

The Aggressor Can Win

FREDERICK THE GREAT. By Pierre Gaxotte. Translated by R. A. Bell. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1942. 420 pp., with index. \$3.75.

Reviewed by CRANE BRINTON

THERE is no satisfactory detailed biography of Frederick in English. Carlyle's colossal life, though it is not as bad as Carlyle's detractors make it out to be, is not the kind of book a modern reader can be expected to use. The shorter lives are now pretty well dated. The Oxford Press is therefore to be congratulated on making available in English the life of Frederick written by the modern French historian Pierre Gaxotte. The fashionable prejudice against the Third French Republic which M. Gaxotte shared with so many young French intellectuals makes his writings on the French Revolution and on Louis XV untrustworthy. Writing on Frederick the Great, however, he is surprisingly fair and trustworthy. He knows and understands eighteenth-century Germany with the thoroughness French students of things German not infrequently display; and though the Third French Republic always crops up in his studies of the First, neither the second nor third Reich comes between him and Frederick.

M. Gaxotte is interested in Frederick as a man, in his complex and contradictory personality, in the people who surrounded him—an extraordinary group—in the intrigues and gossip of the Prussian court, in the literary and artistic culture of the period. He is interested in Frederick as an administrator, and gives us in Chapter IX, "Fredericus Rex," an admirably succinct account of the minute care with which Frederick ran the huge personal estate he thought of as *his* Prussia. (He did everything himself, treating his ministers as mere mechanical servants; could Newton, he remarked, ever have discovered the law of attraction had he collaborated with Leibnitz and Descartes as equals?) M. Gaxotte is also interested in Frederick the diplomatist, and does a good job in making clear the twists and turns of European politics from 1740 to 1786. He is obviously less interested in Frederick the soldier, but even here he gives the essential facts of the military history of the time.

This is not another book running the Nazis to ground in earlier German history. M. Gaxotte is too good a historian to maintain that Frederick made Hitler inevitable. He does, however, show that Frederick did strengthen greatly the already undemocratic



Frederick the Great

machinery of the Prussian state, and that he did nothing to weaken the hold the Junkers had on its social organization. And his analysis of the reasons for Frederick's success in grabbing territory from his neighbors has for us today the greatest immediate value.

Most of the great aggressors who almost built a "new order" out of Europe's system of independent states—Charles V, Louis XV, Napoleon—started out with resources greater than any two or three of their greatest competitors, resources only to be matched by a union of all Europe. Frederick, so to speak, ran up his winnings—he nearly doubled Prussian territory—on a shoestring. He inherited from his father an excellent army and a well-filled treasury. But Prussia was really a second-rate power compared with Austria, or France, or Great Britain, or even Russia. Frederick's audacity, determination, and military skill, as well as the discipline and will to fight of his soldiers, were certainly indispensable to his final victory. Even more indispensable, however, was the failure of his opponents to unite against him. As late as 1762, had Russia only stood by Austria, nothing on earth could have saved Frederick from complete destruction. But his enemy the Czaritza Elizabeth died, and her heir, Peter III, who had a childish admiration for the soldier-hero Frederick, took Russia out of the war. The moral, emphasized by the whole course of European history, is deadly clear: no aggressor can win ultimately against an effective union of all those he menaces, but even an aggressor with inferior resources of men and money can win permanently against stronger nations which fail to maintain an effective union.

Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

NUMBERS IN TITLES

"Many people cannot keep numbers in mind," says Miss Maria A. Loewe, of New York City. Are you one of them? Test yourself by filling in the numbers which have been omitted from the book titles listed below. (Hint: the total is 101,042,112.) Allowing 5 points for each title correctly numbered, a score of 60 is par, 70 is good, 80 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 21.

- a. Men on a Horse, by Abbott and Holm.
- b. Years at Hull House, by Jane Addams.
- c. Cousins, by Louisa M. Alcott.
- d. That Were Hanged, by Leonid Andreiev.
- e. Pound Look, by James M. Barrie.
- f. Steps, by John Buchan.
- g. Years Before the Mast, by Richard H. Dana.
- h. by John dos Passos.
- i. Years After, by Alexandre Dumas.
- j. Black Pennys, by Joseph Hergesheimer.
- k. Men in a Boat, by Jerome K. Jerome.
- l. Guinea Pigs, by Kallet and Schlink.
- m. Years in Sing Sing, by Lewis E. Lawes.
- n. Pillars of Wisdom, by T. E. Lawrence.
- o. Days That Shook the World, by John Reed.
- p. Gentlemen of Verona, by William Shakespeare.
- q. by Booth Tarkington.
- r. Pound Bank Note, by Mark Twain.
- s. Leagues Under the Sea, by Jules Verne.
- t. Days of Musa Dagh, by Franz Werfel.

