weakening economically, is growing stronger all the time. Even though developments on the other side of the world should seriously interfere with her imports of materials still essential for carrying on the war, it is only a question of time—perhaps two years at the outside—when she will become entirely self-sufficient not only for the relatively meagre requirements of her people, but also for the necessary equipment to continue the style of war-making which is, in the circumstances, most effective. It is possible that before the end of that period Japan—quite apart from the effect of other entanglements in which she may be involved—will have succumbed to the long strain, or at least become so weakened as to make necessary a withdrawal from China with as much remaining "face" as may be. Even if that does not happen, in the economic war now under way the odds are all in favour of China.

# THE REAL CONFLICT

By R. A. EDWARDS

ONE of the least observed, and yet one of the most serious, features of the present European situation is the way in which people in England are inclined to talk of such principles as liberty, fidelity to pledges, or compassion, as though they were "rights" in some way inherent in Man (though possibly dependent on Democracy), which would certainly survive once Hitler had been defeated. Hitlerism, in which Man has no rights except those conferred upon him by the omnicompetent State, is tacitly identified with Hitler as though it were something that he had invented out of the blue, or at least as though it were something peculiarly German. To the principles themselves, to questions of what they imply or where they came from, we give no thought at all, almost assuming that they are natural to Englishmen. That is the loosest of loose thinking, for values are not independent entities, secure in their own right; they belong to a whole view of life, and as our opinion of the significance of life changes the values we approve change also.

The values which we claim now to be defending are an inheritance from our Christian tradition. Liberty was not characteristic of the Greek city states, nor was compassion towards the weak characteristic of our own heathen ancestors. It was Christianity that planted these things in the civilisation of Europe; but it did not select them out from a collection of possible virtues. The first Christian preachers did not survey the field of human values, decide on liberty, fidelity, and compassion, and incorporate them in their preaching; such virtues were an inevitable part of the total view of life which they were presenting to the world. A man was free, not in his own right, but because he had the glorious liberty of the children of God; he kept his pledge, whether to his wife or his treaty, not because someone had decided that would be a good plan, but because as a child of God he was dealing with God's children in God's way; he was compassionate because sick people or refugees were, like himself, children of a heavenly Father. In addition he accepted these values "though it were to his own hindrance"; they were absolute, part of the eternal principles of life, and completely independent of the expedience of circumstances.

That view of the world was never unchallenged. Over against it was another view which, while it might vaguely, in some official sense, acknowledge a God, regarded life as something whose principles had to be determined from moment to moment by the exigencies of each case. It recognised no absolute values, and though it might support its values with a philosophy, hedonism, utilitarianism, and the like, it was fundamentally humanist, and its guiding principle was always expedience. At the time of the Renaissance that challenge defeated ecclesiastical control, and, for example, Machiavelli laid down for his prince methods of statecraft which frankly disregarded absolute values, and substituted for them one overruling principle, the immediate welfare of the State, allowing it to be preserved by any method which expedience dictated. In his view such principles as liberty, fidelity or compassion might be on occasion expedient, but could have no absolute claim if to observe them threatened the security of the prince.

It is that humanist view of life which has at last flowered in Hitlerism, and behind the military conflict there lies this much more serious issue of humanism. It is high time that we recognised that if we are successfully to assert human freedom, or that a man or nation must be faithful to pledges, or that to drive tanks through columns of refugees is wrong, we must be clear about the grounds upon which we assert these things. None of them is finally true on the humanist view of life. Hitler does not think them true, and they are not true at all unless his total view of life is wrong. It is mere folly for us to accuse him of immorality, for on his view of life his repudiation of his various pledges is highly moral; he does not accept the opinion that to shoot refugees is wrong if they impede the movement of his armies; and on his view liberty is simply something that the State can give or with equal propriety take away. To defeat him in the military sense may be necessary, but that is a very different thing from defeating his view of life.

The real war that is being waged in our time is something very much more subtle than the military one that inevitably looms so large. It is the assault of humanism upon the Christian view of life. If the Universe has no particular significance, if people are no more than the chance product of some utterly inexplicable, impersonal, undirected series of happenings, Hitler is just as likely to be right as anyone else. Indeed, on that view there can be no final right or wrong; there can only be various ways of making the best of a bad job. We in England have not yet gone so far as other parts of Europe in our abandonment of any form of Theism, and more of the Christian tradition survives here than elsewhere; but the division between the activities of our national, educational, social or industrial life and the surviving Christian tradition is deeply enough marked for thoughtful people to be uneasy, and to listen anxiously to publicists who talk as though to ensure the triumph of liberty, honesty or compassion, it were only necessary to defeat Hitler. Humanism has been our prevailing philosophy for a very long time, and it offers no more support to one set of virtues than to another.

