AL KELLER'S JOURNAL: 3rd Installment

In the last installment you read about the first leg of Al Keller's 1926 post-college trip through England, Belgium, Germany, Austria and Italy with his Harvard buddies Richard Pretzfelt and Morris Newburger. They had landed in Plymouth on July 3, after an 8-day transatlantic crossing on the Caronia, stayed the night in Plymouth at the Hotel Continental (9 shillings a piece, including breakfast), and spent the next day taking a char-a-banc tour of Weymouth via Exeter and Honiton. We now find them setting off for London, once Al attended to a medical issue.

JULY 5 On to London

I spent a miserable night, owing to a cinder in my eye. This morning I went to see a doctor who removed it with the use of cocaine, and told me that as it had left a slight pit in the cornea, I must be very careful, using an eye wash and wearing a patch for two or three days.

We left Plymouth for London at 12.20, and arrived at Paddington Station at about 5.20. We went to the Thackeray Hotel where we had reservations. Being dissatisfied with the accommodations, however, we looked further, and finally put up at the Royal Palace, overlooking Kensington Gardens, at 9s per night each. The cuisine is unimpeachable, as demonstrated by this evening's meal. It is too tempting, I am afraid, for our pocketbooks. I had my first delightful taste of Madeira.

Tomorrow will be a long day with all of London before us. It is now 11.20 and I shall retire.

JULY 6 London

This morning we went to Cook's office just across the street and arranged for three trips. Then Rich and I took a bus from the hotel way out on Kensington High Street, to the German consulate on the other side of Trafalgar Square (9 Carlton House Terrace). We got visas, and then explored the surrounding streets. We saw Inigo Jones' Banquetting Hall at Whitehall. It is not particularly impressive and scarcely gets a passing glance from the average tourist. Its architecture is very fine and dignified nevertheless, and it is a pity that the great conception of which it is a tiny part, could never be realized. Across the way from the Banquetting House the horseguards, in their scarlet jackets, cuirasses, shining helmets and swords, and hip boots, stand guard.

We had met Richard Loeb, George Weil, and Blumenthal, fellow passengers on the Caronia, near Waterloo Place, and arranged to meet them at Simpson's in the Strand for lunch. We met them and ate a very good and full meal.

After lunch I went with George Weil and Blumenthal to the National Gallery. There I spent almost all the afternoon. It is a beautiful place, small enough not to be unwieldy, and possessing

a remarkably fine collection of paintings. I got into the Spanish room first, and was chiefly struck by Valasquez's Venus and Cupid, a magnificent composition, beautifully handled. A portrait of Philip IV reminded me of a similar one in the Boston Museum. I was enchanted with a small Morales, Madonna and child. It was much smaller than I had expected, and a thousand times more exquisite. The Murillos left me rather cold. Zurbaran's Praying Fanciscan is effectively simple. A number of Greco's attenuated figures colored in splashes almost chalky were very interesting.

After the Spanish School came the Dutch and Flemish. Vasn Eyck's Arnolfini and his Wife is there, as beautiful as I expected. There are dozens of others, all interesting, by various Netherlanders, and then we came to a marvelous interior by Vermeer – a piece of work almost perfect – in which a young girl, facing front, stands in a room with a window showing, left, and several pictures on the wall. The general tonality is blue-grey. DeHooch's Dutch courtyard is there, also many fine Ruysdael landscapes. Cuyp's everlasting cows were intolerable.

A bit further along there are some magnificent Jordaens, Rembrandts, and Rubenses. VanDyck's great portrait of Charles I goes with the English work. In the same room with it are a masterful little composition of London life by Hogarth, a dozen fine Reynoldses: the Age of Innocence, Lord Heathfield, the Hoy Family, and others, Gainsborough's Mrs. Siddons, and much other English work.

