

Lessons for Present and Future

MIRROR OF THE PAST. By K. Zilliacus, M.P. New York: A. A. Wyn. 1946. 354 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by WAVERLY ROOT

DECORUM is the dress of diplomats. Matters of protocol, form, and correct attire take on an importance in the diplomatic world which they possess nowhere else. The slightest taint of scandal is sufficient to wreck a promising diplomatic career.

A psychiatrist might argue that the diplomatic preoccupation with respectability arises from a deep-buried and usually unadmitted guilt—the guilt expressed by Cavour, who had not relegated it to the subconscious, in the phrase quoted by Mr. Zilliacus: “What scoundrels we should be if we did for ourselves what we do for our country!” For the business of these ultra-respectable gentlemen is to serve national interests, necessarily, under our current system, at the expense of other national interests. It is to take from other nations, whenever the opportunity is afforded, what they would ordinarily not grant without war; and, if such gains are not possible except by war, to create a situation in which their own nations may reasonably expect to wage war successfully.

This is the indictment which Mr. Zilliacus levels against the diplomats. He has no respect for the motives which are hidden by the superficial and insincere politeness of diplomacy and castigates them in sentences often biting and sometimes savage. “It must never be forgotten,” he writes, “that international law and international morality are concepts irrelevant to power politics except for propaganda purposes.” This amorality of nations is so widespread that it is difficult to separate the more virtuous from the less virtuous on the criterion of their international behavior. Thus, in writing of Italy’s particularly slippery diplomacy before World War I, Mr. Zilliacus remarks:

The Italian people had, if possible, even less to say about their country’s foreign policy than the peoples of France and Great Britain about theirs (and the Western democracies were little, if any, better off in this respect than Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia) . . . Italy was like an all-in wrestler who attracts attention even among his professional brethren for fighting foul. . . . This was not due to a double dose of original sin in Italians, but to the simple fact that Italy had to try to compensate by an overdose of fraud for her lack of force in the great game of power

politics, which is compounded of both.

In this world of unrelieved duplicity and selfishness, Mr. Zilliacus, writing what he subtitles “A History of Secret Diplomacy,” would seem to have selected the diplomats as his villains. Actually his thesis is by no means as superficial as this. Diplomats as individuals, he realizes, are well-meaning mortals like the rest of us. The unsavory work which they are impelled to do is forced upon them by the system within which they labor—which, to seek no examples nearer home, accounts for such surprising inconsistencies as, for instance, the policies of Winston Churchill in opposition to the Chamberlain government and his conduct of the affairs of state when he himself became responsible for them.

The keystone of this system, politically, is “international anarchy,” the refusal of government to submit national decisions to any higher law, or, as Mr. Zilliacus puts it, “the fiction that states [are] sovereign entities recognizing no international duty or interest greater than their ‘right’ to be judge in their own cause and to use war as an instrument of national policy.” On the economic plane, it is founded on “finance and monopoly capital,” which takes advantage of the situation in which no interests superior to national interests are admitted to represent the increase of its own profits as being synonymous with the national interest and, consequently, as worthy of being advanced by all the means at the power of the state, including war. The success of finance and monopoly capital in using the state for its own ends is due to the secrecy with which diplomatic activities are surrounded, or, to look at

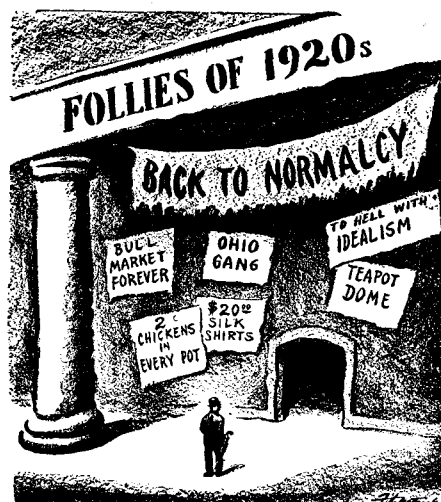
the matter from the opposite point of view, the nature of the uses to which national diplomacy is put necessitates secrecy. National policies are determined by pressures applied to diplomacy long before peoples learn what attitudes have been adopted by their governments. Indeed it is the very departments of government most likely to lead a nation into war, those concerned with military and international affairs, which not only keep their activities secret from the public most consistently, but also tend to despise public opinion as “mawkishly sentimental, impracticably idealistic, and dangerously ignorant.”

This is Mr. Zilliacus’s view of the world of international affairs. He puts the case for it with convincing skill and a wealth of solid documentation, on the basis of the developments of diplomacy which led up to World War I and concluded it. His most valuable contribution, perhaps, is his minute analysis of the attitude of the other powers to the developments of the Russian revolution. The rift with Russia is the great schism in our day, as it was then; and if we are ever to free ourselves of the dangerous miscomprehensions which prevent us from judging this situation accurately, it seems that we must go back to the beginning and retrace painfully, step by step, the record of the past in order to correct the errors which became part of our background thinking about Russia then, because they were sedulously put before us by governments which distorted the truth in the service of narrowly nationalistic policies.

If Mr. Zilliacus has thought it worth while to retrace minutely the malodorous history of international diplomacy before, during, and after World War I, it is, as the title of his book implies, in the hope that by regarding the mirror of the past we may find lessons to apply to the present and the future:

I hope that the effect of this introduction to the morals and methods of the jungle world of international affairs will be that democracy will at last conquer the realms of foreign and colonial policy and defense, and that Anglo-American policy in all three fields will change from top to bottom and conform to the standards and serve the needs of international cooperation. If so, we may win the peace this time. If not, we shall lose it again as surely as we did last time.

