

TWO things of a very opposite nature that have occurred in recent days seem to me to point a moral—not that I want to point a moral, for I hate the things, but we live in a time when under stress of continuous, unrelenting emotion we are forced to come down deep into some real and absolute truths.

Not to be too solemn to start with, the first thing that struck me was our new Budget, or rather the reception of it. We are always having new Budgets now, and I myself, at any rate, have reached a kind of saturation point. After all, by order of the powers-that-be, a month or two ago I gave everything up to my Government, and that simple fact really stopped me thinking about money, and I have felt an airy, bodiless kind of creature ever since.

The second little incident occurred in the big sale rooms at Christies', when books and manuscripts were auctioned for the benefit of the Red Cross. I had a lively personal interest in this sale, because I had been Chairman of this Books and Manuscripts Committee. For months and months I had either been digging out of reluctant owners their precious possessions or welcomed with startled surprise the generosity of unexpected and often unheard-of people. Well, there we were, in Christies' famous room, offering at about two-a-minute wonderful things like manuscript poems by Byron, Oliver Cromwell's letters, the manuscripts of famous novels by Rider Haggard and Somerset Maugham, and disposing of the loveliest old missals and books of paintings and figures that would make any artist's mouth water.

Self-Sacrifice with Gaiety

The atmosphere both around the Budget and around the wonderful self-sacrifice of so many priceless treasures was one of gaiety and abandon. I don't say that any of us exactly welcome these Budgets, and I know that I for one gave up a certain manuscript of my own with a desperate kind of home-sickness; when I saw it disappearing among all the other books it was as though I had just sent my small son to school for the first time. The point I want to make is that here in England we are surrendering everything we have, without any hesitation whatever—and for what?

Myself, I am a man, I suppose, who has had a lot of luck in life. I have been able to earn my living by working at something I love. I have had for thirty years as much money as I could possibly want. I have been able to move with absolute freedom, and until this war I had very few qualms about the kind of life that I was leading and the sort of world in which I was living. That sounds very self-satisfied, but I didn't think myself so.

I thought England was a pretty good place. I knew that there were many things wrong with it—that the slums were terrible, that in the last ten years stories about the devastated areas in the North of England were shocking. I am ashamed to say that I thought I did my part. I took some interest in housing. I was occupied with various charities near my own country home. When I travelled abroad I thought that I got on very well with men in other countries. It is true that I was aware that, more than any other type of any

WHEN THE STRUGGLE ENDS — WHAT THEN ?

By SIR HUGH WALPOLE in "London Calling"

In this article Sir Hugh Walpole, who once lived in New Zealand, asks: "Is there any reason whatever to suppose that everything that follows this war won't be just as disappointing as everything that followed the last?" His answer is encouraging.

other country, a certain sort of Englishman was detested by everybody. The aloof, supercilious, patronising Englishman who behaved in any country where he happened to be as though he owned it. I most certainly, I was well assured, was not like that myself.

After the Last War

I took very little interest during the last twenty-five years in international politics. It was the arts that interested me. I went to Germany for music, to France for painting, to New York for the theatre, and so on. The last war did nothing to me at all. We were fighting, I understood, for the self-termination of small nations. It was going to be a much better world when the war was over, but I never bothered my head as to what kind of a world it was going to be. I was, in fact, like millions of people everywhere, fast asleep in my own self-complacency.

Now I quite suddenly find myself ready to give up everything I possess—to surrender my comfort, my possessions, my luxuries for all my remaining years. I find myself surrounded by people who are ready to do the same thing. Why? I am nearly fifty-seven years of age. It's rather late to wake up. I haven't perhaps a very long lease of life to which to look forward, and yet I am looking forward, with an eagerness that astonishes me, to a brave new world.

