

# A Letter to Anthony Eden

*The elegant young chief of the British Foreign Office receives some well-earned congratulations*

By Robert Forsythe

**D**EAR ANTHONY EDEN: I don't believe I've heard where you are spending your vacation, but I think everybody is agreed that you have won a rest by your splendid work on the Spanish crisis. The chance that the conflagration might spread to all of Europe was very great, and it was a pleasure to see how you have confined it to the Iberian Peninsula. Your technique of pinning the arms of the loyalists while the rebels pounded them about the face was remarkably thoughtful, but it was always my opinion that you made it perfect by your repeated cries of "Stop the fight! Stop the fight!"

Some people are prone to think that you did your best work in organizing the Neutrality Commission, and I suppose I am taking that part of your work lightly, but if I were left to choose from among your achievements, I think I should say that nothing you have ever done compared with your invention of dear Lord Plymouth. Where on earth did you ever get such a droll idea? We have been hearing less and less about Lord Plymouth, but I will never forget those autumn days when he was asking the Portuguese to search their consciences and let him know whether they were doing anything to assist the rebels. The great moment in these interchanges was the look of relief on Lord Plymouth's face when the Portuguese reported that they had searched their souls and couldn't think of a single encouraging thought they had for General Franco.

That was amusing, but I hold to my own opinion that when it came to humor, Lord Plymouth did not at all surpass your own words on Portugal. You must have been gratified by the general response to your sally that Portugal was a free nation which could not be expected to surrender its freedom of action to any power. I am told that the long hard days of vigil were broken for the British Fleet as it rode the waves off Portugal and heard these words over the wireless from London.

BUT even more effective, it seems to me, was your doctrine that a legally elected democratic government had no rights which needed consideration from another democratic power. I know that international law has always maintained that a government in power has the privilege of trading with countries to which it is accredited, but I insist on holding it as a testimonial to your level-headedness that you never once allowed such muddled reasoning to influence your actions in the matter of



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Anthony Eden

Spain. Democracy is all very well, as you probably reasoned to yourself, but there is a time for everything, and too much of anything is not so much justice as license. The fact that the loyal government of Spain was able to pay for its purchases surely had no bearing on the matter. Never let it be said that the British would sacrifice their ideals for commercial gain.

I can remember also the stern refusals which you gave the loyal ships which came into Gibraltar early in the war and wanted to buy oil, and the warnings which you gave them about venturing too close to British shipping. It is of a piece with your later admonitions to the rebel ships and rebel planes which dropped bombs in the vicinity of your fleet. Properly enough, the warnings had tapered off into remonstrances after a few months of fighting, and it is an indication of the sanity of your approach to the problem that you handled one group in one way and another group in another way. To the charge that you were polite to the rebels because they might by chance have been German or Italian

ships and planes, I can only say that in such a case your discretion was all the more called for. Anybody can be brave—I mean, there is a form in such matters and what fits one case may not at all fit another.

THERE were casual observers who felt that your handling of the negotiations with Signor Mussolini were slightly short of perfect, but I find that they base their opinions upon the fact that the reports emanating from London at that time gave the impression that, as a requirement of your compact with Italy, you were insisting on the strict letter of neutrality in Spain. Naturally, you had nothing to do with press comment from London, as it is well known that the newspapers of your country cannot be bribed into withholding news which might be of public interest. If the newspapers and correspondents wanted to feel that you had asked concessions of Signor Mussolini at a time when he was landing 6000 additional troops at Cadiz, I should say that what the press thinks is no business of yours. If there were 6000 Italians who were so concerned in the fate of Spain that they wished to desert the Italian army, uniforms, arms, and all, and proceed to the defense of General Franco, I don't see how you could have done more in the circumstances than turn the matter over to Lord Plymouth.

The further thought that you may have been content with victory for General Franco and the fascists in Spain because of arrangements with the general that England would be well protected in that event, does not do your detractors credit. The history of England is too well known to allow such conjectures. It is far more believable that you and your country are actuated by humane considerations. In a fight between two adversaries, it is obviously the duty of the bystanders to lynch one of the fighters and thus end the bloody struggle. The action of the English in speaking to Mussolini about Ethiopia should be indication enough of what the great empire does to protect weaker states.

Your negotiations with Adolf Hitler have been on the highest plane and will be so regarded by history. Never since the days of the Younger Pitt have such speeches been directed at another nation, speeches which have been so powerfully declarative and yet so diplomatic that Herr Hitler has never once felt it necessary to be annoyed by them. The fact that France has been between England and Germany in this crisis has obviously been an important factor in considering Spain, and I think posterity will regard your statements

of strict neutrality as being less threatening to France than they have appeared on the surface. Nothing is so comforting as a friend behind one's back, if one is certain it is a friend, as France undoubtedly is in this case. But all these actions on your part pale before the final one where you have so definitely capped your policy of neutrality by forbidding volunteers of any sort from entering Spain after March 6. It might seem at first glance that the date had been delayed until Signor Mussolini and Herr Hitler had introduced as many troops as they felt were needed, but this would be a serious misjudgment. After all, good actions must begin some time, and there is surely no better time than after the fall of Malaga, when it became apparent that it would be the sheerest kindness to halt the

Spanish struggle on the side which seemed strongest at that moment.

