

THE LAST WAR.

Maurice Rowdon,
Villa Ida,
Ronchi,
Massa Apuania,
ITALY.

The sloth and torpor of Europe after 1918, the utter bankruptcy of its religion, gave rise to a second war which, unlike the first, did not spare the civilian populations. Hitler was the instrument of this war. He led a revolt against a world where all sense of mystery seemed to have departed, where everything was a money-relation; where there were no longer unspoken loyalties between people, as between noblemen and their retainers, and no longer room for prowess, instinct and courage. It seemed more and more an ignominious world where everyone was grubbing about for a better standard of living. This is what gave Nazism its backward-looking, archaic appearance, as if it were trying to revive artificially---in a middle class society---instinctive ties which no longer existed. But there was one activity that was not a bit artificial and which always brought people to their feet, even at the expense of their pleasures: and that was war, the fascinating mystery of death hanging over a whole continent. The artificial society created by Hitler was only a preparation for this.

The sloth and money-^{was}obsession in Europe ~~was~~ such that at last, had there not been a war, it might have become a kind of ~~like~~ Switzerland bloated with goods, where faces grew more and more abstract, the relations between people more and more practical in a deadly way; where words like crucifixion would have become merely silly. Even the First World War had failed to shake Europe out of its religious bankruptcy, because it did not reach the civilian populations.

Had not war been his message, his raison d'etre and his

dream, Hitler would have been the leader of a Switzerland play-acting a past century, with spectacular uniforms and mystical speeches. English audiences would have continued to laugh at him in the cinemas; whereas, after 1940, they stopped abruptly. He was never interested in peace; he equated it with the sloth he had risen up in arms against. The middle classes were so easy to deal with, he once said, because they would do anything for peace. Even his own subjects did not seem to realise what he was saying. But neither his own subjects nor the rest of Europe showed anything more than a formal hesitation when the time came to murder, provided they had the weapons to murder with. It took only a few months, during the Maginot Line period, for the morals of sloth to ~~become~~^{turn into} his morals---the morals of murder. For the latter grew fat on the former. Thousands upon thousands of people had their revenge in that war for the tedium---stripped of dignity, Godless and mechanical--- of their lives before.

Nazism was all the violence and anger and mystery of old Europe up in arms against the paralysing orthodoxy of a Godless Christendom. It exaggerated. It shouted abuse and stamped its feet melodramatically. Germany's madness was that of a country swollen with metaphysics in a Europe where metaphysics was fast coming to mean simply a failure to make money. The more apathetic the rest of Europe, the louder Hitler shouted.

He really governed the whole of Europe, if not the world, between 1933 and 1945. In the first year of the war there were articles in English newspapers asking whether it was moral to bomb civilian populations. The thought was horrifying to Germans, despite Hitler, as to Englishmen and Americans. But not many months later the massed raids on German cities began and thousands of women and children were blown to pieces or burned to death. It

was as if this were the destiny for which Europe as a community had been waiting since the twenties.

Hitler was convinced that Europe would find its heroism and dignity in a war. He was proved right. The old upper classes woke up from their melancholy dozing and produced leaders again; working people forgot their strikes and their wage-packets. Everybody was together again, in a community. Class hatreds---the most bitter personal hatreds of our epoch---were almost laid asleep. Clean young gentlemen found that they could drop bombs on people they had never seen without turning a hair. People were jocular, lively and helpful.

The First World War was a tedious mass murder of troops on a static line, day after day; it was killing a man in another trench---a man like yourself---for a reason you were never really clear about. But this war was different. People really wanted to fight in this one. Young men in Germany could fight for the Third Reich, and if that sounded silly to them they could fight for the feeling that Hitler had given Germany a bit of dignity in the world. And people like myself, on the other side, could fight against the massacre of people by gas-chamber and furnace, or against a regime which answered the words Christ or art with a kick in the teeth. Our consciences were all involved. Those of us---English or French or German---who would have made good conscientious objectors in the First World War made first-class murderers in this one.

