-stairs to the roof. The hansom may be, as Disraeli called it, the gondola of London, but the 'bus is the old three-decker to which all else must dip its colors. From its triumphant loftiness you

Do overpeer the petty traffickers,

and by so much conceive yourself their superior. Hansoms, broughams, victorias, landaus, motors, vans, wagons, carts, the coster's barrow, do but fall in on the lower spectacular plane, are but items in the sliding, tangled pageant, — extra touches to its variety.

I might have guessed as much: we are heading for the Bank. The 'bus swings grandly into King's Road, Chelsea, pointing Citywards. The right-angled turn is taken with the sureness of the president of the Four-in-Hand Club. No Londoner ever seems too old or too young to drive, and to drive well. The crowded, crooked streets of this "province in brick," seamed with a traffic that makes New York in reminiscence a mere country village, are the best of all driving-schools. None but a first-class whip could live in them. And you have only to watch a 'bus-driver handle the ribbons for ten seconds, you have only to see him hugging his horses down a muddy incline, coaxing them up

Ludgate Hill, or flicking his whip at the pull-up, to be sure he knows his business. There is the professional air, the professional stamp, all over him. He is a wit, too, as all his forebears have been, since first men took to coaches; and in the wondrous *camaraderie* of the London streets he has chance enough to show it. For the brothers of his order, for the drivers employed by the same company, there is the correct salute of the whip and an exchange of greetings, a swapping of pleasantries, that no passenger has yet got the hang of. Anyway, no sooner are two 'buses of the same line within twenty yards of each other than both drivers are at it, in the thick of it, with hilarious whip and shaking shoulders. They will crane round and carry it on long after the 'buses have passed and separated. What it is all about, you never know; you are utterly out of it; tantalizing fragments alone reach your understanding, but to piece them together is hopeless. The two veterans have it all to themselves and keep it there.

