

Thoughts in Wartime England

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ON Sunday, June 28th, 1942, I reached Britain by plane. All of July, all of August and half of September were spent in the British Isles, all but four days' time in England. On September 10th I left England by plane. The visit was made as a result of an invitation from the British Ministry of Information. There were Sundays of preaching in Brighton and Harrow and eight Sundays (sixteen services) at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre where the City Temple congregation is worshipping since the bombing of the City Temple building. There were addresses in and about Manchester, Liverpool, Bristol, Cardiff, Carlisle, Nottingham and Southampton as well as London. There were visits to British Army camps with addresses to groups of men in the ranks and to groups of officers. There were meetings with groups of the clergy, Anglican and Free. And there were very many talks with men of significance in British life in their clubs and in their homes.

Twenty-eight years ago I made my first trip to Britain spending four months in the British Isles. Twenty-four years ago I preached first in the City Temple, whose pulpit I have occupied, usually for a month, during many summers since. For ten years I have been a member of the National Liberal Club, where I met so many friends this summer. Preaching in Scotland (Wellington and Elgin Place Churches, in Glasgow and the Parish Church of St. George's in Edinburgh)

has led to many friendships north of the Tweed, and happy visits, for preaching in Carrs Lane Church in Birmingham and other churches about England have added to one's sense of intimacy with English life. All this furnishes the background of individual relations in England on the part of the person whose thoughts are to be recorded in this article.

I

The wartime scene arrests one's instant and eager attention. The signs of destruction all about London tell their own tragic story. But the fashion in which these Londoners have dealt with the devastation is almost more remarkable than the devastation itself. The matter of rebuilding will of course largely be a question of post-war activity. But with the utmost efficiency the immediate problems have been met. The spirit of London is seen today in its clear, clean streets and it is evident that a raid was scarcely over before the work of taking away debris, and doing

such work of restoration as was possible, was undertaken. Someone has estimated that it would require ten years of intense bombing to destroy London. One suspects that a very much longer period would be required for the crushing of the English spirit, if indeed it could be crushed at all. You go to your club and find a complicated structure of scaffolding where the great circular stairway, the particular pride of the club, once stood. But you learn that lunch was served at the club the very morning of the bombing. You stand sadly by the ruins of the City Temple. But on Sunday you look out upon a congregation gathered from all about London and its environs in spite of the reduction of conveyances of every kind and the scattering of the membership of the church to various parts of England. An alert comes at three o'clock in the morning at a big London hotel. There is no panic among the people who gather ready to go to the shelters. But as the men and women move about quietly you see something in their eyes which tells you that they have looked into stark terror. Men come to London in the morning with flowers in their buttonholes and bright dry jests upon their lips. With pleasant pride they show you the shelters they have built for the hour of need. One friend busy helping homeless people confesses that he has not slept in his own bed for over two years. Men hurry away from dinner with you to take up duty as fire watchers. The little electric lamps gleam for an instant in the black-out hours. And the tiny dots of light are more significant than the darkness. Your friends tell you tales of the bad times of bombing. Some of the stories are very tragic. But they are never dramatized. They are told as a part of the experiences men must meet in days like these. They do not like such experiences. But they meet them with unconquered eyes when they come. Your friends talk to you by the hour. You get to know their opinions about all the problems which confront the tense and torn humanity which inhabits this planet in these treacherous days. There is never a loss of perspective, never a touch of hysteria. There is always the cool eye, the clear mind and the steadfast purpose.

H

It cannot be denied that the dislocation produced by the war has had its influence upon attendance at the churches. The "Evacués" were scattered all about England. Many have returned. Many are still dispersed. But the churches have entered so deeply into the wartime suffering of the people and have ministered to them with such constant faithfulness and understanding that probably it would be fair to say that never have the masses of the people felt a more kindly appreciation of the churches than today. In so many cases that I think one can say they are

