

Refuting the Isolationist Thesis

ROOSEVELT: *From Munich to Pearl Harbor*. By Basil Rauch. New York: Creative Age Press. 527 pp. \$4.50.

BY WALTER JOHNSON

FROM Munich to Pearl Harbor were grim, turbulent days for the peoples of the Western democracies. It is difficult to realize that it is now nearly ten years since Norway, Denmark, the Low Countries, and France were overrun by the Nazi armies and Great Britain was left alone to fight the threat of German domination of the world.

These epochal events destroyed the smug, self-satisfied attitude of many in America that a war in Europe was no threat to the United States. Under the impact of Hitler's victories, Britain's gallant stand, and President Roosevelt's imaginative leadership, the American people shifted from the isolationism of the mid-1930's to support of a program of ever-increasing aid to the Allies.

Professor Basil Rauch, of Barnard College, with skill and insight traces the evolution of President Roosevelt's own belief in collective security from 1933 to Pearl Harbor. The author shows that after Munich in 1938 the President subordinated domestic reform to the international crisis and guided a sometimes confused people into world leadership.

Relying entirely on published books and documents, Mr. Rauch also has written a detailed description of American foreign policy from Munich to Pearl Harbor with emphasis on such events as the revision of the Neutrality Act in 1939, the release of the over-age destroyers to Great Britain, the 1940 Presidential campaign, the Vichy policy, lend-lease, the Atlantic convoy system, and Japanese-American relations in the months just before Pearl Harbor. Mr. Rauch explains in his introduction that he had intended to write a purely factual account of American foreign relations but that the isolationist charge that President Roosevelt plotted to lead the United States into war when the Axis leaders desired to avoid war, changed the entire focus of the book. "My examination of the evidence," Rauch writes, "convinced me that their thesis is based on omissions, distortions, and falsifications. Therefore I abandoned my original plan and turned to write not merely a factual account of events, but also a point-by-point refutation of the isolationist thesis, and to present the internationalist argument in favor of President Roosevelt's conduct of foreign relations."



—From "The Future in Perspective."

Franklin Delano Roosevelt — "as ingenious as Abraham Lincoln."

There is no doubt that the author presents excellent material to refute the absurd statements in George Morgenstern's "Pearl Harbor: The Story of the Secret War" and the more subtle distortion of the record in Charles A. Beard's "American Foreign Policy in the Making" and "President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War." Professor Rauch's handling of the evidence covering the days and weeks just prior to December 7, 1941, is a most convincing repudiation of the charge that the President deliberately provoked the attack on Pearl Harbor.

"Roosevelt from Munich to Pearl Harbor" is a well-written, interesting, but sometimes exasperating book. Why did Mr. Rauch have to drag the Yalta Conference into his story and then state that by the time of Yalta the Rhine had been crossed and victory in Europe was certain? The Rhine was not crossed until about two weeks after Yalta, and the American military at Yalta was not certain when the European war would end. Why, too, did Mr. Rauch write that "the late Dr. Charles A. Beard is the only historian who has written on the process by which the nation abandoned isolationism and turned to internationalism"? There are several others that come to mind immediately.

It is clear from the events from Munich to Pearl Harbor that President Roosevelt was as ingenious as Abraham Lincoln had been in an earlier crisis in inventing devices to preserve the nation. Lend-lease and the exchange of the over-age destroyers, to mention only two of the more important inventions, place Roosevelt in the first rank of Presidents who have known how to act in a crisis. Mr.

Roosevelt also had a keen sense of public opinion and an uncanny ability to steer the public behind his policies. Although Mr. Rauch understands Mr. Roosevelt's ability at top-level negotiations he largely ignores in "Roosevelt: From Munich to Pearl Harbor" the President's skill in molding public opinion on the question of aid to the Allies. Although the President relied on many channels to guide public opinion, one of the most important was William Allen White's Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. Mr. Rauch devotes only two brief sentences to this Committee, and yet much of the pressure put on Congress in 1940 to support the President's program was the result of this Committee's work. Foreign policy is not fashioned in a vacuum and historians of American foreign policy must begin to pay more attention to the dynamics of public opinion if they want their writings to be completely meaningful.

