

# AS OTHERS SEE US

WASHINGTON MOVES SLOWLY

SIR Arthur Willert, the author of this article, recently returned to England from an extensive tour of the United States. A member of the British Foreign Office from 1921 to 1935, he has known the United States for over thirty years and has closely studied political trends here both before and during the War when he was secretary to the British War Mission at Washington. The following is an extract from the London *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*:—

As everyone knows, Washington in recent years has been the scene of a struggle between the isolationists, who think that the Western hemisphere can be insulated from outside troubles, and those who feel that the best way to escape disaster is to help the peace-loving elements in Europe to prevent war, or, if that is impossible, to help them to win it. President Roosevelt and his Foreign Minister, Mr. Hull, are the leaders of the latter school.

I was in Washington just before the Prime Minister took his momentous decision over Poland. It was clear then that, though far stronger than they had been even a few months ago, those two statesmen were still not in a position to take action such as they have now taken, much as they wanted to do something of the sort.

What has happened is roughly this. The White House and the State Department made up their minds long ago that the dictators were dangerous and could not be trusted. There can be no harm now in repeating a conversation which I had with President Roosevelt in March, 1936, on the day after Herr Hitler had marched his troops into the Demilitarized Zone. The President asked me whether I thought

that this infraction of the Treaty of Versailles would mean war. I said that I thought not, that, for one thing, we British would not fight to prevent Germany shaking off what seemed to many of us to be an obsolescent servitude.

'You may be right,' he replied, 'but surely, if you do not fight now, it will only be a case of fighting in five years' time.'

The American public in those days was just as afraid of war as the President. But the reasoning behind its fears was nebulous. It did not grasp the ruthless sweep of Herr Hitler's ambitions.

Since then the world-embracing activities of Herr Hitler's pan-Germanism are being brought home by constant stories of Nazi propaganda, penetration and anti-American intrigues from Mexico City down to Punta d'Arenas and by the blasting, blustering activities of the Nazi organizations in the United States. Another German activity adversely commented upon is the recruitment of working men of German blood to return to Germany.

The Jewish persecution has, of course, provided many nails for the coffin of the reputation of Nazi Germany. It is the strongest single ingredient in the boycott, which Americans tell me, is growing up against German goods. In all parts of the country questions in department stores as to whether there was discrimination against German goods brought an affirmative answer.

Moving picture theatres everywhere told the same tale in their peculiar but significant language—silence or hisses for the dictators and their militarist manifestations, applause and sympathy for the democracies, though not always for their leaders.

I remember particularly a film I chanced upon at Portland, Oregon. It started with the power of the printing

press. The Bible was shown as still being the best seller. But the Bible was being hard pressed by other books, by Lenin's works (silence), by *Mein Kampf* (hisses). Then, after the American Constitution had been shown (cheers), there was a quick switch to the boy scout movement and its excellence for the inculcation of democracy (cheers), American, British, French and again American boy scouts (great cheering), with occasional glimpses of the trampling heels of militarism (hisses).

Two things have kept that film, I hope more or less correctly, in my memory—first the cleverness of it, secondly the fact that the implication of the necessity for democratic solidarity was recognized in the remote Northwest just as readily as on the Atlantic Coast.

But all through my tour I was conscious that something more was needed than the hardening of opinion against the dictators to make it possible for the President to take definite action. That something was emphatic proof that the Western democracies could be as safely trusted as the dictatorships could be distrusted. One did not have to travel far to realize that except in limited circles in the big cities our Prime Minister's appeasement policy was looked upon askance. This policy was, in fact, felt to be so unpractical as to be equivocal. I found that a Western politician with a world-famous name spoke for a very large number of his fellow-citizens when he said that the trouble with the London and Paris Governments was that they distrusted the Reds more than they did Fascism and therefore were too prone to play with the dictators. These suspicions and criticisms were a great handicap to Washington until our sudden change of policy over Poland.

