

Glimpses of London During the Wartime

Article No. 19
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In the previous articles of this series, I have covered the story of the trip from New York to Lisbon, to London and return by Ireland and Portugal, the story going to papers all across Canada. I had expected to complete the story in that series, but quite a number of persons have written to ask for more, and there were many things which I passed over quickly or left out entirely. For that reason, I am retracing my steps to some extent and will write a few more stories for News-Record readers.

Most stories of London seem to take it for granted that the reader is quite familiar with the city, having lived there or visited it. Yet nine out of ten readers of this paper never saw London and while many of the names of places in London are well known throughout the world, names such as Tower of London, Piccadilly Circus, Buckingham Palace, Hyde Park and the like, yet they don't mean much to most native born Canadians, nor even to people from the Old Country who never happened to visit London.

I am one of those village natives who don't like large cities on first acquaintance. Though I lived several years in Toronto (and got my wife there), I never was really fond of Toronto. I remember my first visit to Montreal as a boy, and I loathed the place then, though I like to go there now. (Quebec City I always liked, however). In three times in New York I have failed to feel any enthusiasm.

Yet I liked London from the start and I think all Canadians feel the same way about it. Perhaps it is because it is the centre of the Empire, and the King and Queen are there, and Westminster Abbey and the House of Parliament and all that. So often one runs across a familiar name and says, "Oh, I always wanted to see that." But we don't think that is the explanation entirely.

One reason why I liked London was because it didn't try to overawe me, as New York does. There are no skyscrapers in London. It seems that a building by-law decrees that no building can be more than six stories in height. As a result, whole blocks of buildings are an even six stories high, and it seems obvious that the builders co-operated.

There was a queer story going around London last Fall. The London University buildings are fairly new, part of the money having been supplied by a former Canadian millionaire. It is said that when the present central tower was built, the by-law was simply disregarded and the tower was built with more than the regulation six stories. It isn't being used as a university now, but houses the Department of Public Information and it has been bombed. One bomb is said to have struck the top of the tower, and now it is exactly six stories high.

The Heart of Old London

The heart of London is an interesting place and it's easy to find one's way around, even in these days when maps are unobtainable. One reason is because the Thames runs through the centre of the city, from west to east, and one can always find his way to the river, even in a blackout.

The Thames really isn't much of a river. It is fairly broad in London only because it is still practically at sea level, but west of London, it soon tapers away until it isn't any bigger than the Grand at Fergus. It is a dirty, murky stream, with rubbish floating on it most of the time. The big boats come up as far as Tower bridge and a little beyond. Tower bridge is in the East End, being the bridge nearest to the sea. Its shape is familiar to nearly everyone, with high towers at each end and an elevated walk, so that persons can cross even when the two halves of the main bridge have been lifted up to let the ships pass. Actually, we don't suppose anybody bothers to climb up inside the towers just for that reason, it being quicker and easier to wait until the steamboat goes past. Most of the important dock area is nearest the sea.

The ancient Tower of London is at the north end of Tower bridge. It is down in a bit of a hole but looks exactly like its pictures. In the yard behind the Tower of London there was a barrage balloon, with the chains for raising and lowering it and the day I was there, the crew of the balloon had a soccer game going on in the courtyard and the Tower seems a romantic place for a game of football.

Apparently the Tower has been hit only once by a bomb, and that was what is generally called a "near miss" rather than a hit. The bomb evidently exploded against a small bastion and the old wall which was six feet thick, was blown in, disclosing the little rooms with their miniature furnaces. The grates in the fireplaces couldn't have been over a foot wide and they must have been badly people who got along with so little heat in those rooms.

(Incidentally, I missed the tradi-

tion of English climate. The weeks I was in London were sunny and warm. The hotel, with "central heating" as it's called over there, was invariably too warm. I never had to depend on fireplaces on chilly nights. But there is a story of a Canadian cabinet minister who was in London. He was asked about our Canadian climate. He said: "There isn't much difference between the climates of England and Canada except that we leave ours outdoors."