Isn't this simply, wishful thinking? Weren't we all looking forward during the last war to a wonderful new world, and did anything come of it? Weren't we, in spite of those four years, greedy and selfish when it was all over? Is there any reason whatever to suppose that everything that follows this war won't be just as disappointing as everything that followed the last? Nay, worse, for this time we shall have given up everything; even this freedom about which we talk so much will be constricted by poverty, by strikes, by international revolution—all the old horrors to go through once again, and oneself older and feebler, and less able to fight them. Yet we are most of us here submitting to the Budgets, selling our possessions for charity, giving



SIR HUGH WALPOLE
" . . . I was fast asleep "

everything that we have to the Government, with what we might call an almost crazy optimism.

All Awake at Last

I'll try and give you some reasons for that as I see them. For one thing, we are all awake at last. This war has touched and is touching all of us. Every hour is filled with personal, individual apprehension. What are possessions worth in comparison with the lives of your wives, children and friends? We are driven back here on to the starkest realities. We are threatened not only

with death—that seems, oddly, a small thing—but, for the first time in the experience of any of us, the possibility that we may not be able to move, to think, to speak, except under orders; that treachery may be so universal that we distrust our best friends; that the tortures and the brutalities of the Gestapo may be proved in our own back-garden.

End to Class Snobbery

So the very first thing that we are realising is that in the world, after this war, we have all got to guard and protect one another. We are anxious not for ourselves, but for those we love, and that anxiety is so poignant that we have resolved that in the new world we will none of us suffer it again. That means at once an equality. We have suffered for years in England from class snobbery, neglect of the very poor, indifference to what was going on in the street next to ours. For the first time for 400 years in England there's beginning to be an absolute equality, an equality created by the imminent threat of the loss of the freedom of all of us.

When, at the beginning of the war, thousands of children were evacuated from the northern towns into the country, the country people saw with horror their neglected condition, and swore, as I know, thousands upon thousands of them, that this should never be allowed again. The world after the war is going to be a people's world. It is already ceasing to be a war of nations. We are discovering that

there are men and women, millions of men and women in every country, who feel and think as we do. All the minor differences of language and custom, and sensitiveness to small snubs or meannesses have vanished before this great common desire that nobody ever again shall suffer from that dreadful apprehension of losing his own individual liberty. This means, surely, that in the new world the differences between countries will disappear before the common general realisation of a terrible tyranny that nearly destroyed us. Because we all of us are being personally threatened every day with death, we will surely realise the folly of letting modern scientific invention go so far ahead of us that next time we will all be destroyed, perhaps by some death-ray 200 miles away from us.

Why We Failed

The things that prevented us after the last war from making a new world were complacency, small greeds, meannesses, but this time our passionate realisation of what loss of liberty means is becoming a kind of religion. I am afraid that vague ideals, words, phrases are no good in building a new world. Actual experience for every individual is necessary before he will make a real resolve. When, two months or so ago, the Germans moved with that deadly swiftness across France, some of us swore that when we had won this war we would help towards an internationalism of experience. I mean the experience of every man who had been forbidden to speak the truth, of every woman who had seen the terrified face of her child, of every friend whose companion had been led away into a concentration camp.

The Old World is Dead

This is only the basis of why I think, without undue optimism, that a new world is bound to come. I believe in God, and I believe, too, that because the last war was not enough to shake us all out of our separateness, this war was bound to come, to strike every one of us individually. Here in England, already I see new schemes for education, new thoughts about housing, a new friendliness between anyone and everyone, a new feeling of closeness to the oppressed peoples of Europe. We are, indeed, no longer an island. No country after this war will be apart from any other country. The imminent presence of death and the still more terrible possibility that, if we don't fight to the last man, we shall never be free again, has forced us to come close to one another.

Absurd tariffs, blind clutchings to possessions that we only hold in trust, old-fashioned methods of endless, international discussion, stupid obstinacies about language and creed and personal habits—all these belong to the old world. It's of no use for any one to think that that world will ever exist again. We are fighting with an excited optimism in our hearts, because we see the possibility of at last coming together through the horrid experience of realising how helpless we are when we are apart.