

SOMETHING TO CHEW ON

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS was momentarily hushed at the sight of Captain Jenkins as he stood before the assembly holding aloft a bottle containing one of his ears. Then the House was stirred to patriotic fervour as he related his story of how the Spanish Coastguard had boarded his vessel on the high seas, and in the ensuing mêlée one of the swordsmen had struck off his ear.

So began the War of Jenkins' Ear, fought between Britain and Spain, with France obliged by treaty to come to Spain's assistance.

A similar incident some seventeen hundred and fifty years earlier could also have been the beginning of war, or, at least, insurrection.

The incident of course was with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when Peter cut off the ear of the servant of the High Priest. Fortunately for this man, Jesus "touched his ear, and healed him," and fortunately for history one battle was averted.

Surprisingly enough, in all of its 773,742 words, the Bible has little to say about physical ears. The ear is mentioned many times in the Scriptures, but usually attention or hearing is implied. To have the ear heavy is to pay no attention; to open the ear is to pay attention; uncircumcised ears are those which are deaf to the Word of God.

Having ears is one thing; hearing is another, and still another aspect is listening. The sounds that form the background to our daily lives has long been recognized as a health hazard. With this in mind the architects of a new airline office in Cologne Germany designed a fully air-conditioned, noise-proof building. But architects and airline officials found its deathly silence overpowering. Said one official, "After forty-eight hours in there one would be ready to be carried out in a strait-jacket."

Sound-effects experts have now been asked to install a 'noise machine' that will provide a constant low level background of sound through loudspeakers.

However, the problem of the airlines is not one shared generally. The results of ninety-six industrial noise surveys conducted by the Department of Public Health showed that few industrial plants were without noise exposure problems. Employee noise exposure was widespread and demanded immediate attention if workers were not to have their hearing impaired.

Once long accepted as one of the hazards of city life, the traditional peace and quiet of the country has long gone also with the advent of the tractor and other farm machinery. Research carried out in both New Zealand and America, on the hearing defects of tractor drivers, has found that operators "tended to suffer a slightly greater hearing loss in the left ear." "This is caused by the tractor operator continually looking over his right shoulder to watch the trailing implement."

The fact that the body can adapt itself to the background noises of this space-age allows us to put out of our mind things that may be warning signals.

It would not be correct to claim that religion is one of the more recent victims of this hearing-defective age. From the days of the first prophets, most men have been deaf to the call of God.

Let us notice just three of the appeals made by God to His people.

Psalm 78:1: "Give ear, O My people, to My law; incline your ears to the words of My mouth."

Isaiah 28:23: "Give ye ear, and hear My voice; hearken, and hear My speech."

Isaiah 55:3: "Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live."

What answers are recorded in Scripture to these appeals?

Psalm 115:6: "They have ears, but they hear not."

Isaiah 48:8: "Yea, thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from that time that thine ear was not opened."

Zechariah 7:11: "But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear."

When Stephen preached the gospel to his fellows they "stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord," and because they were "uncircumcised in heart and ears" they stoned him.

Paul warned Timothy that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth." 2 Timothy 4:3.

Truly "a voice crying in the wilderness" would be a suitable title for God's messengers. They have in their day attempted to impart the wishes and warnings of God to His people. Sometimes effectively, as in the case of Jonah's words to Nineveh, but as often as not, without result, as with Noah's Flood warning.

Because the events of history sometimes move slowly, spanning several generations, humanity has often missed the warnings of mercy, and has dismissed God's messages as relating to the past or future. God sent His prophets to preach to the antediluvian world; to Sodom and Gomorrah; and many times to Israel to check their slide towards sin. But this is ancient history, and the prophecy of Jesus that he is to return to this world to redeem the righteous and punish the wicked, is projected by most into the distant future.

Did Jesus believe that his words would be heeded and that people would be ready when he returned? Jesus himself asked a similar question: "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? Luke 18:8. In Matthew 7:13 he answered his own question: "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." Jesus rightly summed up the situation when he said, "Having ears, they hear not."

How long will this deafness be allowed to continue? For how long will men and women be allowed to "stop their ears" and reject the entreaties of their God? God's answer today is similar to His words before the Flood, when He said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." Genesis 6:3. Paul predicted that in the last days men would "turn away their ears from the truth." But it is God who will finally be hard of hearing, according to Proverbs 1:24-29.

"Because I have called, and you refused to listen, have stretched out My hand, and no man has heeded, and you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you, when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comesThen shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but thy shall not find Me; for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord."

Listen now to these pertinent words of Scripture, "Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart." Psalm 95:7-8. And again in Proverbs 1:33, "But whoso hearkens unto Me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil."

Now is the time to reach beyond the noise and sounds of this dying world, and listen to the theme of God's love and mercy.