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Glimpses of London in Wartime

ARTICLE NO. 19
By Hugh Tompkins

In the previous articles of this series, I have covered the story of the trip from New York to Lisbon, London and return by Ireland and Portugal, the story going to papers across Canada. I had expected to write the story in that order, but 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.

Most stories of London seem to tear 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. While many of the papers in 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 folk who don't like large cities in that 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 also like better.) In this time 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 Commons, 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 overtake me. New York does. There are no skyscrapers in London. It seems that a 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 cooperated.

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 great central tower was built, the by-law was simply disregarded and the tower was built with more than the regulation six stories. It had been used as a university hall, but because of the Department of Public Information, and it has been bombed. One report is said to have "broke the top of the tower and now it is only six stories high."

The Heart of London

The heart of London is an interesting place and it is easy to find oneself "around" in these days, when maps are unobtainable. One reason is because the Thames runs through the centre of the city from east to west and one can always find his way to the river even in a thick fog. The Thames really isn't much of a river. It is fairly broad in London, but as it goes east it narrows and it is very shallow. It is a dirty, murky stream with a rubbish floating on its back. The boats on it are just a few old-fashioned barges and a few small boats. The East End being the home of the poor, it is a familiar sight to see a man with a basket on his head and a child in his arms, walking along the river bank. 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 out in the open air than to go up. Most of the important dock area is nearer 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 machinery 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 of the Tower, surely 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, old wall, which was six feet thick, was blown out, disclosing the little rooms, with their miniature fire-places. The grates in the fire-places couldn't have been over a foot wide and they must have been hardly people who got along with no little heat in those rooms. Incidentally, I missed the traditional English climate. The weeks I was in London were sunny and warm. The hotel, with "central heat-

ing" 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 has talked about our Canadian climate. He said: "There isn't much difference between the climate 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 using the Thames. They were wrong. I believe the docks did suffer heavily, but they were repaired and in operation when I wandered down that way on the bus one day. And I know that ships were using the Thames, for I saw them, including a convoy going out the mouth of the river with each ship trailing one of the barrage balloons behind it.

But the little houses of the East End of London show the scars of the bombing. Whole blocks 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 barges are loaded with goods and laid down flat to go under the bridge. 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 airplanes might come down on these stretches of water along the Thames, to old barges and other obstacles of various kinds were moored 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 distinct of them all, is the first one upstream from Tower bridge. Then there's Southwark bridge, and Blackfriars bridge. 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 above that I never knew the bridge by name.

These bridges must have presented a striking target to many a German bomber, but apparently not one of them was ever hit seriously. I examined the stone-work of Tower bridge quite carefully, and there was no sign of scars from bomb fragments or machine gun fire. 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, but with two emergency bridges over the Thames. They were temporary wooden structures, with a span left out so the tugs would not have to leave their stacks. The idea was to use them in case one of the other bridges blew up, but neither had ever been used. Such things as those caused doubts about the value of bombing. But to think that there was a long line of ruined factories on the north 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 steady traffic, the "trams" running quite close together, and half a dozen routes of double-deck buses as well. Here and there, old sailing vessels or training ships are anchored along the wall. On the side of the road away from the river, there are many parks and gardens. The garden behind the Bavy had statues of Gilbert and Sullivan, the profits of whose popular operas provided the money to build the hotel and the adjoining theatre. Cleopatra's Needle, an Egyptian obelisk stands in the bank of the Thames behind the Bavy. It is unharmed by bombs. I had intended to cover much of London in this two columns but the rest will have to wait for another week.

You Roll Them Better With
OGDEN'S FINE CUT
CIGARETTE TOBACCO

Another fund, started last Fall, is purely a local affair, and the proceeds are turned over to the Georgetown Soldiers' Comforts' Committee, which sends cigarettes and parcels from time to time to the district boys overseas. Over 150 soldiers from Georgetown and the surrounding district are on the mailing list for these parcels, and the more generous the donations, the more often the Committee is able to make a shipment. Here, too, there are no administration charges, and every cent of the money acknowledged goes straight to the boys in the guise of "smokes," food and clothing.

PEEL C.C.F. ELECTS OFFICERS

The C.C.F. Peel Riding Association held their first meeting, following their annual convention, at the Old Countrymen's Club in Hampton on May 15th. The following officers were elected: President, Robert F. Hardy, Suroville Road, Erindale; 1st vice-president, Michael Allroy, Lakeview; 2nd vice-president, Jack Carey, Ingleswood; secretary, Herb Gowring, Huttonville; assistant secretary, Chummy Beaton, Ingleswood; treasurer, Ray Tester, Hampton; assistant treasurer, Gordon Fisher, Lakeview. The general opinion of the Council was that the ground-work for C.C.F. activity had been well laid by the past Council and that the time was at hand when people in Peel will look to the C.C.F. banner. The opinion was voiced that "to use an old expression, something is rotten in the state of Peel."

