

As I Please, George Orwell

Part I

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 war-lords 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

For 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 atebirin 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, I 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 I 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 Wymppfen 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 Wymppfen 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.

JEWS 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.

Part II

TRIBUNE June 2, 1944

An extract from the Italian radio, about the middle of 1942, describing life in London:

Five shillings were given for one egg yesterday, and one pound sterling for a kilogram of potatoes. Rice has disappeared, even from the Black Market, and peas have become the prerogative of millionaires. There is no sugar on the market, although small quantities are still to be found at prohibitive prices.

One day there will be a big, careful, scientific inquiry into the extent to which propaganda is believed. For instance, what is the effect of an item like the one above, which is fairly typical of the Fascist radio? Any Italian who took it seriously would have to assume that Britain was due to collapse within a few weeks. When the collapse failed to happen, one would expect him to lose confidence in the authorities who had deceived him. But it is not certain that that is the reaction. For quite long periods, at any rate, people can remain undisturbed by obvious lies, either because they simply forget what is said from day to day or because they are under such a constant propaganda bombardment that they become anaesthetized to the whole business.

It seems clear that it pays to tell the truth when things are going badly, but it is by no means certain that it pays to be consistent in your propaganda. British propaganda is a good deal hampered by its efforts not to be self-contradictory. It is almost impossible, for instance, to discuss the colour question in a way that will please both the Boers and the Indians. The Germans are not troubled by a little thing like that. They just tell everyone what they think he will want to hear, assuming, probably rightly, that no one is interested in anyone else's problems. On occasion their various radio stations have even attacked one another.

One which aimed at middle-class Fascists used sometimes to warn its listeners against the pseudo-Left Worker's Challenge, on the ground that the latter was 'financed by Moscow'.

Another thing that that inquiry, if it ever takes place, will have to deal with is the magical properties of names. Nearly all human beings feel that a thing becomes different if you call it by a different name. Thus when the Spanish Civil War broke out the B.B.C. produced the name 'Insurgents' for Franco's followers. This covered the fact that they were rebels while making rebellion sound respectable. During the Abyssinian war Haile Selassie was called the Emperor by his friends and the Negus by his enemies. Catholics strongly resent being called Roman Catholics. The Trotskyists call themselves Bolshevik-Leninists but are refused this name by their opponents.

Countries which have liberated themselves from a foreign conqueror or gone through a nationalist revolution almost invariably change their names, and some countries have a whole series of names, each with a different implication. Thus the U.S.S.R. is called Russia or U.S.S.R. (neutral or for short). Soviet Russia (friendly) and Soviet Union (very friendly). And it is a curious fact that of the six names by which our own country is called, the only one that does not tread on somebody or other's toes is the archaic and slightly ridiculous name 'Albion'.

Wading through the entries for the Short Story Competition, I was struck once again by the disability that English short stories suffer in being all cut to a uniform length. The great short stories of the past are of all lengths from perhaps 1,500 words to 20,000. Most of Maupassant's stories, for instance, are very short, but his two masterpieces, 'Boule de Suit and 'La Maison de Madame Tellier', are decidedly long. Poe's stories vary similarly. D. H. Lawrence's 'England, My England', Joyce's 'The Dead', Conrad's 'Youth', and many stories by Henry James, would probably be considered too long for any modern English periodical. So, certainly, would a story like Merimee's Carmen. This belongs to the class of 'long short' stories which have almost died out in this country, because there is no place for them. They are too long for the magazines and too short to be published as books. You can, of course, publish a

book containing several short stories, but this is not often done because at normal times these books never sell.

It would almost certainly help to rehabilitate the short story if we could get back to the bulky nineteenth-century magazine, which had room in it for stories of almost any length. But the trouble is that in modern England monthly and quarterly magazines of any intellectual pretensions don't pay. Even the Criterion, perhaps the best literary paper we have ever had, lost money for sixteen years before expiring.

Why? Because people were not willing to fork out the seven and sixpence that it cost. People won't pay that much for a mere magazine. But why then will they pay the same sum for a novel, which is no bulkier than the Criterion, and much less worth keeping? Because they don't pay for the novel directly. The average person never buys a new book, except perhaps a Penguin. But he does, without knowing it, buy quite a lot of books by paying twopence into lending libraries. If you could take a literary magazine out of the library just as you take a book, these magazines would become commercial propositions and would be able to enlarge their bulk as well as paying their contributors better. It is book-borrowing and not book-buying that keeps authors and publishers alive, and there seems no good reason why the lending library system should not be extended to magazines. Restore the monthly magazine – or make the weekly paper about a quarter of an inch fatter – and you might be able to restore the short story. And incidentally the book review, which for lack of elbow room has dwindled to a perfunctory summary, might become a work of art again, as it was in the days of the Edinburgh and the Quarterly.

After reading the Matrimonial Post last week I looked in the Penguin Herodotus for a passage I vaguely remembered about the marriage customs of the Babylonians. Here it is:

Once a year in each village the maidens of an age to marry were collected altogether into one place, while the men stood round them in a circle. Then a herald called up the damsels one by one and offered them for sale. He began with the most beautiful. When she was sold for no small sum of money, he offered for sale the one who came next to her in beauty.... The custom was that when the herald had gone through the whole number of the beautiful damsels, he should then call up the ugliest and offer her to the men, asking who would agree to take her with the smallest marriage portion. And the man who offered to take the smallest sum had her assigned to him. The marriage portions were furnished by the money paid for the beautiful damsels, and thus the fairer maidens portioned out the uglier.

This custom seems to have worked very well and Herodotus is full of enthusiasm for it. He adds, however, that, like other good customs, it was already going out round about 450 BC.

TRIBUNE June 9, 1944

Arthur Koestler's recent article in Tribune (In Tribune, 28 April 1944, Koestler had written an article in the form of a letter to a young Corporal who had written to ask for advice as to which book reviewers could be taken as reliable guides. Koestler pointed out the dismal standards of criticism prevailing in most of the press.) set me wondering whether the book racket will start up again in its old vigour after the war, when paper is plentiful and there are other things to spend your money on.

Publishers have got to live, like anyone else, and you cannot blame them for advertising their wares, but the truly shameful feature of literary life before the war was the blurring of the distinction between advertisement and criticism. A number of the so-called reviewers, and especially the best-known ones were simply blurb writers. The 'screaming' advertisement started some time in the nineteen-twenties, and as the competition to take up as much space and use as many superlatives as possible became fiercer, publishers' advertisements grew to be an important source of revenue to a number of papers. The literary pages of several well-known papers were practically owned by a handful of publishers, who had their quislings planted in all the important jobs. These wretches churned forth their praise - 'masterpiece', 'brilliant', 'unforgettable' and so forth - like so many mechanical pianos. A book coming from the right publishers could be absolutely certain not only of favourable reviews, but of being placed on the 'recommended' list which industrious book borrowers would cut out and take to the library the next day.

If you published books at several different houses you soon learned how strong the pressure of advertisement was. A book coming from a big publisher, who habitually spent large sums on advertisement, might get fifty or seventy-five reviews: a book from a small publisher might get only twenty. I knew of one case where a theological publisher, for some reason, took it into his head to publish a novel. He spent a great deal of money on advertising it. It got exactly four reviews in the whole of England, and the only full-length one was in a motoring paper, which seized the opportunity to point out that the part of the country described in the novel would be a good place for a motoring tour. This man was not in the racket, his advertisements were not likely to become a regular source of revenue to the literary papers, and so they just ignored him.

Even reputable literary papers could not afford to disregard their advertisers altogether. It was quite usual to send a book to a reviewer with some such formula as, 'Review this book if it seems any good. If not, send it back. We don't think it's worthwhile to print simply damning reviews.'

Naturally, a person to whom the guinea or so that he gets for the review means next week's rent is not going to send the book back. He can be counted on to find something to praise, whatever his private opinion of the book may be.

In America even the pretence that hack reviewers read the books they are paid to criticize has been partially abandoned. Publishers, or some publishers, send out with review copies a short synopsis telling the reviewer what to say. Once, in the case of a novel of my own, they misspelt the name of one of the characters. The same misspelling turned up in review after review. The so-called critics had not even glanced into the book - which, nevertheless, most of them were boosting to the skies.

A phrase much used in political circles in this country is 'playing into the hands of'. It is a sort of charm or incantation to silence uncomfortable truths. When you are told that by saying this, that or the other you are 'playing into the hands of some sinister enemy, you know that it is your duty to shut up immediately.

For example, if you say anything damaging about British imperialism, you are playing into the hands of Dr Goebbels. If you criticize Stalin you are playing into the hands of the Tablet and the Daily Telegraph. If you

criticize Chiang Kai-Shek you are playing into the hands of Wang Ching-Wei - and so on, indefinitely.

Objectively this charge is often true. It is always difficult to attack one party to a dispute without temporarily helping the other. Some of Gandhi's remarks have been very useful to the Japanese. The extreme Tories will seize on anything anti-Russian, and don't necessarily mind if it comes from Trotskyist instead of right-wing sources. The American imperialists, advancing to the attack behind a smoke-screen of novelists, are always on the look-out for any disreputable detail about the British Empire. And if you write anything truthful about the London slums, you are liable to hear it repeated on the Nazi radio a week later. But what, then, are you expected to do? Pretend there are no slums?

Everyone who has ever had anything to do with publicity or propaganda can think of occasions when he was urged to tell lies about some vitally important matter, because to tell the truth would give ammunition to the enemy. During the Spanish Civil War, for instance, the dissensions on the Government side were never properly thrashed out in the left-wing press, although they involved fundamental points of principle. To discuss the struggle between the Communists and the Anarchists, you were told, would simply give the Daily Mail the chance to say that the Reds were all murdering one another. The only result was that the left-wing cause as a whole was weakened. The Daily Mail may have missed a few horror stories because people held their tongues, but some all-important lessons were not learned, and we are suffering from the fact to this day.

TRIBUNE June 16, 1944

Several times, by word of mouth and in writing, I have been asked why I do not make use of this column for an onslaught on the Brains Trust. (The Brains Trust was a popular B.B.C. programme, led by Dr Joad, head of the Department of Psychology and Philosophy at Birkbeck College, London, with a panel of 'experts' which answered questions sent in by listeners). 'For Christ's sake take a crack at Joad,' one reader put it. Now, I would not deny that the Brains Trust is a very dismal thing. I am objectively anti-Brains Trust, in the sense that I always switch off any radio from which it begins to emerge. The phony pretence that the whole thing is spontaneous and uncensored, the steady avoidance of any serious topic and concentration on questions of the 'Why do children's ears stick out' type, the muscularcurate heartiness of the question-master, the frequently irritating voices, and the thought of incompetent amateur broadcasters being paid ten or fifteen shillings a minute to say 'Er - er - er', are very hard to bear. But I cannot feel the same indignation against this programme as many of my acquaintances seem to do, and it is worth explaining why.

By this time the big public is probably growing rather tired of the Brains Trust, but over a long period it was a genuinely popular programme. It was listened to not only in England, but in various other parts of the world, and its technique has been adopted by countless discussion groups in the Forces and Civil Defence. It was an idea that 'took on', as the saying goes. And it is not difficult to see why. By the standards of newspaper and radio discussion prevailing in this country up to about 1940, the Brains Trust was a great step forward. It did at least make some show of aiming at free speech and at intellectual seriousness, and though latterly it has had to keep silent about 'politics and religion', you could pick up from it interesting facts about birds' nest soup or the habits of porpoises, scraps of history and a smattering of philosophy. It was less obviously frivolous than the average radio

programme. By and large it stood for enlightenment, and that was why millions of listeners welcomed it, at any rate for a year or two.

It was also why the Blimps loathed it, and still do. The Brains Trust is the object of endless attacks by right-wing intellectuals of the G. M. Young-A. P. Herbert type (also Mr Douglas Reed), and when a rival brains trust under a squad of clergymen was set up, all the Blimps went about saying how much better it was than Joad and company. These people see the Brains Trust as a symbol of freedom of thought, and they realize that, however silly its programmes may be in themselves, their tendency is to start people thinking. You or I, perhaps, would not think of the B.B.C. as a dangerously subversive organization, but that is how it is regarded in some quarters, and there are perpetual attempts to interfere with its programmes. To a certain extent a man may be known by his enemies, and the dislike with which all right-thinking people have regarded the Brains Trust - and also the whole idea of discussion groups, public or private - from the very start, is a sign that there must be something good in it. That is why I feel no strong impulse to take a crack at Dr Joad, who gets his fair share of cracks anyway. I say rather: just think what the Brains Trust would have been like if its permanent members had been (as they might so well have been) Lord Eiton, Mr Harold Nicolson and Mr Alfred Noyes.

One cannot buy magazines from abroad nowadays, but I recommend anyone who has a friend in New York to try and cadge a copy of Politics, the new monthly magazine, edited by the Marxist literary critic, Dwight Macdonald. I don't agree with the policy of this paper, which is anti-war (not from a pacifist angle), but I admire its combination of highbrow political analysis with intelligent literary criticism. It is sad to have to admit it, but we have no monthly or quarterly magazines in England to come up to the American ones - for there are several others of rather the same stamp as Politics. We are still haunted by a half-conscious idea that to have aesthetic sensibilities you must be a Tory. But of course the present superiority of American magazines is partly due to the war. Politically, the paper in this country most nearly corresponding to Politics would be, I suppose, the New Leader. You have only to compare the get-up, the style of writing, the range of subjects and the intellectual level of the two papers, to see what it means to live in a country where there are still leisure and wood-pulp.

