"We have betrayed Spain," the progressive young Englishmen wailed. "We have sold out Austria!"

And the young Frenchmen closed the sad concert with their, "We have sacrificed Czechoslovakia, our ally, our wall in the East."

But we ask ourselves whether the pained anger of our friends was absolutely sincere, whether it was entirely justified. It came a little post-mortem—that was sure. For, had public opinion during the English betrayal of Abyssinia, Spain, Austria, and Czechoslovakia taken a clear and united stand against such betrayal, it would never have taken place. No democratic government, no parliament, no Tory clique, no congress, no senate, is able to impose upon a people anything which it really and clearly does not want. Only a dictatorship is in a position to do that.

But dictatorship comes as infallibly as the "amen" after a prayer, as soon as a nation, made bewildered and unhappy by difficulties and crises from which it sees no way out, morally weakened through too many mistakes and crimes of omission, through concessions to the evil and too many betrayals of the good, betrayals to which it has itself given its consent—when such a nation has lost confidence in itself. Dictatorship comes as soon as a nation has no more power to remain unified and faithful. Dictatorship comes as soon as a nation no longer sees the moral abyss that lies between dictatorship and democracy. But a nation cannot perceive this abyss if democracy itself has covered it over with weakness, dissension, and lack of faith, with self-betrayal, and betrayal of its ideals, with rotten willingness to concede, and with a plaintive liberalism which, pretending to be the real and most important symbol of democracy, throws the gates wide open to the enemy. Dictatorship comes when a nation, without knowing it, is ripe for it. Dictatorship comes when the "resistance" fails.

It will happen either—as in the case of Germany—that an enemy from within will undermine democracy and erect its dictatorship, or—as in the case of France—the enemy inside will surrender the fortress to the aggressor on the outside.

Other forms of a democratic collapse are also imaginable. The enemy within and without might weaken and disorganize the democracy of a country to such an extent that it would be entirely unable to put up a resistance. Inasmuch as it would not fight, it would be unnecessary in such a case to formally surrender it to the enemy on the outside. The democracy would rather slip, step by step, over to the enemy on the outside. He would have nothing to do but, in close collaboration with the enemy within, interpenetrate it completely and occupy its key positions, without the necessity of making his victory too obvious.

That would be possible too.

We don't like to think of it. We don't want to think of it.

But one thing we know. The greatest effort of which a nation is capable, the passionate cooperation of all, the most stubborn self-confidence and an unlimited confidence in the integrity and wisdom of the government chosen by the people—all this and more is necessary to make the "resistance" function. But what is most and above all necessary, is a recognition of the closeness and greatness of the danger.

I had spent the whole day writing. I didn't even go into the dining car. Partly because I wanted to save time, partly because I didn't want to see the young American for whom this scribbling was intended. He might have smiled at me skeptically
and robbed me of my courage to put down on paper the things which I wanted to point out.

But I must tell him tomorrow that he must not believe that I was superficial or unthoughtful, because I wrote down so much in so short a time. I was trying to give a résumé of the thoughts which have not left my mind for one single minute for seven years. It does not take much time to write down things that you have thought over and over again.

Had I made them clear—my long familiar thoughts?

A picture rises within me which again is not a new one. Nevertheless, it seems to me that it has lost nothing of its sharp urgency. It is a simple comparison but it holds true whichever way you look at it. When neighboring houses are on fire, there is only one thing to do: help put it out before it spreads over to our own house. It is senseless to wait until next week when a new, a better extinguisher will be delivered. It is senseless to refuse to waste our water on a fire in someone else’s house, even if this other one should not be without blame for this fire. Because once the fire has spread to our own house, it may become so big, so overwhelming that our water reserve may not suffice to quench it. It is also possible that, poisoned and blinded by the smoke all around, we might not be able to put our water reserve to its best use. It is particularly senseless to argue with one’s roommates about the possibility perhaps of not extinguishing the fire now but somehow hindering its spreading to one’s own house by throwing it a few mattresses in order to appease its hunger and so content it. That all this is senseless is obvious.

And I can already see the mocking expression of my young American friend and hear his “That’s obvious, but nobody would be quite so silly.” Nobody? I wonder...
very much, as if everything depended upon it—my own future and the future of the world.

If he calls me up today to make the appointment, I thought childishly, then everything will be all right. Tomorrow—that will be pretty bad; but the day after tomorrow—that will be disastrous.