Hitler's end was really a massive crucifixion in Europe. Again and again, particularly in the last year of the war, he contradicted his generals, and seemed simply to be indifferent to the most obvious rules of strategy. It is ridiculous to say he was 'wrong' not to stop the war when he saw he was losing. He hadn't the slightest interest in society, even in German society, as an end in itself. To say

that he was forced into war or went into it in order to solve a chronic unemployment problem is completely to misunderstand his intentions (as he wrote and spoke them). Full employment as an end in itself was of not the slightest interest to him, otherwise he would have had no quarrel with half the people in England and France and Germany itself who came out against him before the war started. To say that his motive was in the end a peaceful society is to say that he agreed with the left-wing orthodoxies of the time which he chiefly detested.

It is equally ridiculous to say that England and America were fighting to rid the world of a criminal who had somehow---history's most remarkable accident, and quite gratuitous---got hold of the reins of power. Europe had a dark necessity for Hitler, a fact which it has managed to hide from itself by transferring all its war-guilt on to Germany.

Nazism was not a regime with certain grave blemishes, nor was Hitler a man who made certain unfortunate mistakes. Nazism was complete and whole in itself, and successful. It was not an ideology, like class socialism. It was a fact: that is to say it did not look forward to an ideal society in the future, nor did it consist of an abstract body of doctrine. It was vested in Hitler's personal and mystical leadership; that was its essence. And the Thousand Year Reich was already there, in its first years; it did not depend on some withering away of the State. For heroism now, courage and spectacle now, were its ends; and war was the only means to those ends. Thus, practically speaking, the Nazi system was a society dedicated to the task of making war, as an end in itself. Apologies that Hitler was after all a kindly person, or that the mass deaths in the concentration camps were an accident of war, are

irrelevant to Nazism. They are only interesting as expressions of guilt, on the part of those who supported him.

The European war is quite different from the technical war waged by America or the eastern communisms. The European war is a metaphysical adventure connected with the renewal of the sense of wonder and mystery, and the idea of a fated crucifixion, changing the whole of a man's future life. It is waged with the same values as those which make Europe's art. In the end it is religious. To see the difference between the European war and the Technical war one only has to compare the works of Juenger, Remarques, Siegfried Sassoon, Malraux and Aldington, with a book like The Naked and the Dead. The Red Badge of Courage was still in the European tradition, being the classical study of a man's struggle against terror towards heroism, and his development from a helpless pity, and self-pity, to a kind of stoical awe and compassionate selflessness. All European war-books of any depth are accounts of the Passion, full of nostalgia for those brief glimpses of mystery.

'If there be such a thing as ghostly revisitiation of this earth, and if ghosts can traverse time and choose their ground, I would return to the Bois Francais sector as it was then.'

'As I stepped over one of the Germans an impulse made me lift him up from the miserable ditch, Propped against the bank, his blond face was undisfigured, except by the mud which I wiped from his eyes and mouth with my coat sleeve... He didn't look to be more than eighteen. Hoisting him a little higher, I thought what a gentle face he had, and remembered that this was the first time I'd ever touched one of our enemies with my hands.'

'For me, the idea of death made everything vivid and

valuable.'

'But I was rewarded by an intense memory of men whose courage had shown me the power of the human spirit---that spirit which could withstand the utmost assault.' (Excerpts from Siegfried Sassoon's Memoirs of an Infantry Officer)

But the war of the un-European societies is simply the solution by massed attacks, depending on a high degree of research, of a technical problem. It has no value beyond a practical value which can be calculated on paper. Its spiritual consequences differ from man to man, and they have no unity, no communal or religious reference; they are simply departures from the social or technical norm---mal-adjustments. The books written about these technical battles are either sagas of heroism or accounts of physical discomfort and moral ~~degeneracy~~ ^{degeneracy}. The religious end is lacking.