typical, the Christian minister has become a "Mr. Greatheart," not only known but loved by the whole community. Preachers like Leslie Weatherhead have a devoted following not only in London but all over England. There is a healing touch on the minds as well as on the bodies of men. And those who possess the gift have come to a great hour of opportunity and of power. The man who speaks of the great Christian doctrines from an English pulpit with sincerity and earnestness and intellectual grasp is surprised at the response which he elicits. But beyond those visible and audible matters, which may be computed, is the movement of the mind of the people toward the things of the spirit. Countless men and women have come to feel that they must lean upon a strength firmer than their own, that they must depend not merely upon a power, but upon a Great Person, who in these terrible days is making for righteousness. And practically everyone responds to the discovery of the young surgeon in Emlyn Williams' play *The Morning Star*, that his instinct in mending broken things is a reflection of something very deep and very real in the life of the universe. The chaplains are achieving an intimate and comradesly relation to the men with whom they serve, which has a very profound influence. They are making prayer real. Religion comes to life in their activities. And while there is a fine simplicity and humility about them, they have not forgotten that they represent Jesus Christ. Nor do the men with whom their lot is cast forget. As far as I could see there is a most widespread sense that religion is a part of life and not something apart from life. I never found it easier to talk of religion as a living force than when speaking to soldiers and civilians this summer. Tragedy always opens the door of the temple of faith. And surely England has known tragedy.

III

Everywhere as you go about people want you to talk to them about America and the Americans. One of the editions of Hobbs' *Leviathan* contained a picture of a giant man made up of numerous little men. Perhaps this picture might represent any modern man. Particularly well it represents the typical modern American. How many men have had a share in making any one of us—that is, how many kinds of men! All the blood of Europe throbs in our blood. All the speech of Europe is articulate in one way or another in our speech. There are a hundred and thirty million of us. And if you leave out the Negroes, who came without their own consent, and the American Indians, who were here when we came, we all arrived—a least our ancestors did—because we wanted to get away from something in the Old World and to find a land of promise in the new. It

is something which throbs in our blood stream—this conviction that all the rest of the world consists of places good to get away *from* and the American Republic is a place good to get *to*. This is the root of our spirit of isolation. We must transcend it for the good of our own souls and for the good of the world. But how indigenous it is. Then there is our language. We use English words with nuances and idioms which come from every European speech. With all this process of cross fertilization what a speech it will be one day! Already it has passed beyond the bounds of H. W. Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*.

Our churches all have roots in ancient churches of Europe and Asia. Many of them have the deepest kinship with churches of old England. And we are curiously versatile in religion. Have we not invented Mormonism and Christian Science! This spirit of adventure has gotten into all our churches. Most of them tend to move into uncharted ways. Some have tended to use historic phrases to express a gracious rhetoric, rather than a permanent loyalty. Perhaps only when we have put a deeper loyalty at the heart of our spirit of adventure will our churches really do their work in the world.

We have a political tradition indubitably British. We understand the Magna Charta, the Bill of Rights and the Reform Bills as a corpus of democratic life better than do any other people in the world. We too have fought for a liberty sealed by order and an order based upon liberty. It is less our blood—though there is something in that—than our ideals which unite the varied races which constitute the American Republic to Britain. Our blood may be mixed but in the main we read and write books which have grown out of the British tradition, and the eyes with which we look upon the world are, rather more than we have ever understood, the gift to us of Britain. Our literary rosary consists in the main of British names, when we leave the writers of our own land, except when we include those classic names to which all modern civilized men (British, American, German, French, Scandinavian, Italian and Russian) look back with admiration and awe. Our young cosmopolitan writers are doing something to change this. And our Marxian thinkers have other gods. But these new processes are rather embryonic than actual in the Republic as a whole.

IV

Just now there are multitudes of Americans in England. One meets American officers and men in the ranks everywhere. You see them on the streets, in the hotels, and in the clubs. And they are receiving a most hearty welcome. Indeed there is something winning about the way in which your English

friends say to you: "What can we do to make your American soldiers feel at home among us? We cannot entertain them in the fashion which would have been possible in pre-war days. But if they will take us as we are, and accept such food as in these times of rationing we can offer, we will be glad to have them in our homes." And from the American you are apt to hear: "I am receiving so many invitations that I cannot accept them all." To be sure there are problems. Our soldiers are paid at a higher rate than the British. And sometimes the glamor of the American soldier—a very attractive person—and of the money he has to spend, causes English girls to show more interest in him than in the British Tommy. Then there is the color problem. These American Negroes with their soft voices and gentle ways are very interesting to the British who are eager to serve them in their canteens and to welcome them in their homes. The white soldiers from south of the Mason and Dixon line—and not they alone—are a bit astonished. And sometimes more than that. One asks rather searching questions about the nature of democracy as one confronts this problem.

