

George Orwell

As I Please

1943



TRIBUNE

— December 24, 1943

Attacking me in the *Weekly Review* for attacking Douglas Reed, Mr. A. K. Chesterton remarks, “My country — *right or wrong*’ is a maxim which apparently has no place in Mr. Orwell’s philosophy.’ He also states that ‘all of us believe that whatever her condition Britain must win this war, or for that matter any other war in which she is engaged’.

The operative phrase is *any other war*. There are plenty of us who would defend our own country, under no matter what government, if it seemed that we were in danger of actual invasion and conquest. But ‘*any war*’ is a different matter. How about the Boer War, for instance? There is a neat little bit of historical irony here. Mr. A. K. Chesterton is the nephew of G. K. Chesterton, who courageously opposed the Boer War, and once remarked that ‘My country, *right or wrong*’ was on the same moral level as ‘*My mother, drunk or sober*’.

TRIBUNE

— December 31, 1943

Reading the discussion of ‘*war guilt*’ which reverberates in the correspondence columns of the newspapers, I note the surprise with which many people seem to discover that war is not a crime. Hitler, it appears, has not done anything actionable. He has not raped anybody, nor carried off any pieces of loot with his own hands, nor personally flogged any prisoners, buried any wounded men alive, thrown any babies into the air and spitted them on his bayonet, dipped any nuns in petrol and touched them off with church tapers — in fact he has not done any of the things which enemy nationals are usually credited with doing in war-time. He has merely precipitated a world war which will perhaps have cost twenty-million lives before it ends. And there is nothing illegal in that. How could there be, when legality implies authority and there is no authority with the power to transcend national frontiers?

At the recent trials in Kharkov some attempt was made to fix on Hitler, Himmler and the rest the responsibility for their subordinates’ crimes, but the mere fact that this had to be done shows that Hitler’s guilt is not self-evident. His crime, it is implied, was not to build up an army for the purpose of aggressive war, but to instruct that army to torture its prisoners. So far as it goes, the distinction between an atrocity and an act of war is valid. An atrocity means an act of terrorism which has no

genuine military purpose. One must accept such distinctions if one accepts war at all, which in practice everyone does. Nevertheless, a world in which it is wrong to murder an individual civilian and right to drop a thousand tons of high explosive on a residential area does sometimes make me wonder whether this earth of ours is not a loony bin made use of by some other planet.

TRIBUNE

— January 7, 1944

Looking through the photographs of the New Year's Honours List, I am struck (as usual) by the quite exceptional ugliness and vulgarity of the faces displayed there. It seems to be almost the rule that the kind of person who earns the right to call himself Lord Percy de Falcontowers should look at best like an overfed publican and at worst like a tax collector with a duodenal ulcer. But our country is not alone in this. Anyone who is a good hand with scissors and paste could compile an excellent book entitled *Our Rulers*, and consisting simply of published photographs of the great ones of the earth. The idea first occurred to me when I saw in *Picture Post* some 'stills' of Beaverbrook delivering a speech and looking more like a monkey on a stick than you would think possible for anyone who was not doing it on purpose.

When you had got together your collection of fuerhers, actual and would-be, you would notice that several qualities recur throughout the list. To begin with, they are all old. In spite of the lip-service that is paid everywhere to youth, there is no such thing as a person in a truly commanding position who is less than fifty years old. Secondly, they are nearly all undersized. A dictator taller than five feet six inches is a very great rarity. And, thirdly, there is this almost general and sometimes quite fantastic ugliness. The collection would contain photographs of Streicher bursting a blood vessel, Japanese warlords impersonating baboons, Mussolini with his scrubby dewlap, the chinless de Gaulle, the stumpy short-armed Churchill, Gandhi with his long sly nose and huge bat's ears, Tojo displaying thirty-two teeth with gold in every one of them. And opposite each, to make a contrast, there would be a photograph of an ordinary human being from the country concerned. Opposite Hitler a young sailor from a German submarine, opposite Tojo a Japanese peasant of the old type — and so on.

