

"AH, BUT YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN IT BEFORE THE WAR!"

BY HAROLD E. SCARBOROUGH

"A H, but you should have seen it before the war!"

A virulent period, wherein are sung the praises of ante-bellum days, follows, I suppose, every great upheaval such as that of 1914-18. From the conversation of Englishmen of all classes one gathers that the most ardent desire of some 38,000,000 people in these islands is to turn the clock back to 1914.

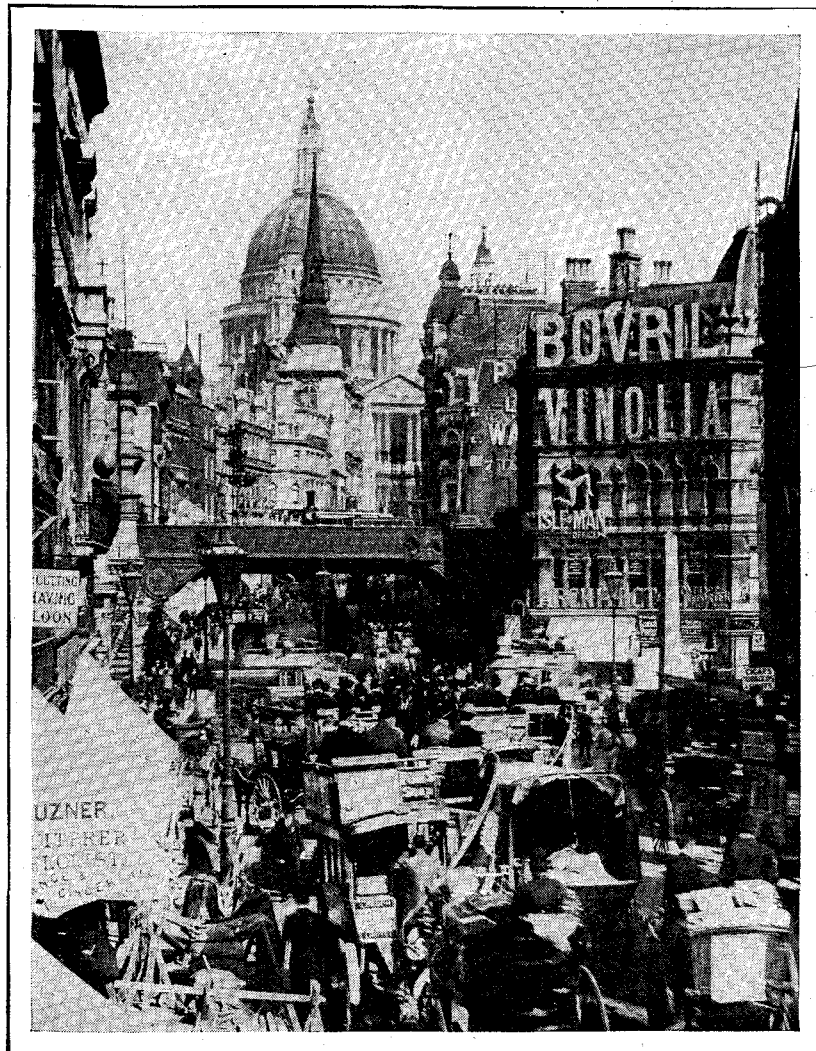
Here and there one finds clearer minds recognizing that the halcyon days of *avant la guerre* will never return. There is more than a touch of pathos in the otherwise universal mourning for the seven lost years. The man in the street realizes that 1921 is profoundly different from 1914; but his longing to forget the war leads him to an etherealized conception of the years that preceded it. "Pre-war" has assumed somewhat of the adjectival connotation of "Sterling" or "A-1." Whether it be applied to whisky or conscience, clothes or taxes, "pre-war" denotes the Good Old Days which every man past forty instinctively capitalizes in his speech.

Were one to judge from reminiscences one hears on every side in England, Britain in 1914 was not far removed from the earthly paradise. An outsider seems to remember clouds of rebellion in Ulster, suffragette activity (Christobel Pankhurst is to-day telling "Why I Never Married" in the columns of a twopenny weekly), and various other disturbances. The Englishman forgets them in contemplation of the fact that safety matches used to be three-half-pence a dozen boxes, and that one could get an efficient German clerk (pronounced "clark," if you please), come over to learn English, for fifteen shillings a week.

