LET THERE BE LIBERTY

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By

A. P. HERBERT

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Freedom, it has been said, is so much a part of the air we breathe that we hardly notice it; or as Mr. A. P. Herbert puts it "our liberties are like our teeth. We forget the very existence of our teeth until we have toothache." So in this address he reminds us of what our liberties really mean: the reality behind the well-worn phrases, Free Parliament, Free

Press, Free Speech, Free Worship. He defends Parliament against its critics in the Press, and he defends the Press against its critics in Parliament: he shows how we have carried the principles of our justice across the world and tells how an African witch doctor's judgment was reviewed and upheld by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and an obscure subject in Ceylon was able to appeal successfully against the Governor's decision on the ground of promises made at Runnymede seven hundred years ago. And in case anyone still remains lukewarm about our liberties and thinks they are not worth fighting for, he describes just one day without them, one normal day in a Nazi year.

 PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

LET THERE BE LIBERTY

(*A Speech delivered at Bath*)

I have never pretended to be a full-fledged politician ready to spread my wings anywhere in the vast spaces of public affairs. If anyone had any burning questions in his heart concerning agriculture, the Gold Standard, the price of butter or the management of industry, it would be no use putting

them to me. Nor shall I, in this address, attempt to explain to the Allied War Staffs how to win the war. But I think it may be useful to say something about certain general questions of which I do pretend to have some knowledge, and to examine them rather more closely than the pukka politician, rightly preoccupied with problems of detail, has time to do; and I have taken for my subject "Our Liberties", a phrase which is often used but seldom examined.

Some of those liberties are in abeyance under the Emergency Powers Act, and more may be before very long, but the special powers Parliament has given Parliament can take away, and my theme is not affected by those busy three hours of Parliamentary business on May 22, when we all lent our lives and property to His Majesty's Government. For years after the last war most of us complained about D.O.R.A.; it was aggravating, for example, not to be able to buy chocolates in a theatre after eight o'clock, and I wrote a good deal on the subject myself. But the irritation that so small a vexation caused shows how strongly we returned to the notion of liberty after the enemy had been defeated. When a German is heard to complain that he still, under an old decree of the Third Reich, cannot visit a beer garden between certain hours, we shall know there is liberty again in Germany.

We see and hear some surprising things in the present war: and that is just as well; for life would be drab indeed if we could predict or govern the course of events to the point of eliminating surprise. I am surprised to hear it said that here and there are people, and peoples, who are lukewarm about the present war. I have met very few lukewarmers myself—I

am not quite sure that I have met any. Our people are not, like the young Prussians, always clicking their heels, waving their arms, saluting, shouting, or singing dreary ditties about dubious characters like the late Horst Wessel. But it would be a great mistake to suppose that they are not as dogged, determined and undauntable as they have ever been.

Twenty-five Years Ago

Still, there may be more lukewarmers than I suppose: and if so, I cannot understand it. Twenty-five years ago I was a young man in His Majesty's infantry forces, and after six months in the ranks, I was just about to sail for the Dardanelles. In those days we had no doubt that we were justly engaged in a just war, which had been thrust upon us by an aggressive enemy, by our treaty obligations and our sense of duty. But I cannot remember that there was in our minds the same sense of urgency, of inevitability of life and death, of black and white, as must surely be present in our minds to-day. In 1914 we fought because our country was at war with another civilised country, and we should have presumed that she was right if we had not been certain of it. To-day we fight because the devil is abroad, because the Powers of Darkness are challenging mankind, because a spiritual pestilence is walking the world, because a great grease-spot is swiftly spreading over the map of Europe.

If we had been defeated in 1914, we should, at least, have gone down to a nation more or less like-minded with

ourselves—a nation with which we had much sympathy and kinship. She had been, she was, a fruitful mother to the arts, to music, to literature and learning and science. She had much to show us and much to teach us in the making and the management of the things of the mind. There was even, in some ways, more liberty than we could show. Music and the arts were encouraged and subsidised and provided cheaply for the people; and some of us used to say lightly that at least under Germany we should get better beer whenever we wanted it. There was freedom of thought, and of worship, in spite of all the heel-clicking and heiling. A Catholic could worship in peace—a Jew could make fine music, write books or cure disease. To-day all that is at an end. Since the rule of Hitler began, not one work of merit in art or music has come from there. Germany has blown out her own brains and stamped upon her soul.

