

"Two things happen to most people who attempt to live under the same roof; they learn to get on with each other once and for all, or they turn against each other once and for all. If our two nations can really learn in the persons of the soldiers of our army and the citizens of your towns and villages to get on with each other, even the most sceptical and tired souls will have reason to believe in the future of the world."

A LONG time ago—a very long time ago—before this war began, British and American writers used to amuse themselves, and sometimes, if they were lucky, their readers as well, by writing about the differences between Americans and Englishmen. It was a harmless undertaking, and one which provided, on occasions, some enlightenment. For an Englishman to look at one of these literary accounts of the Americans, or for an American to look at an Englishman as he appeared in the book, was to provide for each of them a sort of distorted mirror image of himself, like the images provided in the mirrors of the side-shows of our county fairs at home. There you were, looking every bit the same, and talking, theoretically at least, the same language, wearing more or less the same clothes, and believing in very considerable part the same things: only it wasn't you.

The Differences Are Important

It was good fun. In times of peace it was very good fun indeed. It was good fun even if the distortion was unflattering and you had to dash off to a proper mirror to reassure yourself that you were still there. But what is good fun and enormously amusing in time of peace can be something very different in time of war, particularly if, in time of war, the mirror image comes alive, comes directly through the mirror like Alice coming through the looking glass, and settles down in a hutment on the common at the edge of your village or takes to playing darts in your pub.

Precisely that has happened as the result of the arrival of increasing numbers of American troops in the British Isles. For the first time in 150 years or

This, says ARCHIBALD MACLEISH, Librarian to the U.S. Congress, in a recent talk for the BBC about American troops in Britain, is

THE GREAT EXPERIMENT

more, the Americans and the English, who have looked at each other in the mirror of books and words and moving pictures and similar representations, are going to look at each other in the flesh. They are going to do more even than that. They are going to try the most difficult thing in the world; they are going to try to live together. But if the experiment we are undertaking is difficult, it is also full of hope. Two things happen to most people who attempt to live under the same roof; they learn to get on with each other once and for all, or they turn against each other once and for all. If our two nations can really learn in the persons of the soldiers of our army and the citizens of your towns and villages to get on with each other, even the most sceptical and tired souls will have reason to believe in the future of the world.

"A Weapon of Our Own"

That you on your side are aware of all this, we know very well. We have evidences of it in every direction. The hospitality of your people, their obvious desire to be helpful to our boys, the offers of help from all sides, speak for themselves. That we, for our part, are equally aware both of the difficulties and

of the great hope for the future, is known, I think, to most of you. Nothing, however, makes it more apparent than a little booklet our army people have prepared to give to every soldier leaving the United States for these islands. . . . This little guide begins by telling the American soldier that he is going to Great Britain as part of an allied offensive: that for the time being he will be Britain's guest; that America and Britain are allies, and that their alliance means, as Hitler knows very well, his inevitable and crushing defeat; that therefore Hitler has given his propaganda chiefs, as their first and major duty, the duty of attempting to spread distrust between us. This propaganda, our army tells its soldiers, can be defeated with a weapon of our own, a weapon which Englishmen and Americans have always used, and used, they think, rather better than any other nation in the world. That weapon is plain, common, horse-sense, the understanding of evident truths.

The little booklet then goes on in this way: "The most evident truth of all is that in their major ways of life the British and American people are much alike. They speak the same language. They both believe in representative government, in freedom of speech, but each country has minor national characteristics which differ. It is by causing misunderstandings over these minor differences that Hitler hopes to make his propaganda effective." There then follow a few examples which will, I think, set the tone of the whole pamphlet for you. "For instance," says the little book, "the British are often more reserved in conduct than we. On a small crowded island where forty-five million people live, each man learns to guard his privacy carefully, and is equally careful not to invade another man's privacy. So if Britons sit in trains or buses without striking up conversation with you, it doesn't mean they're being haughty and unfriendly. Probably they are paying more attention to you than you think. But they don't speak to you because they don't want to appear intrusive or rude."

Commonsense and Tact

There is no attempt in all this to lecture our soldiers or tell them how they must behave. We don't treat our citizens in that way, and our citizens are still our citizens when they serve as soldiers.



ARCHIBALD MACLEISH
As through a glass, brightly

However, there is a certain amount of good, sound advice which makes the necessary points. For example: "The British dislike bragging and showing off. American wages and American soldiers' pay are the highest in the world. When pay-day comes it would be sound practice to learn to spend your money according to British standards."

Also there are a few reminders which, I think, our men will not lose sight of. Indeed they are reminders of things which are very familiar to our people and of which our people have thought a great deal. "Don't be misled," the booklet says, "by the British tendency to be soft-spoken and polite. If they need to be, they can be plenty tough. The English language doesn't spread across the oceans and over the mountains and jungles and swamps of the world because these people were panty-waists. Sixty thousand British civilians, men, women and children, have died under bombs, and yet the morale of the British is unbreakable and high."

Bonds of Strength

But the real significance of the booklet lies not in its details of counsel and advice and comment, not even in the brave attempts of the authors to explain the differences of pronunciation of English words, but in the tone. I offer you two examples: "The British will welcome you as friends, and allies. But remember that crossing the ocean doesn't automatically make you a hero. There are housewives in aprons and youngsters in knee-pants in Britain who have lived through more high explosives in air raids than many soldiers saw in first-class bar-rages in the last war."

And again: "A British woman officer or non-commissioned officer can—and often does—give orders to a man private. The men obey smartly, and know it is no shame. For British women have proven themselves in this war. They have stuck to their posts near burning ammunition dumps, delivered messages afoot after their motor-cycles have been blasted from under them. . . . Now you understand why British soldiers respect the women in uniform."

I think anyone reading through this little booklet, reading between the lines as well as reading the lines themselves, will agree that we too understand the meaning of the great experiment our two countries are undertaking together; that

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BBC photograph
Every Saturday the British Broadcasting Corporation visits the American Red Cross clubs and broadcasts a programme to America. On this occasion the BBC microphone went to the Washington Club. United States sailors on leave in London are seen ready to send messages home.