

America's Ramparts

AMERICA AND TOTAL WAR. By Fletcher Pratt. New York: Smith & Durrell. 1941. 318 pp., with index. \$3.

Reviewed by OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD

FLETCHER PRATT, the military critic of the *New York Post* and of *Time*, sets forth ably and efficiently the views of those who feel that from now on we must go "all out" in supplying England and also in defending Canada and every other place from which we could possibly be attacked—even to Uruguay and Brazil. This is a strange new doctrine for Americans who, until the rise of Hitler, never planned to defend more than their own soil plus Hawaii and Panama. Yet Mr. Pratt is by no means as militaristic as many, and he is never without the consciousness that overdevelopment of defence produces a militarism which will destroy the institutions we seek to preserve.

Thus, he disposes of the idea that it is possible to protect American cities from air-attacks by providing sufficient anti-aircraft guns. He explains that American cities cover more ground per unit of population than do the European and are built of such flimsy materials that attacks upon them similar to those being made upon English cities would destroy from half to two-thirds of their population. He points out that just to give to our northeastern industrial cities the same relative protection with which the British seek to defend London, "would run us into a figure of something like 120,000 guns and 4,200,000 men which, in the phrase of Euclid, is absurd." But more than that, he declares that if we *could* supply adequate anti-aircraft defence "it would plunge us into a peculiar and special kind of anti-aircraft militarism even to attempt it."

Mr. Pratt also refuses to yield to the panic which has beset some of our Cabinet officers over the possibility of an invasion of this country.

Thus, while Secretary Knox has told a Congressional committee that Hitler will invade the United States within "two or three months" if he defeats England, Mr. Pratt joins Senator Wheeler in declaring that "a single convoy carrying an army big enough to conquer the United States, to force upon us a peace in spite of an unbroken navy, is almost inconceivable. There are not merchant ships enough in the world to carry such an expedition and its supplies. If the supply-line stretches back it must be fought for." Mr. Pratt could have added that we were never able to come within 15,000 tons of landing on a single day in France in 1917-1918 the 40,000 tons of supplies and

ammunition we were supposed to deliver each day and never landed a single cannon or fighting airplane. Even under the most favorable conditions of a free ocean and having two harbors never in danger of being bombed at our disposal, our army would have starved and could not have fought in full numbers in France had the Allies not supplied us with the equipment and supplies we lacked. Mr. Pratt well points out that the United States has "no means of pressing an attack against an Axis completely victorious in Europe. . . . Even our sea-power is incompetent against a monolithic Europe. It is doubtful whether we could maintain a blockade of the whole Continent, and if we could, doubtful whether it would be of any military import." Against such a Europe, he says, we can only sit still and wait for them to attack us and then fight a long, defensive war, aiming at exhaustion of resources.

But Mr. Pratt believes that war between the totalitarian governments and the United States is inevitable and so he favors the two-ocean navy, and the recently leased outlying bases, which, he thinks, place us in a strong defensive position. He is not for a four-million army because he believes that one of a million and a half will more than suffice. As to that army, he admirably depicts the essential difficulty of a democracy in training an army to fight totalitarians. He sees that the four-year plus period of training which the dictators demand of their individual pawns, cannot be given in a democracy and that it invariably produces robots, whereas the soldier of a free state always will be a "thinking bayonet" and therefore superior. This advantage the dictators try to offset by training their men so completely that they will have automatic reflexes and reactions when face to face with the multitude of sudden-battle situations calling for individual leadership and initiative. Mr. Pratt's wise thesis is that we cannot have "both our democracy, our way of

life, and an army of the totalitarian type, with its infantry trained to handle any weapon by reflex action." What then, he asks, can we do?

