

"HERE IS THE NEWS"

(Written for "The Listener" by MARY HEDLEY CHARLTON)

WHEN the first calm, low report of the invasion came over the radio, the man, woman, child and old woman were drinking their second cups of weak tea. The voice came soft but startling: "The troops are landing on the coast of France."

The man, leaning over the table, pushed his cup away and looked at the woman. She, also startled, got up and ran to the radio fiddling with the knobs. "Leave them alone," said the man, "I can't hear so low," she said. "You'll miss all if you fiddle," he said. "Here, let it be," and getting up, he lurched over to the radio.

The child, sitting by the fire with the old woman, remained quiet, looking at his father.

"That's fixed them," said the man, and sat down at the table again.

Automatically, the woman filled up his cup. "There's my serial coming over in a minute," she said. "Serial! Just like a woman," said the man. "History to pass down to your children coming over the radio, and you talk of SERIALS."

"It'll all be in the papers to-morrow," said the old woman, and her voice sounded like dry rushes in the wind.

"You be quiet!" cried the man. "All this woman talk, how can I hear the news?"

"News!" cried the child. "News! News!" And he got up and jumped up and down, his fair hair flopping like wings.

"Do you hear?" said the man. "Boats landing. That's a miracle, that is—that'll fix the Nazis."

"I can't hear when you talk," said the woman.

"Who's talking?" said the man. "All this screaming!"

"It's sad," said the woman. "This invasion," and she cried suddenly, wiping her eyes with her arm.

"It's GOOD news," said the man. "Now don't get all tuned up; we're ready."

"I've seen three wars," muttered the old woman, and drained her cup noisily. "I'm tired."

"You've not seen an invasion," said the man. "Napoleon was the last to see that."

"Napoleon! Napoleon!" cried the child.

"Be quiet, can't you?" said the woman.

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agriculture practiced, sod or grass crops are not grown, and hence there is little occasion to plough under organic matter.

"And then there is the myth concerning the fertility of Oriental soil. Surely if Mr. Faulkner plans to restore 'our birthright of virile health' by junking the plough, he should not point to the Orientals as successful advocates of his theory. A large portion of the Chinese population suffers from malnutrition due to an exhausted soil, much of which they have hand-cultivated, rather than ploughed, for centuries. And the primitive agriculture of India produces an average yield of only five to six bushels of wheat an acre."

"Listen! General de Gaulle is going to speak."

"I've seen three wars," said the old woman. "There's always wars."

"Quiet, now!" said the man. "Listen now."

* * *

THE child felt suddenly lonely and neglected. He didn't understand what it was all about, but it made his mother cry and his father cross, and they had forgotten to spread his slice of bread with syrup. He started to scream angrily and fiercely.

The woman went to him and sat on the stool beside him. In the shelter of her arm he found comfort and peace, and he smiled again.

The voice still went on, but now it was just a voice coming out of a box, and the room was quiet once more, with the kettle singing on the fire, and the man relaxed and leaning over the table, smoking.

"Listen to this," said the man. "This is history."

"When you stop talking," said the woman, "I'll hear."

She pulled the child to her, rocking him, his fair hair falling like straw across her breast.

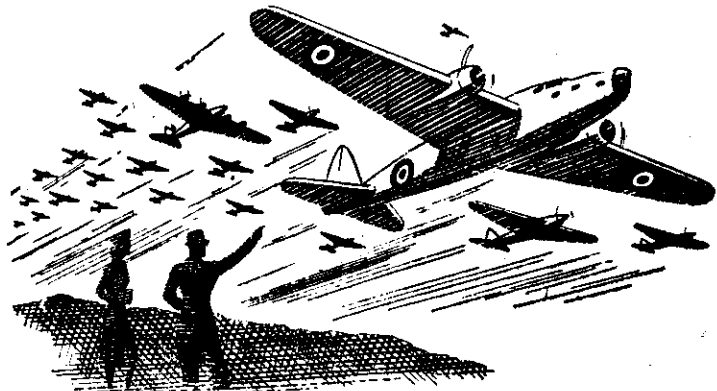
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