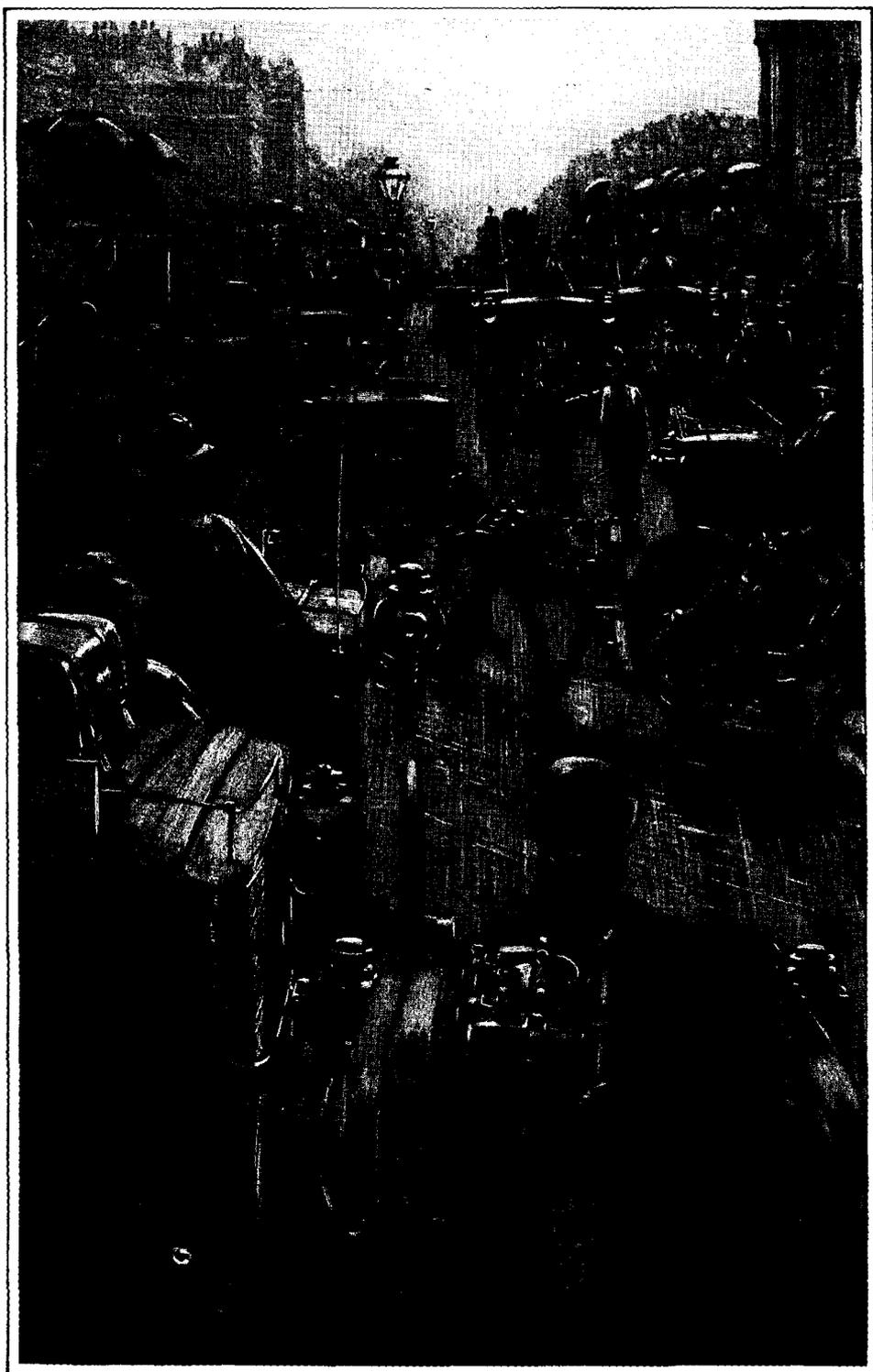
But catch a driver when a clumsy drayman has fouled his wheels or blocked his way, or when a rival 'bus has stolen a march on him. Then you will understand the Londoner's boast that the cockney is the readiest, the wittiest, of all his Majesty's subjects. The tongue is not his only weapon. I remember once starting from the Mansion House on a 'bus the driver of which had been maddened by some remark of the conductor on the 'bus just in front of him. The two belonged to rival companies and were travelling the same route. They talked it over with pungency and zest from the Mansion House to St. Paul's. At the top of Ludgate Hill, one of the regular stopping-places, the driver made up his mind he could stand it no longer. He got down from his seat and pummelled the conductor heartily for two minutes. It refreshed him so much that at the next stopping-place he did it again. By the time Charing Cross was reached it had become a habit with him. Whenever the 'buses stopped there would be a brisk set-to, the intervals between the halts being filled with an exchange of prophecies as to what would happen at the next.

A driver who has been passed by a rival 'bus, or, worse still, for it shows

he is running behind his schedule, by a 'bus of his own company, will not waste much time talking. 'Buses, be it understood, are like Atlantic liners: they "never race." But there are conditions under which one might almost fancy they go quicker than usual; and this is one of them.

Without, of course, racing, the driver will, in a quiet way, do what he can to win back his lost priority. It is about as exciting and baffling a bit of work as a man may well engage in. Just as he sees his opening and the whip is playing freely, the conductor rings the bell and a precious minute has to be lost in depositing or taking up a passenger. (The London 'bus must always stop whenever and wherever it is hailed.) The rival adds alarmingly to his distance; but in an instant he too is brought to a standstill, by a careful old lady on the sidewalk, who is not, at her time of life, going to get on a 'bus while it is in motion. We are nearly on level terms again; if the driver dare but to pass that "isle of refuge" to the right instead of the left, he would be ahead. But the London 'bus-driver, though he may break every other law, keeps the rule of the road to a hair. We yield, are forced inwards, and so another chance is gone. But only for a moment. A hundred yards away all traffic has ceased as though a barrier had been drawn across the street. A thin, ceaseless line of vehicles passes before it from a side street across our route. We are held up to allow its exit. Now is the time when a dexterous driver, wedging in and out among the crowd, may beat his rival at the start and get away.

