
BOOKS & WRITERS

A. J. P. Taylor, Hitler, and the War

By H. R. TREVOR-ROPER

IT IS OVER twenty years since the war began. A generation has grown up which never knew the 1930's, never shared its passions and doubts, was never excited by the Spanish civil war, never boiled with indignation against the "appeasers," never lived in suspense from Nuremberg Rally to Nuremberg Rally, awaiting the next hysterical outburst, the next clatter of arms, from the megalomaniac in Berlin. Those of us who knew those days and who try to teach this new generation are constantly made aware of this great gulf between us. How can we communicate across such a gulf the emotional content of those years, the mounting indignation which finally convinced even the "appeasers" themselves that there could be no peace with Hitler, and caused the British people, united in pacifism in 1936, to go, in 1939, united into war? For it was not the differing shades of justice in Germany's claims upon the Rhineland, Austria, the Sudetenland, Prague, and Danzig which caused men who had swallowed the first of these annexations to be increasingly exasperated by those which followed and take up arms against the last. It was a changing mood, a growing conviction that all such claims were but pretexts under which Hitler pursued not justice or self-determination for Germany but world-conquest, and that, now or never, he must be stopped. And even across the gulf such a mood must be conveyed by those who teach history to those who learn it: for it is an element in history no less important than the mere facts. Or is it? Mr. A. J. P. Taylor, it seems, does not think so.* He sees the gulf all right, and he wishes to speak to those on the other side of it; but in order to do so, he has decided to lighten the weight he must carry with him. Stripping himself of all personal memories, and thus making himself, in this respect, as naked

as they are, he has jumped nimbly across the gulf and now presents himself to them as the first enlightened historian of the future, capable of interpreting the politics of the 1920's and 1930's without any reference to the emotions they engendered, even in himself. Their sole guide, he tells them, must be the documents, which he will select and interpret for them; and indeed, by selection and interpretation, he presents them with a new thesis, illustrated (we need hardly say) with all his old resources of learning, paradox, and *gaminerie*.

THE THESIS is perfectly clear. According to Mr. Taylor, Hitler was an ordinary German statesman in the tradition of Stresemann and Brüning, differing from them not in methods (he was made Chancellor for "solidly democratic reasons") nor in ideas (he had no ideas) but only in the greater patience and stronger nerves with which he took advantage of the objective situation in Europe. His policy, in so far as he had a policy, was no different from that of his predecessors. He sought neither war nor annexation of territory. He merely sought to restore Germany's "natural" position in Europe, which had been artificially altered by the Treaty of Versailles: a treaty which, for that reason, "lacked moral validity from the start." Such a restoration might involve the recovery of lost German territory like Danzig, but it did not entail the direct government even of Austria or the Sudetenland, let alone Bohemia. Ideally, all that Hitler required was that Austria, Czechoslovakia, and other small Central European states, while remaining independent, should become political satellites of Germany.

Of course it did not work out thus. But that, we are assured, was not Hitler's fault. For Hitler, according to Mr. Taylor, never took the initiative in politics. He "did not make plans—for world-conquest or anything else. He assumed that others would provide opportunities and

* *The Origins of the Second World War*. By A. J. P. TAYLOR. Hamish Hamilton, 25s.

that he would seize them." And that is what happened. The Austrian crisis of March 1938, we are told, "was provoked by Schuschnigg, not by Hitler." Hitler was positively embarrassed by it: "he was Austrian enough to find the complete disappearance of Austria inconceivable until it happened." Similarly we learn that the Sudeten crisis of 1938 was created by the Sudeten Nazis, who "built up the tension gradually, without guidance from Hitler": Hitler himself "merely took advantage of it." Having taken advantage of it at Munich, he had no intention of going on and annexing the Czech lands: "he merely doubted whether the settlement would work... [he] believed, without sinister intention, that independent Czechoslovakia could not survive when deprived of her natural frontiers and with Czech prestige broken." So, within six months, as "the unforeseen by-product of developments in Slovakia," he felt obliged to tear up the settlement and occupy Prague; but there was "nothing sinister or premeditated" in that. It was an unfortunate necessity forced upon him by the unskilful President Hacha. The Polish crisis of 1939 was similarly forced upon him by Beck. "The destruction of Poland," we are told, "had been no part of his original project. On the contrary, he wished to solve the question of Danzig so that Germany and Poland could remain on good terms." The last thing he wanted was war. The war of nerves was "the only war he understood and liked." Germany "was not equipped to conquer Europe."

