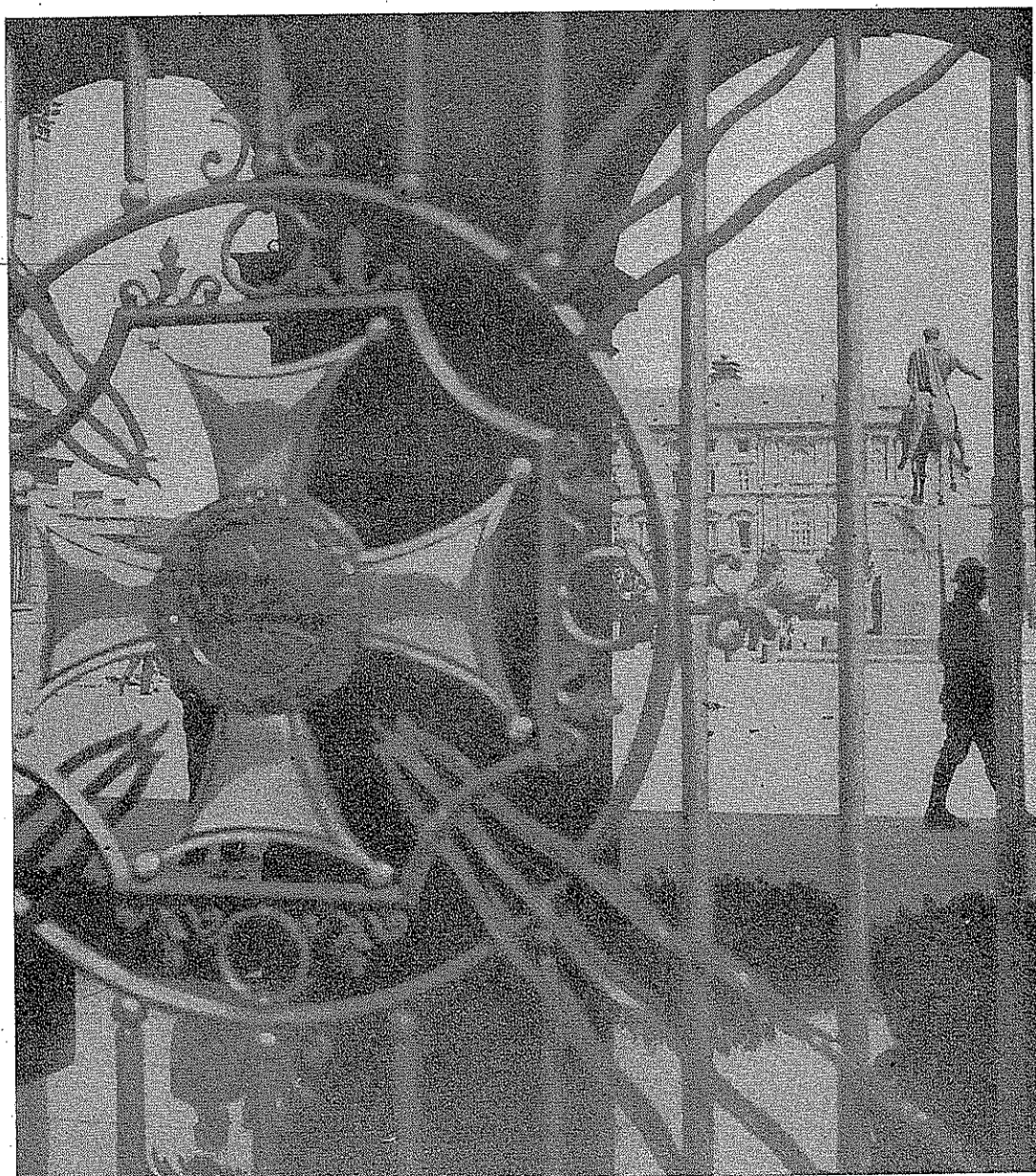


The Listener

Published every Thursday by The British Broadcasting Corporation



Looking through the gates of the Unknown Warrior's tomb in Warsaw on to Marshal Pilsudski Square: a pre-war view

A Week of Victories

(see page 89)

