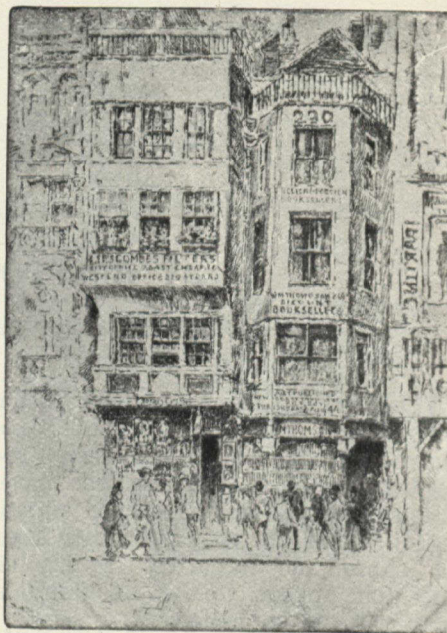




SAINT-MARTINS-IN-THE-FIELD



No. 230, STRAND

Imaginative persons prefer to think that every city has a personality, a blending of characteristics by which an observant man, without other assistance, could distinguish it from others. I have heard it said of Paris that it might be represented in the character of a woman—a French woman—in whom has been developed, over a dim background of early simplicity and country life, vivacity, sympathy for human weakness, capriciousness and good fellowship, cruelty and impulsive generosity, and that she is brilliant at midnight, peevish in the morning, and mischievous by five o'clock. You have probably heard New York characterised, and some of the humbler but well-known cities such as Bruges, Vienna, Berlin, Munich, Naples, and Rome. But none of them has the character of London. London is not a city, but the abiding place of a spirit or many spirits—spirits which, when one has felt their influence, hold a certain power over one's thoughts, the power almost to com-

pel one's steps back from anywhere.

That phrase "stony-hearted step-mother" was well-made. But London might better be referred to as a much-loved woman than as a step-mother. Men do not call London beautiful; it would be *maukish*. Yet she has a fascination for men which is not the fascination of a step-mother. It is a sort of binding spell which draws them back to the gloom, the filth, the misery, the monotony, the brilliance and the stupidity of the Inscrutable City. Every rusted tramp hanging in the dirty water off the Limehouse docks has brought at least one man back this trip to her strange charms. Every liner carries, mixed with the mere pleasure-hunters and money spenders, some man returning to London, not for relatives, nor friends, nor business, but for London! I heard of a man who had escaped Scotland Yard and was on the way to re-making his life as a bookkeeper in a Montreal dry goods house, who threw away position, opportunity, and almost assured safety,