

LET'S FACE THE FACTS

No. 4B

7

**Address to the Men and Women
of Canada**

BY

MR. FREDERICK GRIFFIN

over a national network of
the Canadian Broadcasting
Corporation, Sunday night,
Aug. 11, 1940, at the invita-
tion of the Director of Public
Information for Canada

Text of Frederick Griffin's address over the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation national network Sunday night, August 11th, follows:

I shall try to give you the impressions of a working newspaperman who was privileged to sit on the sidelines of history during forty days which changed the world. For no matter how the war goes, it can never again be the nice agreeable world we used to know.

I suggest that's the first fact we've all got to face if we hope to save any of the values or virtues we claim to prize.

It was my privilege, and a fearful one it was, to see the passing of the old world in England during those fateful forty days in May and June when the props of the world as we knew it cracked and collapsed with what seemed a terrible finality.

My newspaper had sent me across in April to go to Norway in the expectation that the campaign starting there might develop into a major affair. By the time I arrived in Britain, the Norway campaign was already being abandoned and the War Office withheld the necessary permission to proceed there. It was thus that I was in England when the attack on Holland began the succession of events which I do not need to recall. Group by group, my newspaper colleagues were driven back into England from Holland, Belgium and finally from France.

BRITAIN MEETS CRISIS

To me it was a great if tragic privilege to be in the vortex of the British scene during those historic weeks. And if I may, I shall preface my views as to the facts we have to face with some of the impressions and memories of that time.

We British of all classes and degrees have been and have felt

so secure for so many generations it is natural that the succession of shocks we experienced during those weeks should have, in some measure, numbed our perception of events and our memory of them. So terrific were the blows we suffered and bore during those weeks, in whatever part of the Empire we might be, that the bare news of events stole away much of the human story.

How did the British people receive the news? How did they face the facts piling like an avalanche upon them?

I was in a unique position to see how they reacted and behaved. I spent part of most days during those weeks in the various ministries of government, the War Office, the Ministry of Information, the Admiralty, the Air Ministry, the Home and other offices. I visited military camps and various towns and country places of England. It was my lot to be on the quays of Dover to see the evacuated expeditionary force arriving from Dunkirk. I had the curious fortune to be one of the two newspapermen out of all the press of the world to be on the right pier at Dover to see Lord Gort come home from Flanders. I witnessed the suddenly revived evacuation of children from congested areas.

All this was during the gravest, greatest facing of facts in British history.

UNFLINCHING COURAGE

The finest memory I have of those days is of the British people's unflinching courage and unwavering spirit. The bus conductors were still their courteous and cheery selves. The London bobbies with their gas masks and steel helmets remained imperturbable symbols of law and decency. The day Paris fell the taxi drivers thanked you just as kindly for a tip. In the shops the clerks were as attentive as ever.

The staff in the Hotel Russell will always stay in my memory as typical of British reaction to the heavens falling. Acutely aware of events, they knew exactly the meaning of Hitler's smashing victories. Yet none ceased for a moment to be a dutiful porter, bell boy or waiter.

I shall always remember the philosophical lift man who kept reading "Gone With The Wind" between trips and German victories. We often chatted. One day when things were just about at their worst, he said objectively: "Y' know, sir, the British are a funny people." I asked him why. "Because," he said in a cockney voice I dare not try to mimic, "because y've got to knock 'em down and kick 'em before they'll start to fight. Then watch 'em!'"

Such was the spirit and it was everywhere, high and low. No longer did people speak of muddling through but of winning through. For suddenly the British became positive about it, once they faced the facts.

Another memory, never to be erased, is of how England appeared against such a background of tragedy. It was never, in living man's memory, more beautiful than in May or June. Never had there been such serene and cloudless days. The sky was blue like our Canadian sky. The sunshine was bright as Canadian sunshine. The countryside was rich with growth. In the parks of London the grass, the trees, the flowers, the birds, the nameless people taking their customary ease, the countless lovely children at play—all made a picture of security and peace behind the bulwarks of a stable world.

When we arrived, London gave little more evidence of a nation at war than Montreal or Toronto. Few restrictions were apparent except of gasoline and gossip. Butter was scarce, so was sugar

and tomato juice, but generally there was little proof of shortage. The balloons of the defence barrage and the blackout were the only obvious signs of what up to then had been a leisurely war of continental siege and sea blockade. There weren't even casualty lists to bring it close to home.

That was England on the verge. That remained England in the vortex. That, I can assure you, is Great Britain today.

BRITAIN GETS READY

There was little change in the basic picture as the crisis deepened. There were more balloons, more sandbags, more barbed wire in public places. Military officers might be seen carrying revolvers on the streets. Getting into a ministry even with a pass became very difficult. The police began checking the subway crowds for their identity cards.

As the threat to Britain grew, a kind of hardness, not noticeable before, crept into the picture. People spoke little in public. Laughter was stilled. No woman smiled. People with set faces listened to the B.B.C. broadcasts. They read with veiled eyes the newspaper bulletins. Yet almost the only time during those weeks that the British voiced emotion was the day Italy entered the war. That day I heard Englishmen curse openly and deeply.

An unforgettable memory of those days is of that awful weekend when France gave in. Will any of us who were in London then ever be able to wipe from his mind that Sunday when France died? It was a day of silent mortal pain in Great Britain as men tried to think through to find out what it might mean to them, to their country, to the Empire.

Early next morning (Monday) we newspapermen learned off the record that the leaders of France had ordered the "cease fire." The

public did not know it yet. At noon we attended a press meeting in a ministry. Even then it was not announced. We were simply told to listen to a one o'clock broadcast by the French premier.