TRIBUNE June 23, 1944

The week before last Tribune printed a centenary article on Gerard Manley Hopkins, and it was only after this that the chance of running across an April number of the American Nation reminded me that 1944 is also the centenary of a much better-known writer - Anatole France.

When Anatole France died, twenty years ago, his reputation suffered one of those sudden slumps to which highbrow writers who have lived long enough to become popular are especially liable. In France, according to the charming French custom, vicious personal attacks were made upon him while he lay dying and when he was freshly dead. A particularly venomous one was written by Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, afterwards to become a collaborator of the Nazis. In England, also, it was discovered that Anatole France was no good. A few years later than this a young man attached to a weekly paper (I met him afterwards in Paris and found that he could not buy a tram ticket without assistance) solemnly assured me that Anatole France 'wrote very bad French'. France was, it seemed, a vulgar, spurious and derivative writer whom everyone could now 'see through'. Round about the same time, similar discoveries were being made

about Bernard Shaw and Lytton Strachey: but curiously enough all three writers have remained very readable, while most of their detractors are forgotten.

How far the revulsion against Anatole France was genuinely literary I do not know. Certainly he had been overpraised, and one must at times get tired of a writer so mannered and so indefatigably pornographic. But it is unquestionable that he was attacked partly from political motives. He may or may not have been a great writer, but he was one of the symbolic figures in the politico-literary dogfight which has been raging for a hundred years or more. The clericals and reactionaries hated him in just the same way as they hated Zola. Anatole France had championed Dreyfus, which needed considerable courage, he had debunked Joan of Arc, he had written a comic history of France; above all, he had lost no opportunity of poking fun at the Church. He was everything that the clericals and revanchistes, the people who first preached that the Boche must never be allowed to recover and afterwards sucked the blacking off Hitler's boots, most detested.

I do not know whether Anatole France's most characteristic books, for instance, *La Patisserie de la Reine Pedauque*, are worth rereading at this date. Whatever is in them is really in Voltaire. But it is a different story with the four novels dealing with Monsieur Bergeret. Besides being extremely amusing these give a most valuable picture of French society in the nineties and the background of the Dreyfus case. There is also 'Crainquebille', one of the best short stories I have ever read, and incidentally a devastating attack on 'law and order'.

But though Anatole France could speak up for the working class in a story like 'Crainquebille', and though cheap editions of his works were advertised in Communist papers, one ought not really to class him as a Socialist. He was willing to work for Socialism, even to deliver lectures on it in draughty halls, and he knew that it was both necessary and inevitable, but it is doubtful whether he subjectively wanted it. The world, he once said, would get about as much relief from the coming of Socialism as a sick man gets from turning over in bed. In a crisis he was ready to identify himself with the working class, but the thought of a Utopian future depressed him, as can be seen from his book *La Pierre Blanche*. There is an even deeper pessimism on *Les Dieux Ont Soif*, his novel about the French Revolution. Temperamentally he was not a Socialist but a Radical. At this date that is probably the rarer animal of the two, and it is his Radicalism, his passion for liberty and intellectual honesty, that give their special colour to the four novels about Monsieur Bergeret.

I have never understood why the News Chronicle, whose politics are certainly a very pale pink — about the colour of shrimp paste, I should say, but still pink — allows the professional Roman Catholic Timothy Shy' (D. B. Wyndham Lewis) to do daily sabotage in his comic column. In Lord Beaverbrook's Express his fellow-Catholic 'Beachcomber' (J. B. Morton) is, of course, more at home.

Looking back over the twenty years or so that these two have been on the job, it would be difficult to find a reactionary cause that they have not championed — Pilsudski, Mussolini, appeasement, flogging, Franco, literary censorship; between them they have found good words for everything that any decent person instinctively objects to. They have conducted endless propaganda against Socialism, the League of Nations and scientific research. They have kept up a campaign of abuse against every writer worth reading, from Joyce onwards. They were viciously anti-German

until Hitler appeared, when their anti-Germanism cooled off in a remarkable manner. At this moment, needless to say, the especial target of their hatred is Beveridge.

It is a mistake to regard these two as comics pure and simple. Every word they write is intended as Catholic propaganda, and some at least of their co-religionists think very highly of their work in this direction. Their general 'line' will be familiar to anyone who has read Chesterton and kindred writers. Its essential note is denigration of England and of the Protestant countries generally. From the Catholic point of view this is necessary. A Catholic, at least an apologist, feels that he must claim superiority for the Catholic countries, and for the Middle Ages as against the present, just as a Communist feels that he must in all circumstances support the U.S.S.R. Hence the endless jibing of 'Beachcomber' and 'Timothy Shy' at every English institution - tea, cricket, Wordsworth, Charlie Chaplin, kindness to animals, Nelson, Cromwell and what-not. Hence also Timothy Shy's attempts to rewrite English history and the snarls of hatred that escape him when he thinks of the defeat of the Spanish Armada. (How it sticks in his gizzard, that Spanish Armada! As though anyone cared, at this date!) Hence, even the endless jeering at novelists, the novel being essentially a post-Reformation form of literature at which on the whole Catholics have not excelled.

From either a literary or a political point of view these two are simply the leavings on Chesterton's plate. Chesterton's vision of life was false in some ways, and he was hampered by enormous ignorance, but at least he had courage. He was ready to attack the rich and powerful, and he damaged his career by doing so. But it is the peculiarity of both 'Beachcomber' and 'Timothy Shy' that they take no risks with their own popularity. Their strategy is always indirect. Thus, if you want to attack the principle of freedom of speech, do it by sneering at the Brains Trust, as if it were a typical example. Dr Joad won't retaliate! Even their deepest convictions go into cold storage when they become dangerous. Earlier in the war, when it was safe to do so, 'Beachcomber' wrote viciously anti-Russian pamphlets, but no anti-Russian remarks appear in his column these days. They will again, however, if popular pro-Russian feeling dies down. I shall be interested to see whether either 'Beachcomber' or 'Timothy Shy' reacts to these remarks of mine. If so, it will be the first recorded instance of either of them attacking anyone likely to hit back. (They never did.)

TRIBUNE June 30, 1944

I notice that apart from the widespread complaint that the German pilotless planes 'seem so unnatural' (a bomb dropped by a live airman is quite natural, apparently), some journalists are denouncing them as barbarous, inhumane and 'an indiscriminate attack on civilians'.

After what we have been doing to the Germans over the past two years, this seems a bit thick, but it is the normal human response to every new weapon. Poison gas, the machine-gun, the submarine, gunpowder, and even the crossbow were similarly denounced in their day. Every weapon seems unfair until you have adopted it yourself. But I would not deny that the pilotless plane, flying bomb, or whatever its correct name may be, is an exceptionally unpleasant thing, because, unlike most other projectiles, it gives you time to think. What is your first reaction when you hear that droning, zooming noise? Inevitably it is a hope that the noise won't stop. You want to hear the bomb pass safely overhead and die away into the distance before the engine cuts out. In other words, you are hoping

it will fall on somebody else. So also when you dodge a shell or an ordinary bomb - but in that case you have only about five seconds to take cover and no time to speculate on the bottomless selfishness of the human being.

TRIBUNE July 7, 1944

When the Caliph Omar destroyed the libraries of Alexandria he is supposed to have kept the public baths warm for eighteen days with burning manuscripts, and great numbers of tragedies by Euripides and others are said to have perished, quite irrecoverably. I remember that when I read about this as a boy it simply filled me with enthusiastic approval. It was so many less words to look up in the dictionary - that was how I saw it. For, though I am only forty-one, I am old enough to have been educated at a time when Latin and Greek were only escapable with great difficulty, while 'English' was hardly regarded as a school subject at all.

Classical education is going down the drain at last, but even now there must be far more adults who have been flogged through the entire extant works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Vergil, Horace and various other Latin and Greek authors than have read the English masterpieces of the eighteenth century. People pay lip service to Fielding and the rest of them, of course, but they don't read them, as you can discover by making a few inquiries among your friends. How many people have ever read Tom Jones, for instance? Not so many have even read the later books of Gulliver's Travels. Robinson Crusoe has a sort of popularity in nursery versions, but the book as a whole is so little known that few people are even aware that the second part (the journey through Tartary) exists. Smollett, I imagine, is the least read of all. The central plot of Shaw's play, Pygmalion, is lifted out of Peregrine Pickle, and I believe that no one has ever pointed this out in print, which suggests that few people can have read the book. But what is strangest of all is that Smollett, so far as I know, has never been boosted by the Scottish Nationalists, who are so careful to claim Byron for their own. Yet Smollett, besides being one of the best novelists the English-speaking races have produced, was a Scotsman, and proclaimed it openly at a time when being so was anything but helpful to one's career.

Life in the civilized world.

(The family are at tea.)

Zoom-zoom-zoom!

'Is there an alert on?'

'No, it's all clear.'

'I thought there was an alert on.'

Zoom-zoom-zoom!

'There's another of those things coming!'

'It's all right, it's miles away.'

Zoom-zoom-ZOOM!

'Look out, here it comes! Under the table, quick!'

Zoom-zoom-zoom!

'It's all right, it's getting fainter.'

Zoom-zoom-ZOOM!

'It's coming back!'

'They seem to kind of circle round and come back again. They've got something on their tails that makes them do it. Like a torpedo.'

ZOOM-ZOOM-ZOOM!

'Christ! It's bang overhead!'

Dead silence.

'Now get right underneath. Keep your head well down. What a mercy baby isn't here!'

'Look at the cat! He's frightened too.'

'Of course animals know. They can feel the vibrations.'

BOOM!

'It's all right, I told you it was miles away.'

(Tea continues.)

I see that Lord Winterton, writing in the Evening Standard, speaks of the 'remarkable reticence (by no means entirely imposed by rule or regulation) which Parliament and press alike have displayed in this war to avoid endangering national security' and adds that it has 'earned the admiration of the civilized world'.

It is not only in war-time that the British press observes this voluntary reticence. One of the most extraordinary things about England is that there is almost no official censorship, and yet nothing that is actually offensive to the governing class gets into print, at least in any place where large numbers of people are likely to read it. If it is 'not done' to mention something or other, it just doesn't get mentioned. The position is summed up in the lines by (I think) Hilaire Belloc:

You cannot hope to bribe or twist
Thank God! the British journalist
But seeing what the man will do
Unbribed, there's no occasion to.

No bribes, no threats, no penalties – just a nod and a wink and the thing is done. A well-known example was the business of the Abdication. Weeks before the scandal officially broke, tens or hundreds of thousands of people had heard all about Mrs Simpson, and yet not a word got into the press, not even into the Daily Worker, although the American and European papers were having the time of their lives with the story. Yet I believe there was no definite official ban: just an official 'request' and a general agreement that to break the news prematurely 'would not do'. And

I can think of other instances of good news stories failing to see the light although there would have been no penalty for printing them.

Nowadays this kind of veiled censorship even extends to books. The M.O.I, does not, of course, dictate a party line or issue an index expurgatorius. It merely 'advises'. Publishers take manuscripts to the M.O.I, and the M.O.I, 'suggests' that this or that is undesirable, or premature, or 'would serve no good purpose'. And though there is no definite prohibition, no clear statement that this or that must not be printed, official policy is never flouted. Circus dogs jump when the trainer cracks his whip, but the really well-trained dog is the one that turns his somersault when there is no whip. And that is the state we have reached in this country thanks to three hundred years of living together without a civil war.

Here is a little problem sometimes used as an intelligence test.

A man walked four miles due south from his house and shot a bear. He then walked two miles due west, then walked another four miles due north and was back at his home again. What was the colour of the bear?

The interesting point is that - so far as my own observations go - men usually see the answer to this problem and women do not.

TRIBUNE July 14, 1944

I have received a number of letters, some of them quite violent ones, attacking me for my remarks on Miss Vera Brittain's anti-bombing pamphlet. There are two points that seem to need further comment.

First of all there is the charge, which is becoming quite a common one, that 'we started it,' i.e. that Britain was the first country to practise systematic bombing of civilians. How anyone can make this claim, with the history of the past dozen years in mind, is almost beyond me. The first act in the present war - some hours, if I remember rightly, before any declaration of war passed - was the German bombing of Warsaw. The Germans bombed and shelled the city so intensively that, according to the Poles, at one time 700 fires were raging simultaneously. They made a film of the destruction of Warsaw, which they entitled 'Baptism of Fire' and sent all round the world with the object of terrorising neutrals. Several years earlier than this the Condor Legion, sent to Spain by Hitler, had bombed one Spanish city after another. The 'silent raids' on Barcelona in 1938 killed several thousand people in a couple of days. Earlier than this the Italians had bombed entirely defenseless Abyssinians and boasted of their exploits as something screamingly funny. Bruno Mussolini wrote newspaper articles in which he described bombed Abyssinians 'bursting open like a rose', which he said was 'most amusing'. And the Japanese ever since 1931, and intensively since 1937, have been bombing crowded Chinese cities where there are not even any ARP arrangements, let alone any AA guns or fighter aircraft.