In the European war there was always an erratic kind of decorum, amounting sometimes to a kind of love, between the two sides; I have read of English soldiers in the first war getting angry when Germans were abused in conversation at home, and I felt the same anger myself in the second war. But the technical war is merciless; there is no shared concept of the sacredness of the human creature. Prisoners are treated well if it suits policy; they are no longer thought of as the mystical enemy, but as units of bargaining power.

Nazism, or indeed any Fascism, was a kind of conscious philosophy of the European war, and therefore, being deliberate, it was stripped of compassion. That was why Hitler talked like a tortured and haunted man. He was absolutely dedicated to the task of murder, as Europe's destiny. The Thousand Year Reich was a dream with a touch of Walpurgis Night in it. Ruins were proper to it, not peaceful

suburbia. This is what distinguished his socialism from all other forms, his dictatorship from that of the communists. The Generals were astonished when he showed a complete disregard for the common logic of strategy, because they had never realised that for him strategy was simply the servant of a mystical destiny which had satisfactions far beyond those of conquest. War was never for him a technical struggle between two sides. It was essentially a mystery for him, and---though we may not like to use this word in connection with a man who looked to us like an embodiment of the devil--- it was the Passion.

His struggle for power was the climax of a religious crisis that had been developing in the Christian world since the eighteenth century, and of which the growth of huge cities, the establishment of an abstract uniformity of life and behaviour over formerly distinct places each with its spirit, and the pursuit of special intellectual or technical ends instead of the old all-inclusive or religious ones, were the causes. Hitler broke open this uniformity by intellectually infuriating people to fight each other. For the intellect was the last great source of energy in the post-religious world. And he called its deliberate incitement 'propaganda'. The result was that almost every man went into the war with a furious intellectual image before him of 'the enemy', and this image made it possible for him to shoot, disembowel, rape, bomb or massacre on a stupendous scale other people who were from much the same kind of peaceful suburbia as himself. In the course of the war thousands of square miles of crops were burned, millions of homes were pillaged, bombs were dropped 'for luck' on houses far from industrial or military targets. And all this was done by people whose personal manners were probably more peaceable and subdued than those of any previous generation in Christendom. In order to

^{do it}
 they had to believe in it, mentally. And this Hitler taught them to do. He succeeded in inciting to a kind of madness not only his own subjects, not only the Lithuanians and Ukrainians he put in charge of some of the concentration camps and who were said to be the most recklessly brutal of all, but every race, class and group in Europe, and after that in the whole world.

It seemed written in the fate of Europe. Before the war started educated young men went to Spain 'to fight Fascism' and as often as not seemed to go in order to kill and risk being killed, in order to get the smell and touch and quickness of a real experience as opposed to the unheroic tedium of their lives before, when they had been unmoved by religious feelings. Almost every book to have come out of that civil war dwells with fascination on the simple details of battle ~~almost~~ as if they were ends in themselves, with the political ~~inhabitant~~ attitudes as merely formal justification. (1)

It was as if these young men said to themselves, 'At last, with these lice, this exposure to bitter cold, without adequate food or clothing, these bullets and hand-grenades and train-loads of wounded men, at last I feel real. I can feel the life in my body. My compassion is stirred, as well as my hatred and love. I am functioning properly. I ~~am~~ am not living the death-life of a middle class youth...' And that was the burden of Hitler's message to middle class Europe: you aren't alive until you go to war, only ^rmud^r will bring you back to life.

(1) See Orwell's Homage to Catalonia, Part XII, where he ^edescribes his sensations when he was shot in the back of the neck.

During the Thirties people's intellects became increasingly enraged, and his 'propaganda' had a remarkably quick success. His own people began seriously to believe that 'non-Aryans' were by original nature inferior, but this was nothing to the number of people outside Germany who came to believe that 'the Germans' were by original nature inferior. When the young men who went to Spain found that the Falangists differed from the Republicans only in the fact that they raised their fists in the salute instead of the palms of their hands, they were taken aback: they hadn't realised, apparently, that they were human creatures too! In other words, their contact with reality was always through the brain. The 'Falangists' were simply an idea for them, as they themselves were simply an idea for the Falangists. George Orwell wanted 'to kill a Fascist'. Only slowly, and with pain and regret, did he realise that this meant 'to kill a human creature'. Somehow it hadn't ^{looked} ~~been~~ the same. Hitler excited this intellectual obsessiveness to the point where hardly a worker or business man or peasant was left untouched by it. The people who crept beyond the forward lines to have a look at 'a German', with awe, hearts beating fast, were the successors of the young men who peeped above a rampart to have a look at a 'Falangist' or a 'Communist'.

