

JULY 4, 1985

At this writing I'm in London, at a hotel in the Mayfair District. For the past three days I've been shopping and sightseeing and going to plays. I am well cared for. Hijackers haven't been the slightest difficulty, as I've made it a hard fast rule not to associate with that class of people.

Invariably I worry about the wrong things. On the way over, I got to grieving about the dissolution of the British Empire. In my time I'd lost enough leases on pastureland to know how bad it felt to lose ground. But after I'd spent a little time watching the action here in town, I realized that these English guys had figured out a scheme that'd make the old saying that the sun never sets on the British Empire sound like a catchy phrase from a Manhattan ad agency.

You see, everywhere the British went in the world they carried along their customs and habits and sense of taste. Their subjects not only developed a yen for freedom, but also developed an appetite for English clothes and English food and all the amenities that we associate with their fine style of living. So it's ended up that the former subjects couldn't wait to get enough money to come to London and load up on British goods, which of course gave the British a much better override than policing colonies ever will be.

About the best example today is the way raincoats and umbrellas are sold. It rains every 23 minutes in London and the longest I think the sun ever shines is about half that amount of time.

To waterproof the tourists, raincoats are made with a plaid lining that cause such a fever to buy that break-away coat hangers are used on the coat racks to keep the customers from jerking down the displays.

So instead of their needing a Royal Navy with big expensive battleships, all they need is enough mail sacks to be sure that their guests have current supplies of credit cards and traveler's checks. I guess it gets a little tiresome running back and forth to the bank to get the daily exchange rates on the different currencies, but they seem to be able to overcome that hardship in good style.

Cashmere and wool sweaters sell briskly, too. Hotel rooms are heated up to around 34 degrees in the winter and are considerably stuffy after they reach 45 degrees in the spring. I get by on wearing four sweaters in the mornings, but I was raised outdoors and can stand a bit more cold.

I don't have as much to say here as I do at home. The bell boys and room clerks can't keep a straight face when I ask directions or pay my bills. I can't describe how they talk. They are supposed to speak the King's brand of English, but modern monarchs are so scarce they don't do much public speaking, thus I don't know for sure how a king sounds. When they ask where I come from, I just say the child country and let it go at that.

After lunch I'm going to catch a train up to Chester and take a walking trip through part of the Lake District. Don't worry, I won't get lost. I can read the road signs without difficulty and maybe I won't have to ask as many questions once I get out of the city.