

MS. 1906

DIARY OF

LYDIA HOWARD de ROTH

August, 1939 to July 25, 1941

Gladys Rhymes, house-parlourmaid.

Friday, March 8. The Fosters are back, and we went in for a cocktail with them. He looked better than I had expected, after such a serious operation, but still has to keep his leg up on a chair. She was in fine form.

Saturday, March 9. Stopped by at Embassy to collect letter for Herbert. Then on to Selfridge's for orgy of shopping; stockings, panties, bed-jacket and various edibles including a tin of chili-con-carne, which we had neither of us ever eaten before. Coffee and brioches at nice little Danish shop.

Sunday, March 10. Church. Cinema at 5.30. Leicester Square, Greta Garbo in "Ninotchka". Very funny, but too long, and sentimental parts tiresome. Never got out until 8.15, which made us pretty late for dinner.

Monday, March 11. Meat rationing starts. 1/10d. per person per week, not much, but liver, kidney and game and poultry not rationed, so we shall be able to make out.

Gladys is a grumbler. Had her in this morning and decided we had better part. Report this at agency. Cook very satisfactory.

P.W.P. 14.00-18.00. Supposedly with Mrs. Balfour. Arrived and found Mrs. Evans and Wallis. Was told to report at O.P. for exercise. Swung round there and unlocked door to run straight into Mrs. Reed. Apologised for making free with her house, and she said a strange young man was sitting downstairs. It turned out to be the new warden, Mr. Mayor, in a fine camel's-hair coat. Mr. Evans, Miss Oades arrived, and she and I, with Mayor as onlooker, were sent out on accident (14.30); phosgene at Durham Place, corner Christchurch Street, four casualties. The wind was blowing from the S.W. so that little girl, knee-high to a johnny-cake, and I carried the female casualty upwind, and then one of the male, a heavy brute, and the two others walked - not one had a gas-mask. We had put on ours the first thing. We dumped them at the corner of Ralston Street, wrapped them in blankets, and made out our report, telling the services to approach via Tite Street. Miss Oades posted off with the original, while I reassured the victims with promises of theoretic tea and extra blankets. It was a lovely, mild day, the first touch of spring - which was just as lucky for everybody. I went down to Tite Street and at 15.00 the ambulance steamed up. I waved it down Christchurch Street - Miss Oades parked it at Ralston. About 8 minutes later the stretcher-party arrived from Durham Place, through the gas. Miss Oades re-routed them, but they claimed that their message had been received not through Tite Street. We parked them opposite Mr. Reed's, and they all jumped out in gas-masks and bundled the people onto stretchers, I thought pretty roughly. In the midst the commandant approached me and asked how it was that the stretcher-bearers were wearing gas-masks and not the wardens. I replied that the

wardens had worn their masks when they were in the gas area, but that after they had brought the patients into safety, upwind, they had taken them off. I could not answer for the stretcher-bearers, but assumed they had been given instructions to do their ~~sunt~~ in masks. It subsequently appeared that this was reported to Mr. Blandy, who called me up at the pip, as did Wallis, to write up a memo on it. When the ambulance got off, Mr. Evans, who had been time-keeper and general superintendent (though Miss Oades and I were left to run the incident), rode off on his bike. Mr. Mayor, who had come to observe and learn, carried back our rattles, and I returned to duty at the post.

Meeting at O.P. in evening, where all was thoroughly discussed.

Tuesday, March 12. Held the fort alone to-day, as Mrs. Balfour, who was to be with me, put disinfectant in her eye yesterday instead of eye-drops, and is perhaps seriously injured. Mighty tough.

Mr. Mayor is doing a morning shift for this week in company with Mrs. Bright or Mrs. d'Eyncourt, who take alternate days.

Patrol in evening with Larsen, who came in afterwards for a drink of his own cider, and we chatted about trips we had made, and restaurants we had sampled, till our tongues hung out. He is a nice little man.

Wednesday, March 13. Joan came on at 14.30 and took over with me; we played Russian Bank, and the General and Mr. Coote relieved us, just like old times. She came in to dinner at 7.30, and cook turned out a very nice roast chicken and cold chocolate pudding. Afterwards we went to 115, Sloane Street, for Major Crandall's lecture, feeling quite mellow after several cocktails and some red wine. He was interesting as always. This time it was "arsene" or Arthur, the new (?) gas. Afterwards we dropped into the club, and found the two Miss Iredale Smiths, with a male friend, and they drove us home.

Thursday, March 14. Snow! And wind! Really blizzardly. Took log-book to Hutch at Sidney Smith's, and told him to stop in at post and bone up on new wrinkles, which he did, and afterwards took message to the Evans re: their new telephone number, as they are moving to-day.

Met Reed in the street as I was walking Bully in late afternoon. New rule has just come out that women wardens are off the pay-roll, so we are losing Miss Oades, whom we can ill spare, as she is a first-class warden as well as a sweet little girl. Miss Reid and Mrs. Parkinson also will have to go. Epps will take over for Miss Reid in 53. It seems a very grave mistake to lose good wardens nowadays, for no one knows when the spring offensive may be launched. Now that poor little Finland has collapsed, there will be more forces to turn against the Allies.

Friday, March 15. Alone on post most of the week.* Joan in for one day and part of another, a great pleasure. Vamped a strange child to bring

* Until now there had always been two wardens on duty at the Post, but the weekly rota used up so many that it was decided to put on one experienced warden alone. In the event of a yellow or a red the Post Warden or his deputy would arrive and take over.