The Listener

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CONTENTS

	A Week of Victories (broadcast despatches) ...	89	
	Half-Way to Tokyo (Lieutenant Frank Rounds) ...	91	
	A Plea for Pageantry (Thomas Bodkin) ...	95	
THE WORLD TODAY:			
	The Only Way to Peace (George Ferguson) ...	87	
	A Changed Europe (Rev. Nathaniel Micklem) ...	97	
	A Great European Waterway (Negley Farson) ...	102	
THE LISTENER:			
	Nearer to Berlin ...	92	
	What They Are Saying (foreign broadcasts) ...	92	
DID YOU HEAR THAT? (microphone miscellany) ...			93
NEWS DIARY ...			98
POEM:			
	Egypt (Maurice Marcus) ...	101	
GARDENING:			
	Answers to Questions (C. H. Middleton) ...	103	
CORRESPONDENCE:			
	Letters from W. Brownbill, V. G. Plimmer, Dr. M. S. Pollard, Oliver Strachey, R. O. Dunlop, Geoffrey Grigson and C. Lea ...	104	
LITERATURE:			
	Poetry in War Time: II—The Younger Poets (Henry Reed) ...	100	
	The Listener's Book Chronicle ...	105	
CRITIC ON THE HEARTH:			
	Broadcast Drama (Herbert Farjeon) ...	108	
	The Spoken Word (Martin Armstrong) ...	108	
	Broadcast Music (W. McNaught) ...	108	
MUSIC:			
	The Symphonies of Vaughan Williams (Edmund Rubbra) ...	109	
	THE HOUSEWIFE IN WAR TIME ...	111	
	CROSSWORD NO. 776 ...	111	

The Only Way to Peace

A Canadian's view by GEORGE FERGUSON

I SUGGEST that there is only one real and important subject to be discussed by the delegates to the forthcoming British Commonwealth Relations Conference. It is this: How can the nations of the British Commonwealth co-operate best to maintain, first of all, the peace; and secondly, the prosperity of the world to come.

These people have not crossed the oceans of the world to come to London to talk peanuts. They are serious-minded men. I am sure they are coming to talk about peace, and an excellent reason it is. But because I simplify the problem, I do not pretend it actually is simple. There are many ways of trying to organise this co-operation, and all of them have been the subject of historic and violent debate. There is still no agreement, in spite of all that has been said and written on the subject; and that is why I am glad to have my tuppence-worth now, though I am speaking purely for myself in my capacity as a prairie editor, and a private member of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs. In a word, if I am asked how best the nations of the Commonwealth can organise to maintain the peace, I reply that the best way for this particular group of nations to organise is not to organise at all.

My mother was Irish, which perhaps explains why I put it that way. I do not mean there should be no organisation in the world for peace. There must be. But I do mean that it is both artificial and dangerous for the nations of the Commonwealth to attempt to do it on their own. I believe not only that the attempt would break down but I believe too that, as it failed, the major cause of world peace would suffer greatly, and that we should, by making the try, damage the very thing we most want.

Now, I know all this needs explanation, just as I know there are a certain number of people listening to me now in violent disagreement. These people say something like this: 'What is the fool talking about? We have organised for war. We are fighting together, this very minute, co-operating closely at every step. Furthermore, we are going to win together. Why can't this blind man see that, if we organise for peace in the same way, we shall perhaps be able to stop another war before it starts. All we have got to do is to stick together. But, to make the fight for peace effective, we have got to organise ourselves, and make commitments that everybody all over the world will understand. Any aggressor in the future will know he will not only have to deal with Great Britain, or with Canada, or with South Africa, but with all of us, standing together in the cause of peace'. That is the argument. I have heard it often. It was expressed with great clarity in the first broadcast of this series* by Mr. F. B. Malim who seemed to take it for granted that his idea was both practicable and good. To me it is neither. But I agree thoroughly with him that utter dependence on national sovereignty is disastrous. What I disagree with him over is the form which the necessary pooling of sovereignty should take. So let us examine his proposition in some slight detail.

It is important, first of all, to recognise that the outbreak of a war greatly simplifies national policy. The appeal to arms is the ultimate appeal. All other alternatives are discarded. Unity at such a moment of simplification brings certain issues into stark relief, issues so important that many lesser ones disappear. Creation of a common foreign policy at such a moment cannot be compared

* 'The British Commonwealth and the World': printed in THE LISTENER of January 18