I am not arguing that two blacks make a white, nor that Britain's record is a particularly good one. In a number of 'little wars' from about 1920 onwards the RAF has dropped its bombs on Afghans, Indians and Arabs who had little or no power of hitting back. But it is simply untruthful to say that large-scale bombing of crowded town areas, with the object of causing panic, is a British invention. It was the Fascist states who started this practice, and so long as the air war went in their favour they avowed their aims quite clearly.

The other thing that needs dealing with is the parrot cry 'killing women and children'. I pointed out before, but evidently it needs repeating, that it is probably somewhat better to kill a cross-section of the population than to kill only the young men. If the figures published by the Germans are true, and we have really killed 1,200,000 civilians in our raids, that loss of life has probably harmed the German race somewhat less than a corresponding loss on the Russian front or in Africa and Italy.

Any nation at war will do its best to protect its children, and the number of children killed in raids probably does not correspond to their percentage of the general population. Women cannot be protected to the same extent, but the outcry against killing women, if you accept killing at all, is sheer sentimentality. Why is it worse to kill a woman than a man? The argument usually advanced is that in killing women you are killing the breeders, whereas men can be more easily spared. But this is a fallacy based on the notion that human beings can be bred like animals. The idea behind it is that since one man is capable of fertilizing a very large number of women, just as a prize ram fertilizes thousands of ewes, the loss of male lives is comparatively unimportant. Human beings, however, are not cattle. When the slaughter caused by war leaves a surplus of women, the enormous majority of those women bear no children. Male lives are very nearly as important, biologically, as female ones.

In the last war the British Empire lost nearly a million men killed, of whom about three-quarters came from these islands.

Most of them will have been under thirty. If all those young men had had only one child each when they should now have an extra 750,000 people round about the age of twenty. France, which lost much more heavily, never recovered from the slaughter of the last war, and it is doubtful whether Britain has fully recovered, either. We can't yet calculate the casualties of the present war, but the last one killed between ten and twenty million young men. Had it been conducted, as the next one will perhaps be, with flying bombs, rockets and other long-range weapons which kill old and young, healthy and unhealthy, male and female impartially, it would probably have damaged European civilization somewhat less than it did.

Contrary to what some of my correspondents seem to think, I have no enthusiasm for air raids, either ours or the enemy's. Like a lot of other people in this country, I am growing definitely tired of bombs. But I do object to the hypocrisy of accepting force as an instrument while squealing against this or that individual weapon, or of denouncing war while wanting to preserve the kind of society that makes war inevitable. I note in my diary for 1940 an expectation that commercial advertisements will have disappeared from the walls within a year. This seemed likely enough at the time, and a year or even two years later the disappearance seemed to be actually happening, though more slowly than I had expected. Advertisements were shrinking both in numbers and size, and the announcements of the various Ministries were more and more taking their place both on the walls and in the newspapers. Judging from this symptom alone, one would have said that commercialism was definitely on the downgrade. In the last two years, however, the commercial ad, in all its silliness and snobbishness, has made a steady comeback. In recent years I consider that the most offensive of all British advertisements are the ones for Rose's Lime Juice, with their 'young squire' motif and their P. G. Wodehouse dialogue.

'I fear you do not see me at my best this morning, Jenkins. There were jollifications last night. Your young master looked upon the wine when it was red and also upon the whisky when it was yellow. To use the vulgar phrase, I have a thick head. What do you think the doctor would prescribe, Jenkins?'

'If I might make so bold, sir, a glass of soda water with a dash of Rose's Lime Juice would probably have the desired effect.' 'Go to it, Jenkins! You were always my guide, philosopher and friend,' etc., etc., etc.

When you reflect that this advertisement appears, for instance, in every theatre programme, so that every theatre-goer is at any rate assumed to have a secret fantasy life in which he thinks of himself as a young man of fashion with faithful old retainers, the prospect of any drastic social change recedes perceptibly.

There are also the hairtonic adverts which tell you how Daphne got promotion in the W.A.A.F.S. (women's auxiliary air force) thanks to the neatness and glossiness of her hair. But these are misleading as well as whorish, for I seldom or never pass a group of officers in the W.A.A.F.S., A.T.S. or W.R.E.N.S. (women's royal naval service) without having cause to reflect that at any rate, promotion in the women's service has nothing to do with looks.

Part III

TRIBUNE August 4, 1944

Apropos of saturation bombing, a correspondent who disagreed with me very strongly added that he was by no means a pacifist. He recognized, he said, that 'the Hun had got to be beaten'. He merely objected to the barbarous methods that we are now using.

Now, it seems to me that you do less harm by dropping bombs on people than by calling them 'Huns'. Obviously one does not want to inflict death and wounds if it can be avoided, but I cannot feel that mere killing is all-important. We shall all be dead in less than a hundred years, and most of us by the sordid horror known as 'natural death'. The truly evil thing is to act in such a way that peaceful life becomes impossible. War damages the fabric of civilization not by the destruction it causes (the net effect of a war may even be to increase the productive capacity of the world as a whole), nor even by the slaughter of human beings, but by stimulating hatred and dishonesty. By shooting at your enemy you are not in the deepest sense wronging him. But by hating him, by inventing lies about him and bringing children up to believe them, by clamouring for unjust peace terms which make further wars inevitable, you are striking not at one perishable generation, but at humanity itself.

It is a matter of observation that the people least infected by war hysteria are the fighting soldiers. Of all people they are the least inclined to hate the enemy, to swallow lying propaganda or to demand a vindictive peace. Nearly all soldiers - and this applies even to professional soldiers in peace time - have a sane attitude towards war. They realize that it is disgusting, and that it may often be necessary. This is harder for a civilian, because the soldier's detached attitude is partly due to sheer exhaustion, to the sobering effects of danger, and to continuous friction with his own military machine. The safe and well-fed

civilian has more surplus emotion, and he is apt to use it up in hating somebody or other – the enemy if he is a patriot, his own side if he is a pacifist. But the war mentality is something that can be struggled against and overcome, just as the fear of bullets can be overcome. The trouble is that neither the Peace Pledge Union nor the Never Again Society know the war mentality when they see it. Meanwhile, the fact that in this war offensive nicknames like 'Hun' have not caught on with the big public seems to me a good omen.

What has always seemed to me one of the most shocking deeds of the last war was one that did not aim at killing anyone – on the contrary, it probably saved a great many lives. Before launching their big attack at Caporetto, the Germans flooded the Italian army with faked Socialist propaganda leaflets in which it was alleged that the German soldiers were ready to shoot their officers and fraternize with their Italian comrades, etc., etc. Numbers of Italians were taken in, came over to fraternize with the Germans, and were made prisoner – and, I believe, jeered at for their simple-mindedness. I have heard this defended as a highly intelligent and humane way of making war – which it is, if your sole aim is to save as many skins as possible. And yet a trick like that damages the very roots of human solidarity in a way that no mere act of violence could do.

I see that the railings are returning – only wooden ones, it is true, but still railings – in one London square after another. So the lawful denizens of the squares can make use of their treasured keys again, and the children of the poor can be kept out.

When the railings round the parks and squares were removed, the object was partly to accumulate scrap-iron, but the removal was also felt to be a democratic gesture. Many more green spaces were now open to the public, and you could stay in the parks till all hours instead of being hounded out at closing times by grim-faced keepers. It was also discovered that these railings were not only unnecessary but hideously ugly. The parks were improved out of recognition by being laid open, acquiring a friendly, almost rural look that they had never had before. And had the railings vanished permanently, another improvement would probably have followed. The dreary shrubberies of laurel and privet – plants not suited to England and always dusty, at any rate in London – would probably have been grubbed up and replaced by flower beds. Like the railings, they were merely put there to keep the populace out. However, the higher-ups managed to avert this reform, like so many others, and everywhere the wooden palisades are going up, regardless of the wastage of labour and timber.

When I was in the Home Guard we used to say that the bad sign would be when flogging was introduced. That has not happened yet, I believe, but all minor social symptoms point in the same direction. The worst sign of all – and I should expect this to happen almost immediately if the Tories win the General Election – will be the reappearance in the London streets of top-hats not worn by either undertakers or bank messengers. We hope to review before long – and meanwhile I take the opportunity of drawing attention to it – an unusual book called Branch Street, by Marie Paneth. The author is or was a voluntary worker at a children's club, and her book reveals the almost savage conditions in which some London children still grow up. It is not quite clear, however, whether these conditions are to any extent worse as a result of the war.

I should like to read – I suppose some such thing must exist somewhere, but I don't know of it – an authoritative account of the effect of the

war on children. Hundreds of thousands of town children have been evacuated to country districts, many have had their schooling interrupted for months at a time, others have had terrifying experiences with bombs (earlier in the war a little girl of eight, evacuated to a Hertfordshire village, assured me that she had been bombed out seven times), others have been sleeping in Tube shelters, sometimes for a year or so at a stretch. I would like to know to what extent the town children have adapted themselves to country life – whether they have grown interested in birds and animals, or whether they simply pine to be back among the picture houses – and whether there has been any significant increase in juvenile crime. The children described by Mrs Paneth sound almost like the gangs of 'wild children' who were a by-product of the Russian Revolution.

Back in the eighteenth century, when the India muslins were one of the wonders of the world, an Indian king sent envoys to the court of Louis XV to negotiate a trade agreement. He was aware that in Europe women wield great political influence, and the envoys brought with them a bale of costly muslins, which they had been instructed to present to Louis's mistress. Unfortunately their information was not up to date: Louis's not very stable affections had veered, and the muslins were presented to a mistress who had already been discarded. The mission was a failure, and the envoys were decapitated when they got home.

I don't know whether this story has a moral, but when I see the kind of people that our Foreign Office likes to get together with, I am often reminded of it.

TRIBUNE August 11, 1944

A few days ago a West African wrote to inform us that a certain London dance hall had recently erected a 'colour bar', presumably in order to please the American soldiers who formed an important part of its clientele. Telephone conversations with the management of the dance hall brought us the answers: (a) that the 'colour bar' had been cancelled, and (b) that it had never been imposed in the first place; but I think one can take it that our informant's charge had some kind of basis. There have been other similar incidents recently. For instance, I during last week a case in a magistrate's court brought out the fact that a West Indian Negro working in this country had been refused admission to a place of entertainment when he was wearing Home Guard uniform. And there have been many instances of Indians, Negroes and others being turned away from hotels on the ground that 'we don't take coloured I people'.

It is immensely important to be vigilant against this kind of thing, and to make as much public fuss as possible whenever it happens. For this is one of those matters in which making a fuss can achieve something. There is no kind of legal disability I against coloured people in this country, and, what is more, there I is very little popular colour feeling. (This is not due to any inherent virtue in the British people, as our behaviour in India shows. It is due to the fact that in Britain itself there is no colour problem.)

The trouble always arises in the same way. A hotel, restaurant or what-not is frequented by people who have money to spend who object to mixing with Indians or Negroes. They tell the proprietor that unless he imposes a colour bar they will go elsewhere. They may be a very small minority, and the proprietor may not be in agreement with them, but it is difficult for him to lose good customers; so he imposes the colour bar. This kind of thing cannot happen when public opinion is on the alert and

disagreeable publicity is given to any establishment where coloured people are insulted. Anyone who knows of a provable instance of colour discrimination ought always to expose it. Otherwise the tiny percentage of colour-snobs who exist among us can make endless mischief, and the British people are given a bad name which, as a whole, they do not deserve.

In the nineteen-twenties, when American tourists were as much a part of the scenery of Paris as tobacco kiosks and tin urinals, the beginnings of a colour bar began to appear even in France. The Americans spend money like water, and restaurant proprietors and the like could not afford to disregard them. One evening, at a dance in a very well-known cafe some Americans objected to the presence of a Negro who was there with an Egyptian woman. After making some feeble protests, the proprietor gave in, and the Negro was turned out.

Next morning there was a terrible hullabaloo and the cafe proprietor was hauled up before a Minister of the Government and threatened with prosecution. It had turned out that the offended Negro was the Ambassador of Haiti. People of that kind can usually get satisfaction, but most of us do not have the good fortune to be ambassadors, and the ordinary Indian, Negro or Chinese can only be protected against petty insult if other ordinary people are willing to exert themselves on his behalf.

TRIBUNE August 18, 1944

Apropos of my remarks on the railings round London squares, a correspondent writes: 'Are the squares to which you refer public or private properties? If private, I suggest that your comments in plain language advocate nothing less than theft and should be classed as such.'

If giving the land of England back to the people of England is theft, I am quite happy to call it theft. In his zeal to defend private property, my correspondent does not stop to consider how the so-called owners of the land got hold of it. They simply seized it by force, afterwards hiring lawyers to provide them with title-deeds. In the case of the enclosure of the common lands, which was going on from about 1600 to 1850, the land-grabbers did not even have the excuse of being foreign conquerors; they were quite frankly taking the heritage of their own countrymen, upon no sort of pretext except that they had the power to do so.

