

TAM BROON'S VISIT TO LONDON.

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OF a' places in the world for steer an' street traffic that ever ony mortal man saw, London carries the cake.

I gaed up there lately since, an' spent six or eight days seein' the sights. I wad hae been a sicht better at hame.

It was aboot nine o'clock in the mornin' when I found mysel' oot o' the train an' standin' on the street wondering what way to turn.

There was a fearfu' crood o' folk poorin' alang baith ways, an' thousands o' every kind o' twa an' fowr-wheeled vehicles; but everybody and everything seemed in siccan a fell big hurry that I coodna see onybody likely to harken to my questions.

Lookin' aboot me, I saw a Bobby standin' on the middle o' the street regulatin' the traffic, so I watched my chance an' made a race for him.

"Can ye airt me to whaur I cood get a bit chape room tae pit up in for a nicht or twa?" I asks.

Mr. Bobby looked at me yince or twice, an' seemed no to comprehend my question. So I repeated it as plainly as I cood.

But Mr. Bobby only shook his heid, an' went on regulatin' the crooded street-traffic as before.

"Weel then," says I, "if ye canna airt me tae lodgin's, ye cood maybe tell me whaur I cood fa' in wi' a wee shaebblack laddie, as I'm badly wantin' the glaur clautit aff my buits?"

Mr. Bobby looked at me very inquisitively for the third time, an' then he asked—

“Wot part of Germany do *you* come from?”

“Germany, be hang't!” I shouted oot at the tap o' my voice. “Dae ye ackwally tak' me for a sausage-eatin' German? Man, I'm a simple daicent country chappie frae the wast o' Scotland—nae faurrer awa'.”

“Call at the Society for the aid hov distressed foreigners,” the Bobby snapped. “I 'ave no time to 'elp you now.”

There was a bonnie way to trate a stanger, wasn't it? I thocht sae at the time, so my Scotch bluid got up, an' on turning to gang awa' I says—

“Man, ye craw unca croose on yer ain middenheid; but if I had ye doon bye at auld Bannockburn, I wad tak' the starch oot o' ye in twa ticks, or I'm a Dutchman!”

“Oh, you're a Dutchman, are you? All right; 'ave it all your hon bloomin' way; but I concluded as you wass a German sassenger. Good day!”

I was glad to get awa' frae the rascal, as I didna half relish his aff-takin' remarks, pretendin' that he didna understan' plain Scotch, an' that he thocht I was a German sassenger! Na, na, Mr. Bobby; that cock'll no fecht, shod an' spur it as ye will. I'm a Scotchman born and bred, an' I look it, frae heid tae heel.

Weel, I gangs on a bit faurrer, an' I thocht I wad at yince speir my way to my auld frien', Willie Craig's oyster shop, in Fleet Street.

So I gangs owre to a daicent lookin' citizen this time, wha was standin' on the edge o' the pavement waiting a chance to cut across the street, an' I says to him—

“Am frae the auld toon o' Fenwick, doon bye in Ayrshire, an' I've cam' up to London to see my auld frien' Willie Craig, o' the Fisheries, in Fleet Street. Maybe ye cood airt me there? I spoke twa words to a Bobby doon the street there, but he only codded me, an' let on he thocht I

was a German sassenger. I was near-han' lettin' him hae a daud on the lug wi' my steikit neive for his nonsense."

Weel, the man stood lookin' at me, as if I was some hang't Laplander or ither frae the North Pole, an' never a word spak' he.

Thinks I to mysel', "Waur an' waur; this is a dummy I've forgathered wi' this time. He's worse than Mr. Bobby yet, for he hasna heard a single word I've said."

Wi' that I turned awa' frae him, an' pushed forrit the street as weel's the awfu' crood an' steer wad let me, bangin' against this yin, an' gettin' half ca'd owre by the tither yin, till I thocht the win' wad hae been clean knockit oot o' me a' thegither, stowp an' rowp.

"It's a vera strange thing," thocht I, as I daunnert alang, "that a plain-speakin' Scotch country chiel canna mak' himsel' understuid in London; a vera strange affair, indeed."

Then I began to wonder if I was really in London?

"What," thinks I, "if I'm no in London ava'? Maybe I've tooken the wrang train, an' been whisket like lichtnin' awa' to some ither foreign place? Lord, I'm maybe in France, for a' I ken to the contrary."

Weel, wi' that I got quite nervous, an' begood to jaloose I was in a bad fix. So, up I bangs to the first wice-lookin' man I saw, an' says I—

"If ye please, sir, is this London?"

"London? that's so."

"Then is Willie Craig in?"

