

WE FIGHT THAT WE MAY LIVE

"I AIM AT A FIGHTING STANDARD"

says Lord Woolton

Following is the script of tonight's 9.20 p.m. postscript by the Minister of Food:-

Well - I suppose you wonder what you're going to lose now.

The answer is - nothing!

You know, I don't want to talk about the details of food. I do get a bit tired of everyone I meet talking food to me - after all, we have other interests in common.

But first - first let me put your minds at rest: you don't have to worry about the present food position.

That's my worry. But it's not too bad.

No - I'd rather like to talk to you about an idea - the idea of Britain as a family, and what we can do about making it a happier family, and a more effective one in attacking those who threaten it.

I've great belief in the family.

When I finished work today I sat at my desk and picked up a handful of letters which lay there - and glanced through them with a half-hearted curiosity at first - I knew I couldn't answer any more until tomorrow.

But I didn't feel half-hearted long. You see, these weren't official letters with official headings on the paper - they were family letters - personal, hand-written to me, about personal problems and worries.

Some of them were indignant, just a few complimentary for a change. One enclosed a photograph of the writer's baby (telling me sternly to return the picture without fail after I'd looked at it); another told me I was a fool because I had done something he didn't like.

They were the usual daily selection from the hundreds which have to be answered every week - and one of them, the last, made me pause a little.

It was from a critic - and a very stern critic, too. Here it is, let me read it to you.

"Dear Lord, I'm writing to ask why you don't care what happens to people my age. I am 12, and my two friends are 12 too, except one who is 13.

"And we say you make too much fuss about kids and people who work - and yet us fellows of 12 are being driven to the wall because of no special attentions. If the war lasts another six years we will be in it - so what about some special rules for US for a change - or else we might feel pretty rotten when the time comes."

"So let's be fair, and no favouritism for kids.

"Yours truly, Frank Johnson".

Well, there it was. At first I smiled. But then I wondered a little, "In six years he'll be 18" I said.

I didn't worry very much about his grievance - if he wasn't getting his dinners, at school, well, we'd soon find out why.

/But the

But the expression, "Six years" started me thinking. Six years ago - I would no more have dreamed of being at that desk than you would. And where were you then? Do you remember, without thinking hard?

This war has changed so much - our memory now seems always to work from September, 1939, onward, doesn't it?

Perhaps because we were wakened from our sleep that year. Perhaps.

Six years ago I was a business-man in Liverpool - the League of Nations was in Geneva - Mahmoud won the Derby - Arsenal won the English cup - and Frank Johnson, the writer of that letter, was six years old.

We were living in a fool's paradise - hoping against hope that things would straighten out without having to do much about it ourselves.

And in another six years - what? Please God Frank Johnson will not be at war - please God he will never "feel rotten", as he said, because of any omission of mine.

Still, we haven't got there yet. What about now - in this third year of war?

WHAT PRICE HAVE WE PAID

I feared that we might have been worse off on the Food Front - it's been a worrying passage, Heaven knows - but we have managed to keep afloat. Yes, and that word "afloat" makes another picture in my mind.

We've come this far - but what price have we paid? What price in men and in ships? And in anxieties for those men in ships?

People who haven't constant reminders of that sometimes forget it. Quite naturally. But I can't, you know. I have too many reminders - in figures, in reports - and while I was thinking this, I thought of a Merchant Navy captain who came to see me a few days ago.

We'd had a long talk together, and, during that talk he'd said: "After all, you and I, we're running this food business together, aren't we?"

But after he had told me of being torpedoed twice, of being shot at and frozen in turns, adrift in a small boat, after he had described his going back to sea again and again to do his job - well, those words of his, "we're running this food business together" made me think, "Pluck there all right - glad to have a fellow like that as a partner."

It's a good thing to look at this war in terms of people and parties. That boy Frank Johnson - the housewife who writes to me - this merchant seaman - people - individual people with their own problems and their own worries - making their own contributions.

That's where the family comes in again. Sometimes, you know, I feel as if I were sitting at the head of a huge dinner table - a family dinner table.

There's the housewife there, and the seaman and the shopkeeper and the transport worker. There's the British farmer: he's doing a fine job. And over there a West African negro with the cocoa, and a Canadian Wheat farmer, and an Australian with the meat, a New Zealander with the cheese, and an American with Lease-Lend food, an Indian getting out tea for us, and one or two ordinary Englishmen about the house - all of them, and so many more, all gathered round this world-wide family table.

NOT "BUREAUCRATS v. PEOPLE"

It's interesting, isn't it, this way of looking at it? It stops us thinking of bureaucrats on one side and people on the other.

After all, we're all people. We ought all to be one family doing jobs for one another inside the national war effort and trying to take care of one another.

/My job,

My job, obviously, is a family job. People matter more than things. We'll always manage the things if I know what people need and think.