#### MRS. ROOSEVELT'S COLUMN

'Now I must report to you that we have spent a very peaceful week-end at our country home here, and that I had my

first swim this year out of doors. It was cold but invigorating, and sitting in the sun afterwards was very pleasant.' So, Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt in the *Evening Standard*. But *must* Mrs. Roosevelt report that? Was it imperative? Was it desirable? Was it politic? In this country we have heard with respectful astonishment of the daily column which the wife of the President of the United States contributes to the American press. If the practice seems surprising, it is certainly no business of ours. But I am bound to say that the *Evening Standard* has done Mrs. Roosevelt a singularly ill turn by arranging to reproduce her daily column just at the moment when we want to think the best of the host and hostess of the King and Queen. Not, of course, that there is a syllable to object to in the daily column on grounds of taste. What is wrong with it is its terrible triviality. Mrs. Roosevelt, I am certain, cannot resemble remotely the kind of person who would normally produce copy of this type, but casual readers of it could be forgiven for supposing that she was. Actually she is the kind of person who defies reactionaries by inviting a colored soprano to sing before the King.

—Janus in the *Spectator*, London

To the Editor of the *Spectator*:—

SIR:—I am sure that I am expressing the feelings of many of your readers when I say that the admission to your issue of the 9th inst. of the paragraph relating to Mrs. Roosevelt is deplorable. It would show pretty bad taste at any time, but that is specially so when that lady is acting as the hostess of our King and Queen on their momentous visit to the U.S.A.

Even if the writer himself felt what he expresses in that paragraph, a little reticence would have been more in accordance with the good taste which one expects in the columns of the *Spectator*.

One can only hope that this issue may not get into the hands of any American.—

Yours faithfully,

Mill Lawn, Reigate. W. W. Paine

# LETTERS AND THE ARTS

## BAD NEWS FOR DIPLOMATS

From the *Times*, London

**'BASIC ENGLISH,'** the ingenious linguistic toy of a year or two ago, is fast becoming a staple element of education in many parts of the globe. To Oxford men at any rate its advance must appear a little sinister. With what they must regard as the typically underhand strategy of a Cambridge don, Mr. C. K. Ogden, the inventor of basic English, waited till their University Press, at considerable expense, had put forth the twelve mighty tomes of the New English Dictionary before he set out to undermine the whole edifice with his thesis that the English language may be conveniently reduced to 850 words, of which only eighteen are verbs. He even dared to maintain that the necessary vocabulary could be written on a half sheet of notepaper—which will only confirm his opponents' suspicions that there must be something mean and paltry about a man who writes as small as that. They will, of course, retort that small minds have always been able to express their narrow range of ideas in pidgin English, but are promptly caught in another of these dastardly traps. For Mr. Ogden's sophisticated disciples have a tricky habit of pleading their case with great eloquence and ingenuity, and only at the end of the article revealing to their critic that, without knowing it, he has been reading basic English all the time.

But there will be other objectors to the innovation. The very principle of the thing is a menace to many vested interests; for it demands that every writer should consider exactly what he wishes to say before choosing words in which to say it, and, as a corollary, that those words shall mean exactly the same to the reader as they mean to him. The language is

therefore quite useless in diplomacy. What would have happened if the Munich Agreement had been written in basic German, or the guarantee of Albanian independence in basic Italian?

Then there is a further drawback: it looks as if basic English will have only one form of words in which to say one thing; and then what becomes of those eminent Privy Councillors whose dignity requires, as the House of Commons noted last week, that they should never speak for less than half an hour? And what of the grand oracular style, inherited from Delphi by Old Moore, and in these days developed with such impressive skill by the neo-astrological school of the weekly press? Can basic English command that beautiful flexibility which always enabled it to adapt itself to prior prediction? Surely not.

Still less is it likely to achieve that delicate aloofness from the crudities of definition which is justly treasured in Whitehall. Their Lordships will certainly view with apprehension any tendency that might be held to require them to say brutally and basically that two and two make four. As for the headline writers, the real molders of our tongue, they have passed through and beyond basic English; they no longer use any verbs.

It is all rather disconcerting because if foreigners acquire the cunning that enables them to say exactly what they mean, while we are contemplating in an exalted, but less practical, rapture the transcending magnificence of the things we say, there is no question that they may occasionally steal a march on us. Ours, of course, is the higher pleasure. The graduate in basic English cannot read Mr. James Joyce. Even Mr. Ogden does not contend that his is a literary language. But even here a gnawing doubt assails. The prose these people write is sometimes