The Middle Watch

"On the adventure of our lives"—F. DRAKE

By William Rose Benét

IT is dark now, with no moon, as they wade to the coast with blackened faces and with oozing shoes—as they creep up the beach, as they tense for the sudden rivetting of a machine-gun chattering . . .

Is it dark aloft somewhere at twenty thousand feet? Is the moon a lamp up there on floors of cloud as they drone toward France?

Face of the bombardier, of the gunner in his "greenhouse," of the young pilot . . . Gravely they wait the moment—hear and know only what faithful airmen know and hear . . .

But down, far down beneath them, on the Channel, as the chop grows, and the swirling fog-wreaths change strange craft are moving, craft that come from England, that are not subs, destroyers, warships, cruisers nor transports—like no modern ship of the line—strange silhouettes and picturesque, all sailing snug to the water, square-yarded, steep of sheer, flying a cross of red on a white ground, armed with old carronades, against invasion moving dispersed . . .

And now the night-mist blurs them—or are they only colored mist and cloud themselves?

But I see a cabin—and a candle—a bent and bearded man, and a quill scratching in a light in darkness like a binnacle-lamp. A pen scratching on parchment—a man breathing . . .

What does he write? Read it across his shoulder!

"By the Lord Howard of Effingham sent forth with half a score of ships and pinnaces he in the midst of the Channel, with greatest force; I toward Ushant; and Mr. Hawkins placed toward Scilly . . . as the Lord Admiral hath said where are so many doubts, we must attempt the likeliest ways . . . leave unto God at last to direct us best . . ."

Out of your noble past, Commandos, bombers and fighters high in air, this first Commando, the voice of Francis Drake!

"To the Lord Henry Seymour: The army of Spain being known as the Invincible Armada great high-charged galleons and ships and galleys arrived upon our coast . . . there passed between us some common shot . . . as far as we perceive they are determined to sell their lives with blows . . . written aboard Her Majesty's good ship *The Revenge*—off of Start—21st—late in the evening 1588. Signed by your Lordship's friend ready to be commanded Francis Drake . . .

P. S. This letter, my Honourable Lord, is sent in haste. The fleet of Spaniards are somewhat above a hundred sail, and many great ships. I think not half are men of war . . ."

You hear on high? And through the dark, Commandos of England, do you hear?

Listen again, for now in sixteenth century Whitehall it is the voice of England's greatest Queen, Elizabeth—speaking to Walsingham:

"Aye, Mr. Secretary, my good Moor so black-avized, I vow I am mere English yet wedded England early. So it is even this Philip brought us not to bed who now brings war against us, though last April Drake singed his beard. You wrought upon us well to article his voyage round the world! But now we wait for news. England is ready. The English ships are warped from Plymouth harbor. God's winds are on the Channel. They will blow. For in our counsels and our consultations we have been provident and profitable. Let tyrants fear! My body is a woman's but I have the heart of a King—and of England too! Prosper the work, O Lord! Yet, news—yet, news—?"

"Your humble Secretary brings you news, Your Royal Highness . . ."

"Read then!"

"The message reads here, in this parchment, from Sir Francis Drake to the Secretary Walsingham:

"We have the army of Spain before us, and we mind with the grace of God to wrestle a pull with him! There was never any thing that liked me better than seeing the enemy flying with a southerly wind to the northwards . . . So God give us grace to depend upon Him . . . so shall we not doubt victory . . ."

and the reading voice is fading of the dark Secretary—the voice of Drake is whispering in his cabin as at first:

"Victory—for our cause is good!"

So humbly taking my leave, this last day of July 1588,

Your Honour's faithfully
to be commanded ever Francis Drake . . .

I crave pardon of Your Honour for my haste for that I had the watch of this last night upon the enemy."

Do you hear a drum ruffle and roll—aloft there, bombers and fighters—as when that first time every seashore village sent forth its ships, long before Dunkerque sands were red with history?

Out of your past, over your Channel, Spitfire and Hurricane, out of your past, Commandos, that quiet voice with the steel in it, over the roll of the drum, so proudly saying to England's new defenders above a higher crescendo roar of planes, "Your Honours' now—to be commanded ever!"

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