Even pacifism he rendered frivolous. In the First World War it seemed an intelligent enough attitude---you just didn't see why all these people should be killed. But in this war your conscience was held up to ransom. Were you actually prepared to stand by while millions upon millions of people were slaughtered, on a strictly worked out manufacturing basis, for the production of floor-felt, soap and artificial manure? Every moment you deliberated a few more hundred died. To remain a pacifist you needed

to harden yourself intellectually, which was precisely what the others---the murderers---were doing. There was no way out. It wasn't enough to have an intellectual system. Hitler broke through all that, in a world that was fast coming to look like a huge technical organisation. Even now we feel a kind of hushed awe and dread at the sound of his voice, touched perhaps with a vague yearning and nostalgia, like domestic animals who raise their heads and listen to a wild cry in the distance.

Only afterwards did we begin to reckon up what had happened, and what our hands, as if disembodied from our peaceable, social selves, had been made to do. Now, in our period of recollection (rather quiet, however noisy our technical inventions, and perhaps in inverse ratio to their noise), we are wondering again about the ends of life, beyond power and society. The world is no longer commodities, wage-packets and intellectual systems for the management of men. Our religious past gives us all the questions we ask, but we are denied any of the firm answers. We are surrounded again by mystery. Technical power has explained nothing. Upwards of 16 million people died in the last war---most of them in the most dreadful torture and pain---to keep that mystery before us.

Villa Ida,
Ronchi,
Musa Apuania,
Italy.

Dear M^r Spender,

I would be grateful
if you would consider this for
encounter.

Yours sincerely

Maurice Rawdon

THE LAST WAR.

Maurice Rowdon,
Villa Ida,
Ronchi,
Massa Apuania,
ITALY.

The sloth and torpor of Europe after 1918, the utter bankruptcy of its religion, gave rise to a second war which, unlike the first, did not spare the civilian populations. Hitler was the instrument of this war. He led a revolt against a world where all sense of mystery seemed to have departed, where everything was a money-relation; where there were no longer unspoken loyalties between people, as between noblemen and their retainers, and no longer room for prowess, instinct and courage. It seemed more and more an ignominious world where everyone was grubbing about for a better standard of living. This is what gave Nazism its backward-looking, archaic appearance, as if it were trying to revive artificially---in a middle class society---instinctive ties which no longer existed. But there was one activity that was not a bit artificial and which always brought people to their feet, even at the expense of their pleasures: and that was war, the fascinating mystery of death hanging over a whole continent. The artificial society created by Hitler was only a preparation for this.

The sloth and money-^{lust}obsession in Europe was such that at last, had there not been a war, it might have become a kind of ~~Switzerland~~ Switzerland bloated with goods, where faces grew more and more abstract, the relations between people more and more practical in a deadly way; where words like crucifixion would have become merely silly. Even the First World War had failed to shake Europe out of its religious bankruptcy, because it did not reach the civilian populations.

Had not war been his message, his raison d'etre and his

dream, Hitler would have been the leader of a Switzerland play-acting a past century, with spectacular uniforms and mystical speeches. English audiences would have continued to laugh at him in the cinemas; whereas, after 1940, they stopped abruptly. He was never interested in peace; he equated it with the sloth he had risen up in arms against. The middle classes were so easy to deal with, he once said, because they would do anything for peace. Even his own subjects did not seem to realise what he was saying. But neither his own subjects nor the rest of Europe showed anything more than a formal hesitation when the time came to murder, provided they had the weapons to murder with. It took only a few months, during the Maginot Line period, for the morals of sloth to ^{turn into} ~~become~~ his morals---the morals of murder. For the latter grew fat on the former. Thousands upon thousands of people had their revenge in that war for the tedium---stripped of dignity, Godless and mechanical--- of their lives before.