TRIBUNE

— February 4, 1944

When Sir Walter Raleigh was imprisoned in the Tower of London, he occupied himself with writing a history of the world. He had finished the first volume and was at work on the second when there was a scuffle between some workmen beneath the window of his cell, and one of the men was killed. In spite of diligent enquiries, and in spite of the fact that he had actually seen the thing happen, Sir Walter was never able to discover what the quarrel was about; whereupon, so it is said — and if the story is not true it certainly ought to be — he burned what he had written and abandoned his project.

This story has come into my head I do not know how many times during the past ten years, but always with the reflection that Raleigh was probably wrong. Allowing for all the difficulties of research at that date, and the special difficulty of conducting research in prison, he could probably have produced a world history which had some resemblance to the real course of events. Up to a fairly recent date, the major events recorded in the history books probably happened. It is probably true that the battle of Hastings was fought in 1066, that Columbus discovered America, that Henry VIII had six wives, and so on. *A certain degree of truthfulness was possible so long as it was admitted that a fact may be true even if you don't like it.* Even as late as the last war it was possible for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, for instance, to compile its articles on the various campaigns partly from German sources. Some of the facts — the casualty figures, for instance — were regarded as neutral and in substance accepted by everybody. No such thing would be possible now. A Nazi and a non-Nazi version of the

present war would have no resemblance to one another, and which of them finally gets into the history books will be decided not by evidential methods but on the battlefield.

During the Spanish civil war I found myself feeling very strongly that a true history of this war never would or could be written. Accurate figures, objective accounts of what was happening, simply did not exist. And if I felt that even in 1937, when the Spanish Government was still in being, and the lies which the various Republican factions were telling about each other and about the enemy were relatively small ones, how does the case stand now? Even if Franco is overthrown, what kind of records will the future historian have to go upon? And if Franco or anyone at all resembling him remains in power, the history of the war will consist quite largely of 'facts' which millions of people now living know to be lies. One of these 'facts', for instance, is that there was a considerable Russian army in Spain. There exists the most abundant evidence that there was no such army. Yet if Franco remains in power, and if Fascism in general survives, that Russian army will go into the history books and future school children will believe in it. So for practical purposes the lie will have become truth.

This kind of thing is happening all the time. Out of the millions of instances which must be available, I will choose one which happens to be verifiable. During part of 1941 and 1942, when the Luftwaffe was busy in Russia, the German radio regaled its home audiences with stories of devastating air raids on London. Now, we are aware that those raids did not happen. But what use would our knowledge be if the Germans conquered Britain? For the purposes of a future historian, did those raids happen, or didn't they? The answer is: If Hitler survives, they happened, and if he falls they didn't happen. So with innumerable other events of the past ten or twenty years. Is the Protocols of the Elders of Zion a genuine document? Did Trotsky plot with the Nazis? How many German aeroplanes were shot down in the Battle of Britain? Does Europe welcome the New Order? In no case do you get one answer which is universally accepted because it is true: in each case you get a number of totally incompatible answers, one of which is finally adopted as the result of a physical struggle. History is written by the winners.

In the last analysis our only claim to victory is that if we win the war we shall tell fewer lies about it than our adversaries. The really frightening thing about totalitarianism is not that it commits 'atrocities' but that it attacks the concept of objective truth; it claims to control the past as well as the future. In spite of all the lying and self-righteousness that war encourages, I do not honestly think it can be said that that habit of mind is growing in Britain. Taking one thing with another, I should say that the press is slightly freer than it was before the war. I know out of my own experience that you can print things now which you couldn't print ten years ago. War resisters have probably been less maltreated in this war than in the last one, and the expression of unpopular opinion in public is certainly safer. There is some hope, therefore, that the liberal habit of mind, which thinks of truth as something outside yourself, something to be discovered, and not as something you can make up as you go along, will survive. But I still don't envy the future historian's job. Is it not a strange commentary on our time that even the casualties in the present war cannot be estimated within several millions?

