

# Close-up of a Cauldron

HEADQUARTERS BUDAPEST. By Robert Parker. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc. 1944. 345 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HENRY C. WOLFE

IN 1937, Tibor Eckhardt, "the energetic leader of Hungary's Independent Peasant Party," attempted to promote the restoration of the monarchy in Hungary, with Otto as ruler. Dr. Eckhardt recognized the precarious position of his country, caught between the pincers of Pan-Sovietism and Pan-Germanism. He believed that restoration "might weld a defense against Nazism."

Otto's mother, unfortunately, laid down conditions. "Zita ruined the whole idea, however, by publicly stating how much income Otto must have and how many castles he would require. Those Hungarian peasants who had a little land immediately saw it being taken away from them. In May, 1939, the idea of a Hapsburg restoration had become ridiculous." Thus collapsed another abortive attempt to stop the Nazi march down the Danube.

"Headquarters Budapest" presents a fascinating war-time close-up of one of the most important and colorful regions in the world, Central Europe and the Balkans. In this European powder barrel many wars have ignited. World War I exploded there and a dynamic phase of World War II blew up there when Hitler invaded Poland. Without the oil and food of Rumania, the minerals and timber of Yugoslavia, the wheat and bauxite of Hungary, the wool, cotton and chrome of Turkey, the raw materials of Bulgaria, Hitler would hardly have dared to plunge Europe into war. The products and man power of this region have made it possible for the Nazi war machine to keep on functioning for nearly five years. Yet the average American knows virtually nothing about the peoples, politics, economics—even the geography—of this area.

Robert Parker does a top-notch job in introducing the average American reader to Central Europe and the Balkans of World War II. Too many of the books on this subject have been so ponderously written that only specialists would work their way through them. "Headquarters Budapest," while laying no claim to being definitive, brings into close focus the tragicomedy that has gone on playing almost unnoticed behind the curtain of headlines about Russia, Italy, Western Europe, and the Pacific.

Those who know Budapest will remember it as one of the most delightful cities in the world. Its position astride the Danube, its coffee houses, gypsy

music and atmosphere—part Occidental, part Oriental—make it a setting for romance rather than politics. Yet in recent years it has been the setting for a grim political struggle, a struggle that still goes on between the Nazis and their Hungarian allies on one side, and the anti-Nazi and pro-democratic Hungarians on the other.

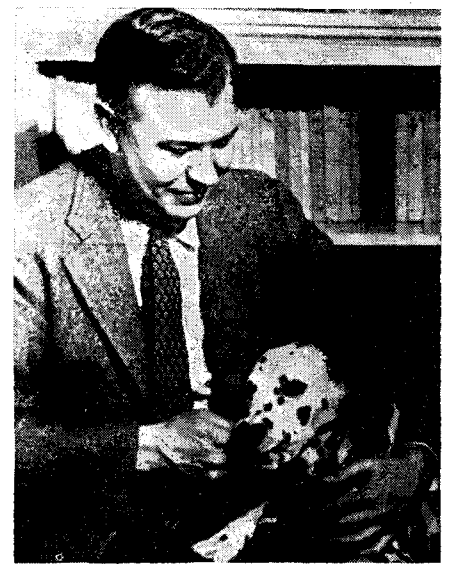
Mr. Parker's volume covers a lot of ground outside Hungary too. The pages on Rumania stir with all manner of excitement—mystery, intrigue, and violence. Here is Bucharest's famed Athenée Palace Hotel. "Take a walk around the lobby. See that little bearded man reading a Greek newspaper in the corner? He looks like an Athens tobacco merchant. He's a member of British Intelligence. . . . The bartender works for some foreign government, nobody knows which—probably two or three at the same time. That man over there by the door—that bent little man with the baggy clothes—is one of Roumania's wealthy oil men, a close friend of Elena Lupescu."

There is plenty of humor in "Headquarters Budapest." King Carol furnishes his share of it, especially in the audience he gave Mr. Parker. Somebody got things mixed, and the American correspondent was ushered into the royal presence while His Majesty was riding a mechanical horse. "The clatter was terrific. Around him (King Carol) was a little group of men in knee breeches holding towels. One had a bucket of water and occasionally would fill a sponge and squeeze it over the rider's head."