The state of German rearmament in 1939 gives the decisive proof that Hitler was not contemplating general war, and probably not contemplating war at all.

Even on August 23rd, 1939, when the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed, "both Hitler and Stalin imagined that they had prevented war, not brought it on." What rational person could have supposed that this pact, instead of discouraging the British, would determine them to stand by their commitments? The war, "far from being premeditated, was a mistake, the result on both sides of diplomatic blunders."

HITLER'S OWN SHARE of these diplomatic blunders was, it seems, very small. He "became involved in war," we are told, "through launching on August 29th a diplomatic manoeuvre which he ought to have launched on August 28th." The blunders of the Western statesmen were far more fundamental. For what ought the Western statesmen to have done when faced by Hitler's modest demands? According to Mr. Taylor, they should have conceded them all. They should not have conceded anything to Mussolini, for

Mussolini's demands were essentially different from Hitler's. Mussolini was "a vain, blustering boaster" whose government, unlike the "solidly democratic" rule of Hitler, "lived in a state of illegality," and whose demands, since they did not correspond with "reality," were "a fraud." Western statesmen, says Mr. Taylor, lost all claim to respect by recognising such a man. But Hitler was a statesman who merely sought to reassert Germany's "natural weight," and they would therefore have gained respect by recognising him. Accordingly Mr. Taylor's heroes among Western statesmen are those who recognised German claims: Ramsay MacDonald and Neville Chamberlain. Winston Churchill believed in the balance of power and would have maintained frontiers designed on principles of security, not nationality. Intolerable cynicism! How much nobler was that "triumph for British policy," the Munich settlement!

It was a triumph for all that was best and most enlightened in British life; a triumph for those who had preached equal justice between peoples; a triumph for those who had courageously denounced the harshness and short-sightedness of Versailles.

Munich, according to Mr. Taylor, "atoned" for all the previous weakness of British policy; it was a victory for "morality" (which is his word for political realism); and he praises Chamberlain's "skill and persistence" in bringing "first the French and then the Czechs to follow the moral line." If only Chamberlain had not lost his nerve in 1939! If only he had shown equal "skill and persistence" in enabling Hitler to detach Danzig and the Polish Corridor, how happy we should all be! Germany would have recovered its "natural" position, "morality" would have triumphed, and everyone would be happy in the best of possible worlds.

SUCH, IN BRIEF, is Mr. Taylor's thesis. It is not surprising that it has been hailed with cries of delight in neo-Nazi or semi-Nazi circles in Germany. It is more surprising that the book has been greeted by the fashionable Grub Street of England as the highest achievement of British historiography. Mr. Taylor has been compared with Gibbon and Macaulay; his failure to secure worthy promotion has caused astonishment. The anonymous oracle of the *Times Literary Supplement* has predicted finality for the result of his "methodical and impeccable logic." In the *Observer*, Mr. Sebastian Haffner (who recently published a panegyric of that "greatest Roman of them all," Dr. Goebbels) has declared the book "an almost faultless masterpiece" in which "fairness reigns supreme"; and his cosy, middlebrow colleagues

in rival papers, hypnotised by a reputation which they are unqualified to test, have obediently jollied their readers along in harmony with the blurb. However, let us not all be hypnotised. Before hurling ourselves down the Gadarene slope, let us ask of Mr. Taylor's thesis, not, Is it brilliant? Is it plausible? but, Is it true? By what rules of evidence, by what philosophy of interpretation is it reached?

