

Garden of Thought

How to Combat Hitlerism

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Whatever Hitler may ultimately prove to be, we know what Hitlerism has come to mean. It means naked, ruthless force reduced to an exact science and worked with scientific precision. In its effect it becomes almost irresistible. In the early days of satyagraha, when it was still known as passive resistance, The Star of Johannesburg, stirred by the sight of a handful of Indians, wholly unarmed and incapable of organized violence even if they wished it, pitting themselves against an overwhelmingly armed government, had a cartoon in which the latter was depicted as a steamroller representing irresistible force and passive resistance was depicted as an elephant unmoved and comfortably planting himself in his seat. This was marked immovable force. The cartoonist had a true insight into the duel between the irresistible and the immovable force. It was then a stalemate. The sequel we know. What was depicted and appeared to be irresistible was successfully resisted by the immovable force of satyagraha—call it suffering without retaliation. What became true then can be equally true now. Hitlerism will never be defeated by counter-Hitlerism. It can only breed superior Hitlerism raised to nth degree. What is going on before our eyes is a demonstration of the futility of violence as also of Hitlerism. Let me explain what I mean by failure of Hitlerism. It has robbed the small nations of their liberty. It has compelled France to sue for peace.

Probably by the time this is in print Britain will have decided upon her course. The fall of France is enough for my argument. I think French statesmen have shown rare courage in bowing to the inevitable and refusing to be party to senseless mutual slaughter. There can be no sense in France coming out victorious if the stake is in truth lost. The cause of liberty becomes a mockery if the price to be paid is wholesale destruction of those who are to enjoy liberty. It then becomes an inglorious satiation of ambition. The bravery of the French soldier is world-known. But let the world know also the greater bravery of the French statesmen in suing for peace. I have

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assumed that the French statesmen have taken the step in a perfectly honorable manner as behooves true soldiers. Let me hope that Herr Hitler will impose no humiliating terms but show that, though he can fight without mercy, he can at least conclude peace not without mercy. But to resume the thread of the argument. What will Hitler do with his victory? Can he digest so much power? Personally he will go as empty-handed as his not very remote predecessor Alexander. For the Germans he will have left not the pleasure of owning a mighty empire but the burden of sustaining its crushing weight. For they will not be able to hold all the conquered nations in perpetual subjection. And I doubt if the Germans of future generations will entertain unadulterated pride in the deeds for which Hitlerism will be deemed responsible. They will honor Herr Hitler as a genius, as a brave man, a matchless organizer, and much more. But I should hope that the Germans of the future will have learnt the art of discrimination even about their heroes. Anyway, I think it will be allowed that all the blood that has been spilled by Hitler had added not a millionth part of an inch to the world's moral stature. As against this imagine the state of Europe today if the Czechs, the Poles, the Norwegians, the French, and the English had all said to Hitler: "You need not make your scientific preparation for destruction. We will meet your violence with nonviolence. You will therefore be able to destroy our nonviolent army without tanks, battleships, and airships." It may be retorted that the only difference would be that Hitler would have got without fighting what he has gained after a bloody fight. Exactly. The history of Europe would then have been written differently. Possession might (but only might) have been then taken under nonviolent resistance, as it has been taken now after perpetration of untold barbarities. Under nonviolence only those would have been killed who had trained themselves to be killed, if need be, but without killing anyone and without bearing malice toward anybody. I daresay that in that case Europe would have added several inches to its moral stature. And in the end I expect it is the moral worth that will count. All else is dross. I have written these lines for the European powers. But they are meant for ourselves. If my argument has gone home, is it not time for us to declare our changeless faith in nonviolence of the strong and say we do not seek to defend our liberty with the force of arms, but we will defend it with the force of nonviolence?