

# Leviathan

**JUGGERNAUT: THE PATH OF DICTATORSHIP.** By Albert Carr. New York: The Viking Press. 1939. 531 pp., with index. \$3.

**DICTATORSHIP: ITS HISTORY AND THEORY.** By Alfred Cobban. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1939. 352 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by CRANE BRINTON

THE present war has made these two books even more timely than it seems likely their authors could have intended. Both are honest attempts to study objectively the nature of modern totalitarian states, and though both are hostile to these states, and especially to Germany, neither is written with the bitter partisanship so inevitable—and so useful—in time of war. Both are worth the attention of anyone who wants to penetrate beyond the current headlines.

Mr. Carr is an American who came to the study of social problems after an apprenticeship in the natural sciences. His early training is evident not only in his constant attempt to write dispassionately, but even more in his effort to bring the observed phenomena of modern dictatorships into a series of laws or uniformities. He wishes to learn "why, how, and when does dictatorship come about." He classifies his dictators into *dynasts*, men who have assumed or extended dictatorial power as the embodiment or representatives of inherited authority (Richelieu, Louis XIV, Frederick the Great, Bismarck, Primo de Rivera, Alexander of Jugo-Slavia, Carol of Rumania, and General Metaxas); *revolutionaries*, men raised to power by discontented groups outside the ruling classes (Cromwell, Robespierre, Bolivar, Lenin, Stalin); and *crisis-men*, men raised to power with popular support in times of crisis, but with the active aid of the ruling economic class (the two Napoleons, Gomez, Mussolini, Atatürk, Salazar, Hitler).

The historical analysis which makes up the body of his book is not without a number of errors of fact, but no more than must be expected when so

much ground is covered rather hastily. Though often wrong, Mr. Carr is so temperate that he does not seem wrong-headed. His last fifty pages, the most interesting part of his book, contain a brief systematic description of the generalized course of dictatorship in modern Western society, or, if you prefer, an outline for a sociology of dictatorship.

Mr. Carr's chief working-tool is an economic interpretation of history which varies but slightly from the orthodox Marxian one. In his terms, a society is in equilibrium when the classes into which it is divided have the political power to which their economic power would "naturally" lead. When changes in techniques, discoveries, ideas, organizations, leaders, give a class greater "political potential" without giving it greater actual political power, there is disequilibrium, political unrest, revolution. Dictators come to power in such times of disturbance, either as agents of the rising classes, or as agents of ruling classes threatened by rising classes. The nineteenth century assumed from its own experience that dictators could succeed only as the temporary agents of the rising lower classes, of "democracy." The twentieth century has had to learn from its own experience that



Bismarck

the crisis-dictators may succeed in establishing something like a new equilibrium based on the exclusion of the great majority of people from real political power and from the possibility of economic improvement. Germany may be the first of the great modern servile states. On the whole, however, Mr. Carr clings to the hope that in favored countries like the United States dictatorship may be avoided, and the bases of political and economic power gradually broadened. In his last chapter, however, he notes a series of symptoms

of crisis-dictatorship in this country—fiscal difficulties, the strengthening of the federal government at the expense of state and local governments, and the rise of fascist groups like Father Coughlin's Social Justice party.

The most serious weakness of "Juggernaut" is its dependence on an oversimple form of the economic interpre-

tation of history. Like so many who appeal to this interpretation, Mr. Carr never comes to grips convincingly with the problem of defining his keyword, "class." You wouldn't get far in biology if you left terms like "phylum" as vague as sociologists commonly leave "class." Even reading between the lines of his book, it is hard to see how Mr. Carr would explain the present pact between Hitler and Stalin—an event which the other book under review definitely foresees. That the economic interpretation of history is an invaluable aid to the understanding of social processes, we should not care to deny; but it is not in itself alone a working tool nearly precise and delicate enough to probe among the complicated phenomena of human behavior in society.

Dr. Cobban is an Englishman trained in the classical tradition of political theory. The argument of "Dictatorship: Its History and Theory" is more closely-woven and philosophical than Mr. Carr's, and for the average American Dr. Cobban's book will make harder reading. Dr. Cobban does not neglect economic factors in his analysis, but he is convinced that ideas do a work of their own in this world. "The new totalitarian dictatorship is powerful," he writes, "not because it rules men's bodies, but because it controls their minds." The origins of contemporary dictatorship he finds in early modern theories of the sovereignty of the state, and especially in those of Hobbes and Spinoza. When the French Revolution transferred sovereignty from the monarch to the people, and infused this abstraction with the emotional force we call nationalism, the ground was ready for men like Hitler. Leviathan, as the totalitarian nation-state, emerged from theory and became a monster of flesh and blood. Our best hope of checking this monster lies in building societies, perhaps a world-society, based on political federalism and economic freedom of exchange, societies in which nationalism would be a fruitful cultural force rather than an obsession penetrating all human activity. The sovereign nation-state must be abolished, or it will abolish us.

Although Dr. Cobban deals so largely with formal political theory, his book seems at least as "realistic" as Mr. Carr's. Perhaps because he has gone to Aristotle rather than to Marx, Dr. Cobban has learned more about men in society than has Mr. Carr. He is certainly more prescient in some matters. "German thought," he writes, "bifurcates in the mid-nineteenth century. One line leads through Marx to Lenin and the other culminates in

Hitler; but both bear . . . the unmistakable signs of their parentage and kinship." We need not repeat the simplicities of anti-German propaganda in the last war, and blame this one on Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche; but surely it is important that men brought up in the Western tradition still feel towards the state a saving distrust not felt to any great extent in central and eastern Europe. This feeling seems not to depend exclusively on the economic "mode of production," which is essentially the same in Essen as in Sheffield and Pittsburgh.