The dreadful tomfoolery at the Rumanian court was actually a profound tragedy for millions of people. The Nazis took advantage of the corruption, misgovernment, scandal, and confusion to tie this unhappy land tightly into their *Grossraumwirtschaft*. Rumanian oil powered planes and tanks that have lengthened American casualty lists in Italy and France.

This volume has the best description that I have seen of the atmosphere of Poland in the summer of 1939. Today, it all seems fantastic. The Poles were standing up to the Nazis. For that they deserve high praise. Their courage was unquestioned. But they were carried away with delusions of their own military power. The Polish public, even Government officials, expected the Polish Army to march straight to Berlin.

Mr. Parker writes: "I found the confidence of the Polish army in its own might was shared by the American Embassy. Ambassador Biddle declared his belief that the Polish army could hold out indefinitely if Hitler were



Robert Parker

so rash as to provoke a conflict. . . . Only Second Secretary Harrison held an opposite opinion and he was laughed at as a confirmed pessimist." It was all part of the incredible background of World War II.

There are times when one wishes that the author had included some documentation in his highly readable chapters. He could have managed it without slowing down his fast pace. Every once in a while the reader encounters a statement that brings him up short. For example: "Odessa on the Black Sea was Russia's only ice-free port." In another place: "Any American boy could have pretty nearly thrown a baseball across the Danube at the Roumanian-Bulgarian frontier . . ." And again: "Four Poles out of every five were illiterate."

But such statements detract little from an exceedingly valuable book. They can be easily corrected in the next edition. On the larger issues Mr. Parker speaks with authority. He was Eastern European chief of the Associated Press for two critical and dramatic years, 1939 to 1941.

In his final chapter Mr. Parker talks about future world peace. He abhors spheres of influence and warns that if our leaders have divided the world into such zones "you'd better plan on your children and grandchildren going to war." He is concerned about our foreign policy. This is "not something that is cooked up after victory is won. A foreign policy is the reason for fighting in the first place. When diplomacy fails to carry out foreign policy, the armed forces must take it over. Either we have a foreign policy and are fighting to carry it through or we don't know what we are fighting for." And he outlines a long-term program aimed "to cut down the possibility that World War III will start in Eastern Europe."

# "Special Police Duty" in Prague

THE FIRING SQUAD. By F. C. Weiskopf. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1944. 264 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT PICK

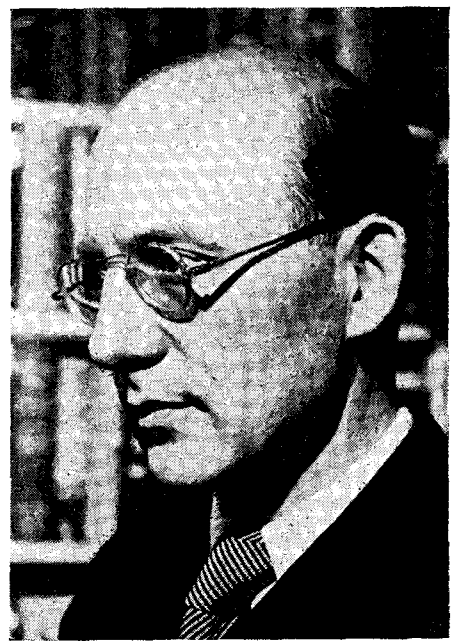
THE German Army is not annihilated yet, the Nazi party is still in the saddle—and already a certain sympathy for legalistic subtleties seems here and there to weaken the resolve that no fascist criminal, whether big or small, shall escape from just retaliation. The question of individual responsibility, or rather non-responsibility, on the part of the underlings may be relied on to make its appearance on the legenda of tomorrow's tribunal. And the established concept of military obedience and subordination, applied to the armed forces and para-military formations as well—and which group in Germany couldn't be termed as such?—might well succeed in narrowing the circle of those to be blamed to a comparatively insignificant number of figure-heads. Already the deeply hurt sense of justice, which burns in the hearts of uncounted millions, is likely to be called in some quarters such names as "thirst for vengeance" or "personal hatred." Yet lasting peace will largely depend on a vindication of man's sense of justice—which is about the last vestige left among Occidentals of universal spiritual values.