The East End of London has been severely bombed. There are reasons for that. First, a plane coming up the Thames reaches the East End first and it's easier to unload bombs there. Second, and more important, the Germans naturally supposed that they could starve London by destroying the docks and shipping. They no doubt thought they could prevent ships from using the Thames. They were wrong. I believe the docks did suffer heavily, but they were repaired and in operation when I was there. The docks are completely gone. I saw two city blocks piled high with bricks from demolished houses. These houses were old and many of them were true slums. They will never be rebuilt as they were before.

Further up the Thames, there is a steady stream of barges and tugs. The tugs have smokestacks, which can be laid down flat to go under the bridges. Little river steamers also go up the Thames a surprising distance, considering how little water there is in it. A series of locks provides the necessary stretches of quiet and level water. In the days of the invasion scare, it was feared that enemy seaplanes might come down on these stretches of water along the Thames, so old barges and other objects of various kinds were moored in the centre of the stream.

There are quite a number of other bridges over the Thames in the heart of London besides Tower bridge. The names are familiar. London bridge, most famous of them all, is the next one upstream from Tower bridge. Then there's Southwark bridge, and Blackfriars bridge, which is opposite St. Paul's Cathedral. Waterloo bridge is at a big bend in the Thames. It leads to Waterloo station, south of the river. Next bridge is Westminster, just at the corner of the Houses of Parliament, with big Ben in the clock tower just west of the bridge. Lambeth bridge is beyond the Parliament, and above that I never knew the bridges by name.

These bridges must have presented alluring targets to many a German Bomber, but apparently not one of them was ever hit seriously. I examined the stonework of Tower bridge quite carefully and there was no sign of scars from bomb fragments, nor machine gun bullets. Hon. Arthur Henderson, who was then a member of the inner war cabinet, sat beside me at dinner one day. He said the Germans had wasted thousands of bombs on these bridges and had never scored a direct hit. He lived down towards the east of London and he said the bed of the river must be covered with bombs that missed their mark.

Waterloo bridge is being rebuilt, but not as the result of damage by bombing. Work on the new bridge began before the war and has kept on. The structure seemed to be about finished. There were two emergency bridges over the Thames. They were temporary wooden structures, with a span left out so the tugs would not have to lower their masts. The idea was to use them in case one of the other bridges had been destroyed, but neither had ever been used. Such things as these caused doubts about the value of bombing. But to offset this, there was a long line of ruined factories on the south bank. If the bridges had escaped, the factories certainly had not.

Along the north side of the Thames between Blackfriars bridge and Westminster runs the Thames Embankment. Along the river side is an iron fence. Inside that is a broad sidewalk with trees along it. The road has been steadily built up. The "trans" runs quite close together and half a dozen (couple) of double-deck buses as well. Here and there, out along the sidewalks or training ships are anchored along the wall. On the bank of the river are many parks and gardens. The garden behind the Savoy had statues of Gilbert and Sullivan to protect it from popular opinion. The project of building the hotel and the adjoining theatre "Olympians" on the bank of the Thames behind the Savoy is unharmed by bombs.

I had intended to cover much of London in this story, but the rest will have to wait for another week.

The Week at OTTAWA

Specialty Written for The Acton Free Press by
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OTTAWA, (CP)—War came closer to Canadian homes this week with introduction of tea and coffee rationing and a reduction in the sugar ration.

Donald Gordon, Wartime Prices and Trade Board chairman, in announcing the new rationing said the "honor system" used in sugar rationing had proved "very satisfactory" and would be followed in the tea and coffee curtailment.

Under the new rationing regulations, all Canadians are called upon to cut their tea consumption by one-half and to reduce their coffee consumption by one-quarter. The sugar ration is reduced from three-quarters of a pound a person a week to one half-pound.

Regulations also reduce industrial use of sugar but make provision for special purchases by housewives for use in preserving and canning.

