

## A CALL TO ACTION

By SCOTT NEARING

ONCE UPON A TIME, in the early 1920's, a boy and a girl decided to get married. Let's call them John and Mary. Both were American born. Both were working in the labor movement. He was steady-going and a plugger; she was vivid, energetic, active. Both had high hopes of helping to create a better U. S. A.

THEN CAME THE FAT YEARS, with their lure of pelf and power for all who would worship the Golden Calf. Our young friends enlisted in his service, in a respectable profession, and began climbing. Within ten years, they were close to the top of a "liberal" big business. The labor movement was far behind—all but forgotten. The world said that they were well fixed and successful.

Another ten years slipped by. The liberal big business which they served joined with other big businesses in a united effort to escape depression by way of war. The first-born of our young friends, grown near to man's estate, decided to join the hue and cry, entered the air force, went to Europe and played his part in dropping high explosives on "enemies"—old, young, of both sexes and all conditions of life. He was killed on one of his terror missions.

THE OTHER DAY I received a book written by the young wife of the dead aviator. She told what a nice chap he was, how readily he took to flying, how much his fellow bombers appreciated him and how tragic it was when he was snuffed out. The book was sent to me by Mary, the boy's mother.

I acknowledged the book and wrote Mary that, while I did not know the detail about her son, I could tell her the story of my nephew, who left college, enlisted in the air forces, made a brilliant record for himself and went down in the Pacific. "So long," I wrote her, "as fine, capable young men respond thus to the call of the big shots, destroying and murdering at the word of command, fine young men will be snuffed out in their early years, leaving mothers and wives to lament their loss. And this holds true whether they respond to the orders of Roosevelt, Hitler or any other commander-in-chief. It is up to the fine young men and those who love them to learn this lesson and to find and follow a way of life that is not built upon organized destruction and mass murder."

It was not a kind letter, but it was true. I wrote it because I thought the time had come for John and Mary to face the music of a comfortable, secure life built on a foundation of exploitation and war.

MARY WAS AWAY from home when my letter arrived. John opened it and wrote me that Mary was still beside herself with grief, that she had not been able to reconcile herself to the loss of her first-born and that, with my permission, he would destroy the letter, lest it plunge her afresh into despairing anguish. He added that it would be appropriate and pleasant if I wrote her a nice letter, acknowledging receipt of the book.

I answered, agreeing to the destruction of the letter, and decided to let the matter rest there. But John was not satisfied. He wrote again, "Please write a little note to Mary, merely saying that you got the book, so that she will not keep expecting some acknowledgment from you."

Well, he had asked for it, so I wrote him: "DEAR JOHN:

"We live in a society of butchers and murderers. We butcher for food, and murder for sport and for power.

"Years ago you and Mary decided to go to work for the plunderers and killers who run our social system. In return, you got considerable comfort, a measure of recognition and some power.

"Then they murdered your beloved son. That was part of the price you paid for living in a world run by plunderers and killers. No use blinking the facts—you know them as well or better than I do.

"When I wrote Mary, I did not put it quite so baldly as this, but I stated the issue clearly enough so that she might get the point, learn the bitter lesson and profit by it.

"You asked me to cancel that letter. I agreed.

"Now you ask me to tell one of our conventional social lies—to write and say it is a nice book and thank her for sending it. But you cannot have it both ways. Destroy the letter? Yes, if you wish. That is a negative lie—dodging the issue by saying nothing about it. Write a socially correct note, pretending to express a sentiment I do not feel? No, that is a positive lie and I will have no part in telling it.

"You and I (and Mary) are getting on in years. If we do not or cannot face the music

here and now, we will soon have to face it there and then.

"I am all for facing it here and now. I either say what I think or I say nothing. I think we live in a community built on lies, robbery, butchery and murder. There is no dodging the issue.

"I also think that the lying, robbery, butchery and murder will continue till we face the facts, turn about and reshape our lives. Again there is no dodging.

"Also, I say it is time we stood up and told each other the truth, without fear or favor. No dodging.

"This is grim doctrine, but we live in a grim world, where millions of innocent young victims are paying with their lives for our ignorance, stupidity, greed, hypocrisy and connivance.

"Maybe it is wiser to tell Mary, after all."

**I** HESITATED for a couple of days before I sent the letter. John must be in his late fifties. Twenty-five years ago, in the labor movement, he could take hard knocks. Can he still take them? Will they do him any good? To these questions there is only one possible answer—try it and see.

Then there is Mary, bowed down by her grief, paralyzed by anguish. Can she meet the issue or will it merely crush her? Twenty-five years ago, she would have met it and held to her course. A quarter century of bourgeois living may have so corrupted her that she cannot stand up to the implications of the social system under which she has eaten from the fleshpots.

Again, there was the question of propriety—was it fair to put the record of these private transactions into a letter like *World Events*?

**A** GAINST THESE personal and private considerations I set social responsibility. President Truman, General Marshall, General Eisenhower and the other champions of a dying social order are doing what they can to perpetuate free-enterprise economy and parliamentary democracy. In Greece, Turkey, Korea and elsewhere in Europe and Asia, they are preparing to go to war in their mad attempt to turn back the clock of history. In the press and over the radio, at the graduation exercises in Annapolis and West Point, in the elementary and high

schools and universities, they are straining every nerve to recruit a new crop of youngsters who will destroy and kill on order.

**J** OHN AND MARY are not just individuals; they are types. I meet them from one end of the country to the other. In their youth, they had hope and faith. In their mature years, they have comfort, security, wealth and power. They have bartered their ideals for this stinking mess of pottage. So insidious has been the propaganda, so diverting have been the bread, beer and circuses, so gradual has been the transformation that they are not even aware of the change that has overwhelmed them.

If the Johns and Marys of 1947 follow in the footsteps of the Johns and Marys of 1921—follow into phase three of the Great War—and place the living bodies of their sons on the altar of Moloch, the whole of western culture may be rubbed out by the whirlwind of destruction and death that atom fission and bacteriological warfare will let loose.

**S** O I MAKE THIS CORRESPONDENCE semi-public in order that I may reach a wider circle with this urgent message:

*Come to your senses! Think. Understand. Act. Re-examine values. Put everything you have into a super-human effort to reshape your own life and reshape the community life along kindlier, juster, more purposive lines.*

*Reach for a new level of consciousness, understanding and personal conduct. Live and help live more rewardingly and more creatively than you have done in the past.*

*Sound the alarm! Arouse your relatives, acquaintances, friends and neighbors. Inform them. Organize them. Lead them in a crusade to plan, establish and administer a world community dedicated to the achievement of welfare, rather than the acquisition of wealth.*

*This call is urgent. If you hesitate or delay, even for an hour, it may be too late.*


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