Nothing shows the exhaustless variety, the appalling wealth of London, like these "blocks." Nothing, too, shows its orderliness so palpably. For the barrier is but "the uplifted arm of the policeman," on which the late Mr. Bayard used to enlarge with so much enthusiasm. Not a man dare poke his horse's nose beyond the line of those outstretched fingers. On a summer's afternoon at Hamilton Place, or lower down by Devonshire House, a jungle of all conceivable conveyances, wheels all but touching, twelve to fifteen deep, will stretch away for a quarter of a mile or more. Every type of vehicle that ever ran on wheels, every



THE ARM OF THE LAW
Regulating traffic at Hyde Park

sort of horse that ever stood between shafts, is there. Below you as you peer over the side of your 'bus is a magnificent landau; next to it, a coster's barrow; farther on, a doctor's brougham, a tradesman's delivery van, a ramshackle four-wheeler with baggage on the roof and a nervous little woman in black inside, hansoms beyond counting, express-wagons, automobiles gasping, 'buses towering like painted turrets, a four-in-hand back from Bushey playing for position with a lorry, and here and there men and women on horseback feeling their way to the front. Wealth, fashion, pleasure, and the infinite gradations of business—all waiting obedient on the "man in blue." It looks like the start of some impossible race, the beginnings of a universal "reliability test," open to all comers. At last the arm falls, its owner steps negligently to one side, and the whole cavalcade breaks away with a roar. Then you may learn what city driving can be. There is nothing in all Europe and nothing in America that will begin to compare with this demoniac plunge down Piccadilly.

But I was forgetting—we are still in King's Road, Chelsea. A mediocre, unlovely, bourgeois street, which even its memories barely redeem; a street sprung from a royal footpath through fields, trodden down by King Charles on his visits to Nell Gwynn. Here, as often in London, the name is all that is left to snatch from the unsuggestive present and conjure with. . . . A turn, and we are in the land of substance, red-bricked, comfortable Sloane Street, hesitating between shops and houses, but evidently determined that whichever wins it shall be good of its kind. . . . Another, and we round into the gut of Knightsbridge, rising through it, with Rotten Row on the left, to the gray spaciousness of Hyde Park Corner. Here is the one really joyous scene that London holds, a veritable splash of freshness and color on its rusty drab. Looking over the Park railings from your secure height, you see first of all the double stream of carriages