Except for the few surviving commons, the high roads, the lands of the National Trust, a certain number of parks, and the sea shore below high-tide mark, every square inch of England is 'owned' by a few thousand families. These people are just about as useful as so many tapeworms. It is desirable that people should own their own dwelling houses, and it is probably desirable that a farmer should own as much land as he can actually farm. But the ground-landlord in a town area has no function and no excuse for existence. He is merely a person who has found out a way of milking the public while giving nothing in return. He causes rents to be higher, he makes town planning more difficult, and he excludes children from green spaces: that is literally all that he does, except to draw his in-come. The removal of the railings in the squares was a first step against him. It was a very small step, and yet an appreciable one, as the present move to restore the railings shows. For three years or so the squares lay open, and their sacred turf was trodden by the feet of working-class children, a sight to make dividend-drawers gnash their false teeth. If that is theft, all I can say is, so much the better for theft.

I note that once again there is serious talk of trying to attract tourists to this country after the war. This, it is said, will bring in a welcome trickle of foreign currency. But it is quite safe to prophesy that the attempt will be a failure. Apart from the many other difficulties, our licensing laws and the artificial price of drink are quite enough to keep foreigners away. Why should people who are used to paying sixpence for a bottle of wine visit a country where a pint of beer costs a shilling? But even these prices are less dismaying to foreigners than the lunatic laws which permit you to buy a glass of beer at half past ten while forbidding you to buy it at twenty-five past, and which have done their best to turn the pubs into mere boozing shops by excluding children from them.

How downtrodden we are in comparison with most other peoples is shown by the fact that even people who are far from being 'temperance' don't seriously imagine that our licensing laws could be altered. Whenever I suggest that pubs might be allowed to open in the afternoon, or to stay open till midnight, I always get the same answer: 'The first people to object would be the publicans. They don't want to have to stay open twelve hours a day.' People assume, you see, that opening hours, whether long or short, must be regulated by the law, even for one-man businesses. In France, and in various other countries, a cafe proprietor opens or shuts just as it suits him. He can keep open the whole twenty-four hours if he wants to; and, on the other hand, if he feels like shutting his cafe and going away for a week, he can do that too. In England we have had no such liberty for about a hundred years, and people are hardly able to imagine it.

England is a country that ought to be able to attract tourists. It has much beautiful scenery, an equable climate, innumerable attractive villages and medieval churches, good beer, and food-stuffs of excellent natural taste. If you could walk where you chose instead of being fenced in by barbed wire and 'Trespassers will be Prosecuted' boards, if speculative builders had not been allowed to ruin every pleasant view within ten miles of a big town, if you could get a drink when you wanted it at a normal price, if an eatable meal in a country inn were a normal experience, and if Sunday were not artificially made into a day of misery, then foreign visitors might be expected to come here. But if those things were true England would no longer be England, and I fancy that we shall have to find some way of acquiring foreign currency that is more in accord with our national character. In spite of my campaign against the jackboot — in which I am not operating single-handed — I notice that jackboots are as common as ever in the columns of the newspapers. Even in the leading articles in the Evening Standard, I have come upon several of them lately. But I am still without any clear information as to what a jackboot is. It is a kind of boot that you put on when you want to behave tyrannically: that is as much as anyone seems to know.

Others besides myself have noted that war, when it gets into the leading articles, is apt to be waged with remarkably old-fashioned weapons. Planes and tanks do make occasional appearances, but as soon as an heroic attitude has to be struck, the only armaments mentioned are the sword ('We shall not sheathe the sword until', etc., etc.), the spear, the shield, the buckler, the trident, the chariot and the clarion. All of these are hopelessly out of date (the chariot, for instance, has not been in effective use since about A.D. 50), and even the purpose of some of them has been forgotten. What is a buckler, for instance? One school of thought holds that it is a small round shield, but another school

believes it to be a kind of belt. A clarion, I believe, is a trumpet, but most people imagine that a 'clarion call' merely means a loud noise. One of the early Mass Observation reports, dealing with the coronation of George VI, pointed out that what are called 'national occasions' always seem to cause a lapse into archaic language. The 'ship of state', for instance, when it makes one of its official appearances, has a prow and a helm instead of having a bow and a wheel, like modern ships. So far as it is applied to war, the motive for using this kind of language is probably a desire for euphemism. 'We will not sheathe the sword' sounds a lot more gentlemanly than 'We will keep on dropping block-busters', though in effect it means the same.

One argument for Basic English is that by existing side by side with Standard English it can act as a sort of corrective to the oratory of statesmen and publicists. High-sounding phrases, when translated into Basic, are often deflated in a surprising way. For example, I presented to a Basic expert the sentence, 'He little knew the fate that lay in store for him' - to be told that in Basic this would become 'He was far from certain what was going to happen'. It sounds decidedly less impressive, but it means the same. In Basic, I am told, you cannot make a meaningless statement without its being apparent that it is meaningless - which is quite enough to explain why so many schoolmasters, editors, politicians and literary critics object to it

TRIBUNE August 25, 1944

A certain amount of material dealing with Burma and the Burma campaign has been passed on to me by the India-Burma Association, which is an unofficial body representing the European communities in those countries, and standing for a 'moderate' policy based on the Cripps proposals.

The India-Burma Association complains with justice that Burma has been extraordinarily ill-served in the way of publicity. Not only has the general public no interest in Burma, in spite of its obvious importance from many points of view, but the authorities have not even succeeded in producing an attractive booklet which would tell people what the problems of Burma are and how they are related to our own. Newspaper reports of the fighting in Burma, from 1942 onwards, have been consistently uninformative, especially from a political point of view. As soon as the Japanese attack began the newspapers and the B.B.C. adopted the practice of referring to all the inhabitants of Burma as 'Burmans', even applying this name to the quite distinct and semi-savage peoples of the far north. This is not only about as accurate as calling a Swede an Italian, but masks the fact that the Japanese find their support mostly among the Burmese proper, the minorities being largely pro-British. In the present campaign, when prisoners are taken, the newspaper reports never state whether they are Japanese or whether they are Burmese and Indian partisans - a point of very great importance.

Almost all the books that have been published about the campaign of 1942 are misleading. I know what I am talking about, because I have had most of them to review. They have either been written by American journalists with no back-ground knowledge and a considerable anti-British bias, or by British officials who are on the defensive and anxious to cover up everything discreditable. Actually, the British officials and military men have been blamed for much that was not their fault, and the view of the Burma campaign held by left-wingers in this country was almost as distorted as that held by the Blimps. But this trouble arises because there is no official effort to publicize the truth. For to my knowledge

manuscripts do exist which give valuable information, but which, for commercial reasons, cannot find publishers.

I can give three examples. In 1942 a young Burman who had been a member of the Thakin (extreme Nationalist) party and had intrigued with the Japanese fled to India, having changed his mind about the Japanese when he saw what their rule was like. He wrote a short book which was published in India under the title of What Happened in Burma and which was obviously I authentic in the main. The Indian Government in its negligent way sent exactly two copies to England. I tried to induce various publishers to reissue it, but failed every time: they all gave the same reason - it was not worth wasting paper on a subject which the big public was not interested in. Later a Major Enriquez, who had published various travel books dealing with Burma, brought to England a diary covering the Burma campaign and the retreat into India. It was an extremely revealing - in places a disgracefully revealing - document, but it suffered the same fate as the other book. At the moment I am reading another manuscript which gives valuable background material about Burma's history, its economic conditions, its systems of land tenure, and so forth. But I would bet a small sum that it won't be published either, at any rate until the paper shortage lets up.

If paper and money are not forthcoming for books of this kind - books which may spill a lot of beans but do help to counteract the lies put about by Axis sympathizers - then the Government must not be surprised if the public knows nothing about Burma and cares less. And what applies to Burma applies to scores of other important but neglected subjects.

Meanwhile here is a suggestion. Whenever a document appears which is not commercially saleable but which is likely to be useful to future historians, it should be submitted to a committee set up by, for instance, the British Museum. If they consider it historically valuable they should have the power to print off a few copies and store them for the use of scholars. At present a manuscript rejected by the commercial publishers almost always ends up in the dustbin. How many possible correctives to accepted lies must have perished in this way!

TRIBUNE September 8, 1944

I have before me an exceptionally disgusting photograph, from the Star of August 29, of two partially undressed women, with shaven heads and with swastikas painted on their faces, being led through the streets of Paris amid grinning onlookers. The Star - not that I am picking on the Star, for most of the press has behaved likewise - reproduces this photograph with seeming approval.

I don't blame the French for doing this kind of thing. They have had four years of suffering, and I can partially imagine how they feel towards the collaborators. But it is a different matter when newspapers in this country try to persuade their readers that shaving women's heads is a nice thing to do. As soon as I saw this Star photograph, I thought, 'Where have I seen something like this before?' Then I remembered. Just about ten years ago, when the Nazi regime was beginning to get into its stride, very similar pictures of humiliated Jews being led through the streets of German cities were exhibited in the British press - but with this difference, that on that occasion we were not expected to approve.

Recently another newspaper published photographs of the dangling corpses of Germans hanged by the Russians in Kharkov, and carefully informed its readers that these executions had been filmed and that the public would

shortly be able to witness them at the new theatres. (Were children admitted, I wonder?)

There is a saying of Nietzsche which I have quoted before, but which is worth quoting again:

He who fights too long against dragons becomes a dragon himself;
and if you gaze too long into the abyss, the abyss will gaze into you.

'Too long', in this context, should perhaps be taken as meaning 'after the dragon is beaten'.

TRIBUNE October 13, 1944

Recently I was told the following story, and I have every reason to believe that it is true.

Among the German prisoners captured in France there are a certain number of Russians. Some time back two were captured who did not speak Russian or any other language that was known either to their captors or their fellow prisoners. They could, in fact, only converse with one another. A professor of Slavonic languages, brought down from Oxford, could make nothing of what they were saying. Then it happened that a sergeant who had served on the frontiers of India overheard them talking and recognized their language, which he was able to speak a little. It was Tibetan! After some questioning, he managed to get their story out of them.

Some years earlier they had strayed over the frontier into the Soviet Union and had been conscripted into a labour battalion, afterwards being sent to western Russia when the war with Germany broke out. They were taken prisoner by the Germans and sent to North Africa; later they were sent to France, then exchanged into a fighting unit when the Second Front opened, and taken prisoner by the British. All this time they had been able to speak to nobody but one another, and had no notion of what was happening or who was fighting whom.

It would round the story off neatly if they were now conscripted into the British army and sent to fight the Japanese, ending up somewhere in Central Asia, quite close to their native village, but still very much puzzled as to what it is all about.

An Indian journalist sends me a cutting of an interview he had with Bernard Shaw. Shaw says one or two sensible things and does state that the Congress leaders ought not to have been arrested, but on the whole it is a disgusting exhibition. Here are some samples:

Q: Supposing you were a National Leader of India, how would you have dealt with the British? What would have been your methods to achieve Indian independence?

A: Please do not suppose a situation that can never happen. The achievement of Indian independence is not my business.

Q: What do you think is the most effective way of getting the British out of India? What should the Indian people do?

A: Make them superfluous by doing their work better. Or assimilate them by cross-fertilization. British babies do not thrive in India.

What kind of answers are those to give to people who are labouring under a huge and justified grievance? Shaw also refuses to send birthday greetings to Gandhi, on the ground that this is a practice he never follows, and advises the Indian people not to bother if Britain repudiates the huge credit balance which India has piled up in this country during the war. I wonder what impression this interview would give to some young Indian student who has been a couple of years in jail and has dimly heard of Bernard Shaw as one of Britain's leading 'progressive' thinkers? Is it surprising if even very level-headed Indians are liable to a recurrent suspicion that 'all Englishmen are the same'?

Sir Osbert Sitwell's little book (A Letter to My Son, see As I Please 1944, September 8) and my remarks on it, brought in an unusually large amount of correspondence, and some of the points that were raised seem to need further comment.

One correspondent solved the whole problem by asserting that society can get along perfectly well without artists. It can also get along without scientists, engineers, doctors, bricklayers or road-menders – for the time being. It can even get along without sowing next year's harvest, provided it is understood that everyone is going to starve to death in about twelve months time.

This notion, which is fairly widespread and has been encouraged by people who should know better, simply restates the problem in a new form. What the artist does is not immediately and obviously necessary in the same way as what the milkman or the coal miner does. Except in the ideal society which has not yet arrived, or in very chaotic and prosperous ages like the one that is just ending, this means in practice that the artist must have some kind of patron – a ruling class, the Church, the State or a political party. And the question 'Which is best?' normally means 'Which interferes least?'

