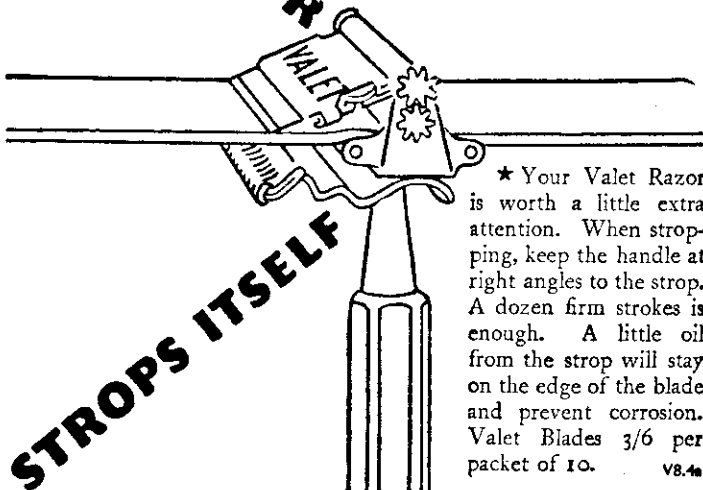


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"THE HUMAN MIND HAS GOT TO JUMP"

Problem of the Individual and the Nation-State

(A BBC Talk by JOHN MIDDLETON-MURRY)

IN order to react successfully to the vast increases of power which he then saw coming, Henry Adams said in 1905 that the human mind would "need to jump." The jump would be necessary (he thought) about 1938. Well, it did not happen. But now, with the atom bomb, the necessity stares us in the face. The human mind has to jump, or the species perish. Plenty of individual minds have made the jump—or believe they are ready to. But that does not make much difference. The paradoxical fact we have to get into our heads is that the individual person nowadays is not real. He is a kind of illusion. The truth is that though the power at the disposal of mankind has increased a thousand times in the last hundred years, it is not the individual person who possesses or controls the power. He is not a thousand times more powerful than his ancestor. It is only as the member of a nation-state that he shares that power. In other words, Man is the nation-state. If we say the human mind has to jump, what we mean is that the mind of the nation-state has to jump.

Vaguely, we all know that. Yet at the same time we persist in believing that the individual person is very real. And somehow between these two contradictory realisations our sense of reality is blurred. Naturally enough. It is very hard indeed to think that one's own reality is primarily social, that one's centre of gravity, so to speak, is outside oneself. And it is particularly hard because the emphasis for so long has been upon the supreme reality of the individual person. This reached a culmination in the belief which prevailed a hundred years ago that, if the individual freely pursued his own satisfactions, universal harmony would ensue. That was the blessed theory of "the harmony of interests"; and, by and large, we can say it was the general belief of English-speaking men all through the 19th Century. Such a habit of mind, slowly formed during two centuries and apparently justified by results, is tremendously hard to eradicate—even in the minds of those who see it has got to be eradicated.

The Myth of the Arch-Villain

A hundred years ago Karl Marx put forward the revolutionary proposition that Man, in reality, was quite different from the idea he had of himself. He was in fact "the complex of social relations." That was quite incomprehensible and neglected accordingly. But to-day it is beginning to penetrate. Man has endured two shattering world wars which



J. MIDDLETON-MURRY
Portrait of the speaker as a young man

a majority of individual men did not desire or will. We try to escape the mental revolution that is required of us by putting all the blame on the other fellow. It was the Kaiser; it was Hitler. It isn't just humbug on our part. It is mainly because it is too difficult to think anything else. As individuals, we say to ourselves quite truly: "We didn't want these wars." And the only explanation which seems to fit is that some evil villains made war upon us. When we are told that the Germans, too, as individuals did not want these wars, at first we just cannot believe it. It does not make sense. But gradually we are forced to believe it. Nobody now seriously argues that the Germans, or the Kaiser, were solely responsible for World War I. Vaguely, we admit that everybody shared the responsibility for that one. But this one now. That's different. The Germans, the Nazis, Hitler, were solely to blame. Nevertheless, the individual English and American soldier is discovering once more that the individual German is surprisingly like himself, and did not want the war any more than he did.

And so the bewilderment grows. The individuals, English and German, are much the same—ordinary decent human beings; yet en masse, they have spent six years trying to annihilate one another. And the only solution to the paradox is a choice between two lines of thought which seem equally impossible. Either we can say that the individual is real—that the individual Englishman and the individual German really are what they seem to each other

(Continued on next page)