The best factor in the whole situation is found in friendships which are being established across national lines. Every time an American soldier comes to think of a British soldier as his particular friend something very profound and promising has happened. And every time a British lad finds a pal in an American there is an implicit individual treaty which is good for both nations. You hear British officers in the camps say how easy they find it to admire and to like American officers. And you know that when the men who are waiting somewhat tensely for the days of large scale fighting come to the times of action, the sense of comradeship will increase.

V

Then of course there is Russia. The magnificent resistance of the Russians to the invasion of their land has won our deepest respect and admiration. And as the months of bitter struggle have gone on, the sense that they are fighting our own battles has become more profound and insistent. The desire for a second front to support them grows. "But we cannot afford another Dunkirk," say British officers. "We must put all our power into an effective support just as soon as we can," the men on the streets and in the homes and in the camps say to each other every day.

In all this there is a rather clear sense that the admiration for Russia and the support of Russia do not involve a support of the particular social and economic theories associated with the recent history of that great people. And with all the apprehension of the corruption of the old Russian Church, any one

who has heard the deep and rich Russian religious music or who has an apprehension of the feeling for religion in the very center of the Russian spirit, comes also to the conviction that one ought to recognize something in the religious tradition of Russia which must not be allowed to die.

VI

We could not forget India if we would. The typical opinion one finds in England is that India was offered self-government and refused, that Ghandi was ready essentially to betray India to Japan, that the Indian people must be saved from civil war, and that the position the British Government has taken must be approved and supported. The sense that Ghandi is more a medicine man than a saint grows among many thoughtful people all the while.

It ought to be evident that the Americans who would like to interfere, court the profoundest and most tragic misunderstanding. If we had hurried in after Dunkirk putting our whole might with Britain, certain things would be vastly different. There is no complaint in respect of the Battle of Britain but the fact is that *alone*, one great commonwealth of nations met the menace of that terrible time and won in that great contention. The winning of the Battle of Britain saved us from situations which would have been tragically inevitable had Britain been defeated. And the British can surely be understood if they feel that not even by entering the war have we won the right to attempt to dictate the policy of the British Empire in its internal affairs. If these relationships are involved in potentialities which have far-reaching implications, our State Department can be trusted through the normal diplomatic channels of friendly discussion to consider them with the great power whose immediate concern they are. The rushing into public discussion on the part of not too well informed and passionate idealists may bring comfort to Hitler. It will scarcely help the Allied cause.

VII

Britain is showing marvelous poise. Unwelcome news came in this summer from North Africa. The reports from Russia were startling and alarming. In England the people took the bad news with the good in their stride, never losing their faith in ultimate victory.

But we must not forget that they have been at war for over three years. The strain has been terrific. The subconscious tension is beyond anything we can easily realize. The British have not broken. And they will not break. But we must not make the strain harder for them by ill-considered criticism and suggestions. As one lives in England week after week,

meeting people of all sorts and conditions, he comes to share in a measure at least the quality of their own tense experience. Coming back to the United States is like leaving one world and entering another. To be sure, we are in the war. And we are giving ourselves gloriously to the great enterprise. But the hour when we will feel the war's awful weight and personally apprehend its destructive tragedy is yet to come. Going from city to city in England, inspecting the destruction which fell under one's eyes, gradually the apprehension of the meaning of it all for those who passed through the fire, became dramatically clear. And with added experience of understanding, one's admiration for the quietly strong people who came through these experiences with their hold on the normal ways of life unaffected, grew to be a glowing warmth in one's heart.

