

A.R.P. THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS

Humour Of Blunders In The Black-out And Elsewhere



Evening Chronicle, Newcastle

SHE: "Isn't it nice they've eased the lighting restrictions a little now, dear?"

HE: "Yes, now . . . Here, what's all this? I've been taking the wrong girl home every night this war!"

IF this war has immortalised anyone, it has immortalised Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, the Reverend C. L. Dodgson (Lewis Carroll to you, and author of *Alice in Wonderland*), who was immortal before, so must now be doubly immortal.

For it is the most annoying characteristic of the British people that they would rather laugh than weep, cry silly rather than cry havoc. Annoying, that is, for foreigners, and especially for people possessing such intensely funny characteristics as seven-a-side whiskers, or a pot-belly.

To be laughed at is no joke, but to be laughed at in the terms of *Alice in Kullerland* or *Malice in Blunderland* is degrading, and chief-propagandist Lewis Carroll has been busy (in parody) since September. Hitler must be feeling the strain.

Even more extraordinary is the habit of the British to laugh at themselves, when they have time to spare from laughing at others.

All in the Dark

All this by way of saying that somehow we are seeing A.R.P. and the Air Menace through the looking glass, with even the most serious papers laughing up their sleeves at the tremendous joke of England, Scotland, and Wales going about in the dark, and piling up more casualties at home in the black-out than the forces suffer at the front.

A Letter From England

A letter which recently reached New Zealand from an English journalist, writing from Northleach, Gloucestershire, throws amusing light on English rural activity for the protection of the realm. The writer says:

"I was in London for three nights the other week and came back covered in bruises through having bumped into fifty or sixty pillar boxes and lamp posts in the black-out. . . . Strangely enough, if you scratch beneath the surface, London is rather gay and night life is becoming more and more Parisian. The longer the war goes on the more clothes the chorus girls take off. Evidently the authorities take the view that the brave boys at the front must be kept amused when on leave. . . ."

"The A.R.P. round here is a constant source of delight to me. The other day we had a practice party at a nearby village. About ten children were scattered round the place with labels tied to them saying: 'complicated fracture of the femur,' 'broken skull,' and suchlike things. The local first aid corps was supposed to patch them up and send them to hospital. They clucked round like a lot of embarrassed hens for a while tying bandages on in the most unlikely places and then chucked them into the ambulance, which promptly got stuck in a ditch. It was announced by the Umpire when they arrived at the hospital that all the casualties were either dead from exposure or loss of blood and that consequently such minor points as that a splint had been carefully tied on the right leg in order to mend a fracture of the left thigh were really quite irrelevant. It was also

England Laughs At These

The very officious A.R.P. warden, tired of inactivity and the monotony of pacing his hut, suddenly thought of something to do. He seized the telephone.

"Hello, hello — that the public library?"

"Yes, this is the library."

"Have you any light literature?"

"Yes."

"Well, put it out at once!"

* * *

Overheard in the village street:

"Aye, there's auld McGregor. He has nae been oot since the war started."

"Why no?"

"Every time he looks oot and sees oor gas-mask boxes he thinks it's a flag-day."

quite beside the point that a little boy who was supposed to have a fracture at the base of the skull was dropped by one of the stretcher bearers on the way to the ambulance so that his head struck a stone wall with a resounding crack. But the climax of the whole pantomime was reached in the case of the girl of about fourteen who had a label round her neck with 'hysteria' written on it. After sitting around in a damp field for about half an hour waiting to be attended to she disappeared. She was eventually found by the first aid party having tea in her cottage with her family. Asked why she hadn't stayed where she was told, she said that she had recovered from her hysteria and now felt quite all right thank you and why therefore shouldn't she go on eating her tea?

Good-Humoured Criticism

While they complain most bitterly about the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Information is allowing Home newspapers and magazines to: Criticise the Ministry of Information; accuse the A.R.P. system of housing (1) scoundrels, (2) scabs, (3) loafers, (4) other vermin; object to emergency regulations (as in New Zealand); and laugh heartily at all these things.

So that Hitler must be saying again, as he said in "Mein Kampf," that the propaganda that wins wars for Britain is despicable, shameful, and perfect. A statement which seems to be no more contradictory, and silly, senseless, and useless, and perfect, than the system, or lack of it, of which he complains.

A Serious Note

But sometimes they are serious. We find *The Times* giving odds on the chances of being hit on the head

during air raids, in spite of the Chinese philosopher's assurance that a man who goes through life without being hit from above by the birds has the same chance of immunity from what *The Times* calls "the detritus of battle in the air."

In New Zealand we are relatively safe, but in England, civilians run the risk of being hit by:

A spent rifle or machine-gun bullet. Falling at 300 feet a second, the blow it gives when it strikes anything on or near the earth's surface is about that of a 40lb. weight falling one foot. (To get an idea of this, try dropping the coal scuttle full of coal on your head).

A spent cartridge case. Dropped from the same height as a bullet fired straight up — about 10,000 feet — it gives a much lighter blow, due to its larger surface giving greater air resistance.

Pieces of shell. The force with which they strike the earth or any object on it is determined by their surface giving resistance to the air.

A heavy bomb which fails to explode and will bury itself to a considerable depth. There are, however, few "duds" in these modern times.

People are warned not to watch aerial combat, as bullets are sometimes fired at an angle to the earth, and could inflict injury up to two miles from the actual scene of fighting.

Disturbing the Enemy

If Lewis Carroll were alive now, perhaps Royalty would honour him again, for his influence on the War of Words, as Queen Victoria once honoured him for *Alice*. Victoria said he might dedicate his next book to her. Unfortunately the next book was *An Elementary Treatise on Determinants*.

Undoubtedly this sort of contradictory jabberwocky is calculated to disturb the enemy. We may threaten the Snark with thimbles, or hunt it with forks and hope; or threaten its life with a railway share, or charm it with smiles and soap. But we simply can't stop laughing at it, and laughs are tough on The Snark (or, if you prefer it, Public Nark No 1, Adolf Hitler).



"I'm knitting little black-out bags for the valves"