He called “today.” That was splendid.

The ocean was blue, the sky radiant and the flowers, bushes and palms were bathed in an unearthly light. But we gave only an occasional glance to the magnificence around us. No sooner were we settled in the car, shortly after my American friend called for me, than we turned our attention to the subject which was the reason for this meeting.

“I’ve studied your paper thoroughly,” the young man said. “I found many things in it which are true and horrifying, but also some that appear incorrect. Or rather, a little inexact and falsely emphasized.”

My head drooped like that of a pupil who is handed back unsatisfactory homework.

“In my opinion,” he continued, “you have approached the problem from a purely psychological and ethical angle, without giving sufficient consideration to the actual political and economic conditions. And so, while in the ethical and psychological spheres there might be some dangerous resemblance between us here and Republican Germany on the one hand, and democratic Europe on the other hand, in the essentially political and economic spheres, our situation is entirely different. Am I right?”

We were driving along the palm-shaded highway from Santa Monica to Santa Barbara. As my young friend was driving and had to keep his eyes on the road with its heavy traffic, we did not look at each other during this conversation. We both stared straight ahead and talked as if delivering a kind of soliloquy.

I reflected. “Are you right? Not entirely. You believe in the doctrines of Karl Marx, I presume?”

He seemed slightly embarrassed. “If I believe in Marx?” he smiled—“what a delicate question! ... He was a pretty great fellow, I suppose, and his ideas may help us to grasp a lot of things that otherwise would seem rather muddled. Think of Fascism, for example—or Nazism. ...”

“I always keep thinking of them,” I interrupted him, with a little laugh that hardly sounded very gay. “Although there are so many other matters to think of—and more pleasant ones, too. ... However, we are bound to brood on Fascism—even when the sun is shining as now, and the sea is so tremendously blue. ... We are doomed to discuss Fascism. Now, does Marx really make you understand that bloody mystery?”

“I think he does,” he said firmly, and added, with a somewhat apologetic smile, “at least up to a certain degree. ...”

“Up to a certain degree!” I repeated swiftly. “There you are! I agree with you that Marx tells nothing but the truth. But it is not the whole truth he says. He has discovered certain new aspects of truth—very significant aspects, to be sure, but the complete truth, as you yourself rightly said in our conversation on the train—the complete truth is more complex, more involved, more horrible, more inspiring. ... It’s all right to say that Fascism is just a last, desperate effort of Capitalism to defend itself against the inevitable rise of Socialism; that it’s nothing but another manifestation, another virulent crisis of the everlasting class struggle that determines the course of all human history. That is an easy and convincing interpretation of what happened in Europe. I don’t say it’s erroneous. But I insist that it is only a
part, a certain aspect of truth and not even a decisive one. You say: Nazism was prepared and established as a militant defense mechanism against Communism. All right. But how, then, did it work? It worked as a sort of perverted revolution, the ‘Revolution of Nihilism,’ as Rauschnig has named it. It did not defend Capitalism but destroyed civilization. It surpassed all limits of a class struggle which, after all, was conceived, originally, as a process within the sphere of civilization. But Fascism is the rebellion of barbarism: the jungle against the order. . . . How do you explain, then, so puzzling and alarming a phenomenon? Neither political nor economic explanations are quite sufficient. There are more mysterious forces involved: age-old impulses, eternal human desires; the diabolic lust of destruction, the infantile rebellion against law and order; the Evil as such, if you know what I mean. . . . This may sound rather mystic. But I mean it in a sober way. I must try to tell you that, to explain the ghastly phenomenon that is Hitler, the Marxian doctrine is not sufficient. Rather may the doctrines of analytical psychology help us in clarifying those appalling events. I am afraid, though, that even such lucidity as they have achieved is not penetrating enough to throw light into that lurid darkness. We need something else to overcome that paralyzing fear and apprehension which is the result of our not-understanding. We need Faith, which is the most mysterious and at the same time simplest of all notions. . . .” He nodded pensively. “Faith, it sounds fine, very fine, indeed. We must have faith, of course! . . . But don’t you think that, on the other hand, those big words and sublime notions are a trifle dangerous, too? They could divert us from the more realistic aspects of things. ‘Diabolic Rebellion,’ ‘Revolution of Nihilism’—O.K. And still I believe the paramount reason for Mr. Hitler’s success was Germany’s poverty which caused the deadly crisis of German Capitalism!”

