

A CITY OF DREAMS

BY LOUISE HAYTER BIRCHALL

"LONDON is such an inexhaustible subject of study, so vast a field of observation," says the guide book, that to attempt to write of it in a descriptive sense in a short sketch would be as unsatisfactory as it would be tedious. Besides, descriptions, I am told, do not make good reading upon the whole. Hence I can, perforce, only seek to treat the subject of the Empire's Metropolis in such a way as to recall to those happy mortals who have been at some time sensible of its thrill and its thrall, hours of past delights, and to stir the imagination of others who have yet to put themselves in the way of realising the same.

London is a Dream City and a City of Dreams. It is also a place in a thousand and a thousand places in one. It is at once so simple and so complex. If you take it as the former, there seems nothing to say about it; it is all so obvious. If you take it as the latter where are you to begin?

The London of to-day is not the London of ten years ago, nay even of five or two years ago. The transportation system alone has taken, and is taking, on so many changes annually that Londoners who are absent for a year have to be directed on their return. The extension of the numerous underground railways to suburban districts is going on all the time. The taxicabs to the number of thousands are an introduction of the last two years, as are also the motor 'buses, and it takes no vivid imagination to realise the

almost entire elimination of the hansom cab and the horse 'bus—two institutions that have contributed more to the characteristic appearance of London traffic than anything else—in another two years. Simple as is the transportation system in vogue to-day when once understood, it is the most baffling problem, the most elusive nightmare, at first. To be at Euston, for instance, and to want to get to West Brompton, or to be at Oxford Circus and to want to get to Highbury—! Oh, well—! I remember finding myself in the Fulham Road a few days after my arrival, my mind in a state of confusion, which left me with a sense of every idea, my very consciousness itself slipping from me. With a sort of mental gasp I seemed to clutch in vague terror the two facts of my name and the place I wished to get to, and these I kept repeating over and over until I was able at last to find a policeman. It sounded funny enough to relate upon returning to my hospice later on. I look back upon it now with amazement and amusement. But it was not a pleasant experience all the same, and it certainly sobered me in my predisposition to treat the matter of getting about in London lightly. Furthermore, it taught me to treasure a letter I had received a few days previously on landing at Liverpool, less as a joke than as a curiosity, the same consisting of two sheets of note paper, six pages of which were closely covered with minute instructions of what to do upon reaching London