

The COMMONWEAL

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THE WEEK	443
MISSOURI VALLEY AUTHORITY	
<i>Edward Skillin, Jr.</i>	446
POETS OF THE RESISTANCE	
<i>John L. Brown</i>	450
COMMUNICATIONS	453
THE SCREEN	<i>Philip T. Hartung</i> 453
THE LABOR MOVEMENT	<i>John C. Cort</i> 454
DESCARTES AND RICHARD CRASHAW	
<i>M. Whitcomb Hess</i>	455
HARLEM ROOFTOP (<i>Verse</i>)	<i>Robert Lax</i> 457
REMEMBRANCE (<i>Verse</i>)	<i>Mike Fenlon</i> 458
BOOKS OF THE WEEK	458

*Economic Democracy and Private Enterprise—
Immortal Village—Primer for White Folks—
Until Summer Comes—The Fates Are Laughing—
Struggling Upward*

THE INNER FORUM	462
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THE WAR, as we write, is virtually over. This is a fact in itself so moving and compelling that any comment rings hollow, falls wholly short of what hundreds of millions of hearts are feeling, hundreds of millions of minds are thinking. And yet in these matters there is at least a certain liturgy to be observed, a certain ritual to be uttered.

The fighting, thanks be to God, is over, which means that the killing and maiming is over. Let us all be determined that the hating also is over, not only the hatred of us, over which we have no control, but whatever hatred is lodged within us, over which we have control, and for which we are, each of us, strictly answerable.

The war is done, and we have more than we know to be thankful for. Mothers and fathers, wives and sweethearts are freed of the ugly and gnawing burden of anxiety. That undefinable strain that has kept us all under its tension is relaxed. For these things not only Americans but our enemies and our allies are thankful without prompting. But here is something more than a liturgy: We, Americans, have something immeasurably greater than personal relief to claim our thankfulness, something carrying with it terrible responsibility. We emerge from the most devastating conflict the world has ever known very nearly unscathed. Our fields are furrowed only by the plough, our factories are intact. Compared to other nations, we have lost but a handful

of our men. We are thus the most powerful people on earth. And for a brief time, at least, we alone possess the most awful weapon yet devised.

In our joy and triumph, in our freedom from the burdens of these years, we must remember this. We must look forward soberly, and we must examine our conscience.

Horror and Shame

TWO MONTHS ago (June 22) we were writing about poison gas. We said: "To the Orient we are bringing the latest inventions of our civilization. There is only one we have not brought. It is gas. If we use that we will have brought them all. Gas is no worse than flame. It is only that it is one more weapon. The last one we have to use. Until we invent a new one." And then we said: "The time has come when nothing more can be added to the horror if we wish to keep our coming victory something we can use—or that humanity can use."

Well, it seems that we were ridiculous writing that sort of thing. We will not have to write that sort of thing any more. Certainly, like everyone else, we will have to write a great deal about the future of humanity and the atomic bomb. But we will not have to worry any more about keeping our victory clean. It is defiled.

There were names of places in Europe which from the early days of the war were associated with a German idea that by disregarding the rights of civilians you could shorten a war. These names of places—Rotterdam, Coventry—were associated, and seemed likely to be associated in men's minds for a great number of years, with a judgment of German guilt and German shame. There was a port in the Pacific which sheltered American naval power. It was attacked by air without warning and the name Pearl Harbor was associated, and seemed likely to be associated for many years, with a Japanese idea that you could win a war by attacking the enemy before declaring war on the enemy. The name Pearl Harbor was a name for Japanese guilt and shame.

The name Hiroshima, the name Nagasaki are names for American guilt and shame.

The war against Japan was nearly won. Our fleet and Britain's fleet stood off Japan's coast and shelled Japan's cities. There was no opposition. Our planes, the greatest bombers in the world flew from hard won, gallantly won bases and bombed Japanese shipping, Japanese industry and, already, Japanese women and children. Each day they announced to the Japanese where the blows would fall, and the Japanese were unable to prevent anything they chose to do.