“Right,” I said, “or, rather, right, again, to a certain degree. For though it may be true that Nazism wouldn’t have come into being were it not for Germany’s status as a ‘have-not-nation,’ it is just as true that the actual Nazi successes are not based on existing economic conditions, that they were achieved in spite of those conditions and for reasons that lie entirely in the psychological and ethical field. Nobody could be poorer than Germany was, poorer in gold and poorer in raw material. Also nobody could appear to have less political power or influence than Germany in 1933. This may have caused the rebellion on her part. But what did cause its success? Hitler was successful, because, in the psychological and ethical sphere the surrounding world failed in its defense fight. Economically and politically this world was in a far, far better condition than Nazi Germany. Nevertheless it drifted irresistibly toward the moment when it had to fight for its bare life, and even that is now almost lost. Why? For what reasons? Because of mistakes which couldn’t be remedied any more; because of an irretrievable loss of time which had its source in ethical and psychological attitudes, and not in economic and ‘essentially political’ conditions. Am I right?”

A bay opened up before us. My American friend parked the car on a grass-covered spot from which we had a most beautiful view of the water and the magnificently curved highway lined with palm trees.

“Maybe,” he finally answered. “But what do you want us to do? Don’t you think that a country at war or in a state of preparation for war necessarily disintegrates ethically to such an extent that in the end it forgets what it is fighting for? Don’t
you think it is better for us to keep ethically intact, to keep our democracy intact, and thus, after the rest of the world has fallen to pieces, still to remain a last haven of freedom, decency, and peace?"

We had left the car and were seated, side by side, on the grass.

"My God!" I exclaimed, "how convincing that sounds, and how mortally wrong it is! Haven't you found out yet that one cannot keep 'morally intact' by giving free course to the infernal disaster? Don't you see yet that this firebrand, this plague will stop nowhere, and that it is up to us to put an end to it if we don't want to be corroded, be devoured by it? Has France's example, the example of England, and that of the European neutrals made no impressions on you whatsoever? Don't you realize that the world has shrunk through the achievements of man's genius and that right now, this minute, the world has to decide in which direction it wishes to rotate in the future, whether to the light of progress and reason—or to the shadows of a most inhuman barbarism? An 'in between' no longer exists. Things have gone too far already. And it is America, it is your country, it is you who will have to make the decision. I beg you for the sake of all that you love, that you value—make the right decision."

The young man laughed. "I?" he exclaimed. "I am a student, a nobody, a grain of sand on the beach. Why do you pick on me?"

I shook my head in desperation. "You are a typical and—I beg your pardon—a very good representative of the youth of this country," I said. "If you refuse to recognize the truth and to live by it in your emotions and actions—then things are really in a very bad way."

He became serious at once. "Well," he said, "I can only repeat, What do you want us, what do you want me, to do?"

"In those seven years," I said, "the European democracies might have had a chance to save themselves and to avoid the catastrophe of this war, if they had kept themselves 'ethically intact' and had fearlessly done the right thing. America, the most powerful democracy in the world, still has that chance. As things are today, it looks as if democracy, due to its structure and principles, were incapable of keeping discipline in times of peace; that war must come before democracy decides on strong, swift, determined and united action. As things stand today, it looks as if democracy simply were inferior to the totalitarian system, and as if it were doomed to take action only when it is already too late. But that is not true! Democracy is not inferior and is not doomed! What a fatal defeatism lies in the belief that Hitler is irresistible and that his mastery over Europe, yes, over the world, was our historical fate. On the other hand, what a terrible mistake it is to assume that he will stop all by himself and that our will for peace alone is enough to stop him. That is not enough. Neither are battleships completed in 1944. 'Men Must Act' is the title of a book by a clever and brave American. We must act, now—not 'later,' not too late. Why do your politicians, despite their undeniable love of America, fight each other to the last at a moment when from the outside the knife is already pointed at the throat of your country? Why do your industrialists make only 896 planes a month when admittedly they are capable of producing thirty times as many? Why do they do that at a moment when a few thousand airplanes might decide this war for America without the necessity for you and those like you to die and, probably, to die in vain? Why do you oppose universal conscription and why will you come to accept
it only when it is too late? Why don’t you want to see the truth? Why don’t you see that you’re doing exactly what Hitler wants you to do—namely, almost nothing?”

