

# ESCAPE FROM EUROPE

*It is just a little over a year since Grace Adams East first brought her silver trumpet to New Zealand. Since then, she has been round the world, has played her way through Australia, Ceylon, India and Egypt to the theatres and radio networks of France and Great Britain. And she saw the war-clouds break in Europe. That experience has provided a sombre background to her reminiscences*

WHEN Grace Adams East left New Zealand at the end of her 1938 visit, she had come more than half-way round the world, and as she had made enough to take her the rest of the way, she determined to make the round trip, contracts or no contracts. It was, as she says, the opportunity of a lifetime.

So, as she told a representative of *The Listener*, instead of doubling back on her tracks and taking ship again for the United States, she returned to Australia. There was no difficulty about securing engagements there, however, and she played her way right across the continent to Perth, and from Fremantle she sailed to Ceylon.

## No Cabaret Artist!

By letter she had arranged an engagement at Colombo, but as some times happens in such circumstances, there was a slight misunderstanding regarding her type of playing. It was a little old Italian who was to act as impresario for her while there, and he looked her up and down in puzzled fashion when they met: "You don't look like a cabaret artist," he remarked dubiously. Grace Adams East explained that she was not, but in the end, she stayed there for five weeks playing nothing but classical music all the time—and made a success of it with all her audiences.

From Colombo she moved on to Bombay, where she had secured another engagement, this time in the famous Frascati Hotel which, to her surprise, she found to be a much more up-to-date and luxurious building than many of the super-skyscrapers of New York. But she did not stay in it.

## Lived as a Parsee

"When I was in New Zealand last," she said, "the Ockenden sisters, of Wellington, were very good to me, and when I left New Zealand, they wrote to a Parsee family of Bombay, with whom they had long corresponded, advising them of my anticipated visit."

The result was, she went on, that as soon as she arrived in Bombay, the Tooka family offered her the hospitality of their home. Keenly interested to discover something of the life of a cultured Indian family, she accepted the offer with enthusiasm, and the time she spent under their roof, in its peace and tranquillity, she was later to contrast sharply with the days of nerve-racking tension she went through in Europe.

The ensuing weeks brought varied interests. There was the full-blooded American negro who was her accompanist at Bombay—who played Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" as she had never thought it could be played, so brilliant was his interpretation.

Not even Gershwin himself had so impressed her. Then there was the comfortable trip in a British liner to Egypt, unmarred by any blackout, for the war-clouds were still only on the far horizon. There followed a brief spell in Egypt, and like a good tourist, she went up the Nile, saw the Pyramids, and gazed in wonder at the treasures from the Valley of the Kings.

## The War of Nerves

The "war of nerves" was in full swing when she arrived in London, and when she registered on arrival, she was issued with a gas-mask. The tension in London at the time, she said, was terrific. In this respect, France and Britain provided a sharp contrast. The French seemed bent on enjoying the peace, unsettled as it was, while it lasted. The British people, on the other hand, did all their worrying in the pre-war period. "I shouldn't be surprised," she said, "if they were standing up to it better than the French now."

However, in those March days the tension in the London air was uncomfortably acute, and at the suggestion of a friend in the Italian colony she went to France. She would find herself anaesthetised, she was told, in the French atmosphere.

In France there was still a feeling that war might be avoided—a forced optimism—her French manager was reassuring, and arranged concerts for her in most of the important French towns, from the north to the cote d'azur, while she also made a brief tour of Belgium.

## Paris-Madrid-Rome-Berlin

She was advised not to go to Germany, but she found time to make a most interesting air-trip from Paris to Madrid, Rome and Berlin and back to Paris again. The plane in which she was travelling passed over Madrid just at the time when General Franco was holding one of his victory parades, but it was not the banners which held her eye as the plane slipped over the town.

"Don't listen to anyone who tries to discount the effects of aerial bombing," she said, "I saw Madrid, and Madrid was a shambles, a desolation of ruined buildings."

## The Storm Breaks

Grace Adams East was in Vichy when she received word from the United States Embassy that it might be advisable for her to pack her trunks and return home. That was on August 28. On August 31, with a mountain of luggage which she had to look after more or less by herself (all the railway porters were en route to the Maginot Line), she arrived in Paris. There she found a note from her manager, apologising for getting her into such a predicament. He, too, was by then in the front line. France, after twenty years of hoping against hope, was in tears. The streets and railway stations were packed with hurrying men, each with his little bundle on his shoulder, and watching them the women stood literally bowed with grief.

A nightmare journey in the blackout took her to Le Havre, where she was to wait for the liner President Harding to take her home, and there she drove



GRACE ADAMS EAST

a taxi between the station and the hotels, meeting other American refugees like herself and finding in the hurry and bustle some sort of anodyne to the hysteria of the times. They were a mixed company in the little waterside hotel where she stayed: "a United States Senator, Senator Reynolds, an American millionaire, a little American nurse, individuals drawn from widely different spheres, but sharing in a comradeship born of their mutual trials."

## Basement Concerts

To keep themselves sane, they organised concerts in the hotel basement, Grace Adams East playing to an accompaniment provided by one of the hotel barman, a one-legged veteran of the first Great War.

"But we even felt ashamed at trying to be happy in the midst of such sorrow," she said. "Singing didn't go over so well. It isn't that kind of war. I don't know what to think of it, and I'm no international commentator, but why can't you have a United States of Europe?"

After a fortnight of waiting, they at last embarked for home, but it took a whole night to make the trip to Southampton, and 12 days to reach New York, weaving their way through minefields and taking every precaution against mishaps.

Back in New York, Grace Adams East found plenty of engagements awaiting her. She played (ironically enough) in the Palace of Peace at the World's Fair, and also in the Temple of Religion, fulfilled social engagements, and did a season at one of the big hotels. Then she sailed back across the Pacific to New Zealand, and at every port of call the peace of the Pacific summer reminded her more forcibly of the dark days she had left behind. Though even far-off New Zealand is at war, she feels that here there is a little more peace for her than she can find in older countries. At least, there is quiet, and she has some need of it just now, for she is busy on a Haydn concerto.

So far, no trumpeter has done a concerto in public, but Jose Iturbi has promised her that he will give her a debut with the Rochester Symphony Orchestra at New York next season. So she intends to stay on in New Zealand as long as she can, perhaps until November.

"Yours is such a mild and peaceful country," she said, "so good a place for artists to work in. Why don't you advertise it more?"