TRIBUNE

— February 25, 1944

Looking through Chesterton's Introduction to *Hard Times* in the *Everyman Edition* (incidentally, Chesterton's Introductions to Dickens are about the best thing he ever wrote), I note the typically sweeping statement: 'There are no new ideas.' Chesterton is here claiming that the ideas which animated the French Revolution were not new ones but simply a revival of doctrines which had flourished earlier and then had been abandoned. But the claim that 'there is nothing new under the sun' is one of the stock arguments of intelligent reactionaries. Catholic apologists, in particular, use it almost automatically. Everything that you can say or think has been said or thought before. Every political theory from Liberalism to Trotskyism can be shown to be a development of some heresy in the early Church. Every system of philosophy springs ultimately from the Greeks. Every scientific theory (if we

are to believe the popular Catholic press) was anticipated by Roger Bacon and others in the thirteenth century. Some Hindu thinkers go even further and claim that not merely the scientific theories, but the products of applied science as well, aeroplanes, radio and the whole bag of tricks, were known to the ancient Hindus, who afterward dropped them as being unworthy of their attention.

It is not very difficult to see that this idea is rooted in the fear of progress. If there is nothing new under the sun, if the past in some shape or another always returns, then the future when it comes will be something familiar. At any rate what will never come — since it has never come before — is that hated, dreaded thing, a world of free and equal human beings. Particularly comforting to reactionary thinkers is the idea of a cyclical universe, in which the same chain of events happens over and over again. In such a universe every seeming advance towards democracy simply means that the coming age of tyranny and privilege is a little bit nearer. This belief, obviously superstitious though it is, is widely held nowadays, and is common among Fascists and near-Fascists.

In fact, there are new ideas. The idea that an advanced civilization need not rest on slavery is a relatively new idea, for instance; it is a good deal younger than the Christian religion. But even if Chesterton's dictum were true, it would only be true in the sense that a statue is contained in every block of stone. Ideas may not change, but emphasis shifts constantly. It could be claimed, for example, that the most important part of Marx's theory is contained in the saying: 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' But before Marx developed it, what force had that saying had? Who had paid any attention to it? Who had inferred from it — what it certainly implies — that laws, religions and moral codes are all a superstructure built over existing property relations? It was Christ, according to the Gospel, who uttered the text, but it was Marx who brought it to life. And ever since he did so the motives of politicians, priests, judges, moralists and millionaires have been under the deepest suspicion — which, of course, is why they hate him so much.

TRIBUNE

— April 14, 1944

Attacking Mr. C. A. Smith and myself in the Malvern Torch for various remarks about the Christian religion, Mr. Sidney Dark grows very angry because I have suggested that the belief in personal immortality is decaying. 'I would wager', he says, 'that if a Gallup poll were taken seventy-five percent (of the British population) would confess to a vague belief in survival'. Writing elsewhere during the same week, Mr. Dark puts it at eighty-five percent.

Now, I find it very rare to meet anyone, of whatever background, who admits to believing in personal immortality. Still, I think it quite likely that if you asked everyone the question and put pencil and paper in hands, a fairly large number (I am not so free with my percentages as Mr. Dark) would admit the possibility that after death there might be 'something'. The point Mr. Dark has missed is that the belief, such as it is, hasn't the actuality it had for our forefathers. Never, literally never in recent years, have I met anyone who gave me the impression of believing in the next world as firmly as he believed in the existence of, for instance, Australia. Belief in the next world does not influence conduct as it would if it were genuine. With that endless existence beyond death to look forward to, how trivial our lives here would seem! Most Christians profess to believe in Hell. Yet have you ever met a Christian who seemed as afraid of Hell as he was of cancer? Even very devout Christians will make jokes about Hell. They wouldn't make jokes about leprosy, or RAF pilots with their faces burnt away: the subject is too painful. Here there springs into my mind a little triolet by the late A. M. Currie:

It's a pity that Poppa has sold his soul
It makes him sizzle at breakfast so.
The money was useful, but still on the whole

It's a pity that Poppa has sold his soul
When he might have held on like the Baron de Coal

And not cleared out when the price was low.

It's a pity that Poppa has sold his soul
It makes him sizzle at breakfast so.

Currie, a Catholic, would presumably have said that he believed in Hell. If his next-door neighbour had been burnt to death he would not have written a comic poem about it, yet he can make jokes about somebody being fried for millions of years. I say that such belief has no reality. It is a sham currency, like the money in Samuel Butler's *Musical Banks*.