Some such timely thoughts may have moved Mr. Weiskopf, a German-writing poet, author, and newspaperman of Czechoslovakian extraction, to write this novel of criminal underlings. It is all about the experiences of a small group of German soldiers assigned to "special police duty" in the Prague of 1942. These men are anything but uniform in their speech and behavior; the features of their class individualism are still apparent beneath the surface of their preparedness to make the best of their situation, and give a hand in what they themselves call "Heavenly Transports." There are differences in their cynicism and moral indifference, and these distinctions account for the degree of their failure and their ultimate fate.

The author presents a gallery of six of them. Against the sombre background of the enslaved town he unfolds their life stories, as seen in the mirror of their hideous job, their talks, and what little private doings are left to them. It has to be admitted that the chosen types are no longer wholly unfamiliar to readers of anti-Nazi novels—from the disgusted, melancholy aristocrat to the young dyed-in-the-wool fanatic. But Mr. Weiskopf manages nevertheless to produce a highly credible, im-

pressive picture of German depravity and German misery. There is practically nothing of the usual underground stuff in his novel, and, what is even more to his credit, his own emotion hardly ever gets the better of him.

The story is told by one Pfc. Hans Holler who—after the squad's disbandment, and his joining a fighting unit again—has been taken prisoner, and now dictates his memoirs to a Russian hospital nurse. That form has its natural drawbacks; for—to use Goethe's words which the soldier-narrator is quoting himself—"every man commonly shrinks from casting out the idols he worships in his soul, from avowing a major error, from admitting any truth that might bring him to despair." Thus, Holler's moral growth, his final knowledge of himself and the world he lived in, seems at times to be projected back into the description of how he felt when he did service in Prague, and by necessity had his share in the brutal wholesale revenge for Heydrich's assassination. In short, he appears to the reader from the beginning as not too unlikeable a fellow. His final outcry for atonement and new hope becomes convincing despite its dramatically heightened accents which are somewhat out of tune with the uninhibited realism



F. C. Weiskopf

—Fred Stein

which has characterized his horrible report.

Self-purification, then, Mr. Weiskopf seems to say, must precede or even substitute for punishment and retaliation. This is a noble thought—and broadened in its application to the whole national body, less romantic than it may sound. For the political term for national self-purification is revolution.

## Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

### ANTECEDENTS OF "IT"

This week's quiz consists of twenty quotations from as many well-known poems, all of which contain the pronoun "it." All you have to do is to identify the object to which "it" refers. Allowing 5 points for each antecedent correctly named, a score of 60 is par, 70 is very good, and 80 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 25.

1. He left it dead and with its head he went palumphing back.
2. In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud, it perched for vespers nine.
3. It brought me fifteen hundred pounds and added to my name.
4. Sturdy and staunch it stands.
5. The next night it came again with a great awakening light.
6. Its loveliness increases; it will never pass into nothingness.
7. Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam, in full glory reflected now shines in the stream.
8. So they took it away, and were married next day by the turkey who lives on the hill.
9. It was brought to me this morning by a rider from the Duke.
10. It was built in such a logical way it ran a hundred years to a day.
11. It stands in the Comitium, plain for all folks to see.
12. And he kissed its waves in the moonlight (Oh, sweet black waves in the moonlight!)
13. It sits looking over harbor and city on silent haunches and then moves on.
14. It seemed to say, "Repay, repay," and my eyes were blind with blood.
15. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath.
16. It is the star to every wand'ring bark.
17. Old Kaspar took it from the boy, who stood expectant by.
18. On a buoy in the storm it floated and swung, and over the waves its warning rung.
19. It rumbled in the mountaintops, it rattled in the dell.
20. Ever its torn folds rose and fell on the loyal winds that loved it well.