OTTAWA, (CP)—The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan is undergoing close scrutiny this week with experts of Britain and three dominions studying how to deal the Axis powers a knock-out punch from the air.

Sitting in at the deliberations on extension and revision of the plan are representatives of Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

The cast training scheme already has sent thousands of airmen into the skies to meet the Axis aerial assaults and to deliver counter-blows designed to batter key enemy war industries into ruin.

Whatever conclusions are reached, this much is certain it will mean thousands more men with wings will be engaged in the world-wide conflict.

Follows Conference

Plans for carrying on the Commonwealth Air Training Plan were discussed immediately following the wind-up last week of the Ottawa air training conference, at which 14 of the United Nations were represented.

Last week's conference was concerned with bringing about a greater measure of co-ordination and co-operation in training. This week's smaller group of nations was concerned in reviewing and bringing up-to-date the most successful large-scale scheme of co-operation yet undertaken.

It is the first general review of the joint Commonwealth Air Training Plan since it was created in Canada late in 1939. That year the four governments set out to organize a training scheme which would give the Allied Nations eventual air supremacy.

by training thousands of men in Canada. The Dominion was chosen because it was too remote for interference by enemy activities.

Renewal Agreement
The agreement was for a three-year period starting in April 1940, when the first training establishments were opened. Since then thousands of pilots, observers and gunners, mostly Canadians but including large numbers of British, Australian and New Zealand trainees, have won their wings in the 90-odd air training plan schools and moved into action overseas. To-day they are bombing Germany and Italy and meeting the Axis fliers on every front.

It was a foregone conclusion that the plan would be continued beyond the three-year period. Purpose of this week's conference is chiefly to settle details of terms, financial aid otherwise for renewing the project.

Combined Committee
The outcome of last week's United Nations air training conference won't be known for weeks to come. But it will spell more trouble and more headaches for the Axis.

Everything was done behind closed doors, except for a formal opening session. The one concrete decision announced was the setting up of a combined committee on air training in North America, with Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom represented. The committee will meet in Washington. Its purpose will be in an advisory capacity to the government and air authorities of the three nations and as a clearing house for information.

Canada's air minister, Maj. C. G. Power, who was chairman of the conference and also official spokesman, gave out the cheering news that enough aircrew personnel now is available to man all available planes. What's more, plans have been made to prevent future bottlenecks in aircrew shortage.

Parliamentary Situation

In the House of Commons proceedings were relatively quiet while the air conference proceeded. Munitions and Supply Department estimates occupied members almost every session last week.

But a storm is brewing over conscription. Anti-conscriptionist French-speaking Liberal members of the House from Quebec province are planning means of fighting the government's announced intention of putting through a bill giving it the power to impose conscription for service overseas. Hon. P. J. A. Cardin, who resigned from the Mackenzie King Cabinet over the conscription issue, has been at these meetings.

However, there is a widespread feeling among observers that Prime Minister Mackenzie King will not make second reading of the amendment bill until much later in the session, thus postponing the inevitable storm.

Mr. King was asked last week if he would move the second reading as soon as the war appropriation bill

was disposed of. But he said he would give no undertaking. "I will decide that question in the heat of interests of all," said Mr. King.

THE TEA MUG

To most people a tea mug is a very humble object—but Y. M. C. A. tea mugs are a class apart. Kings and coroners, princesses and princes, colonels and cooks have all welcomed the steaming hot tea which these mugs contain. Wherever the Y.M.C.A. is at work—in Britain, in Libya, in the Far East, in Ireland—the humble tea mug plays its indispensable part.

Some idea of the general demand for tea can be gauged from the fact that, since the beginning of the war, the Y.M.C.A. in Britain alone has had to order more than 750,000 new mugs, from manufacturers, quite apart from the large number in stock at the outbreak of hostilities.

The manufacture of these new mugs alone costs the Y.M.C.A. nearly \$50,000 a year and that is only one minor item in the vast expenditure needed to maintain all the varied facilities which the Y.M.C.A. provides for men of the Services.