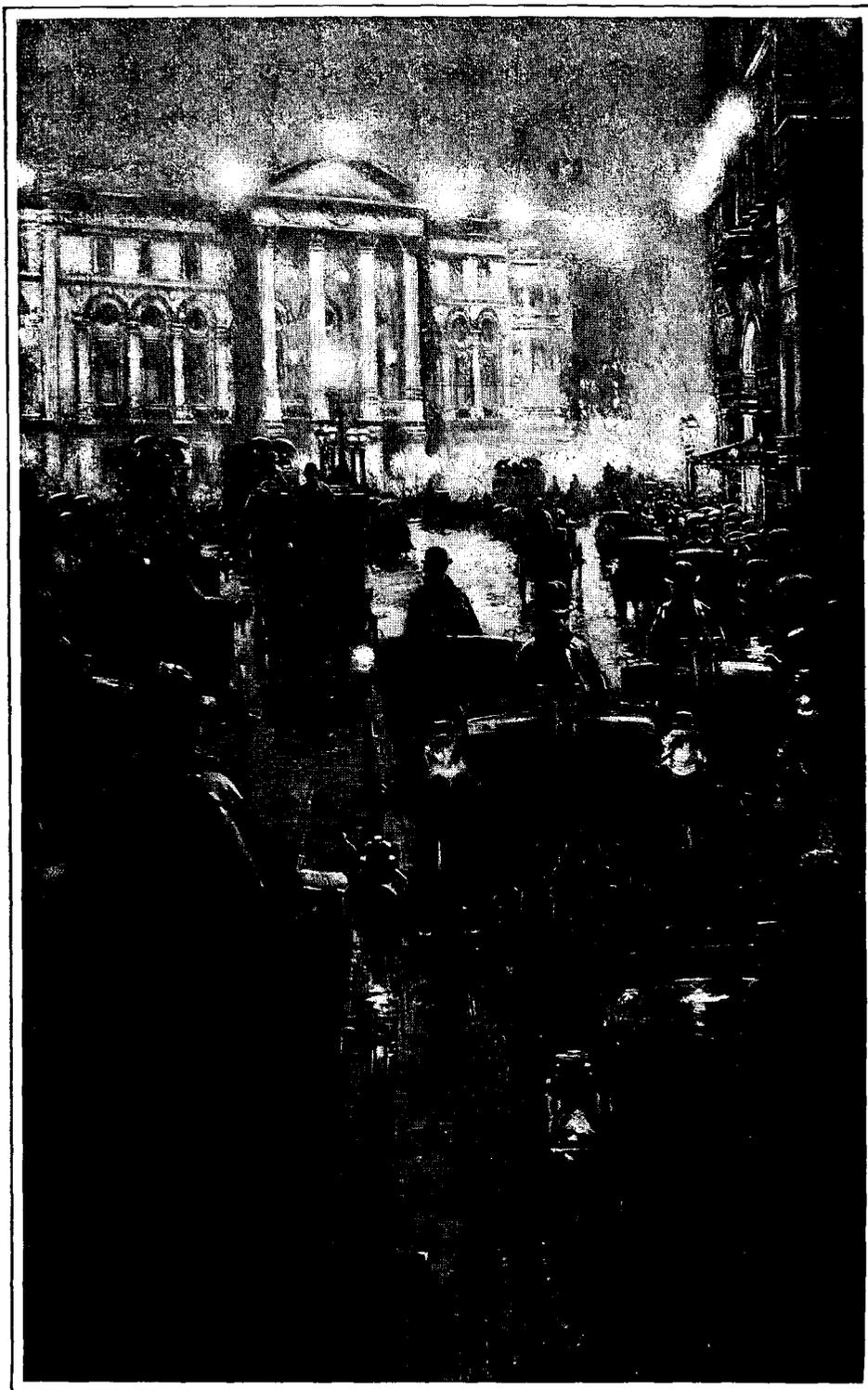
Quick-glancing to the sun:

beyond them, sitting or walking under the trees, the massed concourse of

fashionable idlers, flirting their parasols and dresses in exquisite clusters; farther still, the green pastoral witchery of the Park, dissolved in the distance into that indescribably softening blue-gray mist that is the atmospheric note of London. Here are luxury, leisure, bright movement, an infectious glow of brilliancy, in an almost sylvan setting.

Piccadilly seems cold and blatant by contrast as one charges down it. Yet even here, be the sunshine ever so bright, the visitor is crowned in the pearly haze that tones, attenuates, unifies most if not all of London, that haze that has tantalized and defeated how many artists! Even over Piccadilly, even over this the most mundane of all London streets, it throws its saving glamour. Indeed the whole splendid avenue might serve for a studio, not for its values alone, but for the complexity of the types that throng it. It is the quintessence of London, the distillation of all London humanity, to be studied nowhere so narrowly as from a 'bus-top. Perfect du Mauriers in the original approach, pass by, and are left behind, or stand in groups looking from the club windows; Phil Mays in the life swarm beneath one, and characters from Thackeray and Dickens jostle unsuspectingly on the sidewalk. It is like a perennial subscription to *Punch*. The clubs alone, which never look so thoroughly clubbable as when hastily glanced at from a passing 'bus, will store one's memory with a hundred recognizable types. All England, all the empire, indeed, sooner or later finds its way to Piccadilly. One cannot pass down it without a sight of some glittering, turbaned, alien figure, majestically isolated, majestically unheeded. Regent Street may claim a grander sweep, and by virtue of its shops a more devoted femininity; but it is along Piccadilly that the tide of social London flows brim full.