My job's just the straightforward business of seeing that the things people need are there at the sort of prices people could reasonably afford. And of course it's so much easier if you've no political reputation past or future - to worry about.

Well, I say my job's straightforward - and so it is, in purpose and policy. We shall make mistakes; as we've made them in the past; we shall never be perfect; but together we'll go on trying, and the food will be there.

NO "PROMISSORY CARROTS"

Not, mind you, that I'm making promises. I distrust the glib promise of blessings to come, especially the rosy vision of rewards after the war.

I may dangle a carrot in front of your nose now and again - but it's a real carrot and not a promissory one. And you're not donkeys. You know, as well as I do, how hard is the road before us, how difficult it is to peer through the darkness.

And what we've got to do is to see that our foothold now is absolutely secure: to deal with immediate problems of this war (together as a family) and to do it so energetically that we shall soon have freedom to shape the world of peace.

You know that saying perhaps, that saying which goes "Sow a thought, reap an action: sow an action, reap a habit: sow a habit, reap a destiny."

Well, in that sense we are making the future every day. Our thought is about people now; our actions concern them now. And some of our actions, based upon people's wartime needs, must become national habits - and, in part at least, must influence national destiny.

SAFEGUARDING THE FUTURE

Our plans to safeguard the health of children, for example: there is a thought which may turn into a destiny - the destiny of a nation, strengthened and supported by healthy, vigorous youth.

I believe that what we are doing for children is one of the things which must last after the war.

Of course war shakes us up in our minds, forces us to experiment, to change our ideas, to control our actions.

I don't believe that control should last after the war any longer or in any other form than is necessary for helping the family, but I do say this:-

Don't let us bother about that now. The future is yours.

The things that last after this war - and I hope the care of children and nursing mothers and feeding men on the job in works canteens will be among them - the things that last on the Food Front will last only because I have been able to prove their value to you in these war years and because, knowing their value you are determined to keep them.

You and your post-war Parliament must decide this.

As I see it this job of government is really a family business and that's what all government must be in a free country.

Half our troubles in the past, I believe have been due to ignorance and mistrust: mistrust of one section of the community by another, mistrust simply because we've not really known enough of one another and enough of the ways of life of one another. There hasn't been enough of this family spirit either in government or in business.

That is the point of view I want to put to you - and it has very immediate application to a nation at war.

Take food again as an instance - and as a symbol maybe. We here are just a bit better off than we expected to be. But I don't think that by itself it's a thing to boast about.

"FIGHTING STANDARD"

It isn't comfort we're after. It's winning this war; that's what matters - and using our food to keep us fit to win this war.

And that's the standard I aim at. It's a fighting standard, closely calculated.

That meal you've just had - that was balanced against ships on all the seas of the world: ships that sailed through the deadly menace of bomb and torpedo.

Food brings with it the reek of battle into your kitchens; all we ask for is that we shall have enough of it and no more, to give us the sustaining spirit of battle.

Enough food and no more, I said. Our daily bread to give us strength for our day's job.

We may indeed have to have less than we are having now.

We are well stocked but we must look forward - cautiously, as the housewife does. We've maintained a fighting standard of fitness; we shall maintain it if we husband all our resources - all of them - with the utmost care, each taking only according to his need. Petrol, manpower, rubber, transport - all these things affect you and your food and they'll affect you more and more.

Food must be calculated with the rest. We fight with it - it is a weapon of war - we need food for attack - and because you know the difficulties you weigh them against the problems of a world at war.

And the problems are dark. You know - as Oliver Cromwell said to his troops before battle - that "we are upon an engagement very difficult". Well, that knowledge to a nation like ours is bracing. Russia, Egypt, the Pacific; we live indeed through dangerous days.

We accept difficulty and danger as the soldier on the scorching desert accepts it. We plan as he does: we look ahead: when plans break down we improvise as he does: we are prepared to suffer as he is.

We know in our hearts what we're fighting for. Deep down it is self-preservation. This is no war of phrases. If we don't break the Nazis they'll break us.

We fight that we may live. That's the thing to remember.

I know of course that many of us, who have come to care a good deal more for our fellow men than we ever did in the past - many of us are hopeful of a much better ordering of society in the future.

That's grand - but for my part, I'd just say this: you've got to concentrate in the boxing ring. You've got to find that knock-out punch.

It's all-in, rough-house stuff. And it needs all our thought and all our energy to hit the Nazi solar plexus.

That's what we must do - concentrate on that punch now.

Well, this evening I've tried to show you that behind orders and regulations we are thinking of you as individual people - as members of a family. That's why I say to you the aim of all good government is to make a nation more of a family - a family of people caring for one another.

You know, when the story of this war comes to be written, it will be a family story - the story of the work and devotion of ordinary men and women everywhere.

And no greater story will ever be told.