

CORRESPONDENCE.

ECHOES FROM BABYLON.

London, Nov. 23, 1897.—November looms up dear to the average Londoner's heart, for does it not suggest numerous diversions including the glorious Fifth with its bonfires and crackers galore—a modified Fourth of July so to speak? And, furthermore, does not that great recognized institution that has been in vogue for 600 years past, viz., the Lord Mayor's show, take place four days subsequent? Then there is to be seen a cup-tie football match every Saturday afternoon at which event from twenty to fifty thousand football cranks make the welkin ring with their slogans and satire. Aristocracy begins to get tired of slaughtering hundreds of brace of tame pheasants and partridges upon their preserves so it flocks back to town again; the theaters put on their winter attractions and the policemen, who regulate the mud bespattering traffic, their olivins. Fog, slush, umbrellas and cough mixture. November has struck the Modern Babylon.

'Twas on the fifth of November, 1605, that Guy Fawkes, as every school boy knows, was discovered modestly retiring behind a stack of barrels of gunpowder in the vaults underneath the Houses of Parliament at Westminster. As he was furnished with a dark lantern and matches, it was surmised that he contemplated taking a rise out of King James and his parliament that shortly would have assembled a few brief feet overhead. After the custom of the period, Mr. Fawkes had an extremely lively and harrowing time and was ultimately ushered into the great beyond assisted by a masked gentleman in black tights armed with a keen axe. * * * Bright and early on November 5, 1897, the peaceful serenity of Penton street was broken by what the average Johnny Bull would include under the caption of "a blooming racket." If it had been a little after midnight, when the "pubs" close, the aforesaid racket would have passed without comment, but such an unusual proceeding, when revellers were sleeping and bread winners at work, betokened that something unusual was in progress. From the street below arose the strains, accompanied by a tin can band—

"Please to remember the fifth of November

The gunpowder treason and plot;
I see no reason why the gunpowder treason

Should ever be forgot.

Guy Fawkes, Guy, stick him in the eye,

Tie him to a lamp post and there let him die.

Whoop."

The two last lines to be repeated ad libitum until the chorus becomes depleted owing to failure in the lung department.

To hurl slippers and portable toilet articles at the recumbent forms of several defenders of the faith, who were wasting the precious hours of daylight in solid, sordid, sonorous sleep, was but the work of an instant: "Get up, boys, it is the fifth of November." A diplomatic investigation from ambush on the part of those interested, disclosed that these inharmonious noises proceeded from a band of matutinal disturbers armed as surmised with tin cans, who (the disturbers, not the cans) were attired mostly in fantastic garb and possessed faces that were literally smeared with soot. This motley gang, ever chanting their lugubrious refrain, were busily engaged in escorting a coster's barrow drawn by a

patient "moke." Upon the barrow in state was seated and effigy—possibly it was intended to represent the famous Guy Fawkes. At the same time Mr. Fawkes in his day was a strict Catholic, it seemed slightly inconsistent that his noble chest should be encased in a faded red Salvation Army jersey. This particular Guy was further possessed with a decided Hebraic cast of countenance together with an ancient clay pipe stuck between his lips. As to his anatomy, it was developed in most unlooked-for places owing to an unequal distribution of stuffings. Taken all together it was a most "straw-dinary" looking Guy. All day long were these effigies drawn around the streets and on every corner the luckless pedestrian remorselessly held up for pennies "for the Guy."

It was in the evening when the fun became fast and furious, especially upon what may be designated as London's playground viz: Hampstead Heath, or as it is better known, "appy ampstid eath." To see the Heath at its best one would do well to visit it on a Bank holiday, during the summer time, when the huge undulating park like lung of London is dotted with rows of tall swings, that give the idea that one is amongst the derricks in an oil country, booths, shooting galleries three shies a penny at old Aunt Sally for cocoanuts, ring the cane and other delightful pastimes dear to the average Londoner's heart. Not only do these small fairs line the roads and repose in the shade of the trees, but they are repeated and re-repeated all over the Heath in a most haphazard fashion out on the hot grass for all the world as though they had been shaken out of a bag. The concourse of humanity description fails to particularize. Fun, fun everywhere, rea simon pure old fashioned fun hall-marked from the days of the Morris dancers and guaranteed genuine: a regular conic opera so to speak, with a chorus some 80,000 strong, of fakirs, gipsies, flower-girls (slightly the worse for wear)—let us be charitable and say, suffering from the effects of the sun-resplendent red-coated soldiers with their absurd saucer-like caps, uproariously drunken jolly jack tars and costers.