PERHAPS WE MAY BEGIN by noting Mr. Taylor's general philosophy. Mr. Taylor, it seems, does not believe that human agents matter much in history. His story is "a story without heroes, and perhaps even without villains." "In my opinion," he explains, "statesmen are too absorbed by events to follow a preconceived plan. They take one step and the next follows from it." If they achieve anything, it is by accident not design: "all statesmen aim to win: the size of their winnings often surprises them." The real determinants of history, according to Mr. Taylor, are objective situations and human blunders. Objective situations consist of the realities of power; human intelligence is best employed in recognising these realities and allowing events to conform with them; but as human intelligence seldom prevails in politics, the realities generally have to assert themselves, at greater human cost, through the mess caused by human blunders. This doctrine (if I have correctly expressed it) seems remarkably like Mr. E. H. Carr's "realist" doctrine, advanced in his book the *Twenty Years' Crisis* (1938)—see the first edition—a book rightly described by Mr. Taylor as "a brilliant argument in favour of appeasement."

Once we accept this general theory, the next stage is easy. All we have to do is to ask ourselves, at what point do we make our calculation of reality? This then provides us with a *datum*. Mr. Taylor takes as his *datum* the spring of 1918. At that time Germany was victorious in the West and triumphant in the East. This, he implies, was the "natural" situation: the Allied victory later in 1918 was artificial—or at least it was made artificial (or, in his words, deprived of "moral validity") by the failure of the Allies to carve Germany up before making peace. This omission left Germany still potentially the greatest power in Europe, naturally tending to revert to the "real" position of January 1918. All that intelligent German statesmen had to do, or indeed could do, was to work hand-in-glove with this "historical necessity"—to their profit. All that Allied statesmen could do was to yield to the same necessity—to their loss. In this sense Hitler and Chamberlain were intelligent statesmen.

But is this general philosophy true? Do states-

men really never make history? Are they, all of them, always "too absorbed by events to follow a preconceived plan"? Was this true of Richelieu, of Bismarck, of Lenin? In particular, was it true of Hitler? Was Hitler really just a more violent Mr. Micawber sitting in Berlin or Berchtesgaden and waiting for something to turn up: something which, thanks to historic necessity, he could then turn to advantage? Certainly Hitler himself did not think so. He regarded himself as a thinker, a practical philosopher, the demiurge of a new age of history. And since he published a blueprint of the policy which he intended to carry out, ought we not at least to look at this blueprint just in case it had some relevance to his policy? After all, the reason why the majority of the British people reluctantly changed, between 1936 and 1939, from the views of Neville Chamberlain and Mr. Taylor to the views of Winston Churchill was their growing conviction that Hitler meant what he said: that he was aiming—*so oder so*, as he used to say—at world-conquest. A contemporary conviction that was strong enough to change the mood of a nation from a passionate desire for peace to a resolute determination on war surely deserves some respect from the historian. A historian who totally ignores it because, twenty years later, he can interpret some of the documents in an opposite sense runs the risk of being considered too clever by half.

LET US CONSIDER briefly the programme which Hitler laid down for himself. It was a programme of Eastern colonisation, entailing a war of conquest against Russia. If it were successfully carried out, it would leave Germany dominant in Eurasia and able to conquer the West at will. In order to carry it out, Hitler needed a restored German army which, since it must be powerful enough to conquer Russia, must also be powerful enough to conquer the West if that should be necessary. And that might be necessary even before the attack on Russia. For in order to reach Russia, Hitler would need to send his armies through Poland; and in order to do this—whether by the conquest of Poland or in alliance with it—he would need to break the bonds of treaty and interest which bound the new countries of Eastern Europe, the creatures of Versailles, to their creators, Britain and France. Hitler might be able to break those bonds without war against the West, but he could not be sure of it: it was always possible that a war with the West would be necessary before he could march against Russia. And in fact this is what happened.

Now this programme, which Hitler ascribed

to himself, and which he actually carried out, is obviously entirely different from the far more limited programme which is ascribed to him by Mr. Taylor, and which he did not carry out. How then does Mr. Taylor deal with the evidence about it? He deals with it quite simply, either by ignoring it or by denying it as inconsistent with his own theories about statesmen in general and Hitler in particular: theories (one must add) for which he produces no evidence at all.