Poetry in War Time: II—The Younger Poets

The second of two articles by HENRY REED

'BY God!' exclaimed Dr. Johnson one night at a theatrical performance by the celebrated actress, George Anne Bellamy, 'I will write a copy of verses on her myself'. It is to be noted that it was not a poem he intended to write, but a copy of verses—that is, a polished, gentlemanly exercise in versification, on a purely occasional theme. It is when a poetic manner becomes highly conventionalised and firmly settled down that a copy of verses becomes easy to write. Rhythm and diction become so general an expression of a conventional approach that verse can be written almost in sleep. In Johnson's day the copy of verses would be in rhyming couplets, with nothing said directly which it was possible to invert. Anybody who could write at all, could write like that. The last few years have seen a similar condition in poetry; and any survey of seriously-intended verse written during the war must take account of it. In regarding the work of the younger poets of today, one finds oneself often considering how they have mastered the problems which this condition presented to them. One excludes those poets who avoid technical difficulties or whose work is arbitrarily divided prose or an undirected, casual annotation of daily experiences.

Today's 'Copy of Verses'

The general idiom has been more varied than in Johnson's day; but the models for the formal copy of verses have been there to be drawn from. Their two principal fathers were Dylan Thomas and W. H. Auden, both of whom made impressive *débuts* long before the war. With these poets themselves we need not concern ourselves, for their war-time output has not been especially interesting: it is their influence that is significant. That of Thomas may be described briefly: the characteristic of his early poetry was a superb rhythmic gift; few modern poets could carry off a stanza-form so well as he, and put the reader under so strong a spell. Woven throughout his poetry was a heavy sexuality, not explicit, but allusive, symbolic and titillating, which mingled or alternated with a violent Gothic tangle of skulls, blood, wind, bones and candles. His gifts greatly impressed many young poets who had none of his rhythmic capacity, and who sometimes substituted for his masterful elasticity a monotonous thump; a furtive sexy naughtiness which was their version of his other achievement. There was a good deal of this at the beginning of the war; it was impossible to ignore it; but flatulence has at last given way to debility:

There is no sweeter sight, I swear, in Heaven
Than blossom on the cherry trees by Clee,
Ah dainty brides, you dance on through my dreams . . .

Auden's influence has been wider and more durable. It was he who made possible a more varied 'copy of verses', who discovered recipes for rounding off and filling out almost anything into a piece of verse composition. First there was his particular sentimental surface which was attractive to young poets. He had discovered engaging mannerisms rather than achieved an idiom: there were his relaxed rhythms, the excessive waywardness of his near-rhymes which by-passed rather than faced the problem of rhyming; there was a favourite stanza-form consisting of two long lines and two short ones, usually unrhymed; a habit of introducing a melancholy 'O' suddenly into a line to add a note of earnestness; his fondness for adjectives, especially for deliberately surprising or improbable ones, and for *outré similes* ('The galaxy revolves like an enormous biscuit'); the all-inclusive 'we', and the dictatorial priggish tone ('We are lived by powers we think we understand'). These things combined to produce a recognisable manner, which was easy to take over; easy also were the model subjects which Auden popularised. There was the Famous Names poem, in which a whole troupe of great men would be queued up in relation to some particular concept; one did not always need to mention them by name, if some attribute could make the identity clear ('that asthmatic Frenchman' would always do to indicate Proust). There was the Bird's-Eye View of Europe poem; the Evil Implicit in Our Age poem, its nature readily conjecturable; the Week-End Trip poem, where the squalor and sorrows of some such town as Oxford or Dover would be competently organised

and exposed; most curious of all, there was the Post-Coital Insomnia poem, where the poet, unable to drop off to sleep, would brood sadly over the slumbering form of the beloved.

For at least three years of the war many promising voices were drowned in the sea of stylisation which the above implies. Any poet who did not shut himself off entirely from his contemporaries—and no serious poet does that—had in some way or other to weather its impact, or to keep a wary eye upon its erosive powers, with a view to avoiding them. The first new poet successfully to emerge was the original and delightful W. R. Rodgers, whose volume *Awake!* created a sensation in 1941. He is particularly valuable for this brief survey, since he has given some account of his development. 'I was schooled', he says, 'in a backwater of literature out of sight of the running stream of contemporary verse. Some murmurs of course I heard, but I was singularly ignorant of its extent and character. It was in the late '30s that I came to contemporary poetry, and I no longer stood dumb in the tied shops of speech or felt stifled in the stale air of convention'. His remarkable poem 'Summer Holidays' survives as one of the best long poems of the war. It is full of brilliance and gusto, wit and irony. Rodgers is a poet fond of alliteration and whimsical assonance; he loves words to set him problems, and he likes skirmishing with alliteration on awkward sounds like 'k' and 'j'; and he succeeds amazingly. Words tantalise him as they did Joyce. He is not a sentimental poet and this enables him to gey poets like Hopkins and Auden, who have loosened his tongue. He has quietened, and deepened, since the publication of his book; his poem 'Christ Walking on the Water' is wonderful in its imaginative and verbal resource.

