

Essay Competition 1st Prize.
1941. Class C.

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1st Prize

EMPIRE LEAGUE.

ESSAY 1941.....

(candidates under fourteen)

SUBJECT:- If you were given the choice, in what city of
the Empire would you choose to spend a month?

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Born [REDACTED]

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Victoria Avenue.

Remuera.

AUCKLAND. NEW ZEALAND.

Let's pretend!.... One day, I am picking flowers in the garden, when the Empire fairy-for of course the Empire has a special fairy to guard and care for her- pops out of a dewy rose and says: "Josephine, you have been such a good girl this year that I am going to let you spend a whole month in any city of the Empire you choose. I give you just one hour to decide."..Then, before I can recover my breath, she vanishes into thin air with a dainty swirl of her red, white and blue gossamer gown and I am left to ponder her words. Here, I think, is the chance of a lifetime!.....A month in any one of the great cities of the Empire!.....

Vivid and stirring pictures flash before my eyes and I am lost in Wonderland. Bombay-the mysteries of the East, the colourful robes of the dark, swarthy natives; the dazzling, white palaces of the Rajahs; all the beauty and splendour of rich India. Then follows a picturesque cavalcade of Empire cities, Cape Town with Table Mountain veiled in billowy clouds, luscious purple grapes growing in vineyards, coal-black faces of niggers, the sparkle of South African diamonds.....Sydney-- the Zoo with the native Australian animals and birds: the dear cuddly Koala bear, the mocking, laughing kukuburra, the leaping kangaroo; then the tall, fragrant gum trees, flowering in the sun; the harbour with its sparkling waters spanned by the great bridge.....Vancouver, the purple Rockies hazy in the distance, or perhaps Regina with its fields of golden wheat waving in the breeze; the ranches, the Indians, all the fascinations of North America.....Other scenes come and go. Edinboro' kilts and castles. Hong-Kong, coolies, rice and strange music..... Cairo, pyramids and desert sands.....Then London, the rush and roar of

traffic, the brilliant lights of Regent Street and Kingsway; Whitehall and Westminster.... the very heart of the Empire....

Ah, yes, I have my answer ready when the fairy returns: London. Ever since I was a small child, the word London has conjured up bright and stirring pictures in my imagination. At the time of the Coronation of King George and Queen Elizabeth, I thrilled to see the large posters showing the crowds lining the route of the stately procession, the little princesses in their rich robes, their Majesties in all their regal pomp and splendour, the stirring scene in Westminster Abbey. As I grew older, my longing to visit London increased. I felt, and still do feel, my life incomplete till I see this great city. At the theatre I frequently saw on the screen current happenings centred round London: the King inspecting troops, the Queen opening some new building or laying some foundation stone. From my history book I learned how London had grown up, how she had

"Fought and ruled and traded for over a thousand years", suffered from plague and fire but withstood them all. Along her narrow old streets had ridden kings, strong or weak, some to their triumph, others to their death. I saw pictures of the Tower of London, grim and gloomy, the scene of many an execution. My Geography book taught me about London's outstanding place in the busy modern world, about her gigantic area and population. And as I grow older, all I see, all I read, all I hear, all I dream about London kindles within me the fire of longing to see it.

In this dreadful war London has distinguished herself. By London I mean the people of London, British of the British, whose faith and courage and determination, whose cheerful, humorous endurance have roused the admiration of the whole world.
Empire.

I live in fear that some day a German bomb may fall upon a great historic monument such as Westminster Abbey or Whitehall and wipe it out of existence before one small New Zealander has seen it. Already, St. Paul's, Buckingham Palace and other buildings have suffered. And yet, I know in my heart that

"Though bombs have shattered her churches and torn her streets apart, They have not bent her spirit and they shall not break her heart".

As yet, the war has left unharmed many things in London that I long to see: the statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens, Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament, the National Gallery, the tomb of the Unknown Warrior, Trafalgar Square with the Nelson Monument, No. 10 Downing Street, Temple Bar, the Abbey. How I should thrill to stand in the vast nave and look up at the lovely Gothic roof, the high, stained windows through which the light steals so softly, to wander in the glorious Chapel of Henry VII and see the royal tombs, to linger by the inscriptions in the Poets' Corner, "Alfred Tennyson" and "Robert Browning" and to feel that these are the tombs of those who cannot die.

After such a visit to London, I would echo the lines of Wordsworth

"Earth has not anything to show more fair",
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty."

Lately, I read a book called "Home" by Alan Mulgan, a New Zealander, in which he describes his first visit to London. It appealed to me very much, perhaps because his feelings are so like my own, perhaps because he expresses so aptly the thoughts that I have tried to express in this essay. Some day, I hope my dream, like his, will be realized and

I shall fly-not with the Empire fairy but in a luxurious flying-boat - to see the inspiring sights of London. And when I return, people will say, "Welcome back. Did you enjoy yourself?" and I shall answer, "Oh yes, I had a wonderful time. I have been at the very heart of the Empire".