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*Jack London's Article*

*First Impressions. A Candleless Hotel. And the Garbage-Men of Phillip Street*

Whenever a traveler journeys to a far country the inhabitants of that country immediately set him up on a high place, and demand that he tell them what he thinks of them. And when he has told them they proceed to cast potsherds at him.

Eagerness on the part of a people to know how they and their institutions impress foreigners is commendable. It shows that such a people are young enough and healthy enough to be patriotic and self-satisfied. It is only the old peoples, cankered and perishing that sneer at themselves and are not anxious to see themselves through other eyes. On the other hand, it is only the reckless or war-hardened foreigner who rushes into wide generalisations upon new things and places. Being neither reckless nor callous, I shall resolutely avoid wide generalisations. I shall make mine so narrow, that, though I be potsherded, I shall be content in the knowledge that my facts are irrefragable.

My first impression of Australia was of Sydney Harbor, but I received it long before I saw it. It was in Fiji first – no, it was in Samoa – that I was first told, repeatedly and at length, of Sydney's beautiful harbor. I continued to be impressed through all the islands of Fiji, the New Hebrides, and the Solomons. On the steamer from the Solomons to Sydney, there was no escaping the reiterated and manifold glories of the harbor that were impressed on me by my fellow passengers.

Well, a harbor is an act of God, rather than a virtue of a people; so I make my generalisation on the people, and let the harbor go. My generalisation is that Australians are very like Americans, and particularly like that portion of Yankeedom that dwells west of the Sierra Nevada, and that is always bragging of the glorious climate of California. Believe me, the pointing out of this similarity is not invidious. As a Californian I have bragged about the climate of my state. I still brag about it. And I am confident, when the trumps of judgment sound, that I shall rise up and go on bragging . . . if the good souls fresh-risen from the antipodes, do not drown me out with their slogan "Our Beautiful Harbor."

I think I am peculiarly constituted to speak of hotels, having been entertained in a few of the best and in most of the worst that exist on the planet. I am not living in a hotel at present. I was, at first, and I might still be living in it, were it not for a startling, though not illuminating experience. I went to bed, but found my head too full of ideas to permit me to sleep. I began to jot these ideas down in a notebook. Suddenly the electric light dimmed and faded. I lighted the candle on my bureau, and went on writing. About the time the candle was exhausted the electric light went completely out. I rang for more candles. There were no more candles. It was a large hotel, but there were no more candles -- at least, there were not for me. Furthermore, it was explained to me, delicately, of course, that my conduct in demanding candles was preposterous. I

was given to understand, quite delicately, that respectable guests were not given to such behavior.

I was treated with contumely. I was a naughty child. Perhaps they took me for a lunatic, or perhaps they thought I was drunk, at any rate three able-bodied night-porters entered my room, and held a conference. They stood by my bedside and gazed upon me as they might have gazed upon the Siamese twins. The outcome of the conference was that I was to get no more candles. And I got no more candles. My conduct in asking for candles was unprecedented. They could furnish me with candles only by breaking the rules, and who was I that they should break the rules? No, I got no candles, and I lay sleepless the rest of the night because of the thoughts in my brain that I could not rid myself of by placing on paper.

My generalisation is very narrow. I have had experience of only one hotel in Australia. I do not include all the other hotels. But I hold, temperately and conservatively, that that particular hotel must be managed by barbarians.

I live in a flat now, on Phillip Street. I shall confine my generalisations to Phillip Street. Maybe they conduct certain affairs of life differently in other streets. But on Phillip Street they conduct these certain affairs of life in such a fashion as to rob me of most of my sleep. Early in the evening, on Phillip Street, all the denizens thereof arrange their garbage barrels on the sidewalk next to the curb. These garbage barrels are made of metal. The sidewalks are cement, the streets hard macadam, the buildings on either side are of brick and stone. The acoustics of Phillip Street are splendid.

Between midnight and 1 in the morning the first peace-destroyer arrives. And thereafter, at regular intervals, until 6 in the morning, Phillip Street is a combined boiler shop and lunatic asylum. I am fairly credulous, but I should never have accepted on mere faith that several garbage men, or night scavengers, or whatever they be called, could produce such a vast quantity of outrageous and unnecessary noise. I cannot sleep on Phillip Street. I leave Phillip Street tomorrow, and I shall never return to Phillip Street.

I am a good sleeper, but morning after morning, by 4 or 5 o'clock, the last shreds of sleep are routed, and, with aching eyes and sanguinary soul, I gaze out of my window at the joyous garbage men juggling with the metal barrels, shouting at their horses, and bellowing interminable conversations back and forth until the street is a huge cavern of re-echoing sound.

It has always been my boast that I could sleep anywhere. I have slept in noisy Asiatic cities. I have slept alongside batteries in action in wartime. I have slept in the black Arctic night while a thousand wolf dogs bayed the moon. I have slept in the silence of snow and sea, of sweet country and remote mountain peaks. The throbbing roar of great cities is an anaesthetic to me; the "shouting of a backstay in a gale" is a tender lullaby. I have slept everywhere and always, until I came to Phillip Street.

I am a law-respecting and law-abiding citizen, but I shall be neither if I remain longer in Phillip Street. Until I came here I did not know the essential depravity of my nature. Phillip Street has given me self-revelment. I now know the license of brutal thoughts, the lust for blood, the desire to kill. I devise cunning and diabolical schemes whereby I may murder and remain unscathed. As I lean wan-faced and angry from my window at 5 a.m., and gaze at a certain garbage man, who cries at his horse monotonously and stentoriously twenty times a minute, "Gid-dap!", it is all I can do to prevent myself from getting out my Colt's automatic and filling his noise-organs full of holes. I remember that malaria is still in my blood, and that I can prove it by efficient medical testimony. I remember a certain rifle cartridge, a portion of the powder of which, when swallowed, will send up one's temperature 5 or 6 degrees. I know that in

40 seconds my trusty automatic can put twice eight orifices in that wind-bag of sound perambulating the gutter. And I know that by the time the police break in my door I can be lying on the floor imitating the fine frenzy of a Solomon Islands fever. The fever can be proved by a mouth thermometer, and I'll engage to furnish the frenzy. And I am confident that Anglo-Saxon law would never hang a man for such an act committed in fever delirium.

I instance the foregoing state of consciousness to point out the bad effect of trying to sleep on Phillip Street. There are other bad effects. At times the cunning devil that is in all of us (but that I never dreamed was in me till I came to Phillip Street), prompts me to go around to the chemist's and buy a large quantity of a certain element that bursts into flame on contact with water. The rest is easy. In the early evening I can pour a gallon of water into each garbage tin. The water will settle to the bottom. On the top I can put the combustible chemical. The garbage men will do the rest, for when they empty the tins into their wagons the water will come into contact with the chemical, and a fine conflagration will result. Wagon by wagon, every wagon that dared to rouse the sleepers of Phillip Street would be consumed. And on the next night there wouldn't be any wagons.

Thus am I made not only a murderer in thought, but an incendiary. It is imperative that I leave Phillip Street at once. Another sleepless night, and I shall not be responsible for myself. I shall leave at once, today.

Hence my impressions of Australia up to date have been jaundiced, first by the lack of a candle whereby to jot down such impressions before I forgot them, and next by the garbage men of Phillip Street, who have filled my mind with impressions of them to the exclusions of all other impressions. I am an embittered and sleep-broken man. I shall leave Phillip Street and recuperate. Then possibly, I shall be able to gain some decent and wholesome impressions of Australia.