

thinking and the matters which occupied our thoughts, the orientation being always away from what would disturb or worry us. For example, my own reactions towards the war became entirely technical and impersonal. The reading of the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, the winnowing of rumours, the endless discussion and prognostication of events, absorbed a great part of each day, but the devastation of towns in the West and the slaughterous battles in Russia, Rommel's advance and Stalingrad, affected me only in terms of their historical significance—an attitude impossibly abstract now. Dejection and pessimism came, but not from allied reverses, or from the impact of German propaganda; they were consequences of periods of military inactivity.

Again, we talked enormously, but we avoided that perpetual discussion of common acquaintances which can become the dominant topic among a group of people; incompatibilities and dissatisfactions in personal relationships cannot be faced when those relationships are indissoluble and close, so that the only protection was not to acknowledge the existence of such difficulties. Talk was the one great amenity, and filled a great part of each day; in such a huge, leisured, and stable community, the opportunities for social intercourse and for getting acquainted with scales and categories of living other than one's own were illimitable; there can be few prisoners whose horizons have not been considerably extended in these directions. Inherent in this conversational traffic, though, are the same dangers as there are in too close a confinement within the bounds of any social class. Everybody in a P.O.W. camp has a contemporary background and a recent experience practically identical with everybody else's. Back in normal society, the repatriated prisoner can often find himself rather lost in talking to people without that background and experience, much as products of the worst public schools find themselves lost when they have to do with a working man.

In permanent camps, racketeering and bludging, although they persist as whole-time pursuits, tend to become less obtrusive, an inevitable consequence of the

greater stability the community has, and of the respectability such stability affords. In the long run—and this counts in the years of Stalag life—most men adopt an habitually ingratiating manner towards those in useful positions, and will do far less for other people in general than they did before they were captured. The occasional memory—and the occasional consciousness of their continued existence—of these developments in oneself is one of the more disturbing legacies of P.O.W. life. Perversions, sexual or criminal, were not, I think, widespread, but they were practised fairly openly and without challenge. A curious and revealing circumstance was the existence, for most of my two years in Germany, of a Stalag razor gang which intimidated British W.O.s in charge of certain camp affairs, who engaged in one or two quite bloody exploits, among minor bullying and rough-housing, without, so far as I know, any counter move being made by the thousands of us who knew of them. This is perhaps the extreme case to which was applied a governing principle of social relationships in prison camp—the right of the private individual to make himself a public nuisance.

Apart from the qualifications which I am trusting any reader to make for himself, this account, besides reflecting the incoherence of unassimilated experience, would be absurdly grim. Of course men, even when they become prisoners of war, do not cease to be rational beings; I do not mean to suggest that virtue and right conduct are expensive luxuries; I certainly do not think of myself or of other returned prisoners as fit subjects for psychiatric treatment. Most of us—I certainly—have had extremely valuable experience in prison camps; I met a large number of interesting people; many very funny things happened; there were many enjoyable times; a pleasant sort of easy friendliness existed; I had time to read; I had time to think. What I have been trying to record are the reasons I can find for a feeling; a feeling of our lives as having been lived according to modes utterly different from those I had felt, thought and behaved in before, and from those I am still working myself into now, after a year.