Several correspondents pointed out that one solution is for the artist to have an alternative means of livelihood. 'It is quite feasible,' says Mr P. Philips Price, to write and devote oneself to Socialism whilst accepting the patronage of the B.B.Q, M.O.I., Rank (J. Arthur Rank Film Productions) or C.E.M.A. (Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) ... the only way out is some minor form of prostitution, part time.' The difficulty here is that the practice of writing or any other art takes up a lot of time and energy. Moreover, the kind of job that a writer gets in war-time, if he is not in the Forces (or even if he is – for there is always P.R.), usually has something to do with propaganda. But this is itself a kind of writing. To compose a propaganda pamphlet or a radio feature needs just as much work as to write something you believe in. with the difference that the finished product is worthless. I could give a whole list of writers of promise or performance who are now being squeezed dry like oranges in some official job or other. It is true that in most cases it is voluntary. They want the war to be won, and they know that everyone must sacrifice something. But still the result is the same. They will come out of the war with nothing to show for their labours and with not even the stored-up experience that the soldier gets in return for his physical suffering.

If a writer is to have an alternative profession, it is much better that it should have nothing to do with writing. A particularly successful holder of two jobs was Trollope, who produced two thousand words between seven and nine o'clock every morning before leaving for his work at the Post Office. But Trollope was an exceptional man, and as he also hunted

three days a week and was usually playing whist till midnight, I suspect that he did not overwork himself in his official duties. Other correspondents pointed out that in a genuinely Socialist society the distinction between the artist and the ordinary man would vanish. Very likely, but then no such society yet exists. Others rightly claimed that State patronage is a better guarantee against starvation than private patronage, but seemed to me too ready to disregard the censorship that this implies.

The usual line was that it is better for the artist to be a responsible member of a community than an anarchic individualist. The issue, however, is not between irresponsible 'self-expression' and discipline; it is between truth and lies. Artists don't so much object to aesthetic discipline. Architects will design theatres or churches equally readily, writers will switch from the three-volume novel to the one-volume, or from the play to the film, according to the demand. But the point is that this is a political age. A writer inevitably writes - and less directly this applies to all the arts - about contemporary events, and his impulse is to tell what he believes to be the truth. But no government, no big organization, will pay for the truth. To take a crude example: can you imagine the British Government commissioning E. M. Forster to write A Passage to India? He could only write it because he was not dependent on State aid. Multiply that instance by a million, and you see the danger that is involved - not, indeed, in a centralized economy as such, but in our going forward into a collectivist age without remembering that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.

TRIBUNE February 2, 1945

A not-too-distant explosion shakes the house, the windows rattle in their sockets, and in the next room the class of 1964 wakes up and lets out a yell or two. Each time this happens I find myself thinking, 'Is it possible that human beings can continue with this lunacy very much longer?' You know the answer, of course. Indeed, the difficulty nowadays is to find anyone who thinks that there will not be another war in the fairly near future.

Germany, I suppose, will be defeated this year, and when Germany is out of the way Japan will not be able to stand up to the combined powers of Britain and the U.S.A. Then there will be a peace of exhaustion, with only minor and unofficial wars raging all over the place, and perhaps this so-called peace may last for decades. But after that, by the way the world is actually shaping, it may well be that war will become permanent. Already, quite visibly and more or less with the acquiescence of all of us, the world is splitting up into the two or three huge super-states forecast in James Burnham's Managerial Revolution. One cannot draw their exact boundaries as yet, but one can see more or less what areas they will comprise. And if the world does settle down into this pattern, it is likely that these vast states will be permanently at war with one another, though it will not necessarily be a very intensive or bloody kind of war. Their problems, both economic and psychological, will be a lot simpler if the doodlebugs are more or less continually whizzing to and fro.

If these two or three super-states do establish themselves, not only will each of them be too big to be conquered, but they will be under no necessity to trade with one another, and in a position to prevent all contact between their nationals. Already, for a dozen years or so, large areas of the earth have been cut off from one another, although technically at peace.

Some months ago, in this column, I pointed out that modern scientific inventions have tended to prevent rather than increase international communication. This brought me several angry letters from readers, but none of them were able to show that what I had said was false. They merely retorted that if we had Socialism, the aeroplane, the radio etc. would not be perverted to wrong uses. Very true, but then we haven't Socialism. As it is, the aeroplane is primarily a thing for dropping bombs and the radio primarily a thing for whipping up nationalism. Even before the war there was enormously less contact between the peoples of the earth than there had been thirty years earlier, and education was perverted, history re-written and freedom of thought suppressed to an extent undreamed of in earlier ages. And there is no sign whatever of these tendencies being reversed.

Maybe I am pessimistic. But at any rate those are the thoughts that cross my mind (and a lot of other people's too, I believe) every time the explosion of a V bomb booms through the mist.

Part IV

TRIBUNE November 8, 1946

Someone has just sent me a copy of an American fashion magazine which shall be nameless. It consists of 325 large quarto pages, of which no fewer than 15 are given up to articles on world politics, literature, etc. The rest consists entirely of pictures with a little letterpress creeping round their edges: pictures of ball dresses, mink coats, step-ins, panties, brassieres, silk stockings, slippers, perfumes, lipsticks, nail varnish — and, of course, of the women, unrelievedly beautiful, who wear them or make use of them. I do not know just how many drawings or photographs of women occur throughout the whole volume, but as there are 45 of them, all beautiful, in the first 50 pages, one can work it out roughly.

One striking thing when one looks at these pictures is the overbred, exhausted, even decadent style of beauty that now seems to be striven after. Nearly all of these women are immensely elongated. A thin-boned, ancient-Egyptian type of face seems to predominate: narrow hips are general, and slender non-prehensile hands like those of a lizard are everywhere. Evidently it is a real physical type, for it occurs as much in the photographs as in the drawings. Another striking thing is the prose style of the advertisements, an extraordinary mixture of sheer lushness with clipped and sometimes very expressive technical jargon. Words like suave-mannered, custom-finished, contour-conforming, mitt-back, innersole, backdip, midriff, swoosh, swash, curvaceous, slenderise and pet-smooth are flung about with evident full expectation that the reader will understand them at a glance. Here are a few sample sentences taken at random:

'A new Shimmer Sheen colour that sets your hands and his head in a whirl.' 'Bared and beautifully bosomy.' 'Feathery-light Milliken Fleece to keep her kitten-slug!' 'Others see you through a veil of sheer beauty, and they wonder why!' 'Gentle discipline for curves in lacy lastex pantie-girdle.' 'An exclamation point of a dress that depends on fluid fabric for much of its drama.' 'Suddenly your figure lifts . . . lovely in the litheness of a Foundette pantie-girdle.' 'Lovely to look at, lovelier to wear is this original Lady Duff gown with its shirred cap

sleeves and accentuated midriff.' 'Supple and tissue-light, yet wonderfully curve-holding.' 'The miracle of figure flattery!' 'Moulds your bosom into proud feminine lines.' 'Isn't it wonderful to know that Corsees wash and wear and whittle you down ... even though they weigh only four ounces!' 'The distilled witchery of one woman who was forever desirable . . . forever beloved . . . Forever Amber.' And so on and so on and so on.

A fairly diligent search through the magazine reveals two discreet allusions to grey hair, but if there is anywhere a direct mention of fatness or middle age I have not found it. Birth and death are not mentioned either: nor is work, except that a few recipes for breakfast dishes are given. The male sex enters directly or indirectly into perhaps one advertisement in twenty, and photographs of dogs or kittens appear here and there. In only two pictures, out of about three hundred, is a child represented. On the front cover there is a coloured photograph of the usual elegant female standing on a chair while a grey-haired, spectacled, crushed-looking man in shirt-sleeves kneels at her feet, doing something to the edge of her skirt. If one looks closely one finds that he is about to take a measurement with a yard-measure. But to a casual glance he looks as though he were kissing the hem of the garment – not a bad symbolical picture of American civilization, or at least of one important side of it.

One interesting example of our unwillingness to face facts and our consequent readiness to make gestures which are known in advance to be useless, is the present campaign to Keep Death off the Roads.

The newspapers have just announced that road deaths for September dropped by nearly 80 as compared with the previous September. This is very well so far as it goes, but the improvement will probably not be kept up – at any rate, it will not be progressive – and meanwhile everyone knows that you can't solve the problem while our traffic system remains what it is. Accidents happen because on narrow, inadequate roads, full of blind corners and surrounded by dwelling houses, vehicles and pedestrians are moving in all directions at all speeds from three miles an hour to sixty or seventy. If you really want to keep death off the roads, you would have to replan the whole road system in such a way as to make collisions impossible. Think out what this means (it would involve, for example, pulling down and rebuilding the whole of London), and you can see that it is quite beyond the power of any nation at this moment. Short of that you can only take palliative measures, which ultimately boil down to making people more careful.

But the only palliative measure that would make a real difference is a drastic reduction in speed. Cut down the speed limit to twelve miles an hour in all built-up areas, and you would cut out the vast majority of accidents. But this, everyone will assure you, is 'impossible'. Why is it impossible? Well, it would be unbearably irksome. It would mean that every road journey took twice or three times as long as it takes at present. Besides, you could never get people to observe such a speed limit. What driver is going to crawl along at twelve miles an hour when he knows that his engine would do fifty? It is not even easy to keep a modern car down to twelve miles an hour and remain in high gear – and so on and so forth, all adding up to the statement that slow travel is of its nature intolerable.

In other words we value speed more highly than we value human life. Then why not say so, instead of every few years having one of these hypocritical campaigns (at present it is 'Keep Death off the Roads' – a few years back it was 'Learn the Kerb Step'), in the full knowledge that while our roads remain as they are, and present speeds are kept up, the slaughter must continue?

A sidelight on bread rationing. My neighbour in Scotland this summer was a crofter engaged on the enormous labour of reclaiming a farm which has been derelict for several years. He has no helper except a sister, he has only one horse, and he possesses only the most primitive machinery, which does not even include a reaper. Throughout this summer he certainly did not work less than fourteen hours a day, six days a week. When bread rationing started he put in for the extra ration, only to find that, though he could, indeed, get more bread than a sedentary worker, he was not entitled to the full agricultural labourer's ration. The reason? That within the meaning of the act he is not an agricultural labourer! Since he is 'on his own' he ranks as a farmer, and it is assumed that he eats less bread than he would do if he were working for wages for somebody else.

TRIBUNE November 11, 1946

As the clouds, most of them much larger and dirtier than a man's hand, come blowing up over the political horizon, there is one fact that obtrudes itself over and over again. This is that the Government's troubles, present and future, arise quite largely from its failure to publicise itself properly.

People are not told with sufficient clarity what is happening, and why, and what may be expected to happen in the near future. As a result, every calamity, great or small, takes the mass of the public by surprise, and the Government incurs unpopularity by doing things which any government, of whatever colour, would have to do in the same circumstances.

Take one question which has been much in the news lately but has never been properly thrashed out: the immigration of foreign labour into this country. Recently we have seen a tremendous outcry at the TUC (Trades Union Congress) conference against allowing Poles to work in the two places where labour is most urgently needed – in the mines and on the land.

It will not do to write this off as something 'got up' by Communist sympathisers, nor on the other hand to justify it by saying that the Polish refugees are all Fascists who 'strut about' wearing monocles and carrying brief-cases. The question is, would the attitude of the British trade unions be any friendlier if it were a question, not of alleged Fascists but of the admitted victims of Fascism?

For example, hundreds of thousands of homeless Jews are now trying desperately to get to Palestine. No doubt many of them will ultimately succeed, but others will fail. How about inviting, say, 100,000 Jewish refugees to settle in this country? Or what about the Displaced Persons, numbering nearly a million, who are dotted in camps all over Germany, with no future and no place to go, the United States and the British Dominions having already refused to admit them in significant numbers? Why not solve their problem by offering them British citizenship?

It is easy to imagine what the average Briton's answer would be. Even before the war, with the Nazi persecutions in full swing, there was no popular support for the idea of allowing large numbers of Jewish refugees

into this country: nor was there any strong move to admit the hundreds of thousands of Spaniards who had fled from Franco to be penned up behind barbed wire in France.

For that matter, there was very little protest against the internment of the wretched German refugees in 1940. The comments I most often overheard at the time were 'What did they want to come here for?' and 'They're only after our jobs'.

The fact is that there is strong popular feeling in this country against foreign immigration. It arises partly from simple xenophobia, partly from fear of undercutting in wages, but above all from the out-of-date notion that Britain is over populated and that more population means more unemployment.

Actually, so far from having more workers than jobs, we have a serious labour shortage which will be accentuated by the continuance of conscription, and which will grow worse, not better, because of the ageing of the population.

Meanwhile our birthrate is still frighteningly low, and several hundred thousand women of marriageable age have no chance of getting husbands. But how widely are these facts known or understood?

In the end it is doubtful whether we can solve our problems without encouraging immigration from Europe. In a tentative way the Government has already tried to do this, only to be met by ignorant hostility, because the public has not been told the relevant facts beforehand. So also with countless other unpopular things that will have to be done from time to time.

But the most necessary step is not to prepare public opinion for particular emergencies, but to raise the general level of political understanding: above all, to drive home the fact, which has never been properly grasped, that British prosperity depends largely on factors outside Britain.

This business of publicising and explaining itself is not easy for a Labour Government, faced by a press which at bottom is mostly hostile. Nevertheless, there are other ways of communicating with the public, and Mr Attlee and his colleagues might well pay more attention to the radio, a medium which very few politicians in this country have ever taken seriously.