The night does but seal its supremacy. From seven in the evening till two in the morning London, or all of London that counts, is Piccadilly. Then, like the city for which it stands, it is prodigal of its happiest effects. London is no daylight city. Sunshine, pageantry, merely betray it into a maze of incongruities, startle without relieving its sooty grayness, its perpetual look of thunder. But see it,



PICCADILLY CIRCUS ON A WET EVENING

see Piccadilly, at night and from the perspective of a 'bus, when the lamps show orange-yellow through the blue darkness, and the lights of a thousand hansoms come bowling towards you, and you snatch a glimpse of white dresses, whiter arms and necks gleaming in the blackness. London is pictorially the best because practically the worst lit city in the world. That incomparable artist, its atmosphere, makes even the electric globes forgivable, and adds to the street lamps a softening saffron glow that is never so vulgar as to "dance" or "twinkle." They in turn throw over the nightly pleasure-going stream of beauty, riches, gayety, a recoiling mellowness.

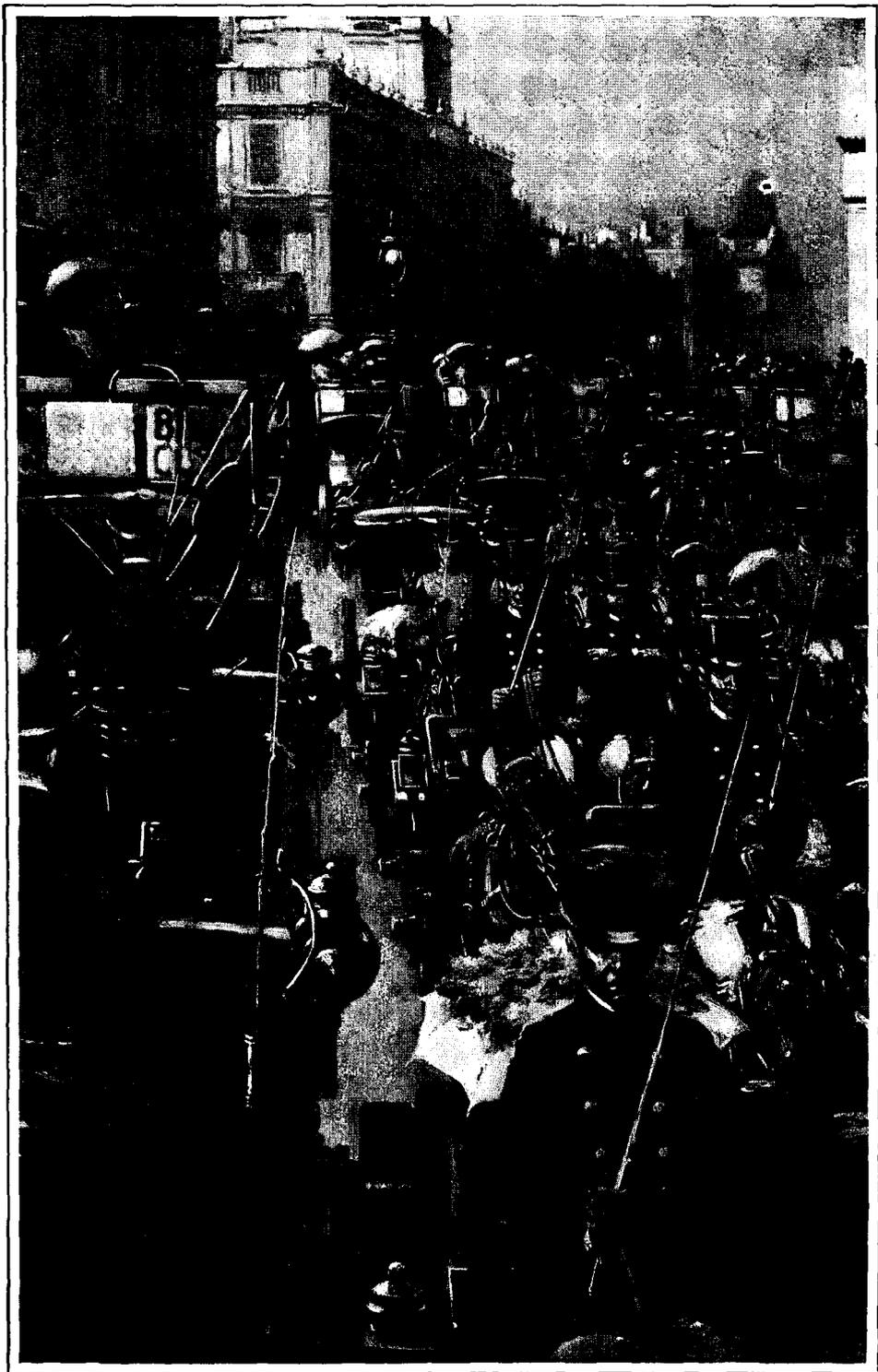
The plangent whirlpool of Piccadilly Circus receives us, fretting and moaning with the confluence of five mighty tributaries. It is the terminus and the starting-point of the West End, where the 'buses from all points meet and load and unload and are scrambled for in rushes of feminine virulence. On a wet evening these rushes reach the point of ferocity. The inhumanity of woman to woman, when it is a question of a seat inside or a thirty minutes' battle with the blue drizzle on the roof, is of more than masculine intensity, as, indeed, it has a right to be. Even so, the Circus yields a sort of dreamy exhilaration, a titanic vapor-bath effect. The lights of lamp and shop front with their murky glimmer, the steaming horses, the hopeless swish of the rain, the drivers twinkling in their oilskins, the tops of the 'buses either a dripping desert or huddled beneath a canopy of umbrellas, and below you, at each stopping-place, this Amazonian fight for shelter, swaying round the 'bus in front, your own 'bus, the 'bus behind, muffled, muddied, despairing—one almost has the sense of a rescue at sea.