And that is not all. If Germany had defeated us in 1914 it would still have been possible for many thousands of our people to say that, apart from a patriotic preference for winning, they would not themselves have been much affected in their daily lives. That would have been true, in a sense, and up to a point. We must remember, and especially those who say that all war is futile—including the last war—that that war did fix the standard of life for this country, and other countries, at least for a generation. But, apart from bread and butter, from work and wages, it would have been true. That Germany, the Germany we defeated, was led by Prussia, arrogant, greedy and aggressive, but it had not yet turned barbarous and pagan, it had not made cruelty its favourite instrument, and brute force its only god. But to-day every single soul in every country that comes under the

German heel knows what to expect. He is to expect that not merely in matters of work and wages will his life be altered and ordered by aliens, but in every moment of the day; that he will never speak without permission, never think without anxiety, nor go to sleep without fear. That is the fate designed for us and every other country on which the Führer sets his feet: and in such a struggle can anyone be lukewarm?

Slavery or Freedom?

I can well understand how a man in this country long unemployed might have said bitterly twelve months ago, "In Germany there are no unemployed", though, as somebody has well remarked, "There are no unemployed in Dartmoor Prison". I can understand such a man saying, only a few months ago, "What use is political liberty to me if I can't get work?" But if since then he has read only a little of what has happened in Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia—and not to Jews only—he will agree to-day, I think, that he would much rather be poor but free in England, with all her faults, than busy in bondage under Prussian rule. He may not agree with me: and if not, it would be impertinent of me to argue with him. But certainly for 99 per cent. of mankind, rich, poor or middling, not only here but in every country in the world, the question in this war is not "Do you like the Germans better than the English?", not "Do you believe in Parliaments?", not "Do you approve of the Treaty of Versailles?", but "Would you rather see Slavery or Freedom win?" That is the question

not only for you and me and the unemployed, but for all those terrified neutrals and non-belligerents.

The Real Empire

And, whatever our dyspeptic moderns may think of the British Empire, I would say the same concerning the millions of every race and creed who, though they may not have full self-government, are still, like you and me, free subjects of the Crown. We, as the Germans are fond of pointing out, have conquered a corner or two of this planet. But what is our method when we have conquered? We do not stamp out the local faith, the local culture, the local customs, and impose our own upon the people by force. We do not command that Mahommedan mosques shall be designed by the British Prime Minister and built in the British style, or forbid the Hindu to worship as he will. We persecute no man because of his race or religion. We may regard ourselves as a superior race; but we do not on that account think ourselves entitled to destroy, or even to drive out the others. We do not take the leading citizens and put them against a wall in order to break the spirit of the people. On the contrary, it has always been our way to encourage the people to live their own life, under their own leaders, traditions and faith, and to impose nothing upon them but what is necessary for the common safety, prosperity or health. Then, by degrees—and this is no idle talk, for it is happening every day—we approach the final goal, and we admit them, with all

necessary precaution, to the dubious privilege, the difficult task, of governing themselves.

All this long process is complete, and indeed is ancient history, in the great Dominions. It is going slowly forward at this moment in India: and that it goes slowly is not a sign that we do not practise what we preach, that we do not really believe in liberty. Quite the contrary. It means that we are not going to hand over the reins of authority until we are sure that by so doing we shall not endanger the freedom of certain minorities.

Jungle Ballot

And if anyone still thinks that I am talking nonsense, let him visit the lovely island of Ceylon, as I have been lucky enough to do two or three times. Ceylon has been described as "the brightest jewel in the Imperial Crown". And that kind of expression calls up the kind of picture that malignant enemies and ignorant Englishmen like to make much of. It suggests to the modern mind the worst that anyone can mean by the vague term "Imperialism". It suggests the Arabian Nights—a selfish and illiberal tyranny. But what are the facts? In Ceylon we have introduced self-government to a degree that many thought to be politically dangerous, a degree that is certainly contrary to the material interests of our own people. In Ceylon we have instituted Adult Suffrage, though enormous numbers of the people are quite illiterate, are governed at elections by religious

considerations and vote accordingly. In Ceylon there is a Parliament; but we have so arranged affairs that it is now quite impossible for a European, that is for those whose industry and capital have built up the prosperity of the island, to obtain a seat. I do not say that you have there complete self-government; I will not say that all is absolutely smooth and easy—this is a Colony at the half-way stage, or a little beyond it: and many, as I have said, think that we may have gone too far. But it is a fine example of our methods; it is a brilliant illustration of the sincerity of our professions. At the risk of every material interest we have grafted on to the Gorgeous East the Committees of the West; we have set up in the jungle the hustings and the ballot box. Right or wrong, it is at least doubtful if Herr Hitler would have the courage or the kindness to do the same.

