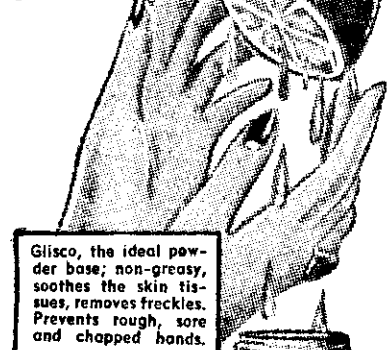


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# BACK THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS—By One Who Has Been There

**F**RANKLY, I don't know which side of the looking-glass I'm on now. I suppose, however, we're all a bit cock-eyed these days, seeing things through a glass, in reverse, backwards, so the opinion of one proton will not affect the spinning of the atom.

The facts are that some time ago I wrote some pieces for *The Listener* entitled "Civilian Into Soldier." This was an attempt to skip through some of the things that happened to an individual once he had been moved from the street into camp. Now it may complete the story if I tell you about reversing the process.

Mac and I were talking to some people the other day and one of them said that everybody was ready and eager to do more work to help in the war effort against Nazism. Whereupon

Mac said: "Yes. Come into the pub with me any night at 5.30 and you'll hear them all shouting—'We wish we were back at work!'"

Well, in a way, Mac is almost as right as he is witty, although he ought to remember that it is dangerous to be more witty than right. Speaking very impersonally, I do not think it is right that a perfectly able-bodied young man like myself should have survived two years of war without seeing a shot fired in anger. If the war is worth fighting we ought to be fighting it, in my humble opinion, and all I'm engaged upon at present is an excellent and recommended recipe for home brewed beer.

## Either or Both?

However, in a civilised democratic country you can't have organisation and ardour too, so I'll have to resign myself to the unhappy prospect that there will probably be time for the brew to mature before the outside world worries me again. I must remain happily frustrated, and comfort myself with the thought that the men of Britain and the men of Egypt, India, Singapore, and all over the world—the comrades of Russia and the peasants of China—have my sympathy, even if it is I who have the beer.

I hope that conveys what my first thoughts have been on coming out again. It is quite as interesting a transition as

the change from civilian to camp life more than half a year ago.

I had to record then that camp routine immediately made the world more remote than ever it had been. And the remoteness of the world meant that the war too was remote.

Now I am back with the newspapers and the radio bulletins. Men and women around me are worrying about this and that and expecting me to worry too. And I am beginning to worry.

The soldier's grumble is as regular as his meal times. But it affects little more than his sleep or his stomach. The civilian grumble is very much more in touch with the revolutions that make or break empires and dictatorships.

## A Different World

There are many fewer vehicles on the roads. Lights are dimmed. Fewer people are travelling. The bars are not so crowded. Where I have been staying the hens have not been laying so well. Prices are up a little more and tables not quite so well spread. My wife is envied because she has been able to buy silk stockings within the last two months. (There are plenty in the country towns, ladies, although the cities are cleaned out.)

Not that I mind very much about all these things. I am used now to adapting my grumbles to more primeval needs than those of the intellect or nervous system. A good meal is a sensation having enough richness in it to last me a week of news-gloomy days. Tablecloths, bright cutlery, soft beds, are as treasured for me now as the conversation of friends. I am considerably reduced in value as a citizen and greatly appreciated in worth as a human animal enjoying fleshly comforts.

I should be glad, of course, to be able to tell you that I am bursting with anxiety to enter once more into the fray. Excelsior and all that. But I am in fact bursting with nothing more than porridge, poached eggs, toast, and sweet tea for breakfast. I have tried rousing up enthusiasm. I have tried being sensitive when I see pictures of old women carrying bundles along refugee roads. I have tried being horrified at accounts of the number of the dead. I have tried determining to strain all my efforts to Help Win the War.

## Men Must Wait and Women—?

But in this, as in all other causes, I have found that mine must wait while other plans mature.

It is probable that my case is duplicated several thousand times in this country, where young men and old spend time in camp preparing for war, and then return to prepare for the next edition or next season's crop. "What the hell," they are likely to say, "was the use of all that?" Whereupon resignation sets in. We adapt ourselves to the incongruity of sheets on the bed while the Panzer divisions thrust towards Omsk, Tomsk and Tobolsk, so to speak.

And with many others, the same sort of thing must be happening. The Home

(Continued on next page)

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