Nazism was all the violence and anger and mystery of old Europe up in arms against the paralysing orthodoxy of a Godless Christendom. It exaggerated. It shouted abuse and stamped its feet melodramatically. Germany's madness was that of a country swollen with metaphysics in a Europe where metaphysics was fast coming to mean simply a failure to make money. The more apathetic the rest of Europe, the louder Hitler shouted.

He really governed the whole of Europe, if not the world, between 1933 and 1945. In the first year of the war there were articles in English newspapers asking whether it was moral to bomb civilian populations. The thought was horrifying to Germans, despite Hitler, as to Englishmen and Americans. But not many months later the massed raids on German cities began and thousands of women and children were blown to pieces or burned to death. It

was as if this were the destiny for which Europe as a community had been waiting since the twenties.

Hitler was convinced that Europe would find its heroism and dignity in a war. He was proved right. The old upper classes woke up from their melancholy dozing and produced leaders again; working people forgot their strikes and their wage-packets. Everybody was together again, in a community. Class hatreds---the most bitter personal hatreds of our epoch---were almost laid asleep. Clean young gentlemen found that they could drop bombs on people they had never seen without turning a hair. People were jocular, lively and helpful.

The First World War was a tedious mass murder of troops on a static line, day after day; it was killing a man in another trench---a man like yourself---for a reason you were never really clear about. But this war was different. People really wanted to fight in this one. Young men in Germany could fight for the Third Reich, and if that sounded silly to them they could fight for the feeling that Hitler had given Germany a bit of dignity in the world. And people like myself, on the other side, could fight against the massacre of people by gas-chamber and furnace, or against a regime which answered the words Christ or art with a kick in the teeth. Our consciences were all involved. Those of us---English or French or German---who would have made good conscientious objectors in the First World War made first-class murderers in this one.

Hitler's end was really a massive crucifixion in Europe. Again and again, particularly in the last year of the war, he contradicted his generals, and seemed simply to be indifferent to the most obvious rules of strategy. It is ridiculous to say he was (wrong' not to stop the war when he saw he was losing. He hadn't the slightest interest in society, even in German society, as an end in itself. To say

that he was forced into war or went into it in order to solve a chronic unemployment problem is completely to misunderstand his intentions (as he wrote and spoke them). Full employment as an end in itself was of not the slightest interest to him, otherwise he would have had no quarrel with half the people in England and France and Germany itself who came out against him before the war started. To say that his motive was in the end a peaceful society is to say that he agreed with the left-wing orthodoxies of the time which he chiefly detested.

It is equally ridiculous to say that England and America were fighting to rid the world of a criminal who had somehow--history's most remarkable accident, and quite gratuitous--got hold of the reins of power. Europe had a dark necessity for Hitler, a fact which it has managed to hide from itself by transferring all its war-guilt on to Germany.

Nazism was not a regime with certain grave blemishes, nor was Hitler a man who made certain unfortunate mistakes. Nazism was complete and whole in itself, and successful. It was not an ideology, like class socialism. It was a fact: that is to say it did not look forward to an ideal society in the future, nor did it consist of an abstract body of doctrine. It was vested in Hitler's personal and mystical leadership; that was its essence. And the Thousand Year Reich was already there, in its first years; it did not depend on some withering away of the State. For heroism now, courage and spectacle now, were its ends; and war was the only means to those ends. Thus, practically speaking, the Nazi system was a society dedicated to the task of making war, as an end in itself. Apologies that Hitler was after all a kindly person, or that the mass deaths in the concentration camps were an accident of war, are

irrelevant to Nazism. They are only interesting as expressions of guilt, on the part of those who supported him.