From Runnymede to Ceylon

And there is much more than that. The vote, as some say bitterly but truly, is by no means the infallible key to happiness. When I was last in Ceylon I heard of some recent trouble in the island. An Englishman, described as an "agitator", had made himself obnoxious to the authorities by, as the phrase is, "stirring up the natives". The Governor, the King's representative, ordered his arrest and deportation. But the man, whose name I have forgotten, appealed to the King's judges in Ceylon—Englishmen like the Governor. He applied, I think, for a writ of habeas corpus. The King's judges decided that the King's representative had exceeded

his powers, and they ordered the man to be released. For what reason? Because this gentleman had not been treated in accordance with the principles and undertakings laid down in Magna Carta, in the year 1215. I got hold of the judgments and read them carefully: and no man with any spark of imagination could have failed, I think, to feel, as I did, a thrill of pride and wonder—to sit in that tropical heat, among the fire-flies and the flame-trees, 7,000 miles from London, and to realise that of all those thousands of dusky Buddhists and Mahommedans about me, most of whom could not speak a word of my own language or write a word of their own, every one had a right not merely to vote for his own representative in the Council but to go to the King's judges and say, "The Governor, the King's servant, is not dealing fairly with me: what is more, he has broken the promises made to all the King's subjects by King John at Runnymede 700 years ago".

There is the reality of freedom: and there I believe, is a true picture of the British Empire.

I recall a more amusing example. An appeal some years ago came up to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London from some far corner of the Empire. The dispute, in the first instance, had been decided in a somewhat primitive manner, according to our notions, by the tribal chiefs, or witch-doctors; I think that there was some element of trial by ordeal—the litigants had to prove the justice of their case by walking unhurt over red hot coals and so on. The plaintiff, not being satisfied with the result, appealed to a higher court, and was successful. But the case climbed on and up in the normal way through successive courts of

appeal and it came at last to the Judicial Committee of the King's Privy Council which sits at Whitehall. And there four or five of the King's greatest judges solemnly decided that the witch-doctors had been right all the time, and the judgment of that primitive court was restored.

"With None to Make Them Afraid"

Now it might be said against us that such proceedings were a waste of time and money. But we are at least entitled to set them against the technique of Hitler and Co. in dealing with the troubles of subject races. They are the kind of thing to bear in mind when you hear the malignant or the ignorant scornfully using against us the new insult "Imperialism". It is very easy, but quite untrue, to speak of the Empire as an area of servitude lashed to London by dividends and tribute. The truth is, as anyone could show, that the chain of British liberty and justice is the real link, and that chain runs firm and continuous from the King in London to the most distant, the most backward of his domains.

Indeed, perhaps the best answer to the "anti-Imperialist" is to be found in some words that were used by King George V in 1935:

"In these days when fear and preparation for war are again astir in the world, let us be thankful that quiet government and peace prevail over so large a part of the earth's surface; and that under our flag of freedom so many millions eat their

daily bread, in far distant lands and climates, with none to make them afraid."

"With none to make them afraid." This, then, as I see it, is the general issue which is joined, as the lawyers say, in this conflict. A victory for Hitler would mean the spread of despotism and darkness: the victory of the Allies will mean the survival and the spread of light and liberty not in Europe only, but wherever the sons of Adam dwell. I do not see how anyone can confess himself lukewarm or dubious in such a struggle.

The Great Divide

But let us examine a little more closely what we mean by "Our Liberties"—that hard-worked phrase—at home.

It is worth while to do this, because, as I think Lord Baldwin once remarked, "Freedom is so much a part of the air we breathe that we hardly notice it". A very just saying. Or, to put it less elegantly, our liberties are like our teeth. We forget the very existence of our teeth until we have toothache, and then we feel that if only we had no toothache the whole of life would be luminous and blissful. So true is this remark that we spend a great part of our liberties in finding fault with the others.

Well, what are they? They are our Free Parliament, Free Press and Speech, Free Worship and Fair Play (by which I mean, in the main, our system and tradition of justice).