The mugs are made from Cornish clay and go through an intricate process of manufacture. Starting as a rough hollow of clay they pass through many expert hands which shape them, bake them for 70 hours in a temperature of 1100° degrees Fahrenheit, give them the final gleaming polish in a bath of liquid glass, and send them out in hundreds of thousands, ready for a welcome anywhere.

That, in brief, is the saga of the Y.M.C.A. tea mug, that humble instrument which binds together all from kings down to drummer boy.

PROBLEM

The young Czech airman was a problem. He had come into the office of the Y.M.C.A. Supervisor at Barrfield Camp with the request that he be helped select a place to spend his leave.

He did not want to go to Toronto. He did not want to go to Montreal. He disliked all cities.

It was too late for skiing. It was too early for a summer resort.

He had no friends in Canada. The "Y" Supervisor was puzzled. Then he had an inspiration.

He recalled that not far distant lay the village of Frankfort. In it a factory had been erected by the Bata Shoe Company. This company was world-famous. It had been brought to Canada from Czechoslovakia.

Around this factory there had sprung up a little colony of Czechs. The young Czech airman was sent there for his leave.

He returned beaming and happy. He had made friends. He had a place to go for future leaves. His problem had been solved.

BESURE YOU HAVE THE RIGHT NUMBER... CONSULT THE DIRECTORY

Clear telephone lines for ALL-OUT PRODUCTION

Your telephone is part of a vast interlocking system now carrying an abnormal wartime load. Don't let needless delays hold up messages on which production efficiency may depend.

OTHER "WARTIME TELEPHONE TACTICS"

1. SPEAK distinctly, directly into the mouthpiece.
2. ANSWER promptly when the bell rings.
3. BE BRIEF. Clear your line for the next call.
4. USE OFF-PEAK hours for your Long Distance Calls.

These things may look trivial, but as 6,500,000 daily telephone calls, they are very important.

On Active Service *During Waiver to War*

Avoid Waste — Save Salvage!

SUGAR RATION

Now 1 1/2 LB.

Since sugar rationing was first introduced, the shipping situation has become more serious. The danger to ships and lives has increased. Consequently it has now become necessary to reduce the sugar ration from 3/4 lb. to 1/2 lb. per week per person. Only persons in areas remote from source of supply are permitted to have more than two weeks' supply on hand at any time.

SUGAR FOR PRESERVING

Special provision is made for additional quantities of sugar for home preserving and canning.

In addition to your ration, you may purchase 1/2 lb. of sugar for every pound of fruit that you preserve or can, and 1/4 lb. of sugar for every pound of fruit made into jam or jelly.

Every person who buys sugar for canning or preserving is required to keep an accurate record of the sugar purchased for this purpose. If any sugar remains after canning and preserving, it shall form part of the regular ration of 1/2 lb. per person per week.

Loyal Canadians will be glad of this new opportunity to do their part to ensure Victory.

THE WARTIME PRICES AND TRADE BOARD 515

TEA AND COFFEE ARE RATIONED

Ships and lives must be conserved

TEA CONSUMPTION MUST BE CUT AT LEAST IN HALF

You must not buy more than 2 weeks' supply of tea or coffee for yourself and household in any one week.

You must not make further purchases of tea or coffee at any time when you have two weeks' supply on hand at the reduced ration. (Exception: those in areas remote from supply.)

Retailers have the right to limit or refuse customers' orders if they suspect the law is not being kept. Retailers must not have on hand more than one month's supply of tea and coffee, whether packaged or bulk.

There are heavy penalties for violations of this law.

COFFEE CONSUMPTION MUST BE CUT AT LEAST ONE FOURTH

So Canadians must now reduce their consumption of tea and coffee. You must reduce your normal consumption of tea by at least a half. You must reduce your normal consumption of coffee by at least one-fourth. These reductions are absolutely necessary.

THE WARTIME PRICES AND TRADE BOARD

THINK! BEFORE YOU USE SO MUCH