Dr. Cobban gives us no such neat uniformities as does Mr. Carr, but he throws out many suggestive generalizations. Such, for instance, is his discussion of the role of modern education in preparing the way for the totalitarian states. The older "classical" education did at least help form a ruling class which was prepared to deal with the whole range of human life. Modern technical and specialized education seems to Dr. Cobban to have formed experts helpless outside their field, easy victims for unprincipled upstarts who know human beings as the expert cannot know them. As for those restricted to primary education, it seems to have but made them more suggestible than ever to propaganda.

It would be unreasonable to expect Dr. Cobban to refrain entirely from prophecy in a book like this, though it must be admitted that he tries hard to make clear to the reader the dividing line between descriptive and prophetic writing in his book. Like almost all contemporary political writers, he is haunted by the fear that we are about to witness the destruction of Western civilization. But he is not without hope, and concludes that "dictatorships in the past have generally not lasted beyond the lifetime, sometimes abbreviated, of the dictator. Defeat in war has been the cause most often productive of disaster. An aggressive foreign policy in the end drives other states to take action to suppress a government that has become an international menace." Long ago, Aristotle concluded from the experience of the Greeks that dictatorship is the most short-lived form of government. After two thousand years we Westerners still behave in most ways like the Greeks whose lives are reflected in Greek art and literature. It seems unlikely that even our science and our machines have altered us beyond profit from their experience. Most of us will hope that Aristotle and Dr. Cobban are right about Hitler.

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## Two French Poets

**ARTHUR RIMBAUD.** By Enid Starkie. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1939. 425 pp., with index. \$3.75.

**CHATEAUBRIAND.** By Joan Evans. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1939. 380 pp., with index. \$4.

Reviewed by ERNEST BOYD

THE lives of Rimbaud and Chateaubriand have both been explored many times, and the bibliographies attached to these two volumes bear witness to that fact. Why, therefore, should these two English women critics feel impelled to write substantial and painstaking biographical studies of subjects with which all who are interested in French literature must already be familiar? Reviewing a life of Chateaubriand—by André Maurois—in this place last year I raised this question of the necessity or utility of writing lives which have already been written repeatedly, unless one can come forward with important new material.

In choosing Rimbaud, at least, Miss Starkie can claim that the literature on the subject in English is sparse and in France the efforts of partisans and pious family whitewashers have tended to leave Rimbaud's strange career in a haze of evasions, misinformation, and confusion. Miss Starkie, therefore, had a fair field before her and she has done a thorough and satisfactory job.

To begin with, Miss Starkie has had access to a great number of hitherto unpublished documents, especially those dealing with the last years of his life. Patern-Berrichon, who was married to Rimbaud's youngest sister, had accumulated a great deal of information which he did not use, presumably in order to build up the legend of Jean-Arthur Rimbaud which his family wished to create. Miss Starkie suppresses nothing and even proudly unearths the evidence that Rimbaud trafficked in slaves when he was in Abyssinia. She also found a journal kept by his eldest sister from which we learn that Rimbaud was in London in 1874, a period when his whereabouts was unknown to previous biographers. She is also determined that there shall be no doubt as to the homosexual orgies of Verlaine and Rimbaud. On this vexed question she brings together every scrap of evidence.

To Miss Starkie Rimbaud is definitely a heroic figure, both in his meteoric career as a poet and in his colonial adventures, after he abandoned literature at the age of nineteen. To most readers Rimbaud is of importance solely as the author of "Les Illuminations" and "Une Saison en Enfer." His rather dubious activities in Abyssinia and on the Somali coast are of minor interest, save for the light they throw upon the indomitable, almost demonic will power which drove the ill-fated Ardennes peasant boy to his miserable and painful end, as it also elevated him to the heights of his poetic achievement. There is a mystic extravagance, worthy of Rimbaud himself, in Miss Starkie's theory of his silence after publishing "Une Saison en Enfer." Her

central theory, she says, is "that Rimbaud, at the time of his greatest creative power, believed that he had become God. . . . At that time Rimbaud thought that poetry was the means of penetrating into the unknown and of becoming identified with God."

Starting with this premise and assisted by a vast apparatus of occult lore—or hocus pocus, according as one views such things—

Miss Starkie proceeds to her conclusion that Rimbaud was so disillusioned at finding that he was not God, that his poetry was no more than the self-expression of a young man no different from others of his kind, that he turned savagely against literature, anathematizing Verlaine and all that his world represented. The skeptical may have some difficulty in reconciling this theory of divinity with the actual behavior of Rimbaud during those creative years. To most people he seemed more like a swine than a god. But Miss Starkie concludes: "It is probable that he intended to continue to write, but works like those of other writers; he discovered, however, that having tasted higher and rarer joys, this humble form of art had no savor for him. How be satisfied with being a mere human writer when one has been God?"

This is a strangely sentimental approach to literature from the author of so reasonable and so well-documented a study as this, where Rimbaud's sordid habits and vices are realistically portrayed and even stressed. It is more in the tone which inspires the "Chateaubriand" of Miss Joan



Rimbaud in Paris: from a drawing by Verlaine.