

HOW wise you were a year ago, Gracie Fields. And how foolish you are today, on the eve of a strained show business comeback. Last summer you were asked to make a farewell concert tour of Britain, but from your beautiful Capri home you said:

"Much as I should like to do it for sentimental reasons, I prefer to go out of show business leaving a good taste. If I did try a comeback it might have a bad smell.

"I think it's better if I just pack it in."

How right you were. But what went wrong? Instead of packing it in, you—born in 1898 and a star 45 years ago—have packed your bags ready for a three-week series of concerts to start on September 6.

"It's not just for the money," you have said. "I'm not hard up." So why?

Because, bless you, you cannot resist the pull of an audience, can you? But think again. This time is at least once too often. Dare I hope that it is not too late to call it off?

We still love you, Gracie—those of us who are old enough to remember your great days—but we love you for sentimental reasons.

There is already what you call "a bad smell" about this comeback and we don't believe that your tired reserves of talent can banish it.

LEGEND

REMEMBER the humiliation of that Royal Variety Show in 1957? You were welcomed on stage with all the warmth a legend deserved, but you left it to the clapping of an audience that did not know how to hide its embarrassment.

"I wonder if I'm finished?" you reflected after an uneasy night's sleep. But you came back, again and again and again.

"They won't let me retire," you said gaily. But after a TV spectacular one critic voiced the sad truth in the hearts of millions of us when he wrote:

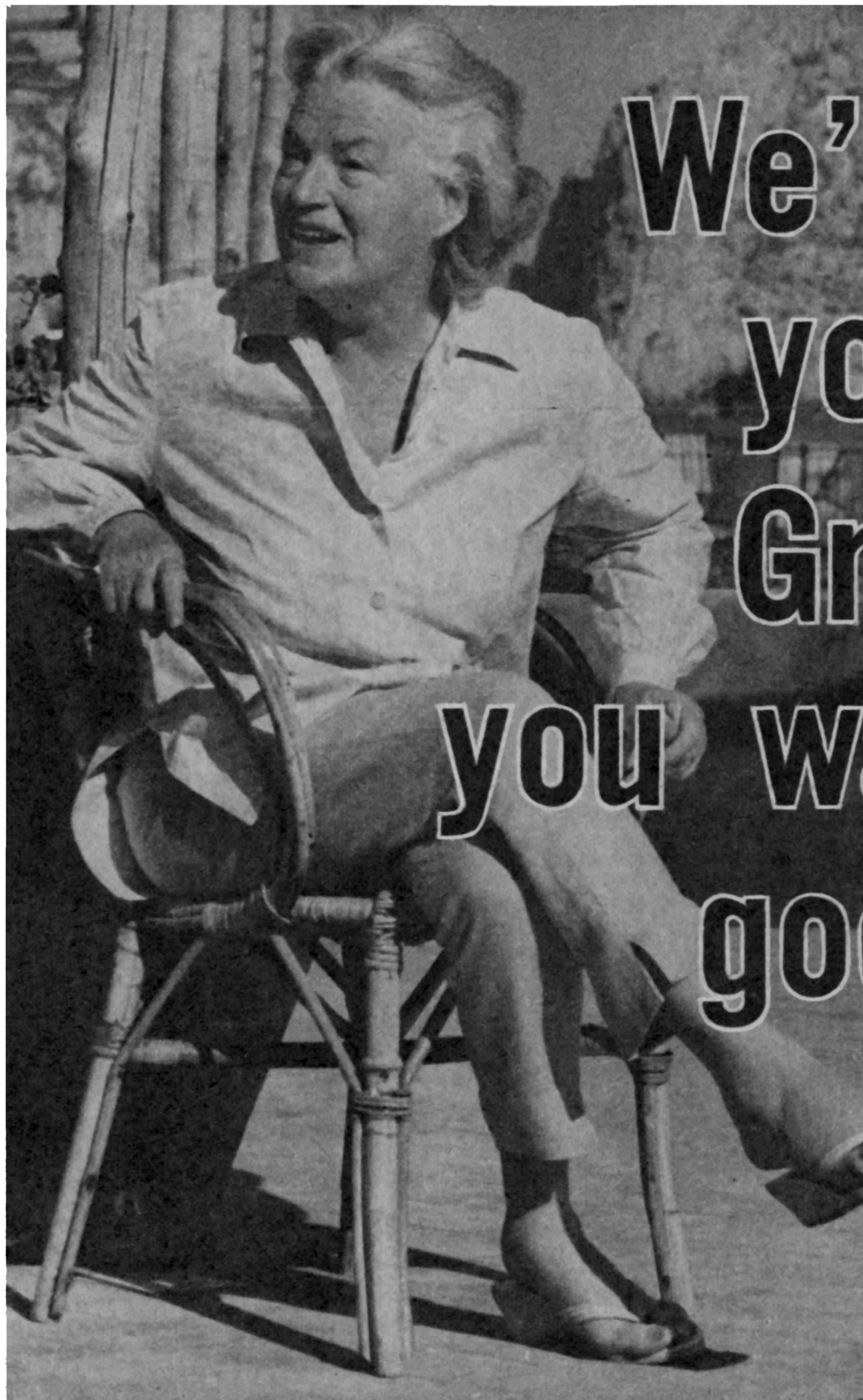
"No amount of loyalty, respect, sympathy, nostalgia or Scotch-and-soda could drown the wish that one of us should have been in Capri last night."

The paper he wrote for died, but you, dear Mrs. Boris Alperovici, CBE, sang on, your enthusiasm swamping your judgment.

"I don't care what's going to happen to me tomorrow," you said. "I just want to get on with what's happening today."

Not that you are really with what is happening today, are you? Back in the mild days of rock 'n' roll you were scorning "all this kid hysteria."

And I remember, sadly, how bitter



Gracie relaxes in the garden of her sun-drenched island home. But she misses one thing—the applause of an audience

you were about Tommy Steele, who took top place on that Royal show while you, as you put it, had to go on while the audience was cold.

"These kids are all alike," you said then. "They wear jeans, jig across the stage, imitate Elvis Presley—and they last five minutes."

But Tommy, you see, is still going strong—stronger, I fancy, than you are. But on with the comeback. Of course we shall all cheer you in Blackpool next month.

Perhaps you will open with *Take*

Me to Your Heart Again—and there will be tears all round. And towards the end, after *Sing As We Go* and *Sally*, you will maybe move on to *Wish Me Luck As You Wave Me Goodbye*. Or would *Now Is The Hour* provide a more emotional finale?

No, no, a thousand times no—keep that comeback for the land of dreams and leave us to remember you with pride and honour.

That's the way we want it. Don't you?

DAVID HUNN

We'll wish
you luck
Gracie if
you wave us
goodbye!