TRIBUNE

— May 5, 1944

*F*or anyone who wants a good laugh I recommend a book which was published about a dozen years ago, but which I only recently succeeded in getting hold of. This is I. A. Richards's *Practical Criticism*.

Although mostly concerned with the general principles of literary criticism, it also describes an experiment that Mr Richards made with, or one should perhaps say on, his English students at Cambridge. Various volunteers, not actually students but presumably interested in English literature, also took part. Thirteen poems were presented to them, and they were asked to criticize them. The authorship of the poems was not revealed, and none of them was well enough known to be recognized at sight by the average reader. You are getting, therefore, specimens of literary criticism not complicated by snobbishness of the ordinary kind.

One ought not to be too superior, and there is no need to be, because the book is so arranged that you can try the experiment on yourself. The poems, unsigned, are all together at the end, and the authors' names are on a fold-over page which you need not look at till afterwards. I will say at once that I only spotted the authorship of two, one of which I knew already, and though I could date most of the others within a few decades, I made two bad bloomers, in one case attributing to Shelley a poem written in the nineteen-twenties. But still, some of the comments recorded by Dr Richards are startling. They go to show that many people who would describe themselves as lovers of poetry have no more notion of distinguishing between a good poem and a bad one than a dog has of arithmetic.

For example, a piece of completely spurious bombast by Alfred Noyes gets quite a lot of praise. One critic compares it to Keats. A sentimental ballad from *Rough Rhymes of a Padre*, by 'Woodbine Willie', also gets quite a good press. On the other hand, a magnificent sonnet by John Donne gets a distinctly chilly reception. Dr Richards records only three favourable criticisms and about a dozen cold or hostile ones. One writer says contemptuously that the poem 'would make a good hymn', while another remarks, 'I can find no other reaction except disgust.' Donne was at that time at the top of his reputation and no doubt most of the people taking part in this experiment would have fallen on their faces at his name. D. H. Lawrence's poem 'The Piano' gets many sneers, though it is praised by a minority. So also with a short poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins. 'The worst poem I have ever read,' declares one writer, while another's criticism is simply 'Pish-posh!'

However, before blaming these youthful students for their bad judgement, let it be remembered that when some time ago somebody published a not very convincing fake of an eighteenth-century diary, the aged critic, Sir Edmund Gosse, librarian of the House of Lords, fell for it immediately. And there was also the case of the Parisian art critics, of I forget which 'school', who went into rhapsodies over a picture which was afterwards discovered to have been painted by a donkey with a paint-brush tied to its tail.

Under the heading 'We Are Destroying Birds that Save Us', the *News Chronicle* notes that 'beneficial birds suffer from human ignorance. There is senseless persecution of the kestrel and barn owl. No two species of birds do better work for us.'

Unfortunately it isn't even from ignorance. Most of the birds of prey are killed off for the sake of that enemy of England, the pheasant. Unlike the partridge, the pheasant does not thrive in England,

and apart from the neglected woodlands and the vicious game laws that it has been responsible for, all birds or animals that are suspected of eating its eggs or chicks are systematically wiped out. Before the war, near my village in Hertfordshire, I used to pass a stretch of fence where the gamekeeper kept his 'larder'. Dangling from the wires were the corpses of stoats, weasels, rats, hedgehogs, jays, owls, kestrels and sparrow-hawks. Except for the rats and perhaps the jays, all of these creatures are beneficial to agriculture. The stoats keep down the rabbits, the weasels eat mice, and so do the kestrels and sparrow-hawks, while the owls eat rats as well. It has been calculated that a barn owl destroys between 1,000 and 2,000 rats and mice in a year. Yet it has to be killed off for the sake of this useless bird which Rudyard Kipling correctly described as 'lord of many a shire'.

TRIBUNE

— May 12, 1944

Reading recently a batch of rather shallowly optimistic 'progressive' books, I was struck by the automatic way in which people go on repeating certain phrases which were fashionable before 1914. Two great favourites are 'the abolition of distance' and 'the disappearance of frontiers'. I do not know how often I have met with the statements that 'the aeroplane and the radio have abolished distance' and 'all parts of the world are now interdependent'.