Well, he rejects the dictator's plan of training warriors from childhood up. His plan is to train one in every eleven American men and to choose them if possible so carefully that they will all be of the "commissioned officer type" (which was what Germany did when restricted to a Reichswehr of 100,000 men by Versailles) and have them taught with the greatest care to use their brains. This means, he sees, the abandonment of the snappy salute (already considerably discarded) and of "squads right," and of tent-pegs all in line at inspection. It means a better training system for the officers and much closer relations between them and the men in the ranks. Mr. Pratt especially stresses that the day of sending men blindly forward "regardless of loss" must end. It is the individual cyclist, or parachutist, or tank-driver, or infantry-engineer who will decide battles as the Germans discovered and planned. He warns, however, that democracy is bound to disappear from the earth unless it can find means of unifying and coördinating its defense efforts to meet all the techniques of the totalitarians.

With that conclusion one does not have to agree, any more than with his belief that a war with Hitler is inevitable, in order to appreciate that Mr. Pratt has given a remarkable picture of the development of modern war. His description of the training and especially of the planning end of the German army is masterly—so clear and crisp that any layman can well understand it and will find it extremely interesting reading. It far surpasses anything else that I have seen on this subject. His restraint and lack of hysteria in dealing with the fifth column, and other new and alarming phases of the new techniques of breaking down internal resistance in the countries to be attacked, also merit praise. At only one point have I found that this Homer has nodded. It was not the "blunder of a junior staff member of the German service that led to defeat at the Marne through opening the gap between the armies of Von Kluck and Von Buelow." The gap was there when the blundering officer, Lieut-Col. Hentsch, arrived and gave the order to retire. Although he did not have even a scrap of paper to prove his authority, he was obeyed, by Von Kluck, despite bitter protests, because of the fact that he wore the General Staff uniform, and therefore had a power that has been remedied under Hitler. But Mr. Pratt's description of how the new German army has been trained and developed, deserves, I repeat, high praise and wide reading.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Drama Collection

SIR:—This is a plea on behalf of a unique but little-known collection of books, the Drama Collection of the 58th Street Branch Library in New York City. The Drama Collection now contains 9,000 volumes, in addition to thousands of useful clippings, magazines, pictures, and reference items, which are used regularly by actors, students, writers, designers, directors, and research workers. It includes 1539 full-length American plays, 1691 English plays, 1118 one-act plays, 659 foreign dramas, 928 plays in foreign languages. Books of criticism and/or the history and technique of the theatre number 1450; there are 611 biographies and 906 additional reference books. Play reviews on file run back as far as 1923 and additional files include pictures and biographies of stage people, settings, and costumes, and motion picture reviews.

During the past ten years the circulation of the Drama Collection has grown 150 per cent, but in the same ten years the city's appropriation has shrunk by 26 per cent. Now the library faces a situation in which it has difficulty replacing books that have been lost or worn out, or in buying enough of the new plays and books as they are published to maintain the high standard of comprehensiveness it has set.

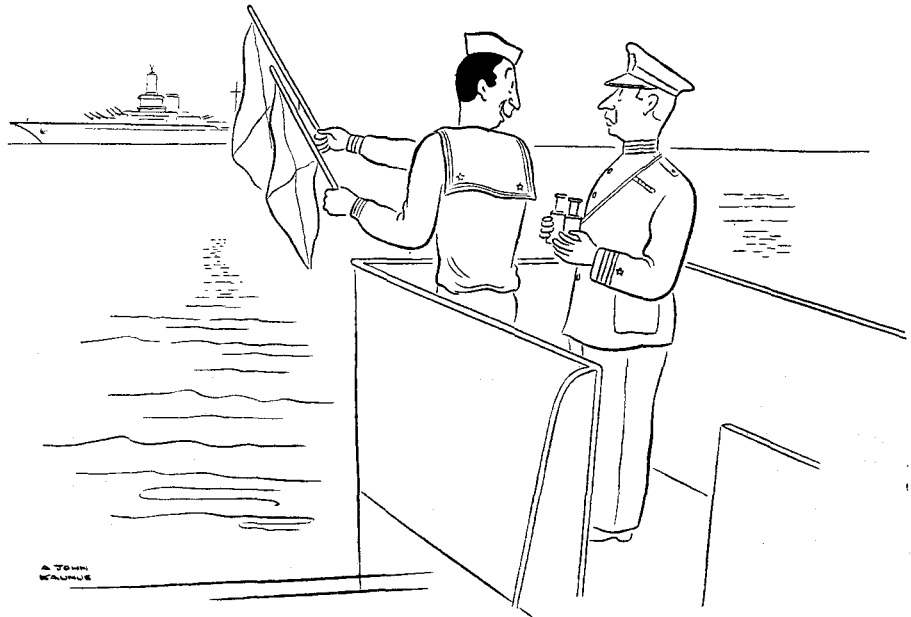
A number of people who have had occasion to make frequent use of the library for reference work of all kinds, have felt that they owe it a debt which they can only partially repay by making every effort to help and to enlist widespread support in its behalf. They include Barrett H. Clark, Mrs. Samuel Newton, John Mason Brown, Miss Rosamond Gilder, Blevins Davis, Philo Higley, Morgan Farley, Miss Margaret Anglin, Mrs. Anita Block, and others.