Take the inconvenient fact of Hitler's avowed programme of a great Eastern land-empire. In spite of some casual admission, Mr. Taylor effectively denies that Hitler had any such programme. Hitler, he says, "was always the man of daring improvisations: he made lightning decisions and then presented them as the result of long-term policy." Hitler's *Table Talk*, he says airily (as if this were the only evidence for such a programme), "was delivered far in occupied territory during the campaign against Soviet Russia, and *then* Hitler dreamed of some fantastic empire which would rationalise his career of conquest." [My italics here, and in all quotations below.] But why does Mr. Taylor believe, or rather pretend, that it was only in 1942, after his Russian conquests, that Hitler dreamed of an Eastern Empire? His programme had been stated, as clearly as possible, in 1924, in *Mein Kampf*, and on numerous other occasions since. Mr. Taylor hardly ever refers to *Mein Kampf* and never to the other occasions. In 1939, he admits, some people "attributed" to Hitler "grandiose plans which *they claimed* to have discovered by reading *Mein Kampf* in the original (Hitler forbade its publication in English)." The implication is that such plans are not to be found in *Mein Kampf* and that those who "claimed to have discovered" them had not really read, or been able to read, an untranslated work. But the fact is that those plans are unmistakably stated in *Mein Kampf* and that all the evidence of the 1930's showed that Hitler still intended to carry them out. I may add (since Mr. Taylor includes me among those who have ascribed to Hitler "preconceived plans" which he never pursued) that I myself read *Mein Kampf* in the original in 1938, and that I read it under the impact of Munich and of the remarkable prophecies of Sir Robert Ensor, who had read it and who insisted that Hitler meant what he said. By absolutely refusing to face this evidence, and contemptuously dismissing those who have faced it, Mr. Taylor contrives to reach the preposterous conclusion that men like Ensor, who correctly forecast Hitler's future programme from the evidence, were really wrong, and that men like Chamberlain, who did not read the evidence and were

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proved totally wrong by events, were really right. His sole justification of this paradox is that he has accepted as an axiom a characterisation of Hitler as a "traditional" statesman pursuing limited aims. Mr. Taylor's Hitler cannot have held such views, and therefore the inconvenient fact that the real Hitler uttered such views with remarkable consistency for twenty years and actually put them into practice, is simply puffed aside. When Hitler, in 1941, finally launched that conquest of Russia which, as he himself said, was "the be-all and end-all of Nazism," Mr. Taylor easily explains it away. "By 1941," he says, "Hitler had lost his old gift of patience": he "gratuitously" deviated from his former course; and at the mere thought of such an unaccountable fall from grace, Mr. Taylor promptly ends his book.

NOR IS THIS the only perversion of evidence to which Mr. Taylor has to resort, in order to represent Hitler as a "traditional" statesman. The traditional statesmen *did not seek*, as Hitler did, to incorporate the Sudeten Germans in the Reich. Traditional statesmen demanded the frontiers of 1914; but Hitler, again and again, repudiated the frontiers of 1914 as a contemptible ambition. They looked back, at most, to the war-aims of 1914; he repudiated those war-aims. Even the "natural" position of January 1918, after the huge gains of Brest-Litovsk, was insufficient for Hitler. The treaty of Brest-Litovsk gave Germany the Ukraine as a colony of exploitation, a capitalist colony. But Hitler always made it quite clear that he spurned such a colony: he wanted the Ukraine as a colony of settlement. "I should deem it a crime," he said, "if I sacrificed the blood of a quarter of a million men merely for the conquest of natural riches to be exploited in a capitalist way. The goal of the *Ostpolitik* is to open up an area of settlement for a hundred million Germans." All this is pushed aside by Mr. Taylor with the remark,

when Hitler lamented, "If only we had a Ukraine..." he seemed to suppose there were no Ukrainians. Did he propose to exploit, or exterminate them? *Apparently he never considered the question.*

As if Hitler had not made his answer perfectly plain! As if he had any scruples about transporting or even exterminating populations! What about the European Jews? But that episode is conveniently forgotten by Mr. Taylor. It does not fit the character of a traditional German statesman who "in principle and doctrine, was no more wicked and unscrupulous than many other contemporary statesmen."