There is one question which at first sight looks both petty and disgusting but which I should like to see answered. It is this. In the innumerable hangings of war criminals which have taken place all over Europe during the past few years, which method has been followed — the old method of strangulation, or the modern, comparatively humane method which is supposed to break the victim's neck at one snap?

A hundred years ago or more, people were hanged by simply hauling them up and letting them kick and struggle until they died, which might take a quarter of an hour or so. Later the drop was introduced, theoretically making death instantaneous, though it does not always work very well.

In recent years, however, there seems to have been a tendency to revert to strangulation. I did not see the news film of the hanging of the German war criminals at Kharkov, but the descriptions in the British press

appeared to show that the older method was used. So also with various executions in the Balkan countries.

The newspaper accounts of the Nuremberg hangings were ambiguous. There was talk of a drop, but there was also talk of the condemned men taking ten or twenty minutes to die. Perhaps, by a typically Anglo-Saxon piece of compromise, it was decided to use a drop but to make it too short to be effective.

It is not a good symptom that hanging should still be the accepted form of capital punishment in this country. Hanging is a barbarous, inefficient way of killing anybody, and at least one fact about it – quite widely known, I believe – is so obscene as to be almost unprintable.

Still, until recently we did feel rather uneasy on the subject, and we did have our hangings in private. Indeed, before the war, public execution was a thing of the past in nearly every civilised country. Now it seems to be returning, at least for political crimes, and though we ourselves have not actually reintroduced it as yet, we participate at second hand by watching the news films.

It is queer to look back and think that only a dozen years ago the abolition of the death penalty was one of those things that every enlightened person advocated as a matter of course, like divorce reform or the independence of India. Now, on the other hand, it is a mark of enlightenment not merely to approve of executions but to raise an outcry because there are not more of them.

Therefore it seems to me of some importance to know whether strangulation is now coming to be the normal practice. For if people are being taught to gloat not only over death but over a peculiarly horrible form of torture, it marks another turn on the downward spiral that we have been following ever since 1933.

TRIBUNE December 6, 1946

With great enjoyment I have just been rereading Trilby, George du Maurier's justly popular novel, one of the best specimens of that 'good bad' literature which the English-speaking peoples seem to have lost the secret of producing. Trilby is an imitation of Thackeray, a very good imitation and immensely readable – Bernard Shaw, if I remember rightly, considered it to be better than Thackeray in many ways – but to me the most interesting thing about it is the different impressions one derives from reading it first before and then after the career of Hitler.

The thing that now hits one in the eye in reading Trilby is its antisemitism. I suppose, although few people actually read the book now, its central story is fairly widely known, the name of Svengali having become a by-word, like that of Sherlock Holmes. A Jewish musician – not a composer, but a brilliant pianist and music teacher – gets into his power an orphaned Irish girl, a painters' model, who has a magnificent voice but happens to be tone-deaf. Having hypnotised her one day to cure an attack of neuralgia, he discovers that when she is in the hypnotic trance she can be taught to sing in tune.

Thereafter, for about two years, the pair of them travel from one European capital to another, the girl singing every night to enormous and ecstatic audiences, and never knowing, in her waking life, that she is a singer. The end comes when Svengali dies suddenly in the middle of a concert and Trilby breaks down and is booted off the stage. That is the

main story, though of course there is much else, including an unhappy love affair and three clean-living English painters who make a foil for Svengali's villainy.

There is no question that the book is antisemitic. Apart from the fact that Svengali's vanity, treacherousness, selfishness, personal uncleanliness and so forth are constantly connected with the fact that he is a Jew, there are the illustrations. Du Maurier, better known for his drawings in Punch than for his writings, illustrated his own book, and he made Svengali into a sinister caricature of the traditional type. But what is most interesting is the divergence of the antisemitism of that date - 1895, the period of the Dreyfus Case - and that of today.

To begin with, du Maurier evidently holds that there are two kinds of Jew, good ones and bad ones, and that there is a racial difference between them. There enters briefly into the story another Jew, Glorioli, who possesses all the virtues and qualities that Svengali lacks. Glorioli is 'one of the Sephardim' - of Spanish extraction, that is - whereas Svengali, who comes from German Poland, is 'an oriental Israelite Hebrew Jew'. Secondly du Maurier considers that to have a dash of Jewish blood is an advantage. We are told that the hero, Little Billee, may have had some Jewish blood, of which there was a suggestion in his features, and 'fortunately for the world, and especially for ourselves, most of us have in our veins at least a minimum of that precious fluid'. Clearly, this is not the Nazi form of antisemitism.

And yet the tone of all the references to Svengali is almost unconsciously contemptuous, and the fact that du Maurier chose a Jew to play such a part is significant. Svengali, who cannot sing himself and has to sing, as it were, through Trilby's lungs, represents that well-known type, the clever underling who acts as the brains of some more impressive person.

It is queer how freely du Maurier admits that Svengali is more gifted than the three Englishmen, even than Little Billee, who is represented, unconvincingly, as a brilliant painter. Svengali has 'genius', but the others have 'character', and 'character' is what matters. It is the attitude of the rigger-playing prefect towards the spectacled 'swot', and it was probably the normal attitude towards Jews at that time. They were natural inferiors, but of course they were cleverer, more sensitive and more artistic than ourselves so such qualities are of secondary importance. Nowadays, the English are less sure of themselves, less confident that stupidity always wins in the end, and the prevailing form of antisemitism has changed, not altogether for the better.

In last week's Tribune Mr Julian Symons remarked - rightly, I think - that Aldous Huxley's later novels are much inferior to his earlier ones. But he might have added that this kind of falling-off is usual in imaginative writers, and that it only goes unnoticed when a writer is, so to speak, carried forward by the momentum of his earlier books. We value H. G. Wells, for example, for Tono-Bungay, Mr Polly, The Time Machine, etc. If he had stopped writing in 1920 his reputation would stand quite as high as it does: if we knew him only by the books he wrote after that date, we should have rather a low opinion of him. A novelist does not, any more than a boxer or a ballet dancer, last for ever. He has an initial impulse which is good for three or four books, perhaps even for a dozen, but which must exhaust itself sooner or later. Obviously one cannot lay down any rigid rule, but in many cases the creative impulse seems to last for about 15 years: in a prose writer these 15 years would probably be between the ages of 30 and 45, or thereabouts. A few writers,

it is true, have a much longer lease of life, and can go on developing when they are middle-aged or even old. But these are usually writers (examples: Yeats, Eliot, Hardy, Tolstoy) who make a sudden, almost violent change in their style, or their subject-matter, or both, and who may even tend to repudiate their earlier work.

Many writers, perhaps most, ought simply to stop writing when they reach middle age. Unfortunately our society will not let them stop. Most of them know no other way of earning a living, and writing, with all that goes with it — quarrels, rivalries, flattery, the sense of being a semi-public figure — is habit-forming. In a reasonable world a writer who had said his say would simply take up some other profession. In a competitive society he feels, just as a politician does, that retirement is death. So he continues long after his impulse is spent, and, as a rule, the less conscious he is of imitating himself, the more grossly he does it.

Early this year I met an American publisher who told me that his firm had just had a nine-months lawsuit from which it had emerged partially victorious, though out of pocket. It concerned the printing of a four-letter word which most of us use every day, generally in the present participle.

The United States is usually a few years ahead of Britain in these matters. You could print 'b —' in full in American books at a time when it had to appear in English ones as B dash. Recently it has become possible in England to print the word in full in a book, but in periodicals it still has to be B dash. Only five or six years ago it was printed in a well-known monthly magazine, but the last-minute panic was so great that a weary staff had to black the word out by hand.

As to the other word, the four-letter one, it is still unprintable in periodicals in this country, but in books it can be represented by its first letter and a dash. In the United States this point was reached at least a dozen years ago. Last year the publishing arm in question tried the experiment of printing the word in full. The book was suppressed, and after nine months of litigation the suppression was upheld. But in the process an important step forward was made. It was ruled that you may now print the first and last letters of the word with two asterisks in between, clearly indicating that it had four letters. This makes it reasonably sure that within a few years the word will be printable in full.

So does progress continue — and it is genuine progress, in my opinion, for if only our half dozen 'bad' words could be got off the lavatory wall and on to the printed page, they would soon lose their magical quality and the habit of swearing, degrading to our thoughts and weakening to our language, might become less common.

TRIBUNE December 13, 1946

When one reads the reports of UNO conferences, or international negotiations of any kind, it is difficult not to be reminded of l'Attaque and similar war games that children used to play, with cardboard pieces representing battleships, aeroplanes and so forth, each of which had a fixed value and could be countered in some recognised way. In fact, one might almost invent a new game called Uno, to be played in enlightened homes where the parents do not want their children to grow up with a militaristic outlook.

The pieces in this game are called the proposal, the démarche, the formula, the stumbling-block, the stalemate, the deadlock, the bottleneck and the vicious circle. The object of the game is to arrive at a formula, and though details vary, the general outline of play is always much the same. First the players assemble, and somebody leads off with the proposal. This is countered by the stumbling-block, without which the game could not develop. The stumbling-block then changes into a bottleneck, or more often into a deadlock or a vicious circle. A deadlock and a vicious circle occurring simultaneously produce a stalemate, which may last for weeks. Then suddenly someone plays the démarche. The démarche makes it possible to produce a formula, and once the formula has been found the players can go home, leaving everything as it was at the beginning.

At the moment of writing, the front page of my morning paper has broken out into a pink rash of optimism. It seems that everything is going to be all right after all. The Russians will agree to inspection of armaments, and the Americans will internationalise the atomic bomb. On another page of the same paper are reports of events in Greece which amount to a state of war between the two groups of powers who are being so chummy in New York.

But while the game of deadlocks and bottle-necks goes on, another more serious game is also being played. It is governed by two axioms. One is that there can be no peace without a general surrender of sovereignty: the other is that no country capable of defending its sovereignty ever surrenders it. If one keeps these axioms in mind one can generally see the relevant facts in international affairs through the smoke-screen with which the newspapers surround them. At the moment the main facts are:

1. The Russians, whatever they may say, will not agree to genuine inspection of their territories by foreign observers.

2. The Americans, whatever they may say, will not let slip the technological lead in armaments.

3. No country is now in a condition to fight an all-out major war.

These, although they may be superseded later, are at present the real counters in the real game, and one gets nearer the truth by constantly remembering them than by alternately rejoicing and despairing over the day-to-day humbug of conferences.

TRIBUNE December 20, 1946

An advertisement in my Sunday paper sets forth in the form of a picture the four things that are needed for a successful Christmas. At the top of the picture is a roast turkey; below that, a Christmas pudding; below that, a dish of mince pies, and below that, a tin of —'s Liver Salt.

It is a simple recipe for happiness. First the meal, then the antidote, then another meal. The ancient Romans were the great masters of this technique. However, having just looked up the word vomitorium in the Latin dictionary, I find that after all it does not mean a place where you went to be sick after dinner. So perhaps this was not a normal feature of every Roman home, as is commonly believed.

Implied in the above-mentioned advertisement is the notion that a good meal means a meal at which you overeat yourself. In principle I agree. I only add in passing that when we gorge ourselves this Christmas, if we do get the chance to gorge ourselves, it is worth giving a thought to the

thousand million human beings, or thereabouts, who will be doing no such thing. For in the long run our Christmas dinners would be safer if we could make sure that everyone else had a Christmas dinner as well. But I will come back to that presently.

The only reasonable motive for not overeating at Christmas would be that somebody else needs the food more than you do. A deliberately austere Christmas would be an absurdity. The whole point of Christmas is that it is a debauch – as it was probably long before the birth of Christ was arbitrarily fixed at that date. Children know this very well. From their point of view Christmas is not a day of temperate enjoyment, but of fierce pleasures which they are quite willing to pay for with a certain amount of pain. The awakening all about 4 am to inspect your stocking; the quarrels over toys at through the morning, and the exciting whiffs of mincemeat and sage-and-onions escaping from the kitchen door; the battle with enormous platefuls of turkey, and the pulling of the wishbone; the darkening of the windows and the entry of the flaming plum pudding; the hurry to make sure that everyone has a piece on his plate while the brandy is still alight; the momentary panic when it is rumoured that Baby has swallowed the threepenny bit; the stupor all through the afternoon; the Christmas cake with almond icing an inch thick; the peevishness next morning and the castor oil on December 27th – it is an up-and-down business, by no means all pleasant, but well worth while for the sake of its more dramatic moments.

Teetotallers and vegetarians are always scandalised by this attitude. As they see it, the only rational objective is to avoid pain and to stay alive as long as possible. If you refrain from drinking alcohol, or eating meat, or whatever it is, you may expect to live an extra five years, while if you overeat or overdrink you will pay for it in acute physical pain on the following day. Surely it follows that all excesses, even a once-a-year outbreak such as Christmas, should be avoided as a matter of course?

Actually it doesn't follow at all. One may decide, with full knowledge of what one is doing, that an occasional good time is worth the damage it inflicts on one's liver. For health is not the only thing that matters: friendship, hospitality, and the heightened spirits and change of outlook that one gets by eating and drinking in good company are also valuable. I doubt whether, on balance, even outright drunkenness does harm, provided it is infrequent – twice a year, say. The whole experience, including the repentance afterwards, makes a sort of break in one's mental routine, comparable to a weekend in a foreign country, which is probably beneficial.