Actually, the effect of modern inventions has been to increase nationalism, to make travel enormously more difficult, to cut down the means of communication between one country and another, and to make the various parts of the world less, not more dependent on one another for food and manufactured goods. This is not the result of the war. The same tendencies had been at work ever since 1918, though they were intensified after the World Depression.

Take simply the instance of travel. In the nineteenth century some parts of the world were unexplored, but there was almost no restriction on travel. Up to 1914 you did not need a passport for any country except Russia. The European emigrant, if he could scrape together a few pounds for the passage, simply set sail for America or Australia, and when he got there no questions were asked. In the eighteenth century it had been quite normal and safe to travel in a country with which your own country was at war.

In our own time, however, travel has been becoming steadily more difficult. It is worth listing the parts of the world which were already inaccessible before the war started.

First of all, the whole of central Asia. Except perhaps for a very few tried Communists, no foreigner has entered Soviet Asia for many years past. Tibet, thanks to Anglo-Russian jealousy, has been a closed country since about 1912. Sinkiang, theoretically part of China, was equally un-get-atable. Then the whole of the Japanese Empire, except Japan itself, was practically barred to foreigners. Even India has been none too accessible since 1918. Passports were often refused even to British subjects — sometimes even to Indians!

Even in Europe the limits of travel were constantly narrowing. Except for a short visit it was very difficult to enter Britain, as many a wretched anti-Fascist refugee discovered. Visas for the U.S.S.R. were issued very grudgingly from about 1935 onwards. All the Fascist countries were barred to anyone with a known anti-Fascist record. Various areas could only be crossed if you undertook not to get out of the train. And along all the frontiers were barbed wire, machine-guns and prowling sentries, frequently wearing gas-masks.

As to migration, it had practically dried up since the nineteen-twenties. All the countries of the New World did their best to keep the immigrant out unless he brought considerable sums of money with him. Japanese and Chinese immigration into the Americas had been completely stopped. Europe's Jews had to stay and be slaughtered because there was nowhere for them to go, whereas in the case of the Czarist pogroms forty years earlier they had been able to flee in all directions. How, in the face of all this, anyone can say that modern methods of travel promote intercommunication between different countries defeats me.

Intellectual contacts have also been diminishing for a long time past. It is nonsense to say that the radio puts people in touch with foreign countries. If anything, it does the opposite. No ordinary person ever listens in to a foreign radio; but if in any country large numbers of people show signs of doing so, the government prevents it either by ferocious penalties, or by confiscating short-wave sets, or by setting up jamming stations. The result is that each national radio is a sort of totalitarian world of its own, braying propaganda night and day to people who can listen to nothing else. Meanwhile, literature grows less and less international. Most totalitarian countries bar foreign newspapers and let in only a small number of foreign books, which they subject to careful censorship and sometimes issue in garbled versions. Letters going from one country to another are habitually tampered with on the way. And in many countries, over the past dozen years, history books have been rewritten in far more nationalistic terms than before, so that children may grow up with as false a picture as possible of the world outside.

The trend towards economic self-sufficiency ('autarchy') which has been going on since about 1930 and has been intensified by the war, may or may not be reversible. The industrialization of countries like India and South America increases their purchasing power and therefore ought, in theory, to help world trade. But what is not grasped by those who say cheerfully that 'all parts of the world are interdependent' is that they don't any longer have to be interdependent. In an age when wool can be made out of milk and rubber out of oil, when wheat can be grown almost on the Arctic Circle, when atabrin will do instead of quinine and vitamin C tablets are a tolerable substitute for fruit, imports don't matter very greatly. Any big area can seal itself off much more completely than in the days when Napoleon's Grand Army, in spite of the embargo, marched to Moscow wearing British overcoats. So long as the world tendency is towards nationalism and totalitarianism, scientific progress simply helps it along.

Here are some current prices.

Small Swiss-made alarm clock, price before the war, 5/- or 10/-; present price, £3 15s.

Second-hand portable typewriter, price before the war, £12 new; present price, £30. Small, very bad quality coconut fibre scrubbing-brush, price before the war, 3d; present price 1/9d.

Gas lighter, price before the war, about 1/-; present price, 5/9d.