If, then, we are really fighting that soul-destroying thing the omnicompetent State, if we are really engaged in an attempt to preserve personal, individual virtues like liberty, honesty or compassion, it would be well that we should quickly set about the recovery in England of the total view of life to which they belong. It is, for example, high time that we asked ourselves what we propose to put in the place of the Christianity which we have allowed so nearly to disappear from our educational life. Just what account of life do we in fact give the children? If we are giving them none, or are telling them that liberty is somehow mysteriously attached to the English flag, we are grossly deceiving ourselves and them. Liberty depends upon what view you take of Man, and humanism smiles just as readily upon Hitler as it does upon the Englishman hauling up the Union Jack.

# FELLOW PASSENGERS

By H. E. BATES

ALL summer, in the south, the trains were crowded. It was only in August that I began to travel on them every day.

Already, by that time, the battalions of business men, travelling with the same cronies in the same compartments, regimentally pin-striped, hiding behind the barrage of *The Times*, the roses of financial success in their buttonholes, had been much thinned out. In their place now were travelling the real battalions: tired soldiers going home on leave, tired soldiers coming back. The weather was very hot, and they carried loads of kit resembling those of porters on a tourist expedition, and I used to get into conversation by handing round the morning papers, which none of them ever seemed to buy. ("Nothing in 'em, anyway. All the same.") It was

clear that most of them were in strange country. Far from home, they had no idea how long the journey would be, no idea of place names, completely fogged as to how to get from Cannon Street to Paddington. One boy from Newcastle grew very excited on nearing London. Looking out of the window, he asked at every passing church, "Is that Big Ben?" and when I told him no, I could see that for him it was a question of realising a life's ambition. So, as we crossed the Thames, I pointed out St. Paul's instead, very impressive in the hot sunlight beyond the water. But he only shook his head, and I could see that it wasn't the same.

Soon I made a daily habit of it—getting into compartments crowded with soldiers, handing round the papers, getting them to talk about themselves, Dunkirk, the winter in France, giving what advice I could about crossing London. We were always crowded, always sitting on top of each other, always lively. Passing along the corridors, I would see officers, both men and women, sitting all alone in first-class state, bored, silent, out of touch. Sometimes there was a coincidence. Once I talked to a tough, regular Army sergeant, who had served in India and China. I wanted very much to hear about that, but he talked as if it had been a trip to Brighton. Instead he talked about Bedford—there was a little village up there, Yelden, quite pretty, with a little thatch-roofed pub. He'd spent Sunday there. Very nice, but now he couldn't remember the name of the pub. Now what was it? Damn it, what was it now?

He couldn't remember, so I told him. 'The Chequers,' I said.

"Well, Blimey," he said, "how'd you know?"

"My aunt kept it," I said, "for thirty years."

The making of friends had never been so easy. In the whole history of British railways there has never been, I should think, so much conversation and friendliness per mile as now. The air of silent refrigeration, the arid cross-examination of stares, the snoozing behind the fat peace-time blankets of newspapers—all that has gone. It has never been so easy to get all kinds of people to talk of themselves. I shall remember a long time the little Folkestone fruiterer—business gone to pot, three sons serving, all his Army pension sunk, few prospects. His life should have been broken in half. Instead, never a word of complaint. And as if to show me what adversity really was he told me reticently how, thanks to the last war, he had had thirty major operations on his stomach, and lifted his trousers' leg to show me a calf carved like a fantastic chair-leg by bullet holes. In peace-time we should never have met. In an hour, now, he had opened his heart to me.