In all ages men have realised this. There is a wide consensus of opinion, stretching back to the days before the alphabet, that whereas habitual soaking is bad, conviviality is good, even if one does sometimes feel sorry for it next morning. How enormous is the literature of eating and drinking, especially drinking, and how little that is worth while has been said on the other side! Offhand I can't remember a single poem in praise of water, i.e. water regarded as a drink. It is hard to imagine what one could say about it. It quenches thirst: that is the end of the story. As for poems in praise of wine, on the other hand, even the surviving ones would fill a shelf of books.

The poets started turning them out on the very day when the fermentation of the grape was first discovered. Whisky, brandy and other distilled liquors have been less eloquently praised, partly because they came later in time. But beer has had quite a good press, starting well back in the

Middle Ages, long before anyone had learned to put hops in it. Curiously enough, I can't remember a poem in praise of stout, not even draught stout, which is better than the bottled variety, in my opinion. There is an extremely disgusting description in Ulysses of the stout-vats in Dublin. But there is a sort of back-handed tribute to stout in the fact that this description, though widely known, has not done much towards putting the Irish off their favourite drink.

The literature of eating is also large, though mostly in prose. But in all the writers who have enjoyed describing food, from Rabelais to Dickens and from Petronius to Mrs Beeton, I cannot remember a single passage which puts dietetic considerations first. Always food is felt to be an end in itself. No one has written memorable prose about vitamins, or the dangers of an excess of proteins, or the importance of masticating everything thirty-two times. All in all, there seems to be a heavy weight of testimony on the side of overeating and overdrinking, provided always that they take place on recognised occasions and not too frequently.

But ought we to overeat and overdrink this Christmas? We ought not to, nor will most of us get the opportunity. I am writing in praise of Christmas, but in praise of Christmas 1947, or perhaps 1948. The world as a whole is not exactly in a condition for festivities this year. Between the Rhine and the Pacific there cannot be very many people who are in need of —'s Liver Salt. In India there are, and always have been about 100 million people who only get one square meal a day. In China, conditions are no doubt much the same. In Germany, Austria, Greece and elsewhere, scores of millions of people are existing on a diet which keeps breath in the body but leaves no strength for work. All over the war-wrecked areas from Brussels to Stalingrad, other uncounted millions are living in the cellars of bombed houses, in hide-outs in the forests, or in squalid huts behind barbed wire. It is not so pleasant to read almost simultaneously that a large proportion of our Christmas turkeys will come from Hungary, and that the Hungarian writers and journalists — presumably not the worst-paid section of the community — are in such desperate straits that they would be glad to receive presents of saccharine and cast-off clothing from English sympathisers. In such circumstances we could hardly have a 'proper' Christmas, even if the materials for it existed.

But we will have one sooner or later, in 1947, or 1948, or maybe even in 1949. And when we do, may there be no gloomy voices of vegetarians or teetotallers to lecture us about the things that we are doing to the linings of our stomachs. One celebrates a feast for its own sake, and not for any supposed benefit to the lining of one's stomach. Meanwhile Christmas is here, or nearly. Santa Claus is rounding up his reindeer, the postman staggers from door to door beneath his bulging sack of Christmas cards, the black markets are humming, and Britain has imported over 7,000 crates of mistletoe from France. So I wish everyone an old-fashioned Christmas in 1947, and meanwhile, half a turkey, three tangerines, and a bottle of whisky at not more than double the legal price.

TRIBUNE February 21, 1947

Manchester Evening News, for Tribune.

For the third and fourth weeks of February 1947, the national weekend reviews and many trade papers were suspended from publication by government order because of the severe shortage of fuel and the consequent power cuts. To help out during the crisis, The Observer, the

Manchester Evening News, and the Daily Herald offered Tribune the hospitality of their columns. Orwell refers to the suspension and the loss of revenue for Tribune in his letter to Dwight Macdonald of 26 February 1947. The following is an extract-row George Orwell's page, 'As I Please,' included each week in 'Tribune'.

The news that, for the second time in the last few months, a play banned from the stage is to be broadcast by the B.B.C. (which will probably enable it to reach a much bigger public than it would if it were acted) brings out once again the absurdity of the rules governing literary censorship in Britain.

It is only stage plays and films that have to be submitted for censorship before they appear. So far as books go you can print what you like and take the risk of prosecution. Thus, banned plays like Granville Barker's 'Waste' (1) and Bernard Shaw's 'Mrs. Warren's Profession' could immediately appear in book form with no danger of prosecution, and no doubt sell all the better for the scandal that had happened beforehand. It is fair to say that, if they are any good, banned plays usually see the light sooner or later. Even 'Waste,' which brought in politics as well as sex, was finally allowed to appear thirty years after it was written, when the topicality which gave it a good deal of its force had vanished.

The trouble with the Lord Chamberlain's censorship of plays is not that it happens, but that it is barbarous and stupid-being, apparently, done by bureaucrats with no literary training. If there is to be censorship, it is better that it should happen beforehand, so that the author may know where he stands. Books are only very rarely banned in Britain, but the bannings that do happen are usually quite arbitrary. 'The Well of Loneliness' (2) for example, was suppressed, while other books on the same theme, appearing round about the same time, went unnoticed.

The book that gets dropped on is the one that happens to have been brought to the attention of some illiterate official. Perhaps half the novels now published might suffer this fate if they happened to get into the right hands. Indeed - though the dead are always respectable - I doubt whether Petronius, or Chaucer, or Rabelais, or Shakespeare would remain un-bowdlerised if our magistrates and police were greater readers.

(1) Waste by Harley Granville-Barker (1877-1946) was banned by the Lord Chamberlain in 1907 because the play, a tragedy, included an abortion. It was publicly presented in 1936.

(2) (Marguerite) Radclyffe Hall (1880-1943), novelist and poet. She published several volumes of poetry, 1906-15, and then novels and stories, including Adam's Breed (1926), The Well of Loneliness (1928), and The Master of the House (1932). Adam's Breed won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, Femina Vie Heureuse Prize, and the Eichelberger Gold Humane Award. The Well of Loneliness was withdrawn in England on 28 August 1928 following the scandal aroused because of its depiction of lesbianism. It was immediately reissued in Paris and it was also published in New York, in 1928, with a commentary by Havelock Ellis. The novel was republished in London (without commentary) in 1949. Miss Hall's companion, Lady Una Vincenzo Troubridge, wrote The Life and Death of Raddyffe Hall (1961).

TRIBUNE February 28, 1947

(Manchester Evening News for Tribune, 28 February 1947) (1)

One thing one notices in these days when typewriters have become so scarce is the astonishing badness of nearly everyone's handwriting. A handwriting which is both pleasant to look at and easy to read is now a very rare thing. To bring about an improvement we should probably have to evolve a generally accepted 'style' of writing such as we possessed in the past and have now lost.

For several centuries(2) in the Middle Ages the professional scribes wrote an exquisite script, or rather a series of scripts, which no one now living could equal. Then handwriting declined, reviving in the nineteenth century after the invention of the steel pen. The style then favoured was 'copperplate.' It was neat and legible, but it was full of unnecessary lines and did not fit in with the modern tendency to get rid of ornament wherever possible. Then it became the fashion to teach children script, usually with disastrous results. To write script with real neatness one practically has to learn to draw, and it is impossible to write it as rapidly as a cursive hand. Many young or youngish people now make use of an uneasy compromise between script and copperplate, and indeed there are many adult and fully literate people whose handwriting has never properly 'formed.'

It would be interesting to know whether there is any connection between neat handwriting and literary ability. I must say that the modern examples I am able to think of do not seem to prove much. Miss Rebecca West has an exquisite handwriting, and so has Mr. Middleton Murry. Sir Osbert Sitwell, Mr. Stephen Spender, and Mr. Evelyn Waugh all have handwritings which, to put it as politely as possible, are not good. Professor Laski writes a hand which is attractive to look at but difficult to read. Arnold Bennett wrote a beautiful tiny hand over which he took immense pains. H. G. Wells had an attractive but untidy writing. Carlyle's writing was so bad that one compositor is said to have left Edinburgh in order to get away from the job of setting it up. Mr. Bernard Shaw writes a small, clear but not very elegant hand. And as for the most famous and respected of living English novelists, his writing is such that when I was at the B.B.C. and had the honour of putting him on the air once a month there was only one secretary in the whole department who could decipher his manuscripts(3).

(1) See headnote to 'As I Please,' from Feb. 21, 1947 for publication of Orwell's column in the Manchester Evening News. Another section, numbered here 75A, appeared the preceding day in the Daily Herald. One of the trade papers to which the Manchester Evening News gave hospitality during the crisis was The Shoe and Leather Record. In a report from that journal printed immediately below Orwell's column was a statement that the fuel crisis had caused a loss in production of 10,000,000 shoes, giving added point to Orwell's difficulty in finding footwear.

(2) (centuries) printed as countries.

(3) The reference is to E. M. Forster's handwriting.

TRIBUNE 7 March 1947

SOME time ago a foreign visitor asked me if I could recommend a good, representative anthology of English verse. When I thought it over I found

that I could not name a single one that seemed to me satisfactory. Of course there are innumerable period anthologies, but nothing, so far as I know, that attempts to cover the whole of English literature except Palgrave's Golden Treasury and, more comprehensive and more up-to-date, The Oxford Book of English Verse.

Now, I do not deny that The Oxford Book is useful, that there is a great deal of good stuff in it, and that every schoolchild ought to have a copy, in default of something better. Still, when you look at the last fifty pages, you think twice about recommending such a book to a foreigner who may imagine that it is really representative of English verse. Indeed, the whole of this part of the book is a lamentable illustration of what happens to professors of literature when they have to exercise independent judgement. Up to 1850, or thereabouts, one could not go very wrong in compiling an anthology, because, after all, it is on the whole the best poems that have survived. But as soon as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch reached his contemporaries, all semblance of taste deserted him.

The Oxford Book stops at 1900, and it is true that the last decades of the nineteenth century were a poor period for verse. Still, there were poets even in the nineties. There was Ernest Dowson—'Cynara' is not my idea of a good poem, but I would sooner have it than Henley's 'England, My England'—there was Hardy, who published his first poems in 1898, and there was Housman, who published A Shropshire Lad in 1896. There was also Hopkins, who was not in print or barely in print, but whom Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch must have known about. None of these appears in The Oxford Book. Yeats, who had already published a great deal at that date, does appear shortly, but he is not represented by his best poems: neither is Kipling, who, I think, did write one or two poems (for instance, 'How far is St Helena') which deserve to be included in a serious anthology. And on the other hand, just look at the stuff that has been included! Sir Henry Newbolt's Old Cliftonian keeping a stiff upper lip on the North-West Frontier; other patriotic pieces by Henley and Kipling; and page after page of weak, sickly, imitative verse by Andrew Lang, Sir William Watson, A. C. Benson, Alice Meynell and others now forgotten. What is one to think of an anthologist who puts Newbolt and Edmund Gosse in the same volume with Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Blake?

Perhaps I am just being ignorant and there does already exist a comprehensive anthology running all the way from Chaucer to Dylan Thomas and including no tripe. But if not, I think it is time to compile one, or at least to bring The Oxford Book up to date by making a completely new selection of poets from Tennyson onwards.

Looking through what I have written above, I see that I have spoken rather snootily of Dowson's 'Cynara', I know it is a bad poem, but it is bad in a good way, or good in a bad way, and I do not wish to pretend that I never admired it. Indeed, it was one of the favourites of my boyhood. I am quoting from memory:

I have forgot much, Cynara! gone with the wind,
Flung roses, roses, riotously with the throng,
Dancing, to put thy pale lost lilies out of mind;
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
Yea, all the time, because the dance was long—
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

Surely those lines possess, if not actual merit, at least the same kind of charm as belongs to a pink geranium or a soft-centre chocolate.

TRIBUNE 14 March 1947

I HAVE not yet read more than a newspaper paragraph about Nu Speling, in connexion with which somebody is introducing a Bill in Parliament, but if it is like most other schemes for rationalizing our spelling, I am against it in advance, as I imagine most people will be.

Probably the strongest reason for resisting rationalized spelling is laziness. We have all learned to read and write already, and we don't want to have to do it over again. But there are other more respectable objections. To begin with, unless the scheme were rigidly enforced, the resulting chaos, with some newspapers and publishing houses accepting it, others refusing it, and others adopting it in patches, would be fearful. Then again, anyone who had learned only the new system would find it very difficult to read books printed in the old one, so that the huge labour of respelling the entire literature of the past would have to be undertaken. And again, you can only fully rationalize spelling if you give a fixed value to each letter. But this means standardizing pronunciation, which could not be done in this country without an unholy row. What do you do, for instance, about words like 'butter' or 'glass', which are pronounced in different ways in London and Newcastle? Other words, such as 'were', are pronounced in two different ways according to individual inclination, or according to context.