The European war is quite different from the technical war waged by America or the eastern communisms. The European war is a metaphysical adventure connected with the renewal of the sense of wonder and mystery, and the idea of a fated crucifixion, changing the whole of a man's future life. It is waged with the same values as those which make Europe's art. In the end it is religious. To see the difference between the European war and the Technical war one only has to compare the works of Juenger, Remarques, Siegfried Sassoon, Malraux and Aldington, with a book like The Naked and the Dead. The Red Badge of Courage was still in the European tradition, being the classical study of a man's struggle against terror towards heroism, and his development from a helpless pity, and self pity, to a kind of stoical awe and compassionate selflessness. All European war-books of any depth are accounts of the Passion, full of nostalgia for those brief glimpses of mystery.

'If there be such a thing as ghostly revisitation of this earth, and if ghosts can traverse time and choose their ground, I would return to the Bois Francais sector as it was then.'

'As I stepped over one of the Germans an impulse made me lift him up from the miserable ditch, Propped against the bank, his blond face was undisfigured, except by the mud which I wiped from his eyes and mouth with my coat sleeve... He didn't look to be more than eighteen. Hoisting him a little higher, I thought what a gentle face he had, and remembered that this was the first time I'd ever touched one of our enemies with my hands.'

'For me, the idea of death made everything vivid and

valuable.'

'But I was rewarded by an intense memory of men whose courage had shown me the power of the human spirit---that spirit which could withstand the utmost assault.' (Excerpts from Siegfried Sassoon's Memoirs of an Infantry Officer)

But the war of the un-European societies is simply the solution by massed attacks, depending on a high degree of research, of a technical problem. It has no value beyond a practical value which can be calculated on paper. Its spiritual consequences differ from man to man, and they have no unity, no communal or religious reference; they are simply departures from the social or technical norm---mal-adjustments. The books written about these technical battles are either sagas of heroism or accounts of physical discomfort and moral ~~degeneracy~~ degeneracy. The religious end is lacking.

In the European war there was always an erratic kind of decorum, amounting sometimes to a kind of love, between the two sides; I have read of English soldiers in the first war getting angry when Germans were abused in conversation at home, and I felt the same anger myself in the second war. But the technical war is merciless; there is no shared concept of the sacredness of the human creature. Prisoners are treated well if it suits policy; they are no longer thought of as the mystical enemy, but as units of bargaining power.

Nazism, or indeed any Fascism, was a kind of conscious philosophy of the European war, and therefore, being deliberate, it was stripped of compassion. That was why Hitler talked like a tortured and haunted man. He was absolutely dedicated to the task of murder, as Europe's destiny. The Thousand Year Reich was a dream with a touch of Walpurgis Night in it. Ruins were proper to it, not peaceful

suburbia. This is what distinguished his socialism from all other forms, his dictatorship from that of the communists. The Generals were astonished when he showed a complete disregard for the common logic of strategy, because they had never realised that for him strategy was simply the servant of a mystical destiny which had satisfactions far beyond those of conquest. War was never for him a technical struggle between two sides. It was essentially a mystery for him, and---though we may not like to use this word in connection with a man who looked to us like an embodiment of the devil--- it was the Passion.

His struggle for power was the climax of a religious crisis that had been developing in the Christian world since the eighteenth century, and of which the growth of huge cities, the establishment of an abstract uniformity of life and behaviour over formerly distinct places each with its spirit, and the pursuit of special intellectual or technical ends instead of the old all-inclusive or religious ones, were the causes. Hitler broke open this uniformity by intellectually infuriating people to fight each other. For the intellect was the last great source of energy in the post-religious world. And he called its deliberate incitement 'propaganda'. The result was that almost every man went into the war with a furious intellectual image before him of 'the enemy', and this image made it possible for him to shoot, disembowel, rape, bomb or massacre on a stupendous scale other people who were from much the same kind of peaceful suburbia as himself. In the course of the war thousands of square miles of crops were burned, millions of homes were pillaged, bombs were dropped 'for luck' on houses far from industrial or military targets. And all this was done by people whose personal manners were probably more peaceable and subdued than those of any previous generation in Christendom. In order to

^{do it}
 they had to believe in it, mentally. And this Hitler taught them to do. He succeeded in inciting to a kind of madness not only his own subjects, not only the Lithuanians and Ukrainians he put in charge of some of the concentration camps and who were said to be the most recklessly brutal of all, but every race, class and group in Europe, and after that in the whole world.

