

LONDON SAYS: VIVE LE PRESIDENT!

Ten years of darkness vanish as Covent Garden regains its old glory with a gala performance in honour of the French President. Prominent among the distinguished assembly is Mrs. Attlee - unaccompanied by her husband, because a vote of confidence is keeping the Prime Minister at the House of Commons. Among other Parliamentary "widows" are Mrs. Churchill Mrs. Morrison. The auditorium has been magically transformed, with the Royal Box a superb centre-piece. Princess Elizabeth - in a crinoline skirted dress of ivory satin - is first of the Royal party to be greeted by the Lord Chamberlain, the Earl of Clarendon. As chief officer of the Royal Household, he also welcomes Their Majesties - the white staff he carries being the sign of his office. With her white satin gown, the Queen wears a tiara of rubies and diamonds. Sir John Anderson, head of the Covent Garden Trust, joins the King and Queen in receiving the evening's guest-of-honour, the President of France and Mrs. Auriol.

Thus comes to a spectacular climax, three days of rejoicing and gaiety, during which London, speaking for the nation, took the President and his Lady to its heart. Seldom has a State visit aroused so much good cheer. Seldom has there been such visible proof of Britain's friendship for France. Seldom has Covent Garden seen such a rapturous welcome as that given to the Royal Party.

Adding to the regal splendour of the occasion is an exquisite performance by the Sadlers Wells Ballet. First of the late arrivals is Sir Stafford Cripps. Perhaps it's the sight of all the tiaras that makes the Chancellor so happy. Following him, comes the Prime Minister - the vote of confidence having gone in his favour by a 14 majority. Last guest to reach the Opera House is Mr. Churchill, like the others, in full evening dress with decorations.

The guests of honour lead the way out as the gala performance comes to an end. The smiling President and his wife return to their country in the knowledge that Britain and France are more than formal allies. They take with them memories of a visit that assures them of this country's deep affection, not only for themselves, but also for the French nation. For the glittering scene at Covent Garden was in effect, Britain's salute to France.

So ends a memorable state visit and a never-to-be-forgotten gala night. For, here at Covent Garden, London was her old self again.