IF MR. TAYLOR'S cardinal assumptions about Hitler's character and purpose are, to

say the least, questionable, what are we to say of his use of evidence to illustrate them? Here he states his method with admirable clarity. "It is an elementary part of historical discipline," he says, "to ask of a document not only what is in it but why it came into existence." With this maxim we may agree, only adding that since the contents of a document are objective evidence while its purpose may be a matter of private surmise, we must not rashly subject the former to the latter. Sometimes a man may say the truth even in a document called forth by tactical necessity. At all events, we are not entitled, in defence of an already paradoxical general theory, to assume that he is lying simply because it may not be tactically necessary for him, at that moment, to utter nothing but the truth.

Now let us take a few instances. On November 5th, 1937, Hitler summoned his war-leaders to the Chancellery and made a speech which, he said, in the event of his death was to be regarded as his "last will and testament." That suggests that he was not talking irresponsibly. The official record of this speech is the so-called "Hossbach Memorandum" which was used at Nuremberg as evidence of Hitler's plans for the gradual conquest of Europe. In it Hitler declared that the aim of German policy must be the conquest of *Lebensraum* in Europe, "but we will not copy liberal capitalist policies which rely on exploiting colonies. It is not a case of conquering people but of conquering agriculturally useful space." That seems clear enough. Then Hitler went on to consider the means of making such conquests. "German politics," he said, "must reckon with two hateful enemies, England and France, to whom a strong German colossus in the centre of Europe would be intolerable." Moreover, he admitted, these two hateful enemies would probably, at some stage, resist him by force: "the German question can only be solved by way of force, and this is never without risk." He then proceeded to discuss hypothetical possibilities. Since the hypothetical circumstances did not in fact arise, we need not dwell on them. The essential points are that the risk of European war must be faced by 1943-5, for "after that we can only expect a change for the worse," and that "our first aim" must be, at the first convenient opportunity, "to conquer Czechoslovakia and Austria simultaneously." This first conquest he hoped to achieve without war, for "in all probability England and perhaps also France have already silently written off Czechoslovakia." It could and should therefore be attempted as soon as circumstances make it possible in order that the later, more real risk could be faced before 1943-5. But there was to be no doubt about the nature of the conquest.

It was not to be (as Mr. Taylor always maintains) the reduction of Austria and Czechoslovakia to the role of satellites: it was to be, in Hitler's own words, "the annexation of the two states to Germany, militarily and politically." The idea of satellite states in Eastern Europe, Hitler said in a secret speech delivered only a fortnight later, was one of the futile notions of "traditional" German politicians, and he dismissed it as "idiotic" (*wahnsinnig*). Finally, it is clear that conquered Austria and Czechoslovakia cannot themselves have constituted the *Lebensraum* which was the ultimate objective. Austria and Czechoslovakia were to be stepping-stones, "in all probability" secured without war, towards larger conquests which would entail a greater risk.

SUCH WAS Hitler's "testament" of November 1937. Its content is clear and logical and it has been taken seriously by all historians—until Mr. Taylor comes along and tells us that we have all been hoodwinked. For was not this document produced at Nuremberg? All documents produced at Nuremberg, he says, are "loaded," and "anyone who relies on them finds it almost impossible to escape from the load with which they are charged." So Mr. Taylor gives us a sample of his method of using such documents. Why, he asks, was the speech made? "The historian," he observes, "must push through the *cloud of phrases*" (so much for Hitler's perfectly clear statements) "to the *realities* beneath." The speech, he notes, was not made to Nazis but to generals and admirals, and its purpose was clearly to demand greater rearmament. With this we can agree. But Mr. Taylor does not stop there. In order to persuade these "conservative" war-leaders of the necessity of further rearmament, Hitler (he says) had to overcome the economic opposition of Dr. Schacht. His speech therefore "*had no other purpose*" than "to isolate Schacht from the other conservatives"; the dates 1943-5 (to which Hitler consistently kept) "*like all such figures, really meant* 'this year, next year, sometime...'" and the content of a speech which Hitler himself described as his political testament (but Mr. Taylor does not quote that description) is dismissed as "day-dreaming unrelated to what followed in real life." Why Hitler should be expected to speak more "realistically" on military matters to Nazis at a froth-blowers' meeting than to hard-headed war-leaders who would have to organise and carry out his programme is not clear. Presumably it is "an elementary part of historical discipline" to assume that.