It seemed written in the fate of Europe. Before the war started educated young men went to Spain 'to fight Fascism' and as often as not seemed to go in order to kill and risk being killed, in order to get the smell and touch and quickness of a real experience as opposed to the unheroic tedium of their lives before, when they had been unmoved by religious feelings. Almost every book to have come out of that civil war dwells with fascination on the simple details of battle ~~almost~~ as if they were ends in themselves, with the political ~~attitudes~~ attitudes as merely formal justification. (1) It was as if these young men said to themselves, 'At last, with these lice, this exposure to bitter cold, without adequate food or clothing, these bullets and hand-grenades and train-loads of wounded men, at last I feel real. I can feel the life in my body. My compassion is stirred, as well as my hatred and love. I am functioning properly. I ~~am~~ am not living the death-life of a middle class youth...' And that was the burden of Hitler's message to middle class Europe: you aren't alive until you go to war, only ^rmuder will bring you back to life.

(1) See Orwell's Homage to Catalonia, Part XII, where he ^edescribes his sensations when he was shot in the back of the neck.

During the Thirties people's intellects became increasingly enraged, and his 'propaganda' had a remarkably quick success. His own people began seriously to believe that 'non-Aryans' were by original nature inferior, but this was nothing to the number of people outside Germany who came to believe that 'the Germans' were by original nature inferior. When the young men who went to Spain found that the Falangists differed from the Republicans only in the fact that they raised their fists in the salute instead of the palms of their hands, they were taken aback: they hadn't realised, apparently, that they were human creatures too! In other words, their contact with reality was always through the brain. The 'Falangists' were simply an idea for them, as they themselves were simply an idea for the Falangists. George Orwell wanted 'to kill a Fascist'. - Only slowly, and with pain and regret, did he realise that this meant 'to kill a human creature'. Somehow it hadn't ^{looked} ~~xxx~~ the same. Hitler excited this intellectual obsessiveness to the point where hardly a worker or business man or peasant was left untouched by it. The people who crept beyond the forward lines to have a look at 'a German', with awe, hearts beating fast, were the successors of the young men who peeped above a rampart to have a look at a 'Falangist' or a 'Communist'.

Even pacifism he rendered frivolous. In the First World War it seemed an intelligent enough attitude---you just didn't see why all these people should be killed. But in this war your conscience was held up to ransom. Were you actually prepared to stand by while millions upon millions of people were slaughtered, on a strictly worked out manufacturing basis, for the production of floor-felt, soap and artificial manure? Every moment you deliberated a few more hundred died. To remain a pacifist you needed

to harden yourself intellectually, which was precisely what the others---the murderers---were doing. There was no way out. It wasn't enough to have an intellectual system. Hitler broke through all that, in a world that was fast coming to look like a huge technical organisation. Even now we feel a kind of hushed awe and dread at the sound of his voice, touched perhaps with a vague yearning and nostalgia, like domestic animals who raise their heads and listen to a wild cry in the distance.

Only afterwards did we begin to reckon up what had happened, and what our hands, as if disembodied from our peaceable, social selves, had been made to do. Now, in our period of recollection (rather quiet, however noisy our technical inventions, and perhaps in inverse ratio to their noise), we are wondering again about the ends of life, beyond power and society. The world is no longer commodities, wage-packets and intellectual systems for the management of men. Our religious past gives us all the questions we ask, but we are denied any of the firm answers. We are surrounded again by mystery. Technical power has explained nothing. Upwards of 16 million people died in the last war---most of them in the most dreadful torture and pain---to keep that mystery before us.