These are all "institutions": but they are founded, all of them, on a single principle—the notion that the individual is the unit of life, that every single human soul, rich and poor, black or white, has merit, has respect, has rights. And of each individual soul the State is not the master but the servant. That is the British doctrine: the doctrine you will find in Magna Carta: "To no man will we deny, to no man delay, to no man will we sell justice or right," but it is also the Christian doctrine—the doctrine that God considers even the sparrows—and it is held by many nations whose institutions are different from ours. It is the doctrine of the United States, whose constitution, I believe, begins, "All men are equal...." But whether you call it British, American, Christian or pagan, it is fundamentally opposed to the doctrine of Nazi Germany, where the State is all and the individual is nothing, denied the right to speak or think except as he is ordered by the particular bullies who happen to be on top at any given moment. Here is the Great Spiritual Divide between the beasts of Berlin and the greater part of mankind.

It would be a great mistake to suppose that this spirit of liberty, this respect for the human soul, can only flourish under our own particular customs and institutions, and I do not suggest it. They may conceivably exist and struggle under dictatorship as under what we loosely call "democracy". But, in practice and in fact, we may say without undue boasting that they have had their longest,

strongest, and widest life in those parts of the world which have come under our command.

It is just possible, therefore, that there is some particular merit in our institutions. And I, for one, believe profoundly, and fiercely, that there is.

Parliament and Press

Take the first two I mentioned—Parliament and Press. I have the honour to belong to both: and the more I see of them the more I believe that they are worth preserving. I know, I think, everything that can be said against both: and I shall not pretend that they are formally perfect. Few things that are free, alive and natural are perfect. The great thing is that they are free, have growth and the power to breed. The Robot may be perfect, but it is dead. The formation and arrangement of the elephant is open to a good deal of criticism: and no doubt, if the critics were put to it, they might devise a much more handsome and logical quadruped. But it would not be an elephant, and might not survive.

This being a free country, we rightly permit criticism of Parliament and Press, as of everything else. But at the present time, when we are fighting for "Our Liberties", I wish that some of us could feel, if we do not show, a more positive affection for the great institutions which are the expression and the defence of freedom; I am sorry, in particular, that the relations between those two great sisters

in the democratic family, Parliament and Press, are not more cordial and understanding. You know how it is. The same politician who cries that we must defend Free Speech is almost apoplectic when he speaks of the Press—and too often he makes no distinction between one organ and another of that vast and varied body. On the other hand, you may see an editorial article hotly defending "democracy", and a few columns away, equally hot attacks by other members of the staff on Parliament, its proceedings, and most of its members—not to mention those low fellows, the humorists, who regard the whole thing as the biggest jest in the world.

Nonsense in the News

Well, you know, it won't do. At least when we are fighting for our institutions, and those institutions are being not merely questioned but derided by our bitter enemies, we should try to understand and know them a little better than some of us seem to do. It may matter little what is said about the individual Member of Parliament. But the cumulative effect of nonsense, if it is never answered, may be strong.

And the nonsense of which I am thinking is never answered. My colleagues in the House of Commons are inclined to shrug their shoulders and remark that many of the accusations against them cancel each other out. Which is true. If we are serious we are dull and dreary: if we are witty we are frivolous. If we make a lot of speeches we are "always talking" ("Why don't they *do* something?"), and if

we sit quiet and support the Government we are "miserable Yes Men!" If we let Bills go through without much argument we are neglecting our duties, and surrendering the people's liberties: and if we make a strong fight in Committee we are pettifogging or pin-pricking in order to "get publicity", or simply to annoy. If we go off to the country to speak to our constituents or hear what they have to say, we are told that we should have been "in our places" at Westminster; but if we remain stolidly at Westminster we are "seduced by the famous 'club facilities'," and it is said that we should be much better occupied getting among our constituents and hearing what is what from them.

Not long ago there was a great attack on "Question-Hour". This was said to be a waste of time and money. Most of the questions were about trifling things that could be settled privately—and so on. But the other day a "popular" paper came out with a great complaint that "Questions" hour was not longer, since, in the opinion of the writer, it was the most valuable feature of Parliament. He did not say whether he wanted the hour extended to two hours, to three, or four. (I think myself that when Ministers are in charge of a war with a mad beast one hour a day is quite enough.) But the point is that those who throw the largest stones are never agreed about the target.