A second example of Mr. Taylor's "historical discipline" is provided by his treatment of the

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crisis leading to the outbreak of war in 1939. By now Austria and Czechoslovakia had been "annexed to Germany, militarily and politically," and Hitler had turned the heat upon Poland. According to Mr. Taylor, Hitler really only wanted the German city of Danzig, but since geography prevented him from obtaining it except by the coercion of Poland, he was forced, reluctantly, to apply such coercion and prepare military plans. Of course (according to Mr. Taylor) he did not intend to execute these plans. His military plans were "only intended to reinforce the diplomatic war of nerves." Unfortunately the British Government, misled after Hitler's occupation of Prague into thinking that he aimed at far larger conquests, had imprudently guaranteed Poland and thus threatened Hitler with European war if he sought this next "natural," "moral" aim by any but peaceful means. However, Hitler was a match for this. By making his pact with Russia, he effectively countered the British guarantee, and therefore, pushing, like Mr. Taylor, "through the cloud of phrases to the realities beneath," he ignored its empty words and relied, as a rational man, on "the crumbling of Western nerve." Unfortunately, in this case, he miscalculated. Britain, quixotically faithful to the "phrases" of the guarantee, and deluded by the idea that Hitler, if given a free hand, would not stop at Danzig, ignored all the "realities" of the situation and made war, "war for Danzig."

Such is Mr. Taylor's version of the Polish crisis. In defence of it he finds it necessary here, too, to charm away some important documents, and once again it is instructive to watch the exorcist at work. On May 23rd, 1939, Hitler again summoned his war-leaders. He told them, according to Mr. Taylor, who quotes no other words of the document, "there will be war. Our task is to isolate Poland. . . . It must not come to a simultaneous showdown with the West." "This," comments Mr. Taylor, "seems clear enough"; but he then dismisses even this evidence by saying authoritatively that "when Hitler talked to his generals, he talked for effect, not to reveal the workings of his mind." So that is that. Three months later, with the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Hitler again addressed his generals, and again Mr. Taylor is content to quote only one sentence from the speech: "now the probability is great that the West will not intervene." Apart from that "hard core," the rest of the speech, he says, can be ignored, as Hitler "was talking for effect." After all, by the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Hitler considered that "he had prevented war, not brought it on." So, once again, Hitler's mere "phrases" dissolve on contact with Mr. Taylor's "realities."

BUT WHY SHOULD WE SUPPOSE, as an axiom, that Hitler, when briefing his generals on the eve of a possible war, talked only for effect? Why should we not suppose that he intended them to be ready (as they were) for the real future? And why should we altogether overlook some very clear statements which he made to them? For if we look at the full texts of these two speeches, we find that Mr. Taylor has made certain remarkable omissions.

In the first of these two speeches Hitler began by insisting that the next step towards Germany's goal could not be taken "without the invasion of foreign states or attacks upon foreign property," and that although bloodless victories had been won in the past, "further successes cannot be obtained without the shedding of blood." "*Danzig*," he went on, in words from which Mr. Taylor has firmly averted his eyes, "*is not the subject of the dispute at all*." It is a question of expanding our living-space in the East." Moreover, he looked clearly forward to the prospect of war with the West. "The Polish problem," he said, "is inseparable from conflict with the West." For all that, "we are left with the decision to attack Poland at the first opportunity. We cannot expect a repetition of the Czech affair." Of course Hitler hoped to avoid a simultaneous conflict with the West, but he did not rely on any such hope: "the *Führer* doubts the possibility of a peaceful settlement with England. We must prepare ourselves for the conflict." The remaining two-thirds of the document deal with the problems of war with Britain, "the driving-force against Germany." All this is totally ignored by Mr. Taylor: it cannot have been the "hard core" of any argument used by *his* Hitler: therefore, he declares, it was mere froth, uttered for "effect."

In the second speech Hitler similarly made clear statements which Mr. Taylor does not quote. For instance, immediately after the "hard core," the single sentence which he does quote, about the probability that the West will be frightened out of intervention by the Nazi-Soviet Pact, come the words, "*we must accept the risk with reckless resolution*"; and Hitler then went on to explain how Germany, thanks to Russian supplies, could withstand a Western blockade. His only fear, he said, was that "at the last moment some *Schweinhund* will make a proposal for mediation": a proposal, perhaps, which might have fobbed him off with Danzig which, as he had admitted, was "not the subject of the dispute at all." No: Hitler was now resolved on war, even if the West did come in.