But to see Piccadilly Circus, indeed to see all London, at its best, one needs a fog,—not a black fog or a "London particular," but a yellowish mystifying haze of the kind that veils without quite obscuring. The 'bus becomes a balloon forthwith, sailing through a cloudland of unrealities. You look down on phantasmal figures and make of them anything you please. The ordinary silk-hatted, frock-coated Londoner, of

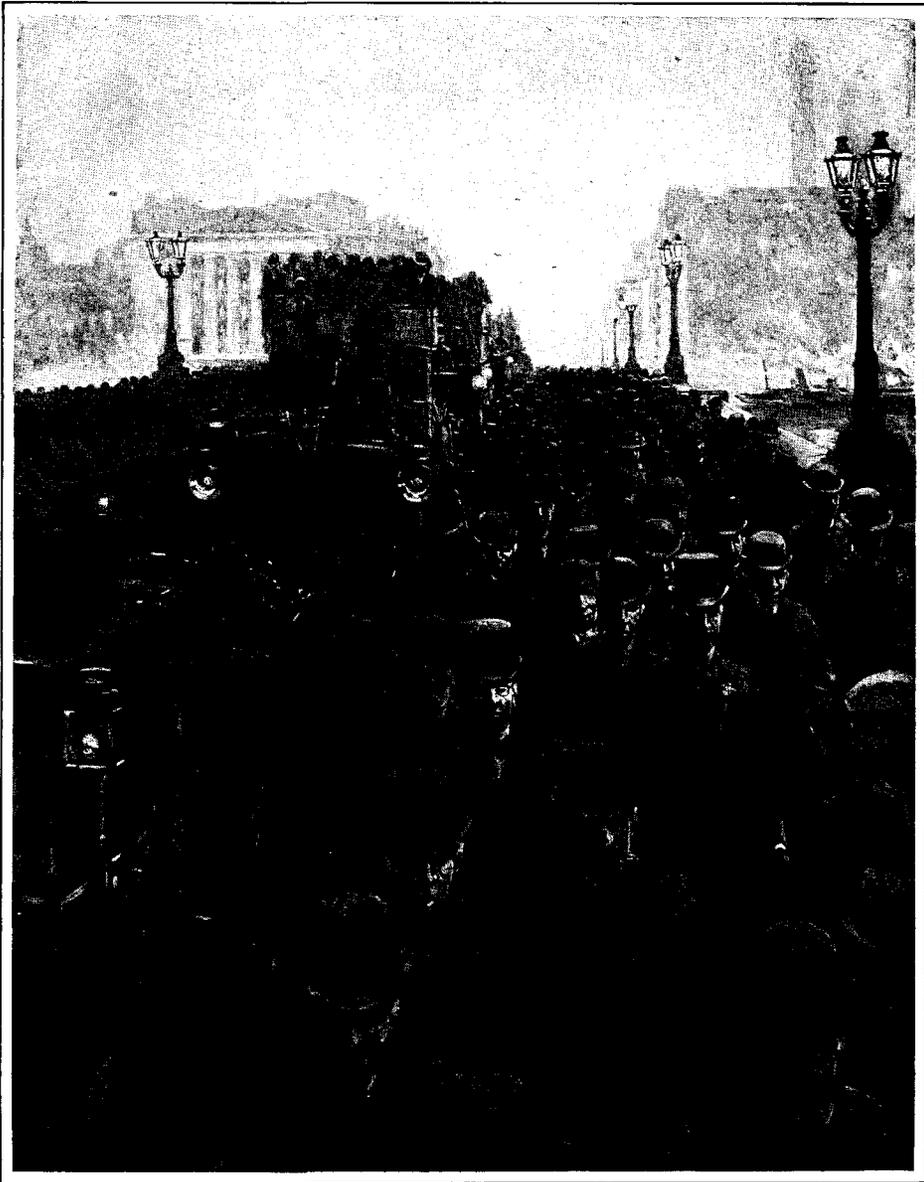
whose uniformity one so heartily wearies by daylight, is transmuted in a fog into a presence of immense possibilities, as he glides below you out of shadow, and is gone before you have made up your mind whether you really see him. Even the 'buses looming up beside you take on an immeasurable ghostliness. On such a day, when all the edges are rubbed out and the outlines of things quiver before one's eyes, there have been those who positively mistook the National Gallery for a fine building. But to-day as we see it across the waste of Trafalgar Square it wears the pepper-box squatness that shook Mr. Henry James's pen to mockery. "The finest site in Europe," say Englishmen. The dreariest, say most foreigners. On the whole, one is glad to escape from the need of decision into the fury of the Strand.

From here to the Bank the 'bus is indisputably supreme. Absolutely unsuspected buildings, in the shadow of which one has walked unknowing a thousand times, reveal themselves from the 'bus-top; not a few of Wren's best churches can only be seen from its elevation, and by its help alone can one call up the eighteenth-century picturesqueness of the narrow, tortuous streets. Between Charing Cross and the Mansion House the flood of humanity is too composite, too overwhelming to have character. If Piccadilly is the Court Guide, the Strand is the entire Post-office Directory. There are, of course, distinctive patches here and there,—round the Law Courts, for instance, and the lower end of Fleet Street,—but to select or summarize or even describe is hopeless. One takes the whole rushing sombre torrent in mass, as something beyond analysis, and too restless to be imperilled by a close scrutiny.