Then there are some who seem to suffer the delusion that a Member who is not continually popping up and asking questions or making speeches is not doing his duty. But it would be highly undesirable, and indeed impracticable, for all Members to exercise continually their rights of Free Speech. Some of the quiet Members who are never heard of

are the best. I remember gratefully what fine service some of them did in the battle for the Marriage Bill—men who from first to last were never mentioned in the papers. They never made a speech (time being short, it would have been a pity if they had). But they could be relied on to turn up at eleven in the morning to provide a quorum in the Standing Committee and vote down the enemy. More, they would arrange private meetings, see and persuade important people, and generally spread the gospel and assist the cause. Quite unknown, but quite invaluable work.

Then there are the clever young newspaper-men who slip into the Gallery for the first time (as a *Daily* —— young man did the other day), count thirty-eight Members of Parliament in the Chamber and go away and write a song about it. The only thing they have proved, of course, is that they can count. This criticism rests upon the nonsensical notion (*a*) that the sole job and justification of an M.P. is to sit in the Chamber and make or listen to speeches: and (*b*) that all 615 M.P.'s, whatever is being debated or done, should always be "in their place" in the Chamber. If this were sound, the German Reichstag would be the ideal Parliament; for all the members turn up punctually at the same time and give no trouble to anyone.

From Cottage to Cabinet

Now, what, after all, is the big, the simple justification of Parliament and Press? That they are strong, permanent,

sensitive, and on the whole truthful, mirrors—or, if you will, conductors—of the thoughts and feelings of the people; that there is no subject so humble, with something to say so small, that he cannot at last bring it to the attention of Parliament, or Press—or both—and if need be, of the Prime Minister himself. Which brings me back to the doctrine I mentioned, that every individual matters.

Now, once you think of Parliament in that way—the clever journalists never do—not merely as a debating society or a law-making body, but as a conductor of thought and feeling from the cottage to the King's Government, you will begin to understand the system better, and you will perceive that most of the accusations are nonsense.

The principle works in two ways—big and small. It means not only that, as I have said, each humble subject, if he has a just cause and one that can be remedied, can bring it to the highest place, privately or publicly: it means as well that every small trickle of opinion on national affairs can move along its own channel towards Whitehall and Westminster; and if there are enough converging trickles they may become a swelling stream that moves Ministers and mountains. And this is no idle talk. You hear much about the "long Parliamentary week-ends", about the comfortable smoke-room. But even these have place and merit in the working of the constitution. The House may adjourn on Fridays at 4 o'clock; and some Members may go off for those "week-ends" even earlier. But they go, very many of them, to more meetings, more speeches—to be listeners as well as talkers. On Mondays they are back with the opinions of the people, of the farmers, the Church, the miners, the fishermen. These

may not always be shouted in the Chamber: but they are whispered in the smoking-rooms, the lobbies, in the upstairs Committees, in the Whips' rooms: and so, very quickly, they reach the Cabinet Room. Great organs of the Press, as you may have noticed, may shout for many months and not be noticed. I can remember one or two great occasions in my short time when the main current of feeling in the House has taken a strong new turn between Friday and Monday, mainly because the Members have been among the people.

What the People Think

Now, quite apart from liberty, think how such a system must make for the efficiency and strength of any Government that seeks to have the people behind it, as wise Governments must. The Prime Minister knows from day to day what the people are thinking. What can Hitler know of what his people are thinking? They dare not even tell each other. Indeed, I have seen it stated once or twice, in books and papers, that from time to time when Hitler has graciously desired to know what his people were thinking about some particular subject, he has had to send a special messenger round the country to visit the various Gauleiters and ask them—though for the reason I have given already, they are not much more likely to know the truth than he. What a confession of darkness! The Prime Minister does not have to send an ambassador to the Lord Lieutenant to find out what the people of Bath are thinking.

