

TWO MODERN PIMPERNELS

Exciting Adventures of N.Z. Residents Who Helped Czechs To Escape From The Gestapo

BARONESS ORCZY'S tales of the Scarlet Pimpernel fade into mere story-book stuff before the exciting real-life adventures of Captain and Mrs. Guy Morton, who smuggled people out of Czechoslovakia under the eyes of the German Gestapo. Captain and Mrs. Morton are now living quietly in New Zealand in charge of the Turangi Fishing Lodge, National Park, but in a few short months in Prague only a couple of years ago they experienced enough excitement to keep them going for life. Dramatic motor chases, passport difficulties, cross-examination by the Gestapo, arrest, and imprisonment — all these and more were their regular fare.

Mrs. Morton has now prepared for broadcasting two talks telling how she and her husband helped four children to escape from Czechoslovakia, and these talks will shortly be heard from 2YA and later from other National stations.

Mrs. Morton was born in China, where her parents were missionaries from England. After schooling in China, she went to Cambridge and qualified as a teacher. In England she met Captain Guy Morton who, in connection with the British Council, was giving lectures about English life, culture, and institutions in Prague. They were married in Czechoslovakia although she admits that she couldn't understand a word of the marriage ceremony performed in Czech by the Mayor of the town.

Fear Comes to Czechoslovakia

When the Nazis first threatened the Sudetenland, fear descended on many Jews who knew that they had either to flee to England or America, or lose their liberty and perhaps their lives. Many scores of Jews, Social Democrats, and others who would be persecuted by the Nazis, appealed to Captain and Mrs. Morton to help in securing passports, visas, affidavits, and similar documents to aid their escape. They came to them because they were English and free from official control, and gradually the Mortons had to give up their whole time to this work. They heard heart-rendering stories of families broken up and of thwarted plans to get out of the country. The difficulties of getting a permit to enter England were immense, but only with such a permit could a Czech hope to get a visa in Prague, and only with such a visa could he get a pass from the Gestapo. Both Captain and Mrs. Morton complain about the lack of co-operation among some of the British Embassy officials in Prague who, they say, needlessly held up the issue of vital papers. They are emphatic in their opinion, based on daily visits to the Embassy, that a little more energy and initiative on the part of some of the Englishmen officially in Prague might have made all the difference to the safety of many Czechs.

In the circumstances Captain Morton felt he had no alternative but to do what he could to assist people to escape the terror — if not legally, then illegally. Some Czechs he put in his car and just drove them over the frontier in the best Oppenheim manner of fooling the frontier guards. With others he had to adopt subterranean plans which even yet he feels it unwise to disclose.

Over the Frontier

In the two talks which Mrs. Morton will give from the NBS stations, she describes in full the methods and excitement

party into custody, and questioned them without ceasing from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Captain Morton said that the valuables were his personal property and that he was an Englishman with a good passport. He carried the valuables with him for safety. The Germans wanted to know why he carried two gold cigarette cases; he replied that one case contained one brand of cigarettes and the other case contained another. He didn't like mixing his brands of tobacco.

It was a risky excuse but it worked.

A customs agent who was called in said that there was no reason to doubt that these valuables were the Captain's own property, and ultimately, through lack of proof, he was allowed to proceed on his way across Germany, through Holland and so to England. But the Czech woman and children were sent back to Prague, and when Mrs. Morton saw them return bruised and bandaged from the car accident, one can well imagine how worried she was, until her husband telegraphed from London and urged her to come home, bringing with her an English girl who happened to be staying with them,

were holding for people in concentration camps. A council of war decided that Mrs. Morton should return to Prague by train because if the Gestapo had suspicions of anybody it would be of Captain Morton. Back in Prague she found that the young secretary was in prison (where he remained two weeks) and that their flat was topsy-turvy. There was nothing Mrs. Morton could do but leave as soon as possible and get to safer country. But how to get away had then become a greater problem because, although most of her papers were still in order, her pass issued by the Gestapo had ceased to be valid. Eventually Mrs. Morton hit on the plan of securing the services of two English friends who lived nearby. She purchased openly and in her own name railway tickets for the return journey but, suspecting that the authorities would be watching every train, she left with her friends in their car, and did not board the train until Dresden.

A Trick Which Worked

There still remained the difficulty of the old pass. When there came the inevitable inspection it was got over very neatly. The two friends with their good passes showed theirs first, got the guards into conversation just at the moment when Mrs. Morton's pass was handed up, and in the diversion the guards did not notice that it had already been stamped! Tricks of this nature are the standby of the thriller-writers, but they do work in real life (sometimes).

In Prague later the Gestapo were busy looking for Mrs. Morton the Englishwoman. She had not left by train, and as they had the country sewn up pretty tightly, they were positive she was still in the country. The Mortons had lived in a modern block of 98 flats, and all the inhabitants of these 98 flats were prohibited from going further away than two kilometres until Mrs. Morton was found. She doesn't know if the ban still holds!

The Mortons left everything behind in Czechoslovakia — clothes, books, furniture, personal jewellery (including her engagement ring) — everything except what they had in a suitcase. But at least they themselves were safe.

And So To New Zealand

Mrs. Morton believes that the real reason why she got out of Czechoslovakia so easily was because the Gestapo didn't even trust itself. The authorities in one part of the country kept things secret from their colleagues in another part.

Safe in London, Captain and Mrs. Morton faced the problem of where they would live. They had both been to China, but China these days is hardly a quiet place to live in. "What about New Zealand?" they said to one another, suddenly one night at dinner. "That is a nice sunny place."

That was said on the 19th of the month and they sailed for this country on the 23rd, settling down to run their fishing lodge at National Park. Ironically, Captain Morton complains that he has since been kept so busy denying rumours that he is a German spy that he hasn't yet had any time to try the fishing!



* These photographs of Captain and Mrs. Guy Morton are taken from passports with an adventurous history *

ments of helping Czech children to reach England, but what she does not tell is the story of how she and her husband finally got out of the country themselves. This is it:

Captain Morton started to breathe more easily when he got safely past the German-Czech frontier into Germany. In his car on this trip were a Czech woman and two young children, pathetic refugees, and in his possession was a wash-leather bag containing jewels and gold objects. One of the children touched his arm to direct his attention to something, and before any of them realised what had happened the car swerved, there was a screech of brakes, and a crash as the car completely capsized. No one was killed, and as they climbed out of the wreckage another car coming along the road pulled up with a jerk to offer assistance. By all the bad luck in the world the second car contained two Gestapo agents, who withdrew their offers of help when they noticed that a little bag had burst open, strewing valuables over the road. Their suspicions aroused, they promptly took the whole



and the two young men who acted as their secretaries.

Mrs. Morton left immediately with their guest and one of the secretaries, and thanks to having the correct passports and visas, the party got through to England without difficulty.

Back Into Danger

No sooner was she in London than a telephone call came through from the other young secretary left behind in Prague to say that the Gestapo had visited the Morton's flat, opened the safe, and taken all their valuables, including a good deal of money which they