If you are taking your vacation in southern France, you may be able to hear the women and children of loyalist Spain asking for death so that peace might the sooner come to their troubled land. I know you will join with them, because the thought of war is repugnant to all sane men, and you have done your part in keeping the flames from spreading. You may even be near Rome, and in that case you will hear the pleased cries of the ailing Pope, who has been practically rejuvenated by the conquest of Malaga and the smell of blood. The Holy Father who represents the Prince of Peace on earth undoubtedly shares your views on the virtues of contentment. *Peace on earth, good will to men.* . . . Were there ever

nobler, grander words! The world can be grateful to you, Anthony Eden. Pay no attention to those who call you a scoundrel, a hypocrite, a double-crosser of a fine race of men. Pay no attention to those who pray for the day when the British empire will be ground into a fine powder, the residue of a great commercial people who would sell their honor every moment of day for the sake of their possessions. You have done a great work and your reward will be equally great. You will be loved by the godly and the clean and fine and noble. What profiteth it a man to gain his soul and lose the earth? For the British own the earth and cherish it, and you are the chosen of the lord.

May I say again that I hope you are having a very pleasant holiday?

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## Gray Rivers

You couldn't call them rivers, much.  
Just overgrown, old, lazy creeks,  
The willow moss could almost touch  
The muskrats swimming on their cheeks.  
Upon their banks the rotted logs  
Hid tiger-lilies, toadstool beds;  
At night the weird persistent frogs  
Echoed our broken fancies, dreads  
And where they met, a mile above  
The swamp a village raised its sheath,  
Brown shacks that looked as though a shove  
Could tumble them, brown men beneath.  
The knife-grass, mustard-flowers choked  
The rusty well-pumps and the crows  
Rasped through the prostrate air, or poked  
The okra, stunted corn-stalk rows.  
The village ground was mostly clay,  
But one mile off the cotton sprawled  
Where sunlight changed to scalding gray,  
Where fingers sped and heart-beats crawled.  
For every hundred pounds we picked,  
We earned a quarter, and the boss  
Short-weighted, fed liquor when we kicked,  
To make us laugh, forget the loss.  
His eyes were harder than rock chips  
With moonshine on them, and his black  
Mustache hung down into his lips  
Moist with tobacco juice, and slack.  
He had three sons, they drove the trucks  
That hauled the cotton to the gin—  
Big, yelling, careless, loose-haired bucks,  
Mouths twisted to a shotgun grin,  
A likkered frown. One night they raped  
My brother's girl—frail as a cloud,  
Almost a deaf-mute, she escaped  
On hands and knees, face twisted, cowed.  
We glared . . . became one maniac.  
Only our shaking, tearful wives  
Kept us from running to attack  
The dog-men gnawing at our lives.  
Afterwards we were smoldering, bound  
With grumbling, plodding lack of hope.



Lithograph by J. Vogel

They had the guns, they owned the ground,  
The sheriff, judge, the lynching rope.

Two years before, my cousin Jake  
Had tramped off, singing: "Watch my so-oul,  
O Lo-o-rd, but please don' chain this a-a-ache.  
O li-ift me out of my-y dee-eep ho-o-ole."  
One day he trudged back and the change  
Within him made us gape and blink.  
He smiled, talked low, explaining strange  
Ideas that forced our minds to think.  
His long split features seemed to test  
A Christ whom we had never known,  
Who said: "Your god is in your chest,  
Too brave to scream, and jump, and moan.  
He wants your heaven on the land,  
The place that holds your heart, your shanks.  
Upstairs, you may find some harp-band.  
*Here*, you can't even gather thanks.

Those white men picking down the road,  
They wind up every year in debt,  
They tote the same pra-aise glo-ory load  
And call us niggers to forget  
The same snake thrashing. Let's be bold,  
Let's come and say: "That row of stones,  
That graveyard dust don't seem to hold  
No jim-crow line for sleeping bones."

Half listening, praying, old men strained,  
And youngsters cursed him with hard pride.  
Some women scorned him and complained  
That he was preaching suicide.  
But others slowly called him right,  
Cried: "We're all frying in that grease.  
That cotton don't know black from white.  
White pickers, black, we can't find peace.  
But they won't strike with us. They frown,  
They nibble at that poison bait.  
White boss say: 'Keep those black skunks  
down.'

White boss, he fills us both with hate."  
Jake slipped away, behind our backs,  
Told the white pickers what we craved:  
Showed up, his face all bloody cracks,  
Just smiling when we stamped and raved.  
Three Sundays running, he walked out,  
Asked them once more to organize:  
Returned and quieted our shout  
And wiped the blood from lips and eyes.  
And then it happened—as we looked  
It came just like a quick earthquake.  
There, walking friendly-like, arms hooked  
With two white pickers—there was Jake. . . .  
Three of us, black and white, were killed  
This morning, falling cheek to cheek.  
Our blood ran down the bank and spilled  
Into the lazy, gray old creek.  
But where I'm hiding in the cane,  
I know one thing and know it clear.  
They hang and burn, their bullets rain  
Because they know—the day is near.

MAXWELL BODENHEIM.