

HOW THEY ARE "TAKING IT"

Letters From The London Front

I HAVE lately been reading through piles of correspondence for a book of collected letters from people in England to people in the United States. A few are from people who rank high in



GEORGE ARLISS
No gentlemen of England now abed

the cultural life of England and are well known in the United States. Although they are more articulate than the man-in-the-street their letters do not differ in spirit or accent from all the other letters pouring out of England today and expressing, as nothing else in the world expresses, how the English are feeling, how they are "taking it."

LADY DIANA COOPER

LADY DIANA COOPER, daughter of the Duke of Rutland, and one of the most famous beauties of England, was formerly on the stage, and was seen by thousands in the United States as the Madonna in Reinhardt's "The Miracle." In April, 1940, on her return from the United States with her husband, Alfred Duff Cooper, she wrote to a friend in New York:

"So often on return from foreign adventures one has to bear with cruel disinterestedness; friends have not registered one's absence, one's narrow escapes and aesthetic thrills fall on ears listening to home chatter, and one suppresses reluctantly the photographs and cuttings. But last week was a new experience:—'What did you do?'—'What did they say?'—'What do they really think?'—'Do they think us phoney?'—'Are they on our side?'—'Why is the betting going against us?' . . .

"A great deal of the welcoming took place at the Savoy, because now more

(By Diana Forbes-Robertson, in "Current History and Forum." Diana Forbes-Robertson, daughter of the late Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson and Gertrude Elliott, is the wife of Vincent Sheean, the noted American journalist.)

than ever is the 'Grill' the 'one place' in London. You are certain to find bits of the Cabinet always there (for where else can late supper be eaten?). Workers off their beat, actors, writers, the press, Mayfair's hostesses who have abandoned their private homes and still want to entertain—they all are there. Friends moving from table to table—here a cup of soup, there a glass of wine. . . .

"With thousands of others I thought and feared that London would be a smouldering heap, disease on the march, many friends widowed, confusion worse confounded, the Apocalypse, the legion of Anti-Christ to be faced and fought—perhaps even in our land. Instead, the cities are strong in protection, and guts and gaiety."

ALEC WAUGH

"I AM not a military historian. I am not a student of strategy and tactics. I am not qualified to express an opinion on the sequence of tragic events that was within a month to drive that magnificent army, its equipment abandoned, upon the beaches before Dunkirk. I only saw it from what would have been described in the last war, as 'the immunity of G.H.Q.' During the whole of the action I did not see a single German tank, I did not see a single German soldier. Yet those thirteen days between the first air raid warning over G.H.Q. and the docking at Dover of the steamer by which I was disembarked, were sufficient to convince me, as they convinced many thousand others, that we are confronted with a new kind of warfare; a warfare for which new weapons, new tactics must be forged. . . .

"There is no safety in distance, in rivers, in cement defences, in this war of parachutists, of fifth columnists, of sweeping infiltrations of air raids bombings where towns fifty miles from the firing lines can become overnight a confused shambles of refugees and cut communications. A total war is not waged along a fixed set line. It is not waged only on one's front. It is waged behind one, and on the flanks, from above and from beneath. It is for that kind of war that we are preparing now."

JOHN GIELGUD

AND finally when total war started in England and every civilian became a front line soldier, we got glimpses of life, normal and abnormal, of people carrying on with their old jobs, or doing jobs that they never expected to do in their lives. John Gielgud, last seen in this country as "Hamlet," writes on September 25 of the last days of normal theatre life:

"Well, the bombing is very unpleasant, and the results make an ugly and sad sight—but people behave magnificently. . . .

"Of course traffic is rather disorganised. People walk to and from their work in long processions through the parks and back streets in this lovely autumn weather, and the shops board up and open again with amazing cheerfulness. Telephones, trains and posts are the most irritating, but will no doubt improve with



LADY DIANA COOPER
The Madonna expected the Apocalypse

time. The tubes are rather dreadful to see, with families queuing up to sleep there at five in the afternoon with bedding, food, etc., children and old women all along the passages and platforms, but they seem fantastically gay and even hilarious sometimes, in that real Cockney way which is so endearing. Mayfair looks very dramatic—it needs a painter to do it justice—the big houses with windows blown out and torn white curtains still streaming out, and trees and railings down here and there—then whole streets quite untouched, and suddenly round a corner, another big lump of devastation—with rooms gaping open to the sky, yet mirrors and pictures often still hanging on the side walls. There were incendiary bombs on the Globe one night, and I went dashing up Piccadilly with the barrage going on all round us, feeling very heroic and terrified, to find the fire out and the stage deep in water—a lot of glass lying about and scenery soaked and damaged but no one hurt.

"Everything closed down a fortnight ago, and the cinemas are closing at 7 o'clock at night—one just goes home about then, dines, and settles in for the night."

REBECCA WEST

REBECCA WEST, the famous novelist, wrote on October 4 from her home in Beekshire:

"We see the marvellous barrage as we lie in bed, over our cedar tree—although London is forty-five miles away. The German aeroplanes come and mill around looking for an aerodrome, last night one seemed to stick among the chimney pots for hours. Up till now they have done little here, though we fear that when they've got even more peeved we shall have low flying and machine gunning. If they get Patience and Primrose, the cows, they won't have to gun me—I'll die of fury."

GEORGE ARLISS

GEORGE ARLISS, the actor, equally beloved by American and English audiences, summed up the spirit of resistance, typical of the whole English people.

"Now the whole of England has joined the army, as it were, the civilians have dressed their nerves in uniform and unfurled a mental banner which reads 'Now do your damndest.'"



JOHN GIELGUD
". . . bombing is very unpleasant"

American Pilots

A FIGHTER squadron has been formed in the Royal Air Force composed entirely of United States citizens as pilots. It is commanded by Group Captain Charles Sweeney who, in 1925, re-formed the famous Lafayette Squadron which operated with the French Air Force in 1914-18. Operational command of the squadron will be in the hands of Squadron-Leader W. E. G. Taylor, a pilot of great skill and experience, who has done important work with the Fleet Air Arm. The squadron is named the Eagle Squadron, and members will wear on the sleeves of their tunics, close to the shoulder, a special badge, approved by the King, bearing the American eagle and surmounted by the letters E.S.