

COMMENT

A YEAR ago the *Thetis* sank. From hour to hour and in every country millions waited, hoped, feared, or choked in their own claustrophobia. Hitler telegraphed his condolences to the King. When it is announced that thirteen Italian submarines have been destroyed in the last few weeks we smile at each other. Human beings have grown vegetable in self-defence, callous to the suffering of others, until it is their turn to clog the roads and rush frantically away from danger. An emotional cycle is established. Optimism, Apprehension, Despair, Relief, Recrimination, Promise to Reform, Optimism. This optimism is not a sign of independence or courage, it is a psychological habit, a refusal bred from years of soft living and illusion, tinned food and Greta Garbo, to face facts. It is the spirit which enables rabbits to go on playing while the stoat threads among them; dissipated by reality it sinks to despair, and generates that indifference to the sufferings of others which is the most revolting effect of war. The optimism settles round its idols, Chamberlain, Gamelin, Ironside ('We're ready for them'), Weygand, and when they fall moves on to abstractions; Immense Resources, General Famine, General Winter, General Exhaustion. One detects the forms of propaganda familiar in Spain, by which anything becomes worthless once it is lost to us (Paris has no strategical importance), (Pétain was only a second-rate general, even in the last war), and operations which are unsuccessful disappear into silence ('The situation remains confused'). It is worth while to examine, while detachment can still find an outlet, some of these shortcomings.

'Understand the weapon, understand the wound.' This maxim of John Cornford is seldom followed. We underestimate not only Hitler, but the dynamism of what he stands for. Fascism and Communism both arise from the decay of international capitalism, just as Calvinism and Lutheranism arose from the decay of the international Catholic Church. This decay was stopped by the Counter-Reformation. Unless Capitalism has such a Reformation the decay will continue. Communism is a revolt from Capitalism with a philosophical, Fascism with an emotional, basis. Hence the difficulty the two parties have in combining together (as in the Tithe war in East Anglia). Fascists always attack Capitalism as

Usury, which is a favourite word in their propaganda; they attack Liberalism for its belief in the perfectibility of human life, and Democracy for its gullibility, lack of dignity, false standards, and addiction to words. Communism believes that the proletariat, after a long tutelage by the party minority, will inherit a perfect world, Fascism that the lower middle class, after long tutelage by the party minority, will produce those supermen who govern the imperfect world. Fascism involves a new feudalism rather than a new bureaucracy. Both revolutionary, Communism offers justice for the workers, Fascism adventure for the clerks. What does England offer? 'Our way of life.' But many people do not like our way of life, and too few can lead it, and here we come to one of the most important factors in world history to-day, and one that the intellectuals can do something to rectify. Our unpopularity. The Germans may be feared and hated, but a certain type of Englishman is certainly the most disliked person on earth. Hence the bewildering series of betrayals.

every day
over his green horizon
a fresh deserter rides away,
and miles away birds mutter
of ambush and of treason;

What is extraordinary is that the Englishman, when disliked, is always disliked for the same reasons, whether it is by Latins, Indians, Irish, or even Americans. 'Lord Plushbottom', who figures in a well-known comic strip, with his cold fishy eye and dangling blimp moustaches, his meanness, lechery, and animal selfishness, might be typical of the governing class as seen by a Russian cartoonist, not by the *Chicago Tribune*. The attacks made by D'Annunzio in Italy, by Beraud in *Gringoire* at the time of sanctions, were similar. They all condemn a certain type of cold, cautious, arrogant, rich, unlikeable sportsman. This is a type that is fifty years behind the times, and survives only as statesmen, soldiers, peers, or ambassadors 'of the old school', that is to say, in positions of power and in prominent contact with other races. The factories where this type is mass-produced are the public schools, and the barrage of criticism which the intellectuals have laid down for years on these ancient seats of learning is at last becoming effective. These marshalling yards