The Venetians get full justice, starting with Giovanni Bellini's Doge, including portraits by Titian, Moroni and others, Veronese's great but cold composition, the Children of Darius before Alexander, and his one spiritual composition, the beautiful Vision of St. Helena, magnificently simple in composition, and perfect in golden tonality; and ending with mior works of Guardi, Longhi, Canaletto, and Tiepolo.

The Florentines are somewhat slighted, although Leonardo's Madonna of the Rocks makes up for many a missing Sanzio. At that, we had Raphael's early Knight's Dream, and much by Lippo and Sandro Botticelli that I had no more time to look at.

Holbein's Christina of Denmark is in the gallery, but I had little time for it or any other Holbeins, Cranachs, or Durers that might have been there. And my look at the French school was even briefer. I must wait for the Louvre for adequate examples of France's own art.

Rich and I ate dinner with Loeb, Weil, and Blumenthal at their hotel, the Glendower. They went to a show, but I returned to the Royal Palace and wrote letters for a while before retiring.

JULY 7 London

Today we went on a sight-seeing tour with Cook's. We got into our char-a-banc at 9.25 and were off to see what we could of the City of London. Our first stop was at the Guildhall, mildly

interesting, were the mayor holds his functions. Several rooms were filled with vile paintings, of which the guide seemed rather fond.

The Tower of London was rather better. I found most of it extraordinarily interesting. We walked in past the beefeaters to inspect Traitors' Gate. We saw, but did not enter, the tower in which the princes were murdered. We then went up and inspected all the magnificent crown jelels in their illuminated glass case behind bars of iron.

The great armouries came next with their exhibitions of almost every type of arm and armor in England's military history. On the way through, we also saw a few instruments of torture, including the block and axe used at the last execution in the Tower. Very interesting to me was the little chapel of St. John, the date of which I forget. It is in excellent condition, yet entirely untouched by the restorer. It is Romanesque, and rather late Romanesque. I noticed particularly that the transverse arches of its vaulted aisles were stilted in order to gain a ceiling of even height.

Outside again we saw the last vestige of the Roman wall, and were shown what parts of the tower dated back to the Conqueror.

Passing the spot where the most important executions took place we entered Beauchamp's tower, famous for the inscriptions on its walls. Most beautiful of them all was the arms of the Dudleys. Which of them carved it (probably with a rusty nail) I don't know. Dudley the tax extortioner under Henry VII, Thomas Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, Regent under Edward VI, and Guilford Dudley, his son, were all prisoners in the Tower.

Before leaving, we also saw the tiny dungeons of Guy Fawkes and Sir Thomas More.

Our next stop was St. Paul's, the masterpiece of Sir Christopher Wren. A good deal of its beauty, particularly within, is marred by the necessary scaffolding. The visit was interesting neverless. We saw the beautiful Kitchener Memorial Room, and, in the crypt, the tombs of Nelson, Wellington, and many another. There were also lists of the famous dead buried in the two previous cathedrals on the site.

We ate lunch at the Florence Restaurant, and then set out again.

Our first afternoon stop was the London museum. Here we saw dozens of reliques of old London. There were several models of the city before the great fire of 1666. These were in the basement. Upstairs we was remains of a Roman galley, dug up near the Thames. We gradually worked up to modern times from that point. We saw actual cells from the old prisons, scolds' gags, old implements, old porcelains, memorials of the Civil War, and, finally, a collection of costumes from about 1700 to the coronation robes of the present king.

We drove about, seeing St. James' palace, Buckingham palace, Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, Park Lane, etc., and ended the afternoon at the National Gallery.

There Rich and I met Ed Aswell and Hank Hart. Just outside we saw Jimmy Freudenthal, Red Rauh, and Jack Patek. A little later, on the Strand, we met Aline Strauss and her mother. It seemed to be the season for meeting people.

Rich, Morris, and I had dinner at Scott's, Picadilly, delicious seafood, but expensive. Rich and Morris went to a movie. I lingered longer over my food and returned to the hotel.