I could quote other similar prices. It is worth noticing that, for instance, the clock mentioned above must have been manufactured before the war at the old price. But, on the whole, the worst racket seems to be in second-hand goods — for instance, chairs, tables, clothes, watches, prams, bicycles and bed linen. On inquiry, I find that there is now a law against overcharging on second-hand goods. This comforts me a great deal, just as it must comfort the 18b-ers to hear about Habeas Corpus, or Indian coolies to learn that all British subjects are equal before the law.

In Hooper's *Campaign of Sedan* there is an account of the interview in which General de Wymppffen tried to obtain the best possible terms for the defeated French army. 'It is to your interest,' he said, 'from a political standpoint, to grant us honourable conditions. ... A peace based on conditions which would flatter the *amour-propre* of the army would be durable, whereas rigorous measures would awaken bad passions, and, perhaps, bring on an endless war between France and Prussia.' Here Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor, chipped in, and his words are recorded from his memoirs:

I said to him that we might build on the gratitude of a prince, but certainly not on the gratitude of a people — least of all on the gratitude of the French. That in France neither institutions nor circumstances were enduring; that governments and dynasties were constantly changing, and one need not carry out what the other had bound itself to do.... As things stood it would be folly if we did not make full use of our success.

The modern cult of 'realism' is generally held to have started with Bismarck. That imbecile speech was considered magnificently 'realistic' then, and so it would be now. Yet what Wymppffen said, though he was only trying to bargain for terms, was perfectly true. If the Germans had behaved with ordinary generosity (i.e. by the standards of the time) it might have been impossible to whip up the *revanchiste* spirit in France. What would Bismarck have said if he had been told that harsh terms now would mean a terrible defeat forty-eight years later? There is not much doubt of the answer: he would have said that

the terms ought to have been harsher still. Such is 'realism' — and on the same principle, when the medicine makes the patient sick, the doctor responds by doubling the dose.

TRIBUNE

— May 19, 1944

Miss Vera Brittain's pamphlet, *Seed of Chaos*, is an eloquent attack on indiscriminate or 'obliteration' bombing. 'Owing to the R.A.F. raids,' she says, 'thousands of helpless and innocent people in German, Italian and German-occupied cities are being subjected to agonizing forms of death and injury comparable to the worst tortures of the Middle Ages.' Various well-known opponents of bombing, such as General Franco and Major-General Fuller, are brought out in support of this. Miss Brittain is not, however, taking the pacifist standpoint. She is willing and anxious to win the war, apparently. She merely wishes us to stick to 'legitimate' methods of war and abandon civilian bombing, which she fears will blacken our reputation in the eyes of posterity. Her pamphlet is issued by the Bombing Restriction Committee, which has issued others with similar titles.

Now, no one in his senses regards bombing, or any other operation of war, with anything but disgust. On the other hand, no decent person cares tuppence for the opinion of posterity. And there is something very distasteful in accepting war as an instrument and at the same time wanting to dodge responsibility for its more obviously barbarous features. Pacifism is a tenable position, provided that you are willing to take the consequences. But all talk of 'limiting' or 'humanizing' war is sheer humbug, based on the fact that the average human being never bothers to examine catchwords.

The catchwords used in this connexion are 'killing civilians', 'massacre of women and children' and 'destruction of our cultural heritage'. It is tacitly assumed that air bombing does more of this kind of thing than ground warfare.

When you look a bit closer, the first question that strikes you is: Why is it worse to kill civilians than soldiers? Obviously one must not kill children if it is in any way avoidable, but it is only in propaganda pamphlets that every bomb drops on a school or an orphanage. A bomb kills a cross-section of the population; but not quite a representative selection, because the children and expectant mothers are usually the first to be evacuated, and some of the young men will be away in the army. Probably a disproportionately large number of bomb victims will be middle-aged. (Up to date, German bombs have killed between six and seven thousand children in this country. This is, I believe, less than the number killed in road accidents in the same period.) On the other hand, 'normal' or 'legitimate' warfare picks out and slaughters all the healthiest and bravest of the young male population. Every time a German submarine goes to the bottom about fifty young men of fine physique and good nerves are suffocated. Yet people who would hold up their hands at the very words 'civilian bombing' will repeat with satisfaction such phrases as 'We are winning the Battle of the Atlantic'. Heaven knows how many people our blitz on Germany and the occupied countries has killed and will kill, but you can be quite certain it will never come anywhere near the slaughter that has happened on the Russian front.