We read much about our muddles and scandals and deficiencies. It is a great thing that we should read about them, for thus they may be remedied. Do you suppose there are no muddles, scandals or deficiencies in Germany? Of course there are. But behind the screen of darkness and terror it may take much longer to detect and correct them. Here, as I have said, the humblest citizen may expose a private trouble or a public wrong in Parliament, the courts, or the Press, or all three, within twenty-four hours of its discovery. For most of our citizens can write, and all may write a reasonable letter of criticism without fear of arrest, imprisonment, and flogging. You may write to your Member —I do not recommend the practice, or I shall get into trouble. The Member may exercise his privilege and pass on the complaint to the Government Department concerned. Or he may approach the Minister privately—very likely in that much-discussed "smoking-room", where at least ninety per cent of the talk is "shop". If he is not satisfied, he may put down a question; and in certain circumstances he may raise a debate. You, if you are not satisfied, may make speeches against him, or write about him in the Press. You may vote against him at the next election. You may found a society to prosecute your cause, hold meetings about it, make speeches in the parks, take deputations to the House of Commons. You do not all, I am glad to say, choose to exercise all your rights; but there they are. It is good to know that they are there: and it is certain that not one of them would be yours under the dominion of Nazi Germany.

From the Strangers' Gallery

And now, if I have made clear my conception of the importance and the place of Parliament (quite apart from the making of laws) I should like you to come back to the Strangers' Gallery. You may look down, like the clever young man from the *Daily* ——, and perceive with surprise that there are only forty members present out of the six hundred and fifteen. But there may be many good reasons for that. It may be early on Friday morning, when most of the Members are still answering a pile of letters from perfect strangers, to which an answer is expected by return, or are on their way to do some service in their constituencies a long way away. We may have debated the particular subject so often that we can get no further, and know it. It may be a trivial debate which ought never to have begun. Mr. Smith has as much right to speak his mind as I have: but there is no reason why all the others should sit and listen to us if we talk nonsense. Free Speech does not, as some seem to think, mean Compulsory Baritone.

And they have very many other things to do. Though the Chamber seems a desert, the Palace of Westminster may be a beehive: and at every corner your troubles and opinions are flying in or receiving attention. To-day perhaps the Chamber talks about coal. We are not all there. But the field of public affairs is so vast that no one can pretend to cover it all. To-morrow's debate is about agriculture, and Mr. Smith is in the library, deep in books and papers, preparing a speech about that. Jones is drafting amendments to the Finance Bill, or questions about unemployment; Robinson is upstairs at a meeting of citizens interested in the Colonies, or receiving a

deputation of pensioners, spinsters or poultry-farmers. Thompson, next-door, is at a Committee on Proportional Representation, or Canals, or Drainage, or Divorce. Innumerable Smiths, all over the place, are meeting constituents, traders, societies, mayors, members, it may be, of the Ceylon legislature or the Jamaican Government, studying their case, answering their letters, or badgering Ministers about their grievances. When those clever fellows drop into the Gallery (for the first time) and count their forty heads, there may be four hundred Members in the building, all busy. But my main purpose is not to defend individual Members from attack, but to persuade you to see our free Parliament as I do—not as a mere debating chamber where well-fed Members make laws and speeches, but as the central pyramid of all our liberties, to which fly, unmolested on the wings of freedom, the thoughts, the troubles, of all the British world. And when they come there, they are more free than ever.

What we do about them is, of course, another question. But again, if you are not satisfied, you are free, in normal times, to throw us out. That is not technically true at present. Yet I believe that Parliament is still, and has been throughout the war, a true and sensitive reflector of the country. It has nudged, but it has not flagged. It has talked, but not too much. It has struck, I think, a difficult but admirable balance between reasonable freedom and foolish interference. It has been cheerful but not complacent, robust but not rancorous. In a word, it has been like the British people. And those who thought that in a life and death struggle with a ruthless despotic power we should be compelled, for sheer efficiency, to scrap our ancient machinery of freedom, shut up the

"talking-shop", and put a muzzle on the people's representatives were making, I am sure, a very big mistake.

A Free Press

Much, very much, of what I have said, I would repeat about the British Press, though, with all deference to my colleagues, I believe that Parliament is the more sensitive and accurate reflector of the two. Few of us, I think, are as proud and grateful as we ought to be about the British Press. It is one of the blessings that we take for granted. Few of us realise the appalling special difficulties under which the papers labour at the present time—caught between the General's wife who complains each morning that "there is nothing in the papers" and the General who rages that there is far too much. Few of us perceive and acknowledge the concentrated skill and speed which bring the great papers to our breakfast every morning—well printed on expensive paper, full of instruction, encouragement and entertainment—and even, from time to time, a small patch of news. Few of us realise, when we rightly condemn the occasional naughtiness of this paper or the permanent naughtiness of that, the reticence and restraint which, in the face of great temptations, is maintained by the rest. In any large and spirited family there is likely to be a naughty child or two; and it is far better to have a spirited family than a troop of slaves. It is generally worth while to risk a little respectability, or even more, for the sake of freedom. Though let me add this: I am not lunatic about liberty; and where