And it was a pleasant world, this ante-bellum England. "Four hundred a year" was an assurance of comfortable means. On £400 one kept servants, sent the children to public schools and perhaps to a university, took one's summer holiday in Switzerland, patronized the opera at Covent Garden, and had a little left over to invest in Consols (bonds of the Consolidated Fund of the Exchequer) as a low-yielding but undepreciating security for the future.

But how?

Well, one paid four guineas for a suit of clothes made by the best West End tailors. (Clothes, doctors' and solicitors' fees, and house rents are estimated, by immemorial custom, in 21-shilling guineas, instead of 20-shilling pounds). One dined well for half a crown (60 cents). One paid eightpence for a taxi journey of reasonable length. Twopence (four cents) was the standard tip to a taxi driver, a railway porter, or a waiter at any except the most expensive res-



(C) Keystone

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taurants. Fifteen shillings (\$3.25) was about the limit for a pair of shoes. A penny fare would carry one a respectable distance by underground, bus, or tram.

The cost of living has come down quite a bit since it reached the peak figure of 176 per cent above the 1914 level last year; but according to the Government's figures it still stands at 128 per cent above the pre-war figure.

Theoretically, that means that £900 will do the work of 1914's "four hundred a year." Actually, £1,000 is nearer the correct estimate. Not all the little incidents of life have confined themselves to the 128 per cent increase. To take the homely illustration of the safety matches: they are now a shilling a dozen boxes—eight times the pre-war figure. Where one tipped "tuppence," one cannot in dignity now give less than a shilling—percentage of increase, 600. Taxi fares are up by only 50 per cent, local transit by 75 per cent; but there

are a good many things which are from 200 to 300 per cent higher than in 1914.

The "general" who before the war did the housework for £18 a year (no, fellow-Americans, that is not a misprint; \$1.75 a week was the standard wage) now demands and gets £50 or more. One dines only very modestly for 5 shillings these days; and one pays from 40 to 60 shillings for the shoes that formerly cost 15. Public school and university fees have increased by leaps and bounds, and Covent Garden opera is no more, because it doesn't pay.

And Consols—the safe, solid, cautious, trust fund investment—are down below 50! Inasmuch as they are irredeemable, it is easy to understand the feelings of those holders who, finding their incomes sadly shrunken in purchasing power, are having to realize on their capital. Little wonder that they long for 1914 and Consols at par again!

Yet, with all the economic disloca-

tion; with three-quarters of a million of her youth buried from the Hebrides to the Falklands; with labor troubles and with Irish troubles; with a war-fevered and sometimes delirious Continent of Europe raising Cain just across the Channel, England is "carrying on."

Out in the countryside—in the little towns of the Sussex downs or the Devon cliffs or the Northumberland moors—there are more granite war memorials and less young men than there were; but for all that a feud between the vicar and the lady of the manor is still an event of the first magnitude. The village barber may (and probably does) harbor memories of one night at Festubert when he picked up "the officer" wounded, and crept with him through a machine-gun barrage to the comparative shelter of a ruined farmhouse. To-day that same officer is very likely to be just what he was before the war—a "toff," and socially just as immeasurably far away from the barber as ever he was. The war has put tweeds in theater stalls hitherto sacred to evening clothes, but it hasn't given Shoreditch a card of admission to Mayfair. The real fact is that Shoreditch doesn't want one. Coster and peer alike turn to 1914 and the years before as the goal.

London, superficially, has changed little. Khaki and blue are off the streets

again. "D.O.R.A." still imposes a few silly restrictions about closing hours; there is no gold coin in circulation; there are more badges on coat lapels. The vast sluggish current of London life apparently wanders on much as usual.

One sits at an office window in the crescent of Aldwych and watches the ebb and flow of the tide of street traffic from the roaring stream which is the Strand. The matinée crowds, as yet only half-conscious that they have left the make-believe world of the stage's illusions, swirl from the Gaiety and disrespectfully linger to chat beneath the frowning austerity of the "Morning Post's" unmistakably Tory façade. Huge, ungainly steam lorries, which for some unknown reason are allowed to lumber through London's streets, creep along with loads of girders for a new building which is rising, American fashion, at the foot of Kingsway. "American fashion," did one say? Conspicuously absent is the deafening clatter of the pneumatic riveter; stolid workmen slowly and laboriously bolt the I-beams together by hand. It is the gaunt steel skeleton, unfamiliar to London, where solid granite is the rule, that gives the American touch.