However, I do not want to prejudge the inventors of Nu Speling. Perhaps they have already thought of a way round these difficulties. And certainly our existing spelling system is preposterous and must be a torment to foreign students. This is a pity, because English is well fitted to be the universal second language, if there ever is such a thing. It has a large start over any natural language and an enormous start over any manufactured one, and apart from the spelling it is very easy to learn. Would it not be possible to rationalize it by little and little, a few words every year? Already some of the more ridiculous spellings do tend to get killed off unofficially. For instance, how many people now spell 'hiccup' as 'hiccough'?

Another thing I am against in advance—for it is bound to be suggested sooner or later—is the complete scrapping of our present system of weights and measures.

Obviously you have got to have the metric system for certain purposes. For scientific work it has long been in use, and it is also needed for tools and machinery, especially if you want to export them. But there is a strong case for keeping on the old measurements for use in everyday life. One reason is that the metric system does not possess, or has not succeeded in establishing, a large number of units that can be visualized. There is, for instance, effectively no unit between the metre, which is more than a yard, and the centimetre, which is less than half an inch. In English you can describe someone as being five feet three inches high, or five feet nine inches, or six feet one inch, and your bearer will know fairly accurately what you mean. But I have never heard a Frenchman say, 'He is a hundred and forty-two centimetres high'; it would not convey any visual image. So also with the various other measurements. Rods and acres, pints, quarts and gallons, pounds, stones and hundredweights, are all of them units with which we are intimately familiar, and we should be slightly poorer without them. Actually, in countries where the metric system is in force a few of the old

measurements tend to linger on for everyday purposes, although officially discouraged.

There is also the literary consideration, which cannot be left quite out of account. The names of the units in the old system are short homely words which lend themselves to vigorous speech. Putting a quart into a pint pot is a good image, which could hardly be expressed in the metric system. Also, the literature of the past deals only in the old measurements, and many passages would become an irritation if one had to do a sum in arithmetic when one read them, as one does with those tiresome verses in a Russian novel.

The emmet's inch and eagle's mile
Make lame philosophy to smile:

fancy having to turn that into millimetres!

I HAVE just been reading about a party of German teachers, journalists, trade-union delegates and others who have been on a visit to this country. It appears that while here they were given food parcels by trade unions and other organizations, only to have them taken away again by the Customs officials at Harwich. They were not even allowed to take out of the country the 15 lb. of food which is permitted to a returning prisoner of war. The newspaper reporting this adds without apparent irony that the Germans in question had been here 'on a six weeks' course in democracy'.

THE other day I had occasion to write something about the teaching of history in private schools, and the following scene, which was only rather loosely connected with what I was writing, floated into my memory. It was less than fifteen years ago that I witnessed it.

'Jones!'

'Yessir!'

'Causes of the French Revolution.'

'Please, sir, the French Revolution was due to three causes, the teachings of Voltaire and Rousseau, the oppression of the nobles by the people and —'

At this moment a faint chill, like the first premonitory symptom of an illness, falls upon Jones. Is it possible that he has gone wrong somewhere? The master's face is inscrutable. Swiftly Jones casts his mind back to the unappetizing little book, with the gritty brown cover, a page of which is memorized daily. He could have sworn he had the whole thing right. But at this moment Jones discovers for the first time the deceptiveness of visual memory. The whole page is clear in his mind, the shape of every paragraph accurately recorded, but the trouble is that there is no saying which way round the words go. He had made sure it was the oppression of the nobles by the people; but then it might have been the oppression of the people by the nobles. It is a toss-up. Desperately he takes his decision—better to stick to his first version. He gabbles on:

'The oppression of the nobles by the people and —'

'JONES!'

Is that kind of thing still going on, I wonder?

TRIBUNE 28 March 1947

I HAVE been reading with interest the February-March bulletin of Mass Observation, which appears just ten years after this organization first came into being. It is curious to remember with what hostility it was greeted at the beginning. It was violently attacked in the New Statesman, for instance, where Mr Stonier declared that the typical Mass Observer would have 'elephant ears, a loping walk and a permanent sore eye from looking through keyholes', or words to that effect. Another attacker was Mr Stephen Spender. But on the whole the opposition to this or any other kind of social survey comes from people of conservative opinions, who often seem to be genuinely indignant at the idea of finding out what the big public is thinking.

If asked why, they generally answer that what is discovered is of no interest, and that in any case any intelligent person always knows already what are the main trends of public opinion. Another argument is that social surveys are an interference with individual liberty and a first step towards totalitarianism. The Daily Express ran this line for several years and tried to laugh the small social survey unit instituted by the Ministry of Information out of existence by nicknaming it Cooper's Snoopers. Of course, behind much of this opposition there lies a well-justified fear of finding that mass sentiment on many subjects is not conservative.

But some people do seem sincerely to feel that it is a bad thing for the government to know too much about what people are thinking, just as others feel that it is a kind of presumption when the government tries to educate public opinion. Actually you can't have democracy unless both processes are at work. Democracy is only possible when the law-makers and administrators know what the masses want, and what they can be counted on to understand. If the present Government paid more attention to this last point, they would word some of their publicity differently. Mass Observation issued a report last week on the White Paper on the economic situation. They found, as usual, that the abstract words and phrases which are flung to and fro in official announcements mean nothing to countless ordinary citizens. Many people are even flummoxed by the word 'assets', which is thought to have something to do with 'assist'!

The Mass Observation Bulletin gives some account of the methods its investigators use, but does not touch on a very important point, and that is the manner in which social surveys are financed. Mass Observation itself appears to keep going in a hand-to-mouth way by publishing books and by undertaking specific jobs for the Government or for commercial organizations. Some of its best surveys, such as that dealing with the birthrate, were carried out for the Advertising Service Guild. The trouble with this method is that a subject only gets investigated if some large, wealthy organization happens to be interested in it. An obvious example is antisemitism, which I believe has never been looked into, or only in a very sketchy way. But antisemitism is only one variant of the great modern disease of nationalism. We know very little about the real causes of nationalism, and we might conceivably be on the way towards curing it if we knew more. But who is sufficiently interested to put up the thousands of pounds that an exhaustive survey would cost?

FOR some weeks there has been correspondence in the Observer about the persistence of 'spit and polish' in the armed forces. The last issue had

a good letter from someone who signed himself 'Conscript', describing how he and his comrades were forced to waste their time in polishing brass, blacking the rubber hoses on stirrup pumps with boot polish, scraping broom handles with razor blades, and so on. But 'Conscript' then goes on to say: 'When an officer (a major) carried out routine reading of King's Regulations regarding venereal disease, he did not hesitate to add: "There is nothing to be ashamed of if you have the disease—it is quite natural. But make sure that you report for treatment at once."' I must say that it seems to me strange, amid the other idiocies mentioned, to object to one of the few sensible things in the army system, i.e. its straightforward attitude towards venereal disease. We shall never be able to stamp out syphilis and gonorrhoea until the stigma of sinfulness is removed from them. When full conscription was introduced in the 1914-18 war it was discovered, if I remember rightly, that nearly half the population suffered or had suffered from some form of venereal disease, and this frightened the authorities into taking a few precautions. During the inter-war years the struggle against venereal disease languished, so far as the civilian population went. There was provision for treatment of those already infected, but the proposal to set up 'early treatment centres', as in the army, was quelled by the puritans. Then came another war, with the increase in venereal disease that war necessarily causes, and another attempt to deal with the problem. The Ministry of Health posters are timid enough, but even these would have provoked an outcry from the pious ones if military necessity had not called them into being.

You can't deal with these diseases so long as they are thought of as visitations of God, in a totally different category from all other diseases. The inevitable result of that is concealment and quack remedies. And it is humbug to say that 'clean living is the only real remedy'. You are bound to have promiscuity and prostitution in a society like ours, where people mature sexually at about fifteen and are discouraged from marrying till they are in their twenties, where conscription and the need for mobility of labour break up family life, and where young people living in big towns have no regular way of forming acquaintanceships. It is impossible to solve the problem by making people more moral, because they won't, within any foreseeable time, become as moral as all that. Besides, many of the victims of venereal disease are husbands or wives who have not themselves committed any so-called immoral act. The only sensible course is to recognize that syphilis and gonorrhoea are merely diseases, more preventable if not curable than most, and that to suffer from them is not disgraceful. No doubt the pious ones would squeal. But in doing so they might avow their real motives, and then we should be a little nearer to wiping out this evil.

FOR the last five minutes I have been gazing out of the window into the square, keeping a sharp look-out for signs of spring. There is a thinnish patch in the clouds with a faint hint of blue behind it, and on a sycamore tree there are some things that look as if they might be buds. Otherwise it is still winter. But don't worry! Two days ago, after a careful search in Hyde Park, I came on a hawthorn bush that was definitely in bud, and some birds, though not actually singing, were making noises like an orchestra tuning up. Spring is coming after all, and recent rumours that this was the beginning of another Ice Age were unfounded. In only three weeks' time we shall be listening to the cuckoo, which usually gives tongue about the fourteenth of April. Another three weeks after that, and we shall be basking under blue skies, eating ices off barrows and neglecting to lay up fuel for next winter.

How appropriate the ancient poems in praise of spring have seemed these last few years! They have a meaning that they did not have in the days when there was no fuel shortage and you could get almost anything at any time of year. Of all passages celebrating spring, I think I like best those two stanzas from the beginning of one of the Robin Hood ballads. I modernize the spelling:

When shaws be sheen and swards full fair,
And leaves both large and long,
It is merry walking in the fair forest
To hear the small birds' song.

The woodwele sang and would not cease,
Sitting upon the spray,
So loud he wakened Robin Hood
In the greenwood where he lay.

But what exactly was the woodwele? The Oxford Dictionary seems to suggest that it was the woodpecker, which is not a notable songster, and I should be interested to know whether it can be identified with some more probable bird.

TRIBUNE (no date)

On the night in 1940 when the big ack-ack barrage was fired over London for the first time, I was in Picadilly Circus when the guns opened up, and I fled into the Cafe Royal to take cover. Among the crowd inside a good-looking, well-made youth of about twenty-five was making somewhat of a nuisance of himself with a copy of Peace News, which he was forcing upon the attention of everyone at the neighbouring tables. I got into conversation with him, and the conversation went something like this:

The youth: 'I tell you, it'll all be over by Christmas. There's obviously going to be a compromise peace. I'm pinning my faith to Sir Samuel Hoare. It's degrading company to be in, I admit, but still Hoare is on our side. So long as Hoare's in Madrid, there's always hope of a sell-out.'

Orwell: 'What about all those preparations that they're making against invasion – the pill boxes that they're building everywhere, the Local Defense Volunteers and so forth?'

The youth: 'Oh, that merely means they're getting ready to crush the working class when the Germans get here. I suppose some of them might be fools enough to try to resist, but Churchill and the Germans between them won't take long to settle them. Don't worry, it'll soon be over.'

Orwell: 'Do you really want to see your children grow up Nazis?'

The youth: 'Nonsense! You don't suppose the Germans are going to encourage Fascism in this country, do you? They don't want to breed up a race of warriors to fight against them. Their object will be to turn us into slaves. That's why I'm a pacifist. They'll encourage people like me.'

Orwell: 'And shoot people like me?'

The youth: 'That would be just too bad.'

Orwell: 'But why are you so anxious to remain alive?'

The youth: 'So that I can get on with my work, of course.'

It had come out in the conversation that the youth was a painter – whether good or bad I do not know; but at any rate, sincerely interested in painting and quite ready to face poverty in pursuit of it. As a painter, he would probably have been somewhat better off under a German occupation than a writer or journalist would be. But still, what he said contained a very dangerous fallacy, now very widespread in the countries where totalitarianism has not actually established itself.

The fallacy is to believe that under a dictatorial government you can be free inside. Quite a number of people console themselves with this thought, now that totalitarianism in one form or another is visibly on the up-grade in every part of the world. Out in the street the loudspeakers bellow, the flags flutter from the rooftops, the police with their tommy-guns prowl to and fro, the face of the Leader, four feet wide, glares from every hoarding; but up in the attics the secret enemies of the regime can record their thoughts in perfect freedom – that is the idea, more or less. And many people are under the impression that this is going on now in Germany and other dictatorial countries.

Why is this idea false? I pass over the fact that modern dictatorships don't, in fact, leave the loopholes that the old-fashioned despotisms did; and also the probable weakening of the desire for intellectual liberty owing to totalitarian methods of education. The greatest mistake is to imagine that the human being is an autonomous individual. The secret freedom which you can supposedly enjoy under a despotic government is nonsense, because your thoughts are never entirely your own. Philosophers, writers, artists, even scientists, not only need encouragement and an audience, they need constant stimulation from other people. It is almost impossible to think without talking. If Defoe had really lived on a desert island, he could not have written Robinson Crusoe, nor would he have wanted to. Take away freedom of speech, and the creative faculties dry up. Had the Germans really got to England my acquaintance of the Cafe Royal would soon have found his painting deteriorating, even if the Gestapo had let him alone. And when the lid is taken off Europe, I believe one of the things that will surprise us will be to find how little worthwhile writing of any kind – even such things as diaries, for instance – has been produced in secret under the dictators.

1943-47

The End