I shall give a propagandist cause for starting the war: never mind if it be plausible or not. The victor shall not be asked afterwards whether he told the truth or not.

As for the West, "even if war should break out in the West, the destruction of Poland shall be the primary objective." Which indeed was exactly what happened. By last-minute diplomatic manœuvres Hitler naturally sought to detach the West, but when that could not be done, he went ahead, with his eyes open, into a European war which, though larger than he had hoped, he still reckoned on winning.

I HAVE SAID enough to show why I think Mr. Taylor's book utterly erroneous. In spite of his statements about "historical discipline," he selects, suppresses, and arranges evidence on no principle other than the needs of his thesis; and that thesis, that Hitler was a traditional statesman, of limited aims, merely responding to a given situation, rests on no evidence at all, ignores essential evidence, and is, in my opinion, demonstrably false. This casuistical defence of Hitler's foreign policy will not only do harm by supporting neo-Nazi mythology: it will also do harm, perhaps irreparable harm, to Mr. Taylor's reputation as a serious historian.

But why, we may ask, has he written it? Is it, as some have suggested, a gesture of posthumous defiance to his former master, Sir Lewis Namier, in revenge for some imagined slight? If so, it is just as well that it is posthumous:

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otherwise what devastating justice it would have received! There would have been no nonsense then about "impeccable logic" in the *Times Literary Supplement*! Or is it, as Mr. Taylor's friends prefer to believe, mere characteristic *gaminerie*, the love of firing squibs and laying banana-skins to disconcert the gravity and upset the balance of the orthodox? Or does Mr. Taylor perhaps suppose that such a re-interpretation of the past will enable us better to face the problems of the present? Theoretically this should not be his motive, for not only does Mr. Taylor, in this book, frequently tell us that the past has never pointed the course of the future, but he has also assured us recently, in the *Sunday Express*, that the study of history can teach nothing, not even general understanding: its sole purpose, he says, is to amuse; and it would therefore seem to have no more right to a place in education than the blowing of soap-bubbles or other forms of innocent recreation. It may therefore be that Mr. Taylor merely means to amuse, not to instruct, by his irresponsible antics. Nevertheless, Mr. Taylor is not noted for consistency and it may be that, in this instance, he does see a connection between the past and the present, a lesson for our times. At any rate, it may be worth while to point out lessons which might logically be

deduced from Mr. Taylor's version of history, if it were accepted as uncritically by the public as it has been by their guides, the weekly reviewers.

BASICALLY, THE PROBLEM is that of the outbreak of world wars. According to Mr. Taylor, the second World War had a double origin: first, it was "implicit" in the general situation; secondly, it was made explicit by the particular blunders of statesmen in the face of that situation. The general situation was created in 1918 when the victorious Allies did not carve Germany up, and so made the ultimate recovery of its "natural weight" inevitable. The particular blunders lay in the failure of Western statesmen to draw the logical conclusions and yield to the inevitable. If only they had shown "realism" and yielded to all Hitler's demands, they would have found them limited and reasonable: it was only war and victory which surprised him by the size of his winnings and made him think of world-conquest.

Now let us transfer these doctrines from the 1930's to the 1950's. The inference is clear. First, the victorious Allies in 1945 did (however unintentionally) carve Germany up, and so (if they will only keep it divided) their settlement of the German problem is "morally valid," and no new German aggression is to be feared. Secondly, in the new circumstances thus created, "realism" consists in allowing the new great power which has replaced Germany in Europe to assert its "natural weight." Mr. Khrushchev, we should recognise, has no more ambitions of world-conquest than Hitler. He is a traditional Russian statesman of limited aims, and "the moral line" consists in letting him have his way more completely than we let Hitler have his: in other words, unilateral disarmament. Perhaps in this one respect Mr. Taylor does display "methodical and impeccable logic."



Heinrich Böll

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LETTERS

"Britannica"

THE *Britannica* may or may not be able to fend for itself against Dr. Einbinder's charge of placing salesmanship before scholarship. But I think it would be unfair for the editors of competing encyclopædias to stand aloof and watch this attack on their Big Brother with tacit glee.