Their feeling is that at a time when public appropriations for such purposes are being reduced, the burden of maintaining the level of cultural and educational institutions must be taken up by the people most able to bear it and most nearly involved by profession as well as taste. Their plea is for gifts of money, however small, to be used for the purchase of books, and also for gifts in kind; published plays and books dealing with every aspect of the theatre, film, radio, etc.

In addition, we would urge those individuals fortunate enough to possess large collections of books of which they make regular use, and therefore cannot spare, to add a clause to their wills regarding such collections, making the 58th Street Branch of the New York Public Library the beneficiary. In this way extensive gifts would accrue to the library in due course of time.

PHILO HIGLEY,
ELEANOR FLEXNER.

131 West 82nd Street,
New York City.



"That's Svenson, all right. He always puts the 'i' before the 'e'."

"Coincidental Commentaries"

SIR:—The tribute of John Dryden to the people of London after the plague and fire of 1666 may well be recalled today. In his dedication of his poem "Annus Mirabilis" to "that City which has set a pattern to all others of true loyalty, invincible courage, and unshaken constancy," he says in part:

Other cities have been praised for the same virtues, but I am much deceived if any have so dearly purchased their reputation: their fame has been won them by cheaper trials than an expensive though necessary war, a consuming pestilence, and a more consuming fire. To submit yourselves with that humility to the judgments of Heaven, and at the same time to raise your selves with that vigor above all human enemies; to be combatted at once from above and from below; to be struck down and to triumph: I know not whether such trials have been ever paralleled in any nation, the resolution and successes of them never can be.

Never had prince or people more mutual reason to love each other, if suffering for each other can endear affection . . . you, who are to stand a wonder to all years and ages, and who have built yourselves an immortal monument on your own ruins.

ISABEL ST. JOHN BLISS.

Oxford, Ohio.

SIR:—I happened on this touching passage from a letter of T. E. Lawrence to Winston Churchill congratulating him on his "Marlborough." It was written on December 12, 1933

during the dreadful years that Churchill was locked out of the political arena by his foes, repeating the same experience of his famous ancestor.

No doubt Lawrence, with his uncanny faculty of prevision, sensed this and wrote these words to comfort and encourage his friend:

How odd that Marlborough's strength should have grown while he was waiting and sleeping, shelved and inactive. This gives an idea of his bigness. I never realized that he attained his premier power without trying for it.*

AUSTIN STRONG.

116 East 56th Street.
New York.

*Page 782 in *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence*.

SIR:—Regarding Emerson's "answer" ["Waves of Chance," *SRL*, Jan. 11], to Anne Lindbergh, would not this from the essay on Montaigne, in "Representative Men" be even more apt?

The lesson of life is practically to generalize; to believe what the years and the centuries say against the hours; to resist the usurpation of particulars. . . . We see, now, events forced on which seem to retard or retrograde the civility of age. *But the world-spirit is a good swimmer and storms and waves cannot drown him. He snaps his fingers at laws.*

And as for inspiring and patriotic poetry, why doesn't some one dig up Emerson's "Ode sung in the Town Hall, July 4, 1857" for a radio song?

NORA B. CUNNINGHAM.

Chanute, Kansas.