My young friend, his eyes again tinted with the grey-black color which I had already noticed on the train, exclaimed: “I beg your pardon. Nothing? Almost nothing? Our preparations are enormous. We will have to pay taxes until we’ll all be impoverished. We’re getting ourselves into wonderful shape—slowly but surely. And as far as our politicians are concerned—that is a consequence of democracy and all that which we wish to maintain.”

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I was too vehement. Please forgive me. But there are thoughts and actions which, although objectively good and right, one cannot afford in certain situations. Thoughts and actions which are erroneous and suicidal when contemplated at the wrong and critical moments. I will give you an example. The young English intellectuals—even many of the Communists among them—were men of great good will. In 1938 they still talked of immediate social reforms as the first problem. They were drawing blueprints for an ideal house to be built in the future—and meanwhile somebody else was getting ready to bomb the very foundations on which this future could be built. They too thought it was just a matter of taxes and reform. But if you let democracy go, its reforms go with it—not only the ones it has now, but the ones a good future might bring.”

After a short silence, the young man said, “You are not an American yet, you are, so to speak, a stranger here. Don’t you think that you are amazingly frank? What I mean is, aren’t you afraid that you might go too far and that it might be better for you not to mingle in our affairs too much?”

He said that in the friendliest fashion and as if more worried than resentful. I answered immediately without thinking about it.

“I am not afraid of that,” I said. “That is, I am not concerned with what might be ‘better for me.’ Everything is at stake now—the very lives of all of us are at stake. If we let Hitler win, then he will rule the world. But it will be a ruined, a horribly desolate world which he will rule and our lives would be meaningless. Neither you nor I could breathe in such a world. Already he has ruined the Continent, already he is threatening to ruin the British Empire. Wherever he steps there is no longer life: the flourishing agriculture of Holland and Denmark—they are wrecked and devastated. France’s civilization—shattered and in ruins. I don’t need to enumerate all the countries and cultures which have bled and died. They all hoped to save themselves by being concerned with their own, only their own security. They all have allowed the murderer to assassinate the neighbor, one after the other until their own turn came, and they were helpless, isolated, corroded by the poison which they had let penetrate their own bodies. And now America? What are you concerned with? Security for yourselves? There is no such thing. There is only a world which offers security to all—or one which means destruction, retrogression and barbarism for all. Let Hitler be victorious in Europe—and work behind your Maginot Ocean and stretching out before you the ocean of time in which you believe and which does not exist! Rearm for the year 1944. Fight tooth and nail among yourselves in internal political quarrels. Let your people believe the danger is far away and that one can, without fear of punishment, be both a hundred percent neutral and, at the same time, vitally interested in the victory of one party. Or let your people believe that America will be able somehow to come to terms with Hitler’s Europe.
Let them believe that this time, in the exceptional case of America, the ‘appeasement’ will work out and that it can be ethically defended. Persuade them that the ‘exceptional country’ America will be able to continue existing as a free and rich democracy when the rest of the world is in ruins and on those ruins crouches the anti-Christ while his apostles growing in numbers within your country are preparing for an attack against you. . . . Am I going too far? Am I a stranger? Am I meddling in other people’s affairs? There is only one affair—the affair of mankind—and that is my affair as well as yours. Into the hands of America, into your hands, God has placed the affairs of mankind. And one man should be forbidden to entreat you: ‘Act! This is your hour, it’s the final hour—the Zero Hour!’

Exhausted, I stopped. My friend was listening in silence. Now, having finished, I was a little ashamed of my emotionalism. I had let myself go, I thought, and it is probably not clever to be so terribly frank. But then again, I thought: Only the truth, the pure and full truth should be spoken from now on. And what I have said was the truth. To the devil with “tactics,” with pseudo-clever and insincere strategy, to the devil with diplomacy in a world where murderers disguised as diplomatic representatives of the mortal enemy walk around freely in peace, and in their “immunity” prepare for the last monstrous crime. To the devil with egotistic and cowardly “caution” in a world which has been ruined by egotistic and cowardly caution.

The young man gave me a long and searching look. When he finally answered, there was warmth and friendship in his tone. What he said had weight although it was clothed in light words.

“O.K.,” he said. “I see.”

III

THEY SAY IN THE COLLEGES . . .

McGEORGE BUNDY