Let it be said at once that Dr. Einbinder either lacks editorial experience in this field, or wilfully ignores it. One of his footnotes is eloquent enough:

The relative weight accorded to scholarship and sales promotion may be suggested by the following consideration. At the current rate of 2 cents a word, if all the words in the *Britannica* were to be replaced, the total payment to contributors would be less than \$800,000. This sum is far smaller than the *Encyclopædia's* annual U.S. advertising budget, which now equals four million dollars a year.

Does Dr. Einbinder really believe that this is the way in which encyclopædias are made? If we could re-shape our encyclopædias, or only bring them up to date, for a mere 2 cents a word, all encyclopædias would be perfect, and surely the *Britannica*. As things are, these 2 cents a word must be multiplied by an enormous amount of money that goes into *editing* those words.

Editing, as Dr. Einbinder should know, not only means selecting the entries, which alone is a formidable task. It means instructing contributors, adapting their output to a given space, co-ordinating the articles with illustrations, checking the accuracy of the data, revising the style, and seeing to the consistency of each entry, nay each word, in relation to thousands of other entries and millions of other words. Inconsistency between different entries is, as Dr. Einbinder rightly points out, "the bane of encyclopædia editors." We should be grateful for his advice how to escape this bane for 2 cents a word.

W. N. LANSBURGH
Editor

Focus International Encyclopædia,
Stockholm

RECENTLY I looked up Captain Kidd in my 1947 *Encyclopædia Britannica*. "Privateer and pirate," it calls him; "... Captain Kidd received the king's commission to arrest all pirates... instead of hunting the pirates down he associated with them, capturing native trading vessels... found guilty of murder and piracy... hanged..." Clearly a bad hat. "See also PIRATE," the article concludes. I did so, only to read that "the famous Captain Kidd was no pirate at all, but the victim or scapegoat of political intrigue."

After reading Harvey Einbinder's mild strictures in the May ENCOUNTER I consulted the only other

Britannica on this island, a 1956 edition. No change.

In both the 1947 and 1956 editions Captain Kidd's bibliography begins and ends in 1853. No wonder; for the numerous later biographies of Kidd were all published after, and because, the evidence in favour of his innocence had been discovered in the Public Record Office and published to the world (in 1911). The bibliography of the less antique article on PIRATE (again in both 1947 and 1956 *Britannicas*) includes books published as recently, so to speak, as 1923.

PATRICK PRINGLE

Ibiza, Spain

Muggeridge and Eye-Witnesses

IT HAS BEEN laid down, possibly by Hannen Swaffer, that a newspaper article which leads to no correspondence is far better than one that does, since if no one writes in, they must have been completely convinced by what they read.

So please don't think that, because I write this letter, I'm not convinced by most of what Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge says about the fallibility of even the most sincere eye-witnesses [ENCOUNTER, March]. The gardener's daffodil is no more a true picture of the flower than Wordsworth's, to my way of thinking.

What I had in mind, however, in *Eye-witness*, my anthology of British reporting, was raw material—and nothing more—on which the historian, whether of war, sport, or social affairs, could work.

Eye-witnesses, I agree, should not be heeded merely because they were eye-witnesses, but it is, after all, important for the historian to know what impressions newspaper readers gained of events at the time when these events happened.

And many stories written at white heat to meet a deadline, have besides their own technical fascination, a closer approximation to truth than something assembled weeks, months, or even years later.

JOHN FISHER

London

The U.S. Press

ON THE AFTERNOON of March 28th I picked up the March 1961 ENCOUNTER and read Arnold Beichman's report from America on the Press. It said:

The American intellectual who frets about esoterica and exotica, about mass- and mid-culture, who has withdrawn from politics and ideology, bears a great responsibility. If he reads a newspaper, he accepts it unconcernedly. Usually he takes the Sunday edition of *The New York Times*, if he lives away from the city, plus a weekly news magazine (or if he is really "in," a British weekly like the *Spectator* or *New Statesman*).

I stopped reading: my mind was in a whirl. How did even "a well-known New York reporter and foreign correspondent" know whether "the Ameri-