MAE MURRAY... OF FILM FAME WRITES OWN LIFE STORY

The famous dancing star of "The Merry Widow" and other film successes, presents... starting in The American Weekly with this Sunday's (May 24) issue of The Detroit Sunday Times... intimate confessions of her rise from obscurity to Hollywood's highest paid star, a path that led to a broken heart. He sure to get Sunday's Detroit Times.

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TIME TABLE
NOW IN EFFECT
Daylight Saving Time
LEAVE GEORGETOWN

Table with 2 columns: Eastbound, Westbound. Rows showing departure times for various routes (a, b, c, d, e, f) from Georgetown.

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Passenger and Mail 10:05 a.m.
Passenger and Mail 6:46 p.m.
Passenger, Sunday only 6:14 p.m.
Passenger, daily 9:43 p.m.
(Stops for Toronto and east of Toronto passengers only.)
Going West
Passenger and Mail 8:30 a.m.
Passenger, Sat. only 2:15 p.m.
Passenger daily except Saturday and Sunday 6:14 p.m.
Passenger and Mail 6:46 p.m.
Passenger, Sundays only 11:30 p.m.
Going North
Passenger and Mail 6:46 a.m.
Going South
Passenger and Mail 6:00 p.m.
Depot Ticket Office-Phone 200

The Editor's Corner
A BOOST FOR THE RED CROSS

We intended to write a Red Cross editorial this week, inasmuch as the campaign for funds is in its final stages in this district, and the \$4,000 objective has not been reached as we go to press. We have repeatedly boasted this worthy organization in the columns of the Herald, and in the future shall continue to do so. In peace-time it plays a noble part, as the victims of floods and hurricanes in the southern United States can tell you, and with the advent of war it has added such new services as prisoners-of-war parcels, and the precious blood serum.

Instead of writing our own editorial, we have taken the liberty of reprinting a portion of an editorial by editor Clayton Schaus, of the Chesley Enterprise. Mr. Schaus has done a good job of presenting facts to his readers—facts which can well be absorbed by every one of us. Here is what he says:

"There is some talk around town that too much of the money asked from Chesley in the Red Cross campaign which starts this week will go 'out of town,' and apparently it comes from the same class of people who give liberally to the church for its local work but close their purse whenever mission work is mentioned. Why they should feel this way is hard to understand, in view of the fact that all the money which Chesley invested in the Victory Loan or War Savings certificates, as well as that given last year to the Y.M.C.A., Salvation Army, Canadian Legion and other war services also goes out of town.

"It takes more than a parochial view to realize the good work done by the Red Cross all over the world. It is now trying to get parcels to the Canadians who were captured at Hong Kong; it sent medical supplies to Russia when that country was invaded and 'scorched' by the Nazis; it was on duty when British civilians were killed by the thousands, and many other thousands were rendered homeless by bombings; it helps the Canadians in the services, the merchantmen who get the armed forces and supplies to Britain. The Red Cross is on the job whenever there is famine or pestilence or suffering.

"Possibly because it is such a 'shining mark,' it draws to itself a lot of criticism. People with idle tongues accused it of selling soap and other things to the soldiers. Then they alleged that too much of their money went to maintain Red Cross officials. Then they said that the Red Cross does nothing for the boys in the services. All of these allegations have been proved false. Now these people say 'Too much of the money goes out of town.' It is a poor excuse."

FURTHER TIRE RESTRICTIONS

Retreaded and used tires, used tubes, and retreading services, as well as new tires and tubes, are now under rigid control according to an order made effective last Friday, details of which are contained in a Government advertisement in another section of the Herald.

Three classes of eligible vehicles are set up "A," "B" and "C," on a sliding scale gauged according to the usefulness of the vehicle to a country at war, and it rules out the million or more motorists who are no longer able to buy even a used tube. Class "A" may buy new or used tires and tubes, retreaded tires and retreading services. Class "B" may buy any of these with the exception of new tires and tubes, while Class "C" may purchase only used tires and tubes.

GEORGETOWN FOLK ARE GENEROUS

As the Herald War Victims' Fund approaches the \$3,000 mark, we reflect on the generosity of district citizens who have lent their support to raise this substantial sum of money in a period of stress. It was in the February 19th, 1941, issue of the Herald that an announcement first appeared, stating that a War Victims' Fund was being established, and since then there has been a steady flow of donations ranging all the way from 25c to \$300.00, which have brought the fund to its present level.

At intervals the money accumulated, with a detailed list of donations, is forwarded to the Evening Telegram in Toronto, from whence the money is despatched to England. The list is subsequently acknowledged in the Toronto paper. There are no administration charges of any nature, either in Georgetown or in Toronto, and every cent of the money is used for the purpose for which it is intended—the relief of British war victims. The latest cheque, totalling \$333.69 has been sent this week, and the money represents all donations since the start of the new year.