

able to take up where I had left off, perhaps a little better at doing some things, certainly slower and clumsier at others; there would be all those wartime regulations to find out about.

Since that moment, I have had to acknowledge an increasing awareness that the business of returning, of beginning where I had left off, of catching up, is not so simple. Quite largely, I think, this feeling of discrepancy, of incompatibility between myself and people at home was initiated by the weeks of answering questions which insisted on the peculiarities of my experience. I had continually to cast unformed judgments into words and say what it felt like to be back, what sort of life we led in prison camps, what I thought of the Germans. There were lectures and articles which I read, on the psychological abnormalities of prisoners of war and refugees which I have not been able to assure myself were incorrect or exaggerated. I would catch myself being grotesquely hearty or fatuously dumb.

Perhaps this is becoming a little too personal, a little over-dramatized. What I want to convey, however, is necessarily derived from personal experience, although I believe that it is shared by other men who have returned from prison camps, and, I believe too, by refugees and "liberated" people. There is the ballooning emotion that comes when freedom is sensed as an actual experience, and with it the feeling that the return to familiar surroundings is all that is necessary for return to normal life; there is an increasing consciousness of estrangement and abnormality.

What happens when a man becomes a prisoner of war, what happens, conceivably, when people have their country occupied by an army of enemies, is a revolutionary change in his make-up as a social being. He does not leave his friends, the people he knows, and go into prison, where he, uniquely, is thrust into a hostile environment and where he must fight an essential battle to maintain his selfhood, where he can, defending it, regard himself as cut off from normal society, from real life. He has with him instead the society that he knew as normal and real, and it is towards this

society, towards his friends and acquaintances themselves, that he has to reorder his attitude.

It is difficult to think back to our state of mind during the first days of captivity in Corinth. We all, I suppose, based our ideas of German prison camps on press versions of Dachau horrors; we envisaged lives flattened out under relentless discipline and omniscient organization. We expected the worst, and prepared for it. There would be a time of tough and bitter experience, and we had to get through it as best we could. So, when we departed—as most of the ten thousand of us did—from customary ethical standards, we did not feel that we had jettisoned decency for good and all, but that we had pocketed such things until the time came for employing them again.

In fact, conditions were extremely bad just at the beginning: no food was issued for the first three or four days at Corinth. Wounded and sick were segregated and cared for, after a fashion, so that there were no obvious claimants for sympathy or generosity. The job was to keep oneself alive, and nobody had anything to spare for anybody else. There were exceptions, of course, as there always are; close friends remained together, and food that had been saved or scrounged might be shared with the man one "mucked in" with; but, apart from the existence of such cobbles and muckers, society around each prisoner would be regarded by him as a cunning enemy: people you had liked and trusted for years, and with whom you had shared a number of dangers and excitements would be watched suspiciously while they divided up the rations; fights over this occasionally took place.

On the positive side, this meant that life resolved itself into a perpetual intrigue for food. Even when things were a little easier, fear of future shortages, fear of jealousy, or of importunate begging hardened each man's selfishness and cunning into permanent features of P.O.W. life. The campaigns and humiliating shifts directed in the Dulags towards cadging food from men who went outside the camps to work or who had other means of getting extra food were resorted to later in the Stalags for