Then, without warning an American plane dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

Russia entered the war. There was no doubt

before or after Russia entered the war that the war against Japan was won. An American plane dropped the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki.

We had to invent the bomb because the Germans were going to invent the bomb. It was a matter of avoiding our own possible destruction. We had to test the bomb and we tested it in a desert. If we were to threaten the use of it against the Japanese, we could have told them to pick a desert and then go look at the hole. Without warning we dropped it into the middle of a city and then without warning we dropped it into the middle of another city.

And then we said that this bomb could mean the end of civilization if we ever got into a war and everyone started to use it. So that we must keep it a secret. We must keep it as sole property of people who know how to use it. We must keep it the property of peace-loving nations. That is what we said about the atomic bomb—together with odds and ends about motors the size of pin points which would drive a ship three times round the world—that is what we said about it, after we had used it ourselves. To secure peace, of course. To save lives, of course. After we had brought indescribable death to a few hundred thousand men, women and children, we said that this bomb must remain always in the hands of peace-loving peoples.

For our war, for our purposes, to save American lives we have reached the point where we say that anything goes. That is what the Germans said at the beginning of the war. Once we have won our war we say that there must be international law. Undoubtedly.

When it is created, Germans, Japanese and Americans will remember with horror the days of their shame.

Reconversion Prospect

THE NATION appears perennially to be in a state of unpreparedness. We are no more ready today for the gigantic task of demobilization than we were for an attack on Pearl Harbor. It is natural enough to look round for a scapegoat—one or several. Fingers are pointing at the members of Congress, who went off on a long vacation with so critical a part of their vital task still undone. After another ten days or so vacation our legislators are in fact returning to Washington on the instance of President Truman. Still others are blaming the Army or the Navy or the various war boards which have held off the plant, the manpower or the critical materials which were needed to start up the reconversion process in any major fashion. Weren't a lot of these leaders in on the secret of the atomic bomb or in the know about Russia's plan to join up in the Far East at the eleventh hour? If recriminations are to be indulged in, however, must not a good

part of the blame rest squarely upon the great bulk of the American people, who despite numerous published warnings which made the prospect clear, failed to exert sufficient pressure in the halls of Congress to assure at least a comprehensive blueprint ready for VJ day.

There is some point to fixing much of the blame upon the great bulk of the American citizenry. For if they are not sufficiently aroused to the perils of the peace as regards the domestic American economy, private interests can throw too many wrenches while public representatives deal with other things.

Consider the immediate prospects. Five million war workers to be discharged within sixty days of VJ day; three million soldiers or more to be released within the coming year; federal expenditures for goods and services to be cut 75 percent. And to meet the immediate prospect very little: private construction companies have dwindled in numbers and have no appreciable pool of peacetime contracts; only one-half the public works conservatively estimated as needed are in the blueprint stage; set-up for the disposal of surplus property (especially of the materials essential for reconversion and civilian manufacture) is highly unsatisfactory; the national War Mobilization and Reconversion Director places his hopes on urging discharged war workers (and managers of civilian plants which are opening) to register with the United States Employment Service and in urging further that plants which have had orders cancelled to cancel at once any orders which they in turn have for critical raw and semi-finished materials; the announcement of a "simple and direct" WPB blueprint for national reconversion.

The number of legislative measures now required for any adequate attack on the reconversion problem is genuinely startling. It is admitted all round that a considerable interval must elapse between stoppage of war orders and the transformation of many plants to peacetime purposes. Those who are honest will also admit that certain areas of our country, notably the Northwest, are unable to employ anywhere near their present war-worker contingent in civilian production. Thousands of workers will be stranded, local relief rolls will suddenly be taxed beyond capacity and vast segments of considerable purchasing power will abruptly be wiped out. How can the President, Congress and the American people evade the issue? More extended and more substantial unemployment compensation must be provided for this critical interval. How can we permit such action to be delayed any longer?