"Is Willie Craig in?" repeated the person questioned; "likely enough he is; at least there is room enough for him here, I daresay. Where does your friend burrow?"

"In Fleet Street," I quickly answered, glad to have met a man that understood plain Scotch.

"Oh, Willie Craig of the Fisheries?"

"That's him," I answered.

"A fine chiel, an' a Scotchman, too," answered the stranger.

"I'm a Scotchman myself, and my heart warms to the tartan. Fleet Street lies straight ahead; you'll find the famous Fisheries in one of the oldest buildings in old London, and Willie himself in his shirt-sleeves, and at the back of the counter, most likely."

Now, there was a daicent sensible man. He comprehended my question in a moment. For a rale clever, clear-headed, sensible man, recommend me tae a Scotchman. He's usefu' baith at hame an' abroad, but he's oftener abroad than at hame, as a rule.

But I didna let my countryman gang awa' dry-lippit. Na, na; I aye like daicency, an' a social taste o' the Auld Kirk o' Scotland when meetin' wi' a frien' in a strange place. So, after a bit quate dram atween us, and a short twa-handed crack, we shook han's an' pairted, an' in five minutes thereafter I was safe through the busy Strand, an' forgein' my way up auld Fleet Street. Eh, me, but London's an awfu' place for steer an' street traffic! That I'm back here in Scotland wi' a' my limbs hale an' soond an' firmly haudin' tae me, is a mystery an' a marvel to mysel' this day.

But it was about my auld F'enwick frien', Willie Craig, I was speakin'. Weel, in a wonderfu' short time, considerin' what I had to encounter, wi' crooded streets an' strange faces an' mainners, I fand oot Willie's shop, an' got a richt guid frien'ly Scotch welcome, a savoury plate o' stewed eels, an' a kind sitten-doon for the remainder o' my stay.

Willie's daein' rale weel in London, ye'll a' be glad to hear. Man, he's a rare cook. His stewed eels are really grand, an' his oysters are jist perfection. If ye're ever up in London, tak' my compliments wi' ye, an' ca' at Willie's shop in Fleet Street. Ye'll find baith him an' his public table up tae Tommy in a' respects.

But about big London. The first day I was there I visited the Tower. It's a truly wonderfu' sicht. Then, I

next got on the tap o' an omnibus an' syne drave, like a lord, tae the Zoological Gardens.

Eh, but yon's a perfeckly wonderfu' exhibition o' birds an' animals. I thoct the lions a grand sicht, but I was mair than merely interested in the monkeys. Siccan auld-fashioned lookin' wee deils o' men folks I never clapp't een on before. As for auld Aunt Sally, the big gorilla, I'll only say this, that if yon's no somebody's grandnither, I'll eat my auld hat richt up, frae rim tae croon. An' siccan a crood o' birds an' animals frae a' pairts an' places o' the kenned world! It was fair prodigious!

"You look amazed a bit, friend?" remarked a bystander to me while sittin' in the gardens. "Wot's the wonder?"

"The wonder's this," says I, "hoo auld Noah ever got a pair o' each o' a' these animals crushed intae his ark, no' to mention the necessary provender. It fair licks cock-fechtin."

Weel, next day I visited St. Paul's, the British Museum', the National Gallery, Westminster Abbey, the inside o' the Hoose o' Commons, an' a lot o' ither famous places besides.

On the third day I had a fine time o't sailing up an' doon the Thames in the penny steamers. It's a wonderfu' big an' busy river the Thames; Irvine Watter canna haud a caunle tae't.

On board yin o' the river steamers I was vera nearly ha'ein' a haud wi' a conceited bit nyaff o' a Cockney.

"Hello, Scottie, what think ye o' London?" he impidently asked me.

"Fully mair than I dae o' you," I as sharply replied.

"Aw! are you going back to Scotland again?" he next asked.

"I hope to guidness I am," says I, "when the like o' you's about."

"Well, that is strange—aint it, now?"

"What's strange in that?" I asked.

"Oh, when a Scotchman proper once sees London, as a rule he never once thinks of going back, you know. But

you don't find us Englishmen remaining over a brief fortnight in Scotland,—your country is so very barren and poor."

"That'll dae for you, Mr. Cockney," says I, "if ye come doon wi' me to Scotland, I'll tak' in han' to show ye whaur thirty thousand o' your countrymen hae been lyin' contented for over 500 years."

"Where's that?" he said.

"Bannockburn," says I.

Faith, I had him on the hip there, an' no mistake! Ye may catch a weasel asleep, if ye gang early enough to its hole, but no Tam Broon; I'm owre weel nicked in the horns by this time to let a Cockney tak' a laugh oot o' me. Oh, ay! trust me for that.

