

A FAMOUS BEAUTY

Women and the Home

Interview With Lady Diana Duff-Cooper



LADY DIANA
"Looks like a portrait of herself"

LADY Diana Duff-Cooper does not like flying. "I prefer to go at eight miles an hour and see the country," is her comment. When I saw her at a Wellington hotel, she had that morning flown up from Christchurch, attended a civic reception and eaten a State luncheon. She had a few minutes to spare before a hairdressing appointment and an afternoon function give by Mrs. Peter Fraser.

For 20 years or more, Lady Diana has been a reigning beauty. Even if her social life had not told upon her, one would think that the strain of appearing always at one's best would be enough to etch lines about the mouth and put a pucker in the forehead. But when I saw her, no hint of fatigue or strain marred her flawless face.

She Is Very Beautiful

I had read so much about her—I had seen so many portraits of her—that I was quite prepared for disillusionment. But she is very beautiful.

She came into the hotel sitting room, twirling a red rose between elegant rose-tipped fingers.

"That's one of the things at which New Zealanders can beat the English," she said, "growing roses. And, what's more, you know how to arrange them here. At home, we seem to stuff them into vases and think we've done our duty by them."

Her long fingers threaded the rose into her coat. I watched her. She wore a redingote of navy wool georgette that emphasised the slim elegance of her figure. She slipped it off to reveal a simple dress of white linen with a knife-pleated skirt, a band of crimson at the armhole, and loose sleeves of navy. Her large navy straw hat with its provocative veil showed off to advantage the beauty of features and colouring. She

looks like a portrait of herself, I decided. Her widely-spaced blue eyes have a childlike innocence. Her complexion is the traditional milk-and-roses of the English beauty. Her hair is gold, and curls softly against her cheek. Decidedly a face that would launch a thousand ships.

Cigarettes And Stockings

She asked for a cigarette. "I prefer cheap cigarettes," she confessed. "In England now, everybody smokes Woodbines, and they're very lucky if they manage to get them."

"And what about stockings?" we asked, casting envious glances at Lady Diana's sheer-clad legs.

"The shortage doesn't affect me very much," she confessed, with a smile. "I wear them only when going to a Royal Levee, or something equally important. I prefer to go without. I got this pair in Canada. They're nylon, and will last for ever." She slid a hand down inside the stockings to demonstrate its fineness. Sighs of envy from the assembled reporters—all women. "But the silk stocking question is, after all, very unimportant, when we consider the other problems the women of England have to face."

"Is it true," someone asked, "that the Government is having difficulty in persuading women to accept jobs in vital industries?"

"While we were in England, there was certainly no reluctance on the part of women to take their place in vital industries," said Lady Diana. "The only explanation I can offer is that the Government has now got down to the malingers. Most women who were available for work probably volunteered long ago."

"Do you think that there will be any difficulty at the end of the war in persuading women to give up their jobs and go back to their homes? I believe there was some unrest at the end of the last war."

Lady Diana turned her wondering blue eyes upon the speaker. "I don't recall that there was any difficulty at all," she said. "After the war I am sure the women of England will welcome a return to home and family life. They will be only too glad to be reunited to their husbands and children."

Her Son in Canada

The conversation turned to the problems of evacuation. "I think that the British children who found homes in New Zealand or Australia will derive great benefit from the change. It should broaden their outlook, and enable our countries to come even closer together. Our own 12-year-old son is at present at school in Toronto. We received some criticism for sending him out of England. It was not because we were frightened of the blitz, but because

Hitler is such a bitter enemy of my husband that we feared our boy might be taken to Germany as a hostage if Hitler invaded England.

"Being a mother myself, I know how difficult it is for those mothers who are separated from their children. Sometimes, of course, the mothers were able to go, too. But in many cases, though the children plunged wholeheartedly into the joys of country life, the mothers found it much more difficult to make the adjustment."

And After the War?

"And after the war? What will happen when all the men come back, and all the children from the slums, who have learnt to love the country, are forced to re-adjust themselves to live in a crowded city?"

"In England, we are hoping that widespread emigration will help to solve that problem, though here in New Zea-

land you don't welcome that solution. But I don't like that phrase 'after the war.' It's like Hitler building grandstands along the route of his victory procession. Time enough to think of post-war problems when the war is over. Now all I can think of is the war itself."

The manager popped his head round the door for the third time during our brief interview. Lady Diana's appointment with the hairdresser was two forty-five, he reminded her. Miss — was waiting downstairs.

With a sigh, Lady Diana rose. She shook hands with each of us in turn, on each flashed a smiling glance from her blue eyes. We watched for a last glimpse of her elegantly slim back as she glided along the corridor and disappeared into the lift.

A wisp of smoke from her cigarette floated in the air of the sitting-room, and on the floor lay a petal from the red rose . . .

—M.I.

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