of incapacity, these heavy concentrations of snobbery, envy and caution are being bombed out of existence, and their communications with the high offices of power are being cut. Our empire was not won by the public schools, it was won by the English of the eighteenth century; nor was our literature made by them. The public schools, as we know them, are entirely the creation of the last hundred years, and their function has been to produce an administrative class, to hold an empire, not to win one, to develop obedience, reliability, honesty, team spirit and collective responsibility. For a hundred years the public schools have fought Imagination, and with so much success that they have almost succeeded in extinguishing it in the ruling class. We are even faced with the extraordinary situation of fighting Germans who have more imagination than we have, for imagination combined with efficiency has characterized all the actions of the enemy in this war, and it is because Churchill has imagination that he is the one indispensable leader at the present time. But the public schools have discouraged leadership as well as imagination. They have been required to produce only civil servants and business men; the wild boy is as unwanted as the dreamer, and for the successful athletes, the potential adventurers, there were only the cautious rewards of a benevolent capitalism—openings in the city, or as secretary to a conservative member; vacancies for cricketers in breweries, jobs for centre-forwards in oil or tobacco or a bank in Shanghai. Now the public schools are proving a failure as a source of leadership; they are as unfitted to producing a Clive or a Nelson as a Shelley or a Keats. The virtue is leaving them and passing to the secondary schools, and we are witnessing a gigantic reversal of values of the *status quo*, in which 'our way of life' has to be entirely remodelled before it can win.

Imagination is an intellectual quality: had cabinets and general staffs understood each other as well as the intellectuals of England, France and Spain, history would have been different. The Germans now talk about 'the battle for Europe which began in Spain in 1936'. It was lack of imagination which cost us this battle: it cost us a friendly Spain and a united France, just as lack of imagination—in the shape of the fear of Bolshevism—cost us a European system of alliances at the time when we most needed them—or lack of imagination in the French High Command cost them Paris. It is important to realize this, because so many other causes

are blamed. Old Marshal Pétain blames Pleasure, and there is an all-round tendency to join in this. Presumably, if Germany loses the war it will be because Hitler had a sweet tooth or Goering was too fond of hunting! The onslaught against Pleasure releases latent puritanism and makes no attempt to discriminate between pleasures, or to note that it is not the Love of Pleasure, but the Fear of Love that characterizes the English. Pleasure is not inherently bad, nor is it to the discredit of the French that 'they are not the same as in 1914'—it would be lamentable if they were. No one should blame the French and English for having benefited so much from twenty years of civilization and relative prosperity that it is with extreme difficulty that they can cut down through this new layer to the brutal and primitive energies necessary to preserve it. They are not to be blamed for their difficulties in fighting Fascism, only for their lack of imagination in letting it grow. And for this all are to blame, Right and Left, English and French. France let Hitler over the Rhine, Blum the Socialist refused arms to Government Spain, Left Wing England cried 'Disarm and Fight'. Right Wing England funked Manchuria, the Czechs, and a Russian alliance. Laval sabotaged Sanctions, and, owing to the party fluctuations in France and England, no true Right Wing or Left Wing policy was ever consistently tried. As a great tree is doomed by a ring round its bark, so the collapse of France was implicit in the Russo-German pact, which added an enormous Left Wing party to the powerful Right who were already prepared to sacrifice their Country to their class. France divided, it would be easy to divide England and France, the two great xenophobe nations. In an article in this number, General Fuller, the Tank expert, tells us the kind of life we should have led, and the kind of government he thinks we should have had in order to have promptly defeated Hitler. If we had had it, this magazine could not exist, nor could most of the contributors be writing in it; an article on Racine would be subversive, a poem on the Enclosures treason. In the next number D. R. Gillie, the Paris correspondent of the *Telegraph*, will contribute a long essay on the events in France, and Hugh Kingsmill a study of Kipling. For *Horizon* believes in witch-hunts and recriminations, because it believes, against all evidence, that human beings can learn, can be improved, even to the extent of learning from the mistakes of others.

J. R. ACKERLEY
MICHELDEVER

(To Henry Cook, 1812-1831)

‘The fate of Henry Cook excites no commiseration . . .’
The Times: January 3, 1831

I

At first I could not find you. Up and down
I searched in vain. This was the place, I knew,
The village church, and there beyond the turn
Your way from Winchester: but where were you?

Had Nature with your enemies combined
To hush you up? This dumb, frustrated stone—
Was it *your* name the fidget-fingered wind
Had smudged away, the rinsing rain undone?

Or this that when Earth shivered in the dews
Sank forward on its face—who lay below?
‘Is this his place? Is this?’ I asked. ‘Whose? Whose?’
‘The boy who died a hundred years ago.’

Here by the fields you tilled, beneath these limes
That sprouted with your life, no stone records
Your death although it figured in *The Times*;
You were buried that bleak evening without words.

No solemn prayer entreated that dark pit,
No epitaph your mortal memory furthered,
Though there was thought enough and words to fit:
They said in Micheldever you were murdered.

2

I know the pattern, here the pieces lie;
I fit them in, yet still the picture wants—
Some light, now shuttered, in the country eye,
A confident, proud manliness of glance,