Science, Religion, and Technique

Certain younger poets have taken longer than Rodgers to come through as individual voices. I have already mentioned the inclusive 'we'; this was often followed by some far-reaching generalisation about the human heart whose effect was strangely to dehumanise the poetry. And for an obvious reason: poets appeared to start further along the road to an understanding of the psyche than one had been accustomed to. A knowledge of scientific psychology is a very good thing; it may help us to avoid making the same mistake more than four or five times. But poetry is more than applied science, and it cannot begin so sophisticatedly; and there was a tendency for poets to ignore the recesses of their own personality, which are the best starting-point for poetry, however dreadful poetry may be when it simply stays there. A poet coming under the influence of Auden had to be on guard on the one hand against dehumanisation, on the other against technical carelessness. Roy Fuller, by now an excellently equipped poet, though technically not an outstandingly remarkable one, is an example of a poet whom his immediate predecessors at first overpowered. His African experiences seem to have forced him back to a different starting-point, whence he has progressed with a continually increasing ability. Anne Ridler and Kathleen Raine, two of the most beautifully gifted poets of their generation, suffer on the technical side from a similar easy acceptance of the canons of yesterday. They have a carelessness and an air of imperturbable self-satisfaction about craftsmanship which I would venture to assert were typically feminine if so many men poets did not also have these faults. But they often emerge from them with an astonishingly disarming capacity, and no one can miss their unusual grace in a book of modern poems. Both suffer from what Thurber calls a 'religious taint'; by which I mean that their religion, not yet assimilated into their work, disfigures rather than suffuses it. But both have human wisdom and a knowledge of life. Miss Raine, whose work penetrates honestly into personal conflicts, has written very fine love-poetry; and Mrs. Ridler's 'Ringshall Summer' is a poem never to be forgotten.

One would wish space to praise a number of other young poets for their various distinct gifts: F. T. Prince, Terence Tiller, Norman Nicholson, John Heath-Stubbs, Laurie Lee among them. The three poets, however, who with Rodgers impress me more than others who

have emerged since the war, are David Gascoyne, Vernon Watkins and Alun Lewis. Gascoyne's verse, of course, goes back some years before the war; his recent volume is called *Poems 1937-42*, and before 1937 he was known as a surrealist. Surrealist poetry is rarely very interesting, but it loosened Gascoyne's tongue for more deliberate work; and the associations with France which it probably brought him have provided him with an additional background. He is the least provincial of the younger English poets, and the one who seems best able to combine versatility and sincerity; poems as different from each other as his 'A Wartime Dawn' and 'Noctambules' are equally convincing. His series of poems called 'Miserere' is a fine achievement, deservedly well known.

Whose is this horrifying face,
This putrid flesh, discoloured, flayed,
Fed on by flies, scorched by the sun?
Whose are these hollow red-filmed eyes
And thorn-spiked head and spear-stuck side?
Behold the Man: He is Man's Son.

Vernon Watkins I have difficulty in writing about. I find him at times very hard to understand, sometimes impossible; yet if a premature judgment may be allowed, I believe him to be the one poet of his generation who holds out unequivocal promise of greatness. I find myself not minding his obscurity; or as with Mr. Eliot, I am prepared to wait or to take on trust. His philosophy or metaphysics I suspect I should find antipathetic. Yet I never read him for long without knowing that here is a *voicé*, at times one of the very loveliest. His music is rich, his cadences are subtle and he can prolong a line with great delicacy. Like Rodgers, Gascoyne and Mrs. Riddle he can write a long poem which sustains one's excitement to the end; his long 'Ballad of the Mari Lwyd' is a remarkable work. Dylan Thomas has left his mark on some of Watkins' poems, but he is more truly and deeply rooted in the past—in Rilke, Yeats and Blake particularly. His poetic allegiances are of the kind which exact, intellectually and technically, a good deal from a devotee.

There the perfect pattern is
Though here these cruel cords are strung.
Above the moving mysteries

The fountain's everlasting song
Aiters not a drop or breath;
Inviolatè the music mocks
The groan of mutilated death
Broken on these mortal rocks,
Paradise of paradox
That terrified the Virgin Thel
Alone in all the sunny flocks
Who saw where tears of pity fell.

