

# "THE SICKNESS WITHIN OURSELVES"

**HERBERT AGAR**, editor of the Louisville "Courier Journal," is a distinguished American writer and speaker visiting Britain at the present time. From the beginning of the war he has been the strongest advocate of all help possible for Britain, and he has said outright that America should enter the war as a combatant. On August 19, he spoke to the people of Britain in the BBC's Home Service. Here is his talk (slightly abridged):

I HAVE just arrived from America. I therefore can't tell you anything new about the war which you are fighting, and which to my grief we are not. But I do want to say something about why this calamity came upon our world. I want to begin with a story I was told the other day: it seems to me symbolic. A friend said to me that he had made a poll of British opinion and that he had discovered that a large majority of the people did not want America to come into the war. I told him that seemed to me nonsense and he replied that it could not be nonsense because it was scientific. Scientific, or not, I would bet my last shilling that the British do want us in the war. They want us in the war for the same reason that the Germans want us out of the war—because Hitler will be beaten more quickly and more surely if we get in at once.

But the British people have been told hundreds of times that they must not say this. They have been warned that if they speak the truth as they feel it in their hearts, nameless harm might be done. The best way to keep America out of the war, according to this story, is not to let her know that anybody wants her in it. In other words, the best way to get what you want is never to say what you think. I would like to point out a weakness in this theory that America should never be told that Britain wants her in the war. The weakness is that every American whose mind has not gone bang knows perfectly well that Britain wants us in the war. In heaven's name why shouldn't she? We are not, after all, another Italy.

## Who Is Being Fooled?

So the question arises, who is being fooled, and the answer, of course, is that nobody is being fooled. Nobody except the truth. The poor truth takes another beating in the name of practical politics, which are the only kind of politics that always fail. Where are the practical politicians of Europe to-day? They are dead or in gaol or in exile, or they have been blackmailed into becoming traitors to their country. It is a disease of our world, this feeling that the simple fact is the one thing that no one dare mention, and I want to suggest to you to-night that this disease, or the weakness that comes from this disease, is one of the chief reasons for the Axis barbarism that threatens to destroy us.

I want to suggest that this war is something more dangerous than just another outbreak of German trouble. The German trouble became possible only because we of the Western World had lost faith in ourselves, and we had lost faith because for many dreary years we had refused to tell ourselves the truth. Instead of facing the troubles that were multiplying around us we took refuge in big words—big words that were not associated with big deeds; big words that were used not as a call for action, but as a soothing syrup. So the day came when the syrup was no longer soothed, but it made the patient sick, and on that day the Nazi Revolution of barbarism became possible.

Democracy is one of the big words that we have abused: everybody saving the world for democracy and then betraying the world to slump and indifference. That word has been used to cover a multitude of crimes and corruptions. To-day it is hard to use the word with-

## Victory Demands A New Faith

out sounding sentimental or weak. Yet if we took it seriously, if we lived it instead of talking it, the concept of democracy has still an almost magic power.

### Democracy Begins With Morals

Like all the great forces which can make or break the world, democracy is first of all a code of conduct. It is a rigorous way of life or else it is nothing but wind and promises. In other words, democracy begins with morals, it begins with an act of faith about the nature of man and about the dignity of his soul, and with a determination to build institutions which will fulfil that nature and uphold that dignity. If we take democracy in this high sense it makes heavy demands on us. We have got to live differently and we have got to be discontented with many of our political and economic practices. But after the last war our world didn't want to be disciplined and self-critical; it wanted to indulge itself and to make money. So in America, at least, we substituted the easy word for the difficult deed. It wasn't only in America that we did this, but I use my own country as an example for obvious reasons. We told ourselves in America that we were the greatest democracy on earth, pointed to our constitution and our standard of living and forgot all about democracy as a code of conduct. We didn't treat the negro any better, we didn't demand of ourselves a high standard of virtue in politics. We paid no heed to those who reminded us that millions of our fellow citizens were living in such inhuman poverty. We were content to boast ourselves democrats while living our lives in the service of the false gods of success and prosperity.

Now prosperity is a fine and pleasant thing, but it is not a faith; it is not the basis for a civilisation. The presence of prosperity is not what did us harm but the absence of a deeply held meaning to life. It is nice to have more and more ice-boxes and automobiles, but the best ice-box in the world cannot long compensate man for the loss of his soul, and the whole world was losing its soul because it was taking high words cheaply, boasting of virtue instead of seeking it. In this way our world fell sick and cynical and self-destructive, but the wages of cynicism is death. The other great nations which are a part of our western Christian world were treating their institutions and their ideals almost as negligently as we were treating ours.

In the Nazi lust for destruction, the sickness within our world has come to an ugly head. The policy of words without deeds, the fear of facing the bold simple truth, has weakened us to such an extent that this disease could arise. If the Nazis win, we shall not have a new order imposed, instead of the old; we shall have no order at all. If the Nazis win, we shall descend into the long night which follows the death of every great civilisation. What is happening, I suggest, is not a war in any ordinary sense. What is happening is the disintegration of our world—a counter-revolution against our world.

### More Than Beating Germany

We have got to do more than beat the Germans. We have got to kill the source of that sickness within ourselves. The killing of Germans is a harsh necessity to-day, but the mere killing of Germans will not renew our faith in ourselves. It will not teach us to live up to the brave words we use. It will not make us see democracy as a code of conduct, freedom as a heavy responsibility. But unless we do reform in these ways, the same disease that made the German threat possible will still infect our world. The disease will break out again in a new place and the next time it will certainly prove fatal. So, we have two jobs ahead of us. We must conquer the Germans in the war, which is the military phase of this revolution against life, and we must conquer ourselves within ourselves—the slackness, the indifference to

truth, the worship of success. If we do both of these things we may be good enough to build that world which Mr. Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt described together.

## AIR TRAINING FOR BOYS Radio To Assist Recruiting

A CAMPAIGN to recruit boys for an Air Training Corps was begun with a broadcast from 1YA last Monday (September 1). It will be continued as far as the NBS is concerned with periodical broadcasts at New Plymouth (September 29), Napier (October 7), Wellington (November 1), Christchurch (November 17), and Dunedin (December 1).

The Corps is intended as a preliminary training organisation for prospective Air Force personnel. Boys not less than 16½ years of age at June 30 in the year of enlistment and not more than 18 years of age at the same date, will be eligible for training in subjects related to the duties of air crews, flight mechanics, riggers, radio mechanics and operators.

Units will be formed in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Invercargill, and at Hamilton, Palmerston North, Wanganui, New Plymouth, Hastings, Napier, Gisborne, and Timaru.

College units will also be formed in these centres where a sufficient number of recruits is available at the schools (with a minimum age limit of 15), and also at Whangarei, Dannevirke, Feilding, Hawera, Stratford, Levin, Masterton, Nelson, Blenheim, Ashburton, Waitaki, Gore, and Greymouth.

For the town units, uniforms with special badges, patches, and buttons will be issued. The school unit members will have special badges, and badges will also be available for members keeping up membership by correspondence.

The training will not make entry into the Air Force obligatory, and the Air force will not necessarily accept every recruit from the Air Training Corps, but it is anticipated that the Corps will provide basic training for Air Force personnel with its combination of the characteristics of High School Cadets, Technical Night School, and some features of the Air Force's preliminary education scheme.

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