In the crowd that passes beneath one's window nothing is conceded to Paris or to Constantinople in the matter of cos-

mopolitan characteristics. A navy, sucking a "short clay," proceeds a pace in front of a Guards officer. Sallow and bespectacled Hindus, never quite at ease in their Western garments, slide slimly past. An ample woman in a leopardskin coat with a tiny monkey cuddled in the crook of her arm appears, and draws not even a glance. (Am I right in assuming that she would cause a near-riot on Fifth Avenue?) Blandly unconcerned Japanese—London is full of them, now that Prince Hirohito has been here—add their touch of the Orient. As a filler there is the usual assemblage that one sees in any street, any time, anywhere in Europe—all nonentities, by the grace of the vast and mighty unconcern which is and always has been London's.

"Ah, but you should have seen it before the war!" sadly comments the Londoner at one's elbow. "In 1914, now—"

There is a well-known story that when the London "Times" passed under the control of Lord Northcliffe an ancient reader of that paper complained to its editor that the "Times" wasn't what it used to be.

"My dear sir, it never was!" flashed back the editor.

Sometimes one cannot help wondering whether London ever was, either.

PERSONAL GLIMPSES OF A CHINA FAMINE

BY WILLIAM T. ELLIS

BRADLEY laughed till he shook "like a bowl full of jelly." I did not see the joke; probably because I was it. Still, he was welcome to his laughter, for there was mighty little of it domiciled in mid-China at the time. Bradley, although he is no thin and ghostly ascetic, is a missionary, a physician by profession, and in practice a general handy man of civilization. So when he and his fellow Southern Presbyterian missionaries found themselves in the midst of the great famine of 1906-7, the only white men and women in that remote part of China, he turned, American fashion, to the job of building roads in order that recipients of relief money might not be pauperized.

The tragic tales that had come down to Shanghai of the terrible visitation that had befallen the Kiangpeh region had of course lured the traveling newspaper man to the scene, via the Yangtze River and the Grand Canal. I well remember the panic in the American compound at Sutsien when Mr. and Mrs. Correspondent arrived from their houseboat by night; by night, when not even respectable Chinese ventured abroad because of the desperate characters whom hunger had driven into highwaymanry! A bad case was made worse because we had gone up the canal for a journey of several days without an interpreter, and so knew no better, when we reached

Sutsien, than to disembark by night. The only conveyances available were one sedan-chair and a wheelbarrow. Mrs. Correspondent was put aboard the chair and whisked briskly off ere Mr. Correspondent was fairly settled in his wheelbarrow. She arrived at the Bradley home long before her husband; and for a time there was interesting discussion as to the probability of the madman's ever getting there alive. Naturally, he did arrive, with no other wounds than those incident to wheelbarrow riding over a Chinese highway.

The next day I was out with Bradley and his road-making gang. It cannot be denied that prudence is not my cardinal virtue. The entire trip had been undertaken in the face of official and unofficial warnings of its dangers. All along the way I had been cautioned against the personal perils that inhered in the distribution of money, for I carried two big pockets full of copper coins for that express purpose. Out among Bradley's hunger horde I committed another indiscretion. Upon observing a youth with a tray full of native sweets—wherever there is a market the world around, there is food of some sort to be had, regardless of famine conditions—I bought the whole supply, and began to distribute it.

At once the American Croesus was

mobbed. In their eagerness to get a morsel of the sweet provender, the men crowded upon me and crushed me and were fairly bearing me down to earth. My last sight ere I flung the food from me as far as I could send it, in order to relieve the situation by sending the men scrambling for the food, was of Bradley, up on a bank, laughing, earthquake-wise, at the plight of this Smart Aleck of a newspaper man. But then he had gone through pretty much the same thing every day for weeks as he distributed the wooden tags which meant work to a horde of heads of families.

As somewhat of a specialist in human misery all over the earth, I must say that the Chinese peasant takes his hard luck man fashion. He does not easily become a sycophantic mendicant. When he has used up all the edibles on his place and sold everything vendible he owns, at times not excepting even the timbers of his poor dwelling, he loads his remaining family possessions, including his baby and his grandmother, upon his wheelbarrow and sets out on a tragic trek toward the nearest walled town or city. In the meantime, with inherited wisdom, he has learned how to get a modicum of nourishment, or else that sorry substitute, a "full feeling," from certain grasses, roots, and barks of young trees. A compressed cake of