This sort of thing went on for a month. All the time the *blitzkrieg* was closing in on us. And yet all the time another curious thing was happening: evacuees from the coast were, in spite of everything, going back home. Two young women, the mother of one of them, and a frowsy brood of tiny children herded into the compartment on a suffocating afternoon. Dead tired from heat and travelling, they vowed and hoped, as long as they lived, never to go to Wales again. The babies grizzled and snuffled miserably, puffy-eyed, wet, hanging on laps like lumps of leaden dough. There was much threatening of bottom-smacking, alternate coddling, bottle-filling and despair ("If you don't be quiet that man'll come and git you"). The prettiness of one girl was still just visible, very dim, behind the dirty lines of poverty, weariness and a slight viciousness imposed by something at which I could only guess. "My God," she kept saying, "my God, my God," and I would have given my heart to know what lay behind it all.

Then changing circumstances turned me from the south. I began to travel north instead. The north of England begins, for me, on the platform of St. Pancras station. A new life begins there: the Luton hat travellers with their samples, the downright level-headed boot-and-shoe men, the right-on-the-spot lads from Leicester eternally playing cards on outspread newspapers, the hurrying high-tea Yorkshiremen who demand "something more soobstantial" for tea. After years in the south it is impossible to mistake them.

Yet the very first afternoon I was, as they say in the Midlands, sucked in. The man sitting opposite me looked like the pale, down-trodden city clerk who is a popular cliché in fiction I had grown so used to interesting fellow passengers that I was disappointed and immediately read into the pallor, the neat dark suit and the air of weariness a life whose foundations were a desk, a semi-detached, a Morris-Ten and a garden bounded by treilis-work. I was much mistaken.

In two minutes I was talking, not to a city clerk, but to a mining engineer home from the Gold Coast. The pallor had nothing to do with a city desk, but was the fruit of a climate whose humidity is too great to be measured, where nobody ever runs upstairs, where people conserve their strength by talking in whispers, and where all water is boiled. As the train went on I pumped hard. The working conditions, the natives, the social life, the colonial administration—I pumped out something about each of them. And lastly the gold itself. How was it worked, was there much of it, was it in danger of petering out? In answer he told me of mines in Ashanti that were too rich to be worked. "Daren't work 'em," he said. "We keep 'em under lock and key. Can't have too much gold in the world. Oh! no, that wouldn't do."

Next day, in a world in which gold was kept under lock and key while homeless people starved, and a nation struggled to find six million pounds a day for war, the train was crowded by people who literally no longer had a home. The tired young women with children I had seen going home to Dover were now repeated a hundred times. And not only young women, but old women, old men ("look after him, porter, see that he gets out at Sheffield"), a boy with his rescued tabby cat, whole families struggling as if on a Bank Holiday to get a seat on the over-crowded train. All needed sleep. There were more strange coincidences. I travelled twice with a man, the brother of a famous singer, before discovering his name was the same as my own. There was the country parson who, only the day before, I had found absorbed in the active restoration of his church, passionately reconstructing it with excellent taste, while in London the churches of centuries were being blasted to pieces. There were more cases of deceptive appearances—the little blonde office girl who had neither home, office, nor clothes, and on whom I almost took pity as destitute. She casually remarked as I left her that her fiancé was, or had been, a Dutch Cabinet Minister.

And finally there was the waiter in the restaurant car. I think of him as fighting for, indeed, risking his job for democracy. The train, as always, was crowded; the tea, as always, bad, late and expensive. At one table a man was clearly not playing the game by trying to keep one seat for himself, one for his bag, and another for his overcoat. The waiter pointed out the injustice of this on a train where three hundred people were standing. The man made some objection in reply.

The waiter at once delivered a speech magnificent in its fire-eating anger. Didn't the gentleman know there was a war on? Didn't he know there were three hundred people standing on the train? Didn't he know how difficult travelling was? If he didn't it was high time he did. Nor, said the waiter, need he think he could come on the train and throw his weight about. Times were difficult. People not only had not got seats, but many had not got homes. "And finally," the waiter said, "not so much of your sauce, and not so much of your old-school-tie tactics. They'll get you nowhere here!"

Such a speech from waiter to customer struck us all completely dumb. It was the equivalent of a revolution, and was rightly regarded by all in the restaurant car as hot stuff. It was certainly something else that could never have happened in peace-time. In its way, dictated though it may have been by the weariness of the moment, it was a piece of high courage. In it spoke the souls of all waiters—and, I may say, a lot more of us besides.

As the daily exodus from London went on I found myself becoming interested in, sympathetic towards, attached to a great number of people. Death is a leveller; but death by bombing is, in more senses than one, the greatest leveller of all. It has smashed the silence of the English railway carriage.