VIII

If when the victory is won, we insist on having Utopia, we will actually have hell. If we see clearly that some things—the Nazi oppression and the Japanese treacherous power—must be brought to an end, and regard this as the purpose of the war, so much can be accomplished. If after this we are content to go forward step by step, firmly securing each clearly envisaged gain before going on to the next, we can be saved from the vast disillusionment and the bitter sense of frustration which followed the last war. There is much danger that the people who tried to prevent our entering the war will wreck the peace. A good many of them are now assuming that other people will kindly win the war for them and are setting about making blueprints for the peace. They are often persons of spacious and persuasive speech and writing. When they tried to isolate America from the moral life of the world they were aiding the very forces they professed to hate. And now if we allow them to have their way, their uncritical and unrealistic idealism will betray us again. We *can* crush the evil thing which has been let loose in the world. Then slowly and with infinite care we can move forward doing one thing at a time. But we cannot have an instant Utopia. The world will be a difficult place while it is recovering from its terrible agony. We will need patience. We will need faith. But though the early morning may be unpleasantly cold and heavy with mist, it will be the beginning of the new day, if we are worthy of the trust which will be placed in our hands.

IX

In England one kept thinking of the two proud friendly nations which must march down the way of life together. They are but a part of the great world,

to be sure. And the world is every man's world. And the four freedoms are for every man. But the British Commonwealth of Nations and the United States of America together can clear the path for the nations and make the way of the peoples of all lands a way leading toward the sure if distant light. There are forces in the United States and there are forces in Britain which will need to be watched and checked if the good fruits of victory are to be made secure. The great problems are never simple. They are always complicated. But they are not too difficult for gradual sound solution.

X

If the Christian Church is honest eyed and strong minded enough to make itself permanently the voice and the instrument of moral love, its contribution to the life of mankind may be of an importance beyond computation. But it must repudiate forever the fallacy of the isolated virtue. Love alone becomes soft and corrupting. Righteousness alone becomes hard and cruel. Love suffused with righteousness and righteousness warm with love can speak to the world words of judgment which are yet words of hope. Only the word of moral love is good enough and wise enough and strong enough to meet the need of mankind.

The land of the Beowulf tales, the land of the vision of Piers Plowman, the land of the spiritual beauty of Spenser, and the moral grandeur of Milton, the land of the Cambridge Platonists and the Wesleyan Revival, the land where spiritual liberty has lived with simple and solemn grandeur generation after generation is a good land even in a terrible war. And the thoughts which fill one's mind there, still haunt the imagination among the familiar sights and sounds of the land to which he returns from all his journeys—the land to be most deeply loved and most sternly judged—just because it is one's own.

Dealing with Japanese Evacuees

I came away from a recent visit to one of the Japanese Assembly Centers in California with the conviction that there is one thing that must be done which stands out above all the complications that surround this problem. Action must be taken without delay to discriminate between those Japanese Americans who are known to be loyal and those who are suspected of disloyalty. The failure to do this is seriously damaging the morale of the loyal Japanese. They are in custody under conditions that strongly suggest that all are suspected by the government. They may know that the government suspects only a small minority, but the fact that they are in custody convinces them that the general public does suspect them all. If the general public in its ignorance does, the only way in which that attitude can be changed is for the government to clear most of them after investigations have been made. It may be necessary to divide them into three categories: those who are known to be loyal, those who are either known to be disloyal or are under strong suspicion, those who will have to be cleared more slowly because too little is known about them. It is intolerable that those whose loyalty can easily be established should be made to suffer this great blow to their morale as persons. We should at this stage separate this process of clearing the majority of the interned Japanese from the much debated question of the evacuation and from the question of their immediate release. Their release may have to come gradually as communities are prepared to receive them but the beginning of such preparation depends upon words and action by the government which remove from them this cloud of suspicion. There perhaps can be two opinions about the original evacuation, but how much longer can the American people keep almost 75,000 American citizens penned up under conditions that are not externally cruel but that are humiliating? Remove the stigma of suspicion now from as many as possible and with that most of the humiliation, and then gradually release them under conditions that will restore their self-respect as Americans.

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