It was almost as if officials hoped against hope for a last hour miracle.

Then Marshal Petain made his speech and we knew then for sure that France—liberal, democratic, freedom-loving France—was only a name in history.

France was enslaved and across on the far shores of the English seas the Nazis swarmed as conquerors. In forty days the Hitler avalanche had achieved what the Kaiser's halted juggernaut had not achieved in over four years—the conquest of the Channel ports and a jumping-off place for a close, direct attack on England.

That's the central fact in this whole historic cataclysm. It's not a pretty or a pleasing fact, but in this series of broadcasts we're supposed to face the facts. So let's face them.

CANADA'S NEW FRONT LINE

You remember that a few years ago Mr. Baldwin, when he was Prime Minister, said that Great Britain's frontier was now on the Rhine. It was then, in the early days of Hitler. But today Great Britain's frontier—the frontier of the British Empire—is on the Straits of Dover and the English Channel. At its narrowest, scarcely 25 miles separate Britain from an onslaught by the massed machinery which Hitler used in his land drives from Poland onward.

So a fact we must all face is this: Not 3,000 miles of ocean any longer separate us in Canada from the Nazi-Fascist legions but a mere 25 to 50 miles of English Channel, plus the British Navy, the Royal Air Force and the citizen army which Great Britain has formed and is arming.

Great Britain stands alone ex-

cept for the help her Dominions can give and for the aid in kind she may receive from the United States. That is the fact we've all got to face today.

We can face it as the people of Britain faced it, unflinchingly. In the weeks after May 10 I saw them tear down the trammels of their old ways and gird themselves to meet the worst that Hitler might hurl against them.

The British are not a simple race. In their manner and behavior they are hard for the outsider to understand. And my view of them was in a time of abnormal stress. So it would be an impertinence on my part to try to assess the forces at work in their complex system.

All I know is that during the weeks that followed May 10 one could feel the British stirring from top to bottom as with a ferment. The new Churchill government not merely drew on, but drew from, all the strengths of all the people.

DEMOCRACY AT BAY

This government, with the people's okay, did bold, great things which changed almost overnight the social, economic, political and military face of Britain. It cut away precious property rights. At the same time it took away many of labor's hard won privileges. In one hour and ten or twenty minutes it passed an act which virtually suspended for the war, at least, the Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights. Not since Cromwell's day have British parliamentarians acted so strongly to strike back at tyranny.

Thus the British people accepted freely and uncomplainingly the duties and rigors of a democracy at bay.

You could feel the country, this ancient, accustomed, easy-going land, literally jumping to work. It sprang as one man to bear arms. The very air seemed suddenly to

hum with the sound of wheels turning. The mellow countryside became a labyrinth of gashes, breastworks, traps and barbed wire. The sea shores became deep defence fronts. Day by day London grew more and more like Madrid during the siege as barricades and forts sprang up in certain streets and public places.

Thus the people of Great Britain faced the facts, without a whimper of fear or self-pity. Suddenly realizing that they had taken too many goodly things for granted, they decided with a fierce and indomitable will to work for them, fight for them, suffer for them and die for them.

THE LESSON OF SPAIN

Which brings us to a fact or two I only wish I had the power to drive home to those fellow Canadians who may still be thinking smugly that everything will work out all right somehow. One is this: In Spain in the civil war I saw democracy murdered by democracy. The people of Spain, fighting a military rebellion backed by Hitler and Mussolini, were riven by strife and disunion. They were uncertain, divided, wasteful of purpose and of strength. They never did get a united front. And so they were beaten.

We must learn quickly the lessons the democracies have been

taught at such a frightful cost to themselves. We in Canada are lucky to have time to learn and to act. Norway, Denmark, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Poland, France, did not have time or a second chance.

Great Britain gained time at last largely, I believe, because of the quick collapse of France. Not only did it arouse her to extreme action but the very speed with which Hitler smashed France left him out on a limb. He didn't expect such a fast conquest. In consequence he was not ready to swing full out against England. One hesitates to think what might have been the result if in the next week or two after the French collapse Hitler had been able to turn his total attack against the British Isles. He would have caught them at low ebb, while they were changing over, while they were improvising home defence, while they were vehemently seeking to catch up the slack.

But Hitler wasn't able to attack then and may not perhaps dare a frontal attack now. For every day, every week, has given the people of Great Britain a chance to steel themselves against the worst.

THE JOB WE FACE

We must learn from the totalitarian states how to organize, how to serve, how to use the

popular strength for a common purpose. Russia was the first to show how a dictator state can funnel every ounce of energy and emotion to a single end. The Nazis learned from Russia and went beyond it. We smiled because they denied the people but-ter to build bombing planes. We laughed when they tightened their belts in peacetime. We mocked at their discipline, parades and enthusiasms.

But in order to beat them, we must, at this late date in war, match their mass devotions, however impelled. We must, as a democracy, discipline ourselves so that all of us in our hearts, minds and acts are contributing 100 per cent. to the national effort. We must work and serve, every one according to his or her full capacity, in order that we as a free democracy may help Great Britain to lick Hitler.

We must give up our leisure, our comforts, yes, even our liberties and our rights as free citizens in order to forge ourselves into a single mighty weapon against this evil system which we hate. Under our own system we can win back lost liberties from our government afterwards. Don't let us make the mistake of the Spanish people. They feared to lose a liberty which they had not learned to use and ended up by losing all.