But tae tell o' a' I saw in London wad weary oot yer patience. For it's an awfu' size o' a place, an's fu' o' every kind o' Christian an' unchristian man an' woman on this earth, frae a woolly-headed Caffir to a hooked-nosed German Jew.

An' for spendin' money in! Dinna mention 't! The week I was up there the white sixpences were flein' oot o' my pooches like fair snawdrift. I had some fourteen shillin's in my pooch on the day I landed in London, and when I started for hame, I declare to guidness, I had nae mair than four shillin's left oot o't a'! So, ye may guess hoo the money was spinnin', an' hoo I was rinnin' the merry rig. Oh, ay! London's an awfu' place for sportin' an' spendin' money in, tak' my honest word for that. I've been thro' the whins mysel', an' can speak o't frae a saut personal experience.

But, if ye want to see the world in miniature gang up to London in the season, as I did, altho' it may cost ye a bit penny o' siller.

An' when ye gang there, dinna fail to ca' on my auld Fenwick frien', Willie Craig, o' the Fleet Street Fisheries. As I was sayin', ye'll find him a true-blue Scot, an' takin' my compliments along wi' ye, he'll mak' ye as welcome an' as muckle at hame as if ye were sittin' at yer ain fireside,

wi' yer wife on the yae side o' ye, an' yer bowl o' evenin' brose on the ither.

But, mind ye, tak' guid care o' the bawbees when ye gang oot sicht-seein', for sicht-seein' in London is sair, sair on the sixpences, as I this day ken to my cost.

Maybe ye'd like to hear an instance o' this? Aweel, here's a funny yin for ye:—

On the day o' my arrival in the muckle toon, I gaed into a brow-lookin' barber's shop in the centre o' the City, an' sat doon on a fine-cushioned chair that felt as saft as melted butter.

"Your hair shortened, please?" asked yin o' the attendants, jumpin' roon me like a young kangaroo.

"Na, na," says I, "nae need for gettin' *my* hair shortened in the barber's."

"No! How so, may I ask?"

"*I'm a married man*; my wife's twa han's are seldom oot o' my hair. Fegs it's the keepin' on o' what's left that sair bothers me. D'ye twig onything, chappie?"

Weel, the bit barber buddy laughed alang wi' mysel' an' the ithers in the shop, an' they a' began winking tae each ither, an' cuisting side-glances in my direction.

"What then can I do for you, please?" resumed the barber.

"Tak' aff my beard," says I; "my chin's as rough as a stubble field."

"Soap!" said the barber, an' in twa ticks a young shaver had me saipit a' owre, frae lug tae laggan, afore I could get time to draw a breath, or cry Jake Robinson! Man, it was grand. If the brush had been dippit in warm treacle it coodna hae slid mair easily an' saftly roond my chin. In that barber's shop I felt in fair Paradise. There's an airt in shaving. They ken hoo tae pit on the saip in London;—ay, an' the expenses tae! But stop a bit; I'm comin' tae that.

Weel, I was vera highly pleased wi' the operation—it had been so very agreeably an' handsomely dune. My chin was like a fair new chin a' thegither—it was sae smooth, sae

glossy, an' sae even on the surface. I thoct mysel' quite the swell after't. But stop awee; there's nae rale lastin' enjoyment or peace o' mind on this side o' time. I was vera sune plunged, heid an' ears, in a tub o' cauld watter, figuratively speakin'.

"What's tae pay?" I asked, grandiloquently handlin' my purse wi' the twelve or fourteen shillin's in't. "Hoo much is tae pay, I'm askin'?"

"Sixpence," said the barber.

"Sixpence!" I cried, fa'in' back in my chair, as if my wind-pipe had been nicked by the razor. "Sixpence, say ye?"

"Sixpence—that's the charge," repeated the barber.

"Na, na, my chappie; it'll no dae; the shae disna fit; ye've shaved me yince, I admit" (clawin' my chin) "but ye'll no, wi' my will, shave me twice after that fashion. I never pey mair than a penny for gettin' the beard aff my chin in Scotland. See, there's a penny, an' if ye're no satisfied ye can jist pit on my beard again!"

Wi' that they a' burst oot in laughter, in the midst o' which I pick't up my bannet an' slippit quately an' quickly awa', leavin' the penny on the coonter.

Eh, it's a wonderfu' place London; but, as I said before, it's there ye can spend the bawbees, an' never ken ye're daein't. A sixpence is never safe in yer pooch there when ye're oot sicht-seein', an's faur better left in yer lodgin's till yer return, as I this day ken tae my saut cost!