War is not avoidable at this stage of history, and since it has to happen it does not seem to me a bad thing that others should be killed besides young men. I wrote in 1937: 'Sometimes it is a comfort to me to think that the aeroplane is altering the conditions of war. Perhaps when the next great war comes we may see that sight unprecedented in all history, a jingo with a bullet hole in him.' We haven't yet seen that (it is perhaps a contradiction in terms), but at any rate the Suffering of this war has been shared out more evenly than the last one was. The immunity of the civilian, one of the things that have made war possible, has been shattered. Unlike Miss Brittain, I don't regret that. I can't feel that war is 'humanized' by being confined to the slaughter of the young and becomes 'barbarous' when the old get killed as well.

As to international agreements to 'limit' war, they are never kept when it pays to break them. Long before the last war the nations had agreed not to use gas, but they used it all the same. This time they have refrained, merely because gas is comparatively ineffective in a war of movement, while its use

against civilian populations would be sure to provoke reprisals in kind. Against an enemy who can't hit back, e.g. the Abyssinians, it is used readily enough. War is of its nature barbarous, it is better to admit that. If we see ourselves as the savages we are, some improvement is possible, or at least thinkable.

A specimen of Tribune's correspondence:

TO THE JEW-PAID EDITOR,
TRIBUNE,
LONDON.

JEWES IN THE POLISH ARMY.

YOU ARE CONSTANTLY ATTACKING OUR GALLANT POLISH ALLY BECAUSE THEY KNOW HOW TO TREAT THE JEW PEST. THEY ALSO KNOW HOW TO TREAT ALL JEW-PAID EDITORS AND COMMUNIST PAPERS. WE KNOW YOU ARE IN THE PAY OF THE YIDS AND SOVIETS. YOU ARE A FRIEND OF THE ENEMIES OF BRITAIN! THE DAY OF RECKONING IS AT HAND. BEWARE. ALL JEW PIGS WILL BE EXTERMINATED THE HITLER WAY — THE ONLY WAY TO GET RID OF THE YIDS. PERISH JUDAH.

Typed on a Remington typewriter (postmark S.W.), and, what is to my mind an interesting detail, this is a carbon copy.

Anyone acquainted with the type will know that no assurance, no demonstration, no proof of the most solid kind would ever convince the writer of this that *Tribune* is not a Communist paper and not in the pay of the Soviet Government. One very curious characteristic of Fascists — I am speaking of amateur Fascists: I assume that the Gestapo are cleverer — is their failure to recognize that the parties of the Left are distinct from one another and by no means aiming at the same thing. It is always assumed that they are all one gang, whatever the outward appearances may be. In the first number of Mosley's *British Union Quarterly*, which I have by me (incidentally, it contains an article by no less a person than Major Vidkun Quisling), I note that even Wyndham Lewis speaks of Stalin and Trotsky as though they were equivalent persons. Arnold Lunn, in his *Spanish Rehearsal*, actually seems to suggest that Trotsky started the Fourth International on Stalin's instructions.

In just the same way, very few Communists, in my experience, will believe that the Trotskyists are not in the pay of Hitler. I have sometimes tried the experiment of pointing out that if the Trotskyists were in the pay of Hitler, or of anybody, they would occasionally have some money. But it is no use, it doesn't register. So also with the belief in the machinations' of the Jews, or the belief, widespread among Indian nationalists, that all Englishmen, of whatever political colour, are in secret conspiracy with one another. The belief in the Freemasons as a revolutionary organization is the strangest of all. In this country it would be just as reasonable to believe such a thing of the Buffaloes. Less than a generation ago, if not now, there were Catholic nuns who believed that at Masonic gatherings the Devil appeared in person, wearing full evening dress with a hole in the trousers for his tail to come through. In one form or another this kind of thing seems to attack nearly everybody, apparently answering to some obscure psychological need of our time.

TRIBUNE

— May 26, 1944

I was talking the other day to a young American soldier, who told me — as quite a number of others have done — that anti-British feeling is completely general in the American army. He had only recently landed in this country, and as he came off the boat he asked the Military Policeman on the dock, 'How's England?'