Unhappily the evidence of Mr. Zilliacus’s book does not permit optimism; for the mistakes he isolates are being duplicated while the more hopeful factors have disappeared. After World War I, America, through President Wilson, exercised a restraining



—Fitzpatrick in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Repeat Performance?

influence on the reactionary policies of some of her allies; today, she often outdoes them. After World War I, America experienced the same swing to the right which she is undergoing today, a common result of the ascendancy of military standards during wartime; but whereas she was then in tune with a world in which Britain and France had experienced the same movement she is today dangerously opposed to their present swing to the left. It makes no difference whether the political development in the United States be considered as intrinsically desirable or the opposite, on the domestic plane; the fact remains that divergence from the dominant tendency abroad constitutes a menace on the international plane.

Lloyd George's confidential memorandum to the Big Four at the time of Versailles noted, on the question of the treatment of Germany:

A large army of occupation for an indefinite period is out of the question. Germany would not mind it. A very large number of people in that country would welcome it, as it would be the only hope of preserving the existing order of things.

That is the solution adopted today, although this shrewd observation is probably as true now as it was then.

"The Allied governments' fear of revolution was again their chief motive," Mr. Zilliacus reports, in the development of their erroneous policy towards Germany. These words are still valid. As a result of that fear, Sir Henry Wilson noted in his diary that "the war against the Boche is turning into a war against the Bolshie." He might repeat that observation today. The failure to consolidate the victory of democracy occurred chiefly because the winners "persisted in treating the Bolsheviks and the revolutionary unrest in the working class as though they were just as much their enemies as plutocracy and conservatism." Replace the last two nouns by "fascism" and that sentence is up to date too.

British labor, Mr. Zilliacus reminds us, obliged London to end its undeclared war against the infant Soviet government by refusing to load the munitions ships. It failed to make any such effective protest this time in the case of Greece, though it should be recorded that Mr. Zilliacus himself was not alone among Labor members of Parliament in protesting his own party government's policy. And, finally, to end a depressing parallel, in the first few years after World War I, "no state was rearming intensively, nor apprehended war."

That, lamentably, we are unable to say today.

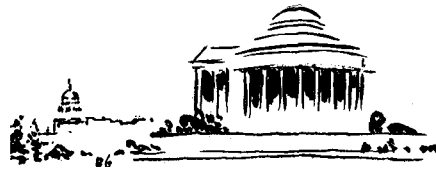
As McIntire Remembers Him

WHITE HOUSE PHYSICIAN. By Vice Admiral Ross T. McIntire. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1946. 244 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

ROSS MCINTIRE, who was Franklin Roosevelt's physician throughout his years in the Presidency, has written a medically documented and at the same time often moving book of recollections about him. But somehow, despite the doctor's candor and his medical reports, the book does not seem to me to dispel the continuing mystery about Roosevelt's health from late in 1943 until the April of 1945 when he died.

Knowing Ross McIntire, I am confident about every medical fact he presents. If he says, as he does, that there was nothing beyond weariness and loss of weight the matter with the President except a "moderate



arteriosclerosis" up to the time of his death, I do not question it. But as one of those who watched Roosevelt decline steadily and perceptibly to death from December 1943 to April 1945 I am confused.

I was one of those who wanted very much to believe that there was nothing the matter with Franklin Roosevelt. What Ross McIntire writes in this book is what he told me when, as press secretary to the President, I discussed the matter with him in connection with a story Roscoe Drummond, the well-known Washington correspondent, was planning to write about Roosevelt's health. That was just a couple of weeks before Roosevelt's death. But looking back as a complete layman, I know in retrospect that the man I saw go to Warm Springs was a man about to die—and that the approach of his death, imperceptible as it may have been to medical diagnosis, should have been visible to the naked eye.

Whatever may have been the matter—sheer weariness perhaps, and God knows there was reason enough for that—the steady decline of Roosevelt's health was heartbreakingly apparent to everybody around him from the influenza of December 1943 until he died. While he lived, of course, fears about him were always accom-

panied by hopes, too. His gaiety and his mental vigor often belied the signs of deterioration in the man. But—I doubt that the rumors in the country (malicious, irresponsible, and uninformed as most of them were) were any more widespread than the guarded fears among his friends. Certainly before he died those close around him understood that new procedures would be necessary in his Secretariat to guard and assist his waning physical powers.

Dr. McIntire, speaking as of Yalta, says that much of the talk about Roosevelt's declining health was occasioned by newspaper pictures. Toward the last, he thinks, the newspapers seemed to prefer pictures which were unflattering. "Many photographs taken at Yalta," he says, "were excellent, showing him alive and alert; but for the most part the papers printed flashlights that gave the President a ghastly pallor and accentuated the thinness of his face." That was true in some cases, notably of one picture generally circulated at the time of his speech accepting the 1944 nomination. But all the pictures taken at Yalta were made by the Army and none were released until they had been screened at the White House. The pictures which appeared after Yalta were not the worst but the best of the pictures taken.

Apart from the President's health, Dr. McIntire's book will be one of the many volumes of memoirs which added together will help historians shape the full Roosevelt story. Already it is apparent that not all those close to Roosevelt saw the same man. The story of Roosevelt's attitude toward Russia and Stalin and Churchill in this book is almost diametrically opposed to that related by Elliott Roosevelt in his recent controversial volume. There are other differences. Elliott reports that at Cairo in November 1943 McIntire, in discussing the flight from Cairo to Teheran, said that his father could not stand an altitude of over 7,500 feet. McIntire does not mention such fears in his book but reports the flight at great altitudes as one in which the President delighted.

There will be other books which will be more valuable in throwing light on the problems which Roosevelt faced. But this will certainly be one of the most essential books to all those who undertake to understand Roosevelt the man. As friend as well as physician, Dr. McIntire has told his story with both warmth and clarity. He has written from affection for history.