there is deliberate and persistent abuse of liberty I would curtail or suspend it without hesitation, that men may learn to value it better. But whatever you may think of this paper or that, the big point is this, that every one of you can sit down to-night, even now when we are at war, and write to Fleet Street to say that he dislikes Mr. Churchill, that he distrusts Mr. Chamberlain, that Parliament is full of unpatriotic, corrupt or senile Yes-men, that on the whole Communists are right, that Hitler is not as black as he is painted, or any other nonsense that may enter his head. And, if he chooses the right paper, he will see his nonsense printed. Hitler would say that this was madness. I think myself that it is good and glorious.

About freedom of worship, and free speech generally, I could say little that would not be obvious to you all.

To the Lukewarm

But in case there is anyone who is still lukewarm about "Our Liberties" or thinks that they are not worth fighting for, let him try to imagine a day without them. He wakes, a little anxiously, and sees the daylight with relief, for in the dead of any night the political police may invade his home without warning, without warrant, without charge or explanation. He finds, I suppose, a newspaper with his breakfast or at the station; but every day there is nothing in it but praise for his rulers and what they do, dictated by the same rulers. It is no use for him to say, as every indignant Englishman may do, "I

shall write to the papers about it", for there is no paper that may print his accusations. In the train, in the office, in the street, he will not speak his mind on any public affairs without glancing over his shoulder and lowering his voice. At lunch-time, in the restaurant, the notice "Do not discuss politics" hangs over his table—not in war-time only but in peace. If it is a Sunday, he may go to his place of worship; but he cannot be sure that the priest will not be in prison. At home every book, every picture on the walls, every piece of music that is played or sung, must conform to the pattern prescribed by his political leader, and if he even sings the wrong song he may be in for trouble. Even in the home, before his oldest friends, before his own children, he is afraid to say what he thinks. There are spies at the window, at the back-door; he cannot trust his servants; his children may give him away at school. If upon some charge, however false, he is arrested, there is no Magna Carta to which he can appeal, no writ of habeas corpus, no nonsense about imprisonment without trial, about the right to be heard by counsel. He is as helpless, as rightless, as a straw upon the sea.

So the day passes—his body fed, maybe, his mind and muscles occupied, his income adequate—but what a life! And at the end of the day there is perhaps the saddest, most degrading scene of all. This man, this fine flower of centuries of civilisation, is permitted to know nothing of what is being said and done outside his own country. He is the heir of centuries of scientific discovery: he has all the manifold and magical channels of modern communications at his disposal. Yet he is as remote, as ignorant of the world, as the savage in the jungle; for every channel is closed to him by his own paternal Government. And it is death to listen to what the

world is saying. Yet at night, starving for knowledge, he determines to risk death for it. He turns on his wireless and allows to blare through a loud-speaker some crude patriotic speech or music. Then, clapping ear-phones to his ears and cowering in a cupboard or under the bedclothes, he listens, guilty and terrified, to the news of the world. And so to bed.

Such is the condition of darkness to which Herr Hitler has brought his people: such is the fate of all who fall under his "protection". We are last—or last but one—upon his list. But I am not going to press that point. It has become almost irrelevant. The time has gone by when any given country could say properly, "Am I concerned in, or endangered by this affair? If not, I will keep out of it". All countries, that are, or were, part of the healthy civilised order of things are concerned in this; because the whole of that order is threatened by the German pestilence. It is no longer nation against nation—it is black against white—the devil against God—or what you will. Who, if I am right, can be lukewarm in such a struggle? There never should have been a neutral in this war, and, sooner or later, there will be none. But we cannot expect the unhappy, ill-defended neutrals to come in with us so long as there is a single sign of flabbiness or doubt among us. Let us expel them both. Those of us who can find no fun in war can surely at least find fire for this one. We do not fight for dividends or domination, we fight against the powers of darkness. We are in the van of those who say, "Let there be liberty. Let there be light". And we are entitled to use once more the words of John Milton: "Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation, rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks."

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[The end of *Let There Be Liberty* by A. P. (Alan Patrick) Herbert]