'The girls here walk out with niggers,' answered the M.P. 'They call them American Indians.'

That was the salient fact about England, from the M.P.'s point of view. At the same time my friend told me that anti-British feeling is not violent and there is no very clearly-defined cause of complaint. A

good deal of it is probably a rationalization of the discomfort most people feel at being away from home. But the whole subject of anti-British feeling in the United States badly needs investigation. Like antisemitism, it is given a whole series of contradictory explanations, and again like anti-semitism, it is probably a psychological substitute for something else. *What* else is the question that needs investigating.

Meanwhile, there is one department of Anglo-American relations that seems to be going well. It was announced some months ago that no less than 20,000 English girls had already married American soldiers and sailors, and the number will have increased since. Some of these girls are being educated for their life in a new country at the 'Schools for Brides of U.S. Servicemen' organized by the American Red Cross. Here they are taught practical details about American manners, customs and traditions — and also, perhaps, cured of the widespread illusion that every American owns a motor car and every American house contains a bathroom, a refrigerator and an electric washing-machine.

The May number of the *Matrimonial Post and Fashionable Marriage Advertiser* contains advertisements from 191 men seeking brides and over 200 women seeking husbands. Advertisements of this type have been running in a whole series of magazines since the sixties or earlier, and they are nearly always very much alike. For example:

Bachelor, age 25, height 6 ft 1 in., slim, fond of horticulture, animals, children, cinema, etc., would like to meet lady, age 27 to 35, with love of flowers, nature, children, must be tall, medium build, Church of England.

The general run of them are just like that, though occasionally a more unusual note is struck. For instance:

I'm 29, single, 5 ft 10 in., English, large build, kind, quiet, varied intellectual interests, firm moral background (registered unconditionally as absolute CO), progressive, creative, literary inclinations. A dealer in rare stamps, income variable but quite adequate. Strong swimmer, cyclist, slight stammer occasionally.

Looking for the following rarity, amiable, adaptable, educated girl, easy on eye and ear, under 30, secretary type or similar, mentally adventurous, immune to mercenary and social incentives, bright sense of genuine humour, a reliable working partner. Capital unimportant, character vital.

The thing that is and always has been striking in these advertisements is that nearly all the applicants are remarkably eligible. It is not only that most of them are broad-minded, intelligent, home-loving, musical, loyal, sincere and affectionate, with a keen sense of humour and, in the case of women, a good figure: in the majority of cases they are financially OK as well. When you consider how fatally easy it is to get married, you would not imagine that a 36-year-old bachelor, 'dark hair, fair complexion, slim build, height 6 ft, well educated and of considerate, jolly and intelligent disposition, income £1,000 per annum and capital', would need to find himself a bride through the columns of a newspaper. And ditto with 'Adventurous young woman, left-wing opinions, modern outlook' with 'fairly full but shapely figure, medium colour curly hair, grey-blue eyes, fair skin, natural colouring, health exceptionally good, interested in music, art, literature, cinema, theatre, fond of walking, cycling, tennis, skating and rowing'. Why does such a paragon have to advertise?

It should be noted that the *Matrimonial Post* is entirely above-board and checks up carefully on its advertisers.

What these things really demonstrate is the atrocious loneliness of people living in big towns. People meet for work and then scatter to widely separated homes. Anywhere in inner London it is probably exceptional to know even the names of the people who live next door.

Years ago I lodged for a while in the Portobello Road. This is hardly a fashionable quarter, but the landlady had been lady's maid to some woman of title and had a good opinion of herself. One day something went wrong with the front door and my landlady, her husband and myself were all locked

out of the house. It was evident that we should have to get in by an upper window, and as there was a jobbing builder next door I suggested borrowing a ladder from him. My landlady looked somewhat uncomfortable.

'I wouldn't like to do that,' she said finally. 'You see we don't know him. We've been here fourteen years, and we've always taken care not to know the people on either side of us. It *wouldn't do*, not in a neighbourhood like this. If you once begin talking to them they get familiar, you see.'

So we had to borrow a ladder from a relative of her husband's, and carry it nearly a mile with great labour and discomfort.

1943

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