Though Watkins seems to me the most brilliant of the newly-emerged poets, I feel a more intimate sympathy with Alun Lewis. We shall not see the fulfilment of Lewis's promise, and the developments hinted at in the later poems from India will remain incomplete. He was, on the surface, a simple poet; he painted the sad exile of the soldier with the utmost honesty, and his poetry is doubly moving because for all its firmness and objectivity, it is the poetry of one in whom war and banishment have broken the heart. This can go side by side with a devotion to fellowmen, and in Lewis it did; his verse and prose are the expression of it. The loss of him, as of Sidney Keyes, is greatly to be mourned. Keyes was a younger poet than Lewis, passionately dedicated to literature—his background was an extensive and an ideal one—and at his best, as in 'The Wilderness', he was a dazzlingly accomplished writer. It is idle to speculate on what their futures might have been; better to read their four small books of verse; best of all perhaps to read them quietly: I cannot but think that they would feel genuine horror at the fulsome praises and the emotional falsifications which will always coagulate round such tragedies as theirs. How they would hate this! For they were good poets, each sincerely allied to great traditions of literature through a healthy predecessor: Keyes through Yeats, Lewis through Edward Thomas. They therefore felt themselves to be part of literature itself and it is as that that they would prefer to be remembered and judged. There is much of their verse I could wish to quote: here I can merely transcribe a sentence from a letter of Lewis's, quoted in an anthology by Mr. Keidrych Rhys. It is worth remembering—indeed I think it is unforgettable—for it expresses the war-time predicament of Lewis and Keyes and of thousands of their fellow men and women: 'So much is dormant in me that I hardly know how I go quietly through my days as I do'.

Half-Way to Tokyo

(continued from page 91)

through drowning of countless forces of men, Japan's standing army has not yet had to be mustered to its full strength. Estimates are that today she has an army of four million men. Of these less than a third are in service south of China and Formosa. Japan, we know, has a normal replacement of nearly a quarter-of-a-million men a year, as fresh drafts come of age. And the destruction of her armies has not yet reached this annual rate. In China at the moment, the course of the war appears to be in Japan's favour. As long ago as November, 1943, Admiral Nimitz, at Pearl Harbour, said that one objective of allied strategy was the opening of safe ocean routes to China. But the Allies, instead of securing additional advanced bases from which we could strike at Japan by air, have lost several strategic fields in China in the last few months.

The new B29 Super-Fortresses, operating from bases in China and in the Mariana Islands, are bombing Japan's industries, although so far they can only do so now and then. But, as the pace is stepped up, as it will be, these attacks point to a deadly strategy for the future. At the moment, though, Japan's industries are beyond the range of saturation air attacks, and her great industrial centres will remain in comparative safety until the Allies are able to establish bases within five hundred to six hundred miles of her shores. If you think of the contrast between this situation and the continuous, round-the-clock, all-out bombing of Germany—well, it's extreme.

And Japan has other advantages. As far as we know, she can still increase her production in almost every category of war equipment and military supplies. She has many strategic supplies on her own home islands, and in nearby Korea and Manchuria. And her production of food is calculated to be enough to keep her population going almost indefinitely. In the air the enemy is losing about five planes to our one, but in spite of that it is estimated that the Japanese are currently able to produce planes as rapidly as we destroy them. And they now can mass their air power in a narrowing theatre of action. Japan has

been conserving her air power and improving her aircraft. Her planes of every type today have greater fire power, greater armament, greater range, greater load capacity and higher speed than ever before. For these reasons aircraft of the United States Navy no longer have such a technical advantage over enemy planes as they had a few months ago.

For us, the defeat of Germany will mean that half the global struggle is over. To the Japanese, on the other hand, the end of the war with Germany will mean that Japan's all-out war against the United Nations is just beginning. It is likely, as in the case of Britain, when she stood alone on her rock, without allies, in the summer and fall of 1940, that Japan's determination and fighting spirit likewise will rise to new heights. All of these factors, calmly and soberly added together, don't present a very optimistic picture. The first ten million square miles were hard and tough, full of bruises and burns and blood. The final ten million square miles, I think, will be worse.—*Home Service*

Egypt

Let me unfasten the restive dream,
And weep my love into the Pyramid.
The queen is carried into the sacred vault,
And in the red-eyed darkness laid.
Is this the fruit of thy nine months of labour?
This Thou wickedest into silence
O God of Death?
The fields renew their crops with every season;
What Nile shall fertilise my desert years?

MAURICE MARCUS