

A LONDONER'S DAY AND NIGHT.

by Rt.Hon.J.C.Wedgwood, D.S.O.,M.P..

We come out at dawn like rats and climb to the 9th floor. Up goes the black-out blind, and we look out over the same old city. A tooth~~h~~ more, here and there, has gone; but the Power Station across the river still sends up its twin banners of smoke. It has seen us through 45 nights of ruin, unchecked, a triumphant dynamo. We sieze the papers, punctual as usual.

I climb into my bus for Parliment. The bus drivers pay no attention to 'Moaning Minnie'; but just then a bomb drops. The driver looks questioningly at the conductor. They may as well start, and he shrugs his shoulders and climbs up. 'Once more to the breach, my friend' I say; at which we all three chuckle. It is ~~a~~ wonderful how chatty and undignified we all become. The girl in the corner attends to her face. She has more important matter for reflection.

One gets indifferent as to whether the sirens register 'off' or 'on'; but I never get indifferent to bombs cracking the sky. Miners take it best. An old one from South Wales said to me when I remonstrated, 'Ah lad! I've heard the roof crack afore now.' The excellent Minister for Mines, who was one himself, was knocked flat in Whitehall, where they have peppered us freely. He just picked himself up and walked to his office. I still run like a rabbit into ~~my~~ doorway, when the crash comes.

For the first hour in the Commons, we heckle all that long row of Ministers. There are not so many left to ask questions now, and often the Minister will come over and say 'don't put that Question, I Can't answer properly'. Roof-spotters tell us when to adjourn. There's There's no safety in going down to the crypt, so most go to the Library and write this sort of thing to their mothers.

I am back home in the flat before dark for tea. A Jew from Poland, whom I had extracted from the accursed consentzation camp that our Fifth Column have inflicted on us, turned up - /Lord! There's a loud one close by, and I didn't know that Minnie had moaned - / We gave him tea, and a raid started. I begged him to stop, - fairly safe indoors even on the top floor. Oh! No! he couldn't stop; he would walk home. 'I have perfect trust in my God!' said the little Jew. I never felt quite so confident! With me it is 'swagger', vanity, 'showing off

We never manage to get through supper, before the night 'straaf begins, and my wife, being deaf, will not hurry, - insists on cleaning up before we go down to Lady Snowden's deserted flat on the 2nd floor. An iron drain pipe come down and mashed the arm chair ten minutes after I had left it to go down!

When we got down and were peacefully playing Patience, crash, and splintered glass and smoke. My wife did not hear that one! It pitched six yards away and went through the garage, turning all the cars to splinters.

Our immense block of flats is reinforced concrete. We have been hit seven times, twice on the roof and nothing went except the top floor, but over 1000 of our 4000 windows gape drunkenly. One came in slantwise and got the shelter 'causing some casualties'.

These subterranean shelters must house 2000 people, not only residents but those unfortunates who live in brick houses all around. It is a sort of club, where we all get together to exchange news, cigarettes, and experiences. It lacks like the 'tween decks of an emigrant ship. You don't hear so much down there; but nobody dares to look afraid when you do hear. All resolutely set the tone.

One goes to bed, on bed, mattress or shelf, early,- the ladies in their 'siren-suits' with torch ready in case the lights fail. You lie and listen to the brute wandering about overhead. It always seems exactly overhead. He drones along, and you await the crack and crash, the trifle explosion for they always drop them in a 'stick' of three, each two yards from the preceeding. Is the droning going away or coming nearer is one's constant preoccupation in bed. Our guns, always difficult to distinguish from bombs, start bellowing afresh after each loud explosion. We know they can't see or hit ; but they are comforting.

It goes on all night. You hear it in your dreams; and then,- pause, and 'All clear' goes - as day filters in.