It is not until St. Paul's is past and one nears the Mansion House that the sidewalk throngs become in a way distinguishable, homogeneous. One is conscious of a restrained gait, a weightier aspect, a more measured and graver carriage, befitting men who live at the heart of the world's credit. Here it is rather the roadways that are multitudinous. But if you slip from this down the moneyed air of Lombard Street and on to London Bridge, when the evening



PICCADILLY IN THE SEASON



THE HOMEWARD TIDE—LONDON BRIDGE

exodus from the City is pouring southwards, it is to be dazed with a double immensity, of vehicles as well as people—a sedater Brooklyn Bridge during the “rush hours,” but more variegated, more overpowering, with a flow and swell like an ocean in flood. And the view from it again demands the focus that only the ’bus-top can bring to bear, the view

of the “Pool of London” with its myriad masts against a Turner sunset,—of all London views, without question, the most entrancing.

Primarily, no doubt, the ’bus is just democracy on wheels—and even so it is endlessly rich in character and humor; but there is always room for the artist on the front seat.

"An Exceeding High Mountain"

BY MARGARET DELAND

I

ROBERT GRAY'S first wife, Alys (Old Chester had hard work to swallow her name; "but it's better than any of your silly 'ie's,'" said Old Chester)—this first Mrs. Gray was a good deal of a trial to everybody. She was not only "new," but foreign; not only foreign, but indifferent to Old Chester. Indeed, it took all Old Chester's politeness and Christian forbearance to invite Mrs. Robert Gray to tea—with the certainty that the invitation would be declined. She was an English girl whom Robert met somewhere in Switzerland; a heavy-eyed, silent creature, certainly a very beautiful woman, but most inefficient and sickly;—and there were so many nice, sensible girls in Old Chester! (However, there is no use saying things like that: as if a man ever married a girl because she was sensible!)

Yet young Gray certainly needed a sensible wife; his wealth was limited to character and good manners plus a slender income as tutor in the Female Academy in Upper Chester. Excellent things, all; but a wife with sense (and money) would have been an agreeable addition to his circumstances. Whereas, this very beautiful English girl was a penniless governess, left stranded in Germany by an employer, who had, apparently, got tired of her. Robert Gray had met the poor frightened creature, who was taking her wandering way back to England, and married her, frantic with rage at the way she had been treated. When he brought her home, he was so madly in love that he probably did not half appreciate Old Chester's patience with her queer ways. But the fact was that, for the few months she lived, she was so miserable that Old Chester could not help being patient, and forgiving her her half-sullen indifference, and her silence, and her distaste for life;—even in Old Chester!

For in spite of Robert's adoration, in spite of all the ready friendliness about her, in spite of the birth of a baby girl, she seemed, as it were, to turn her face to the wall. She died when the child was about a week old. Died, the doctor said, only because, so far as he could see, she did not care to live.

"You ought to try to get better for the baby's sake," said Miss Rebecca Jones, who had come in to help nurse her. And the poor girl frowned, and shook her head, the heavy white lids falling over her dark eyes.

"I don't like it."

And Rebecca (who had too much good sense to be shocked by the vagaries of a sick woman) said, decidedly: "Oh, you'll learn to like her. Come, now, just try—!"

But she did not seem to try; even though Robert, kneeling with his arm under her pillow, holding her languid hand to his lips, said, sobbing, "Oh, Alys, Alys—for God's sake—don't leave me—"

Then she opened her beautiful eyes and looked at him solemnly. "Robert," she said, "I am sorry. I am—sorry. I—am—"

"What for, precious?" he entreated; "sorry for what?—to leave me? Oh, Alys, then live, live, dear!"

"I—am—" she began; and then her voice trailed into eternity.

Miss Rebecca Jones hung about the house for a few days, to make the poor gentleman comfortable; then he was left alone, with the child (purchased at so dreadful a cost) and one servant, and his daily work of teaching the polite languages at the Female Academy. Miss Rebecca's hard face softened whenever she thought of him; but all she could do for him was to go often to see the poor seven-months baby,—which seemed for a time inclined to follow its mother.

Now it must be understood at once that Rebecca Jones was not a schemer,