

MANY LONDONS

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THERE are many Londons. Each of us knows one. Those who have not seen London have their pre-conception of it. Those who have been there and have returned retain recollections, for it is not a city that is ignored nor forgotten. It has its peculiar appeal to the imagination and will not be denied.

It is well known, but no less curious to observe, that London makes no effort to gain the reputation it holds. It is by its very indifference, its very self-sufficiency, that it piques the curiosity of mankind and draws to it, year by year, hordes of men and women anxious to see it. New York is systematically advertised. It makes a business of attracting visitors and causing them to stare at its prodigies when they come. Each year it has new wonders to show, each year fresh advertising. London has no designed wonders, no prodigies except the prodigy of so much humanity in one place. It makes no effort to be friendly, has no desire to be known or to be admired. It is like a man whose quiet poise suggests immeasurable reserves of information and interest.

Of course, it would be presumptuous to undertake, or to pretend to undertake, to describe London. It would be as though someone volunteered an essay on Truth in an after-dinner speech. No man knows London, not even those who have passed their lives in the city, nor those who pass back and forth once, even twice and

three times a year, on business excursions. No one would agree with any one conception of London other than his own. There is commercial London and financial London, "society" London, and political London; that London which smacks of the Foreign Service, of ambassadors, special missions, great appointments and heroic services in far lands; and that other London, the city of the mediocre, the city of crime, poverty and corruption. For us, who have little better than a militia, whose experience with kings and ambassadors is meagre to say the least, and whose greatest financial affairs are petty compared to the financial transactions and the financiers of London, Financial, Social, Political and Imperial London command our imagination at once, but it is poorer London, the City of the Mediocre, the city of crime, poverty and corruption, that makes the deeper and wider appeal. Generation after generation of men have left their habits and their names written in the pavements of London. London streets are centuries deep in the lore of humanity, which has been accumulating there since the days of the Hegemony. The Strand and the distorted streets of the city are beaten hard by the feet of countless men, by the countless caravans that have left their litter in book and story, in old court-yard and alleyway, in hall and attic. It is Human London that matters. It is the reek of humanity that makes it fascinating.