

Guernsey's 5 Years Under Nazi Rule:

An Epilogue

For four years, ten months, and seven days, we 23,000 people in this Island of Guernsey have endured occupation by the forces of the enemy. Now, at long last, hopes and fears, doubts and disappointments, wish-thinking and wondering-what-will-happen all dissolve in an overflowing cup of joy, relief and happiness. No words are adequate, no pen powerful enough to express our feelings.

As the gates of Liberation and Freedom swing upon their hinges, the duration of captivity passes like a dreadful dream, and there opens before us a prospect impossible: as yet either to realise or to visualise.

In this supreme moment in the lives of all—a moment which will never again be equalled—emotion overwhelms us. Pride, and prayer, and thanksgiving mingle as one in our hearts. Pride in the Mother Country which has steered our nation into the harbour and anchorage of Victory. Pride, too, in the thousands of sons

Very soon after the German invasion descended upon the island, Jurat Leale, in a memorable call to all, said "We shall have to work hard to survive." We have worked hard. And we have survived. For the future, it must of a certainty be said that we shall have to work harder still to recover. But recover we can.

For a while, however, in the transition period from war to peace, from military to civil customs, let us count our blessings.

Luckiest in Europe

Even though we have experienced a few air raids; even though we have seen streets of shattered shop-fronts and some homes blasted and ruined; even though two old couples and a grower were murdered by the Germans and a few others met violent deaths; even though our crops have been pilaged and plundered and our cattle filched from us; even though many of our fellows have suffered at the hands

Debt to Red Cross

And when at length, after last June, and increasingly so until the end of the year, everyone had to tighten their belts, the crisis did arrive, an "S.O.S." had to be sent forth upon the air to the International Red Cross at Geneva. It was answered with a promptitude which—remembering the dire plight of multitudes elsewhere—we had no right to expect.

On the last day of 1944 there came into every home in Guernsey those parcels which were beyond price, and which, periodically, from that time to this, have continued to lay the spectre of starvation which has been always lurking just around the corner.

To the Red Cross, and the men of the gallant ship *Vega*, travelling 1,400 miles a month to save and succour us, Guernsey owes a debt which can never adequately be repaid. That wonderful world-wide organisation of compassion and of mercy, which has

Next, the classes of workers—on farm or field, in greenhouse or garden, in factory or shop. All in their own sphere have done their bit to keep our commercial life going. They are entitled to our full support as soon as the wheels begin to go round again. Finally, from our voluntary entertainers to the nurses in our hospital wards there are countless others embracing every walk of life who have enabled the Island to carry on, and still more whose "little, unremembered acts of kindness and of love" will find no place on the scroll of fame but who have lightened one another's burdens many times and oft.

To School Again

Over less worthy episodes in our Occupation history, let us for the nonce draw a veil. Those who sought to line their pockets at the expense of others less fortunate, and those who did not scruple to betray their friends—let them, until a later date, deal with



of Sarnia who have fought and wrought and played their noble part. Prayer, that when the blessed day dawns of reunion with those from whom we were severed and sundered in June, 1940, we may find them well and waiting to gladden and greet us. Thanksgiving that a merciful Providence has spared this little island so much of the horror and the terror, the unspeakable anguish and suffering, and the want and impoverishment which have befallen millions of other men, women and children in every corner of the Continent which is but a few minutes' flight from these shores.

Our Immunity

Let us, in this hour of deliverance and release, offer great gratitude for all that we have escaped; for the salvation from calamity such as has engulfed countless other human beings.

There will be time enough in the days ahead to wrestle with our problems, monumental as they are, and to reflect on what the war and the Occupation have cost Guernsey in trade and treasure, what it will require to launch us on the road of rehabilitation and reconstruction.

It is a mighty task which lies before this island community—a task which will require all our brains, all our labour, and all our resources. We shall face it in the spirit which has pulled us through these five years of Occupation.

of the Gestapo and been flung into gaol; even though we saw many loved ones torn away and transported to internment camps at Biberach and Laufen; even though, for months, we have hovered on the very borderland of starvation; even though we have seen the matchless beauties of our coast and countryside gashed and scarred and disfigured for a decade by hideous fortifications; and even though property everywhere has been wrecked and furniture stolen; even remembering all these things, and many more which we have witnessed under the trampling heel of the Nazis, we must still admit that we have been the most fortunate people in all Europe.

Unlike the European peoples—and our own people in England—we have not had to cower in cellars for night after night awaiting a cataclysm from the skies. We have slept comfortably in our beds, tranquil and undisturbed, for years on end.

For the last eleven months of the war—since, in fact, Invasion Day, when the British blockade was well and truly closed and clamped down—we have known what it is to be hungry, really hungry. But for four years before that our rations appeared regularly and we had no real cause to grumble.

forged new bonds between this island people and their kinsmen in Canada and New Zealand, and those sturdy seamen of the Swedish steamer, have in these latter days, symbolised the literal life-line to which all Guernsey has clung. In after-years let none ever forget that, above all, it was the Red Cross which helped us through.

The Helping Hand

Really, and actually, of course, as we look back upon the trials and the travail which have beset us since the German invasion of July, 1940, we become conscious how we have helped each other through.

That little band of men and their staffs at Hirzel House and Ladies' College, who have put up with all the brickbats and garnered precious few bouquets—perhaps hereafter, as we get things in correct perspective, we shall appreciate, more perhaps than we do now, how great is the debt, they are owed for a thankless job well and diligently done.

The housewives of the Island—are there any words in which to enshrine their self-sacrifice and devotion? The hours they have spent in queues, the wearisome waits for a chance purchase in the markets! The endless effort to evolve something new and appetising for meals, the toilsome days labouring to keep the home sick and sweet. Ladies, we honour you and we thank you.

their own consciences. They may be compared with the courageous company who, risking the penalty of prison in Germany—where several who were unfortunate were sent and where one, at least, died in one of those notorious Nazi hells—retained their wireless sets through good times and bad and enabled the whole Island, in divers ways, to hear the news. To these also: "Well done, and thank you!"

Hearing the news, indeed, was our only link with the wide world beyond. But it was a decisive factor in our lives. It was the every-day tonic which sustained our faith and maintained our stout hearts, we moved steadily towards the day we knew would surely come—this, the day of our liberation. But as we emerge from the shadow of the Swastika into the sunlight of Peace, it is as strange beings beginning a reincarnation!

For five years we have been cut off from all that has happened in education and science, music and art, and literature, plays and films—in fact, everything that makes life worth living. We shall have to go to school again! But what eager pupils!

And so our long ordeal is over and done. The presence of those grey-green uniforms and all the disturbance and destruction and dislocation of the Occupation—they are finished and already fading into limbo. But the memory of the years from July 1st, 1940, to May, 8th, 1945, abides for ever.