The costers are distinctly a London institution—kind of a cross between a Bowery tough and a State street bouncer. They have a regulation dress, too; the men—short, stunted beetle-browed individuals, who affect a curl plastered down on the center of their forehead, surmounted by a cap with a velvet peak also a suit of clothes literally frescoed from the velvet collar down to the lowest extremity of their bell buttoned velvet striped pants with rows of pearl buttons, each as big as half a dollar, which the aforesaid individuals affectionately designate as their "pearlies." The women and girls are fearfully and wonderfully made and affect umbrella sized matinee hats, loaded with multi-colored feathers. Further they are adorned with numerous rat-tail curls and frizzes in front, with a bob at the back of the head as big as a football, enclosed in a net. They manifest a passion for red and claret colored plush skirts and bead-trimmed velvet capes. Here their effort as regards dress terminates, for their shoes are decidedly hors du combat; the heels in most cases run up the sides of their feet and their toes spread out like pads. Oh, how they do gather around a hand organ or a band engaged in a free for all dance, and they dance very gracefully too, with just a suggestion of high kicking.

It was just such an aggregation of Londoners that gathered on Hampstead

Heath on the night of the fifth to witness the annual parade, bonfire and fireworks that are held there. Whoop! there they go in squads, twenty coster girls, with their arms lovingly intertwined around their immediate neighbor's necks, stretched in a row completely across the road, yelling the chorus of the latest popular ditty: "Nothing, nothing, nothing to spend but quids,

If you want to be a family man there's nothing to have but kids."

Whoop! down go their heads simultaneously, apparently aimed for the fourth button of one's vest. Just when you deem annihilation inevitable, up comes a phantom of millinery and twenty shattered wrecks of erstwhile four and eleven penny shoes are shaken definitely at the horizon.

Dancing in its barbaric fashion seems to be strictly confined to the girls or 'Arriets as they are designated by scoffers, whilst the 'Arry's content themselves with making night hideous with catcalls, concertinas and harmonicas. To such an extent do the 'Arriets throw themselves into the mazy measure that one trembles, for some of the poorer girls are so held together with pins and so generally ventilated between the pins, that one might truthfully say that their costumes gape and yawn at every point. Suddenly a 'Arriet apparently breaks in two at the waist. She severely pulls herself together and complacently remarks: "Blow it, give us a pin, Liza," and continues in her mad career. Yet Max O'Rell says the English take their pleasure sadly! Taken as a class, the coster girls are a hardworking set and although their vocabulary is anything but refined, they are possessed of a moral code of virtue.

One parade is much like another: There are the same blatant brassy bands with plenty of drum, floats, rank and file, etc.; one bonfire greatly resembles another and as the sky rockets ascend skywards, as in America so in England, a long drawn prolonged O-O-Oh! goes up from the up-turned faces. As the parade started on its tour of the Heath, a general bombardment on the part of the crowd ensued in the form of squibs and crackers hurled with telling effect at the occupants of the coal wagons designed as floats. Britannia, who happened on this occasion to be of the sterner sex, manfully rose to the occasion, upon receiving an explosive firework upon the apex of the helmet, delivered a 5th of November oration with great eclat, the reproduction of which in cold type would seriously jeopardize the successful running of the linotype; confetti scattered to the four winds and settling over everything and everybody, down one's neck, and in one's hair; whilst 'Arry armed with squibs and lady tormentors (squirts) made life a dreary blank to any who had the hardihood to wear a silk hat.

Lord Mayor's Day was but a repetition of four days previous, although from the fact that the route of the procession was in the heart of the staid old city, possibly things did not assume such a boisterous turn. In the streets set apart for the parade traffic was entirely suspended at an early hour, the thoroughfares being given over to the throngs of sightseers who patiently waited for hours to see the time honored pageant. Of course the aforesaid crowd had to be amused, so battalions of young medical students with charming graciousness condescended to furnish gratis entertainment, by way of humorously smashing hats, defying the ever-patient police and making life a burden to those in the immediate vicinity. The occupants of the windows overlooking the streets further indulged in the time honored custom of heating pennies up-