Another vital sector demanding immediate attention is the reorganizing of our surplus property disposal procedure. It cannot be over-emphasized for citizens generally that the great

danger in the period just ahead is that a big depression spiral will be set in motion by the very slowness of the reconversion process. If the priorities system is too summarily and too universally removed, big companies will capture the *matériel* needed to restart manufacturing. These corporations with their vast resources, and chances to recover large chunks of what they paid out in war taxes, are under no such impulsion to start work again as are smaller concerns with little capital and dependent upon rapid turnover for mere survival. If, then, the all-important pace of reconversion is to be maintained, little business must have every opportunity to acquire what it needs to speed the day of reconversion; such provision is lacking in the present set-up.

These are only two of the leading items in our current unpreparedness. THE COMMONWEAL will have occasion to advert to others in subsequent issues. After-war lethargy would inevitably rob the American people of many of the fruits of their long-sought military victory.

Cultural Change

WHAT are we going to try to do with Japan? Remarkably few Americans, including those who make it their business to inform the rest of us on Far Eastern affairs, have any conception of the tremendous implications involved in this question. Almost none of us fully realize the significance of a war between two totally different cultures, having only the most shallow and superficial connections. If such a war ends in the old fashioned way, without any attempt on the part of the victorious party to impose any cultural change upon the defeated enemy—and this has been the pattern of substantially all the wars in which Japan has been involved during the last century—the implications are unimportant. But if, as is clearly the case now, the victor in such a conflict intends so to impose his will upon the defeated as to effect a deep psychological change, the picture is vastly different.

We should be deceiving ourselves entirely were we to view the Japanese social and cultural climate as being in any way analogous to the climate of Nazi Germany. Superficially, on the surface, there have been certain resemblances. But these resemblances are essentially accidental. Japanese culture has been until now a dynamic and viable going concern within very much the same framework for at least a thousand years. However much we may dislike it, however little we find to sympathize with in it, we are blind if we do not admit this elementary fact. Of course it would be utterly ridiculous to attempt in a few hundred words even the most superficial of descriptions of this culture. Suffice it to say that substantially all the evidence available indicates that it has been a culture spiritually at peace with itself and

acceptable to the vast majority of the Japanese community, a culture in which considerable happiness was available to the ordinary citizen, even though in terms to us quite incomprehensible. There were, of course, a certain number of "liberal" Japanese, some of whom have been imprisoned, some assassinated. Principally these were men and women who had come under a strong Western influence. Numerically they amounted to nothing.

Contrast this with the situation in Germany, where free Western traditions are certainly as old as the traditions which produced Nazism. Consider the number of Germans whom Hitler had to lock up in concentration camps or intimidate by other equally successful if more subtle means before he could be at all certain of internal security. Admittedly there are ancient roots for that aspect of German culture which the rest of the West dislikes and will fight when it becomes aggressive; there are similar roots in all the Western countries. The point is that in Japan the *only* historic sources are the sources of a single cultural stream which we are dedicated to cast into a new channel—a channel through which no water has *ever* flowed. The more one studies Japan's history, the more one realizes how great a unity is her society. Indeed so uniform is the pattern of Japanese social history that it could tolerate centuries of the most savage clan and civil warfare—and still survive. For conflicts of interest—bitter as they were—took place within a definite code so universally accepted that it has occurred to no one to rebel against the code, and it is that code which we think we can destroy by means of military occupation, an Allied high command, and—what we love to promise everyone—free elections.

It is very nearly a safe bet that a genuinely free election in Japan at any time in the foreseeable future would yield precisely the system we think we can so easily extirpate. Moreover, we must remember that the Japanese has always excelled at the management of secret societies, of clandestine movements. We could execute every Japanese army and navy officer, every member of the economically dominant class, and there would still be Japanese fanatically loyal to their traditional ideals, completely willing to sacrifice themselves and their families to the preservation of those ideals by every means their ingenuity may suggest.

The intent of these remarks is not to convey the idea that a more acceptable Japan is impossible, but to make us reflect upon the course we have chosen, recall an old saying about sitting on bayonets, and realize that we shall have to offer the Japanese an example, to them visibly better than their own, if we are ever really to accomplish what we say we would accomplish.