Walter Johnson, a member of the history department at the University of Chicago, is author of "William Allen White's America" and edited the late Edward R. Stettinius's book "Roosevelt and the Russians."

Of and By FDR

COLLECTING FIRST EDITIONS OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT: *Contributions to an F. D. R. Bibliography*, by Ernest J. Halter. Privately printed in Chicago for subscribers. \$26. Franklin D. Roosevelt first appeared in print on October 29, 1900, on page one of the *Harvard Crimson*. His baptismal offering was headed "President Eliot Declares for McKinley." It was a clean scoop. Six months later—on April 30, 1901—he scored another: "Vice President Roosevelt to Lecture in Government I." Nineteen years later still, our author, now a seasoned professional with a dozen or more published papers about the Navy to his credit, wrote a *Saturday Evening Post* piece called "Can the Vice President Be Useful?" It was a question which FDR would never be able to answer out of personal experience. And the only Roosevelt who ever did get to be Vice President could have spoken out of an experience of only six months.

Those two *Crimson* stories, Mr. Halter admits, really do not belong in his book, but he could not resist including them. His rules are rigid but sensible. He lists books, pamphlets, and leaflets concerned wholly or mainly with FDR, those books and pamphlets with FDR's name in the title or subtitle, magazines containing material by FDR, and books and whatnot containing material by FDR "of gen-

eral interest or permanent value." Even with these restrictions, his roster extends to 919 units.

This is designedly a book for FDR collectors, who are already sufficiently numerous to have their own association and their own magazine. But its usefulness goes far beyond the technical conveniences of collector interest. It is the springboard from which all subsequent research into FDR source materials will have to take off. Industry, judgment, and devotion have gone into its compilation, and to these Mr. Halter adds a virtue which is not universal among bibliographers—to wit, modesty. He does not look upon his accomplishment as definitive; he is content to have not the last word, but the first. For convenience, every unit listed has been assigned a number, but the number in every instance is preceded by a T. The T stands for Temporary.

Here, in as complete array as Mr. Halter has been able to muster them, are not only the biographies, the state papers, the tributes, and all the ephemera of adulation, but also the haters and the detractors, neatly embalmed in perpetuity. Here is "From Belshazzar to Roosevelt," by W. Lloyd Clark, published at Milan, Illinois, which charges that FDR "broke every campaign promise he made the people except the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, which act opened 700,000 booze dives as schools of crime and anarchy and producers of misery and poverty." Here is Elizabeth Dilling's "Christians, Awaken! FDR Orders Bible Changes" (Chicago, 1943), which Mr. Halter characterizes as "a disjointed harangue." Here are the works, presumably complete, of C. M. Garland, "Roosevelt!!! Is He Greater Than Washington???" (1940) and "The Great American Fraud. A Study of the Roosevelt Regime" (1944). Here is Robert Caldwell Patton, "in collaboration with Charles King," with "Roosevelt for King. 'Royalist Party' of America," issued at New York by His Majesty's Ink-Slingers, Inc., in 1937. They are all present, accompanied, in most instances, by a brief characterization by Mr. Halter, who appraises them judiciously and with even temper.

Judge Samuel I. Rosenman contributes a brief foreword disavowing any interest in first editions, but asserting a lively interest in FDR material in any edition. And he adds: "This bibliography is interesting and valuable to all those who, like me, are trying to gather together what the President wrote and what has been written or is being written about him." That is precisely what this book fulfills, allowing for the limitations inherent in the task.

—JOHN T. WINTERICH.

Fiction. In many ways the most interesting of the books reviewed this week is William Saroyan's "The Twin Adventures." Mr. Saroyan's genius and his sympathy for the downtrodden little people were outstanding products of the Depression. Since the war he has been somewhat unpredictable. "The Twin Adventures" contains his peculiarly irritating, charming war novel, "The Adventures of Wesley Jackson," and for the first time in literature, as far as we know, a long diary of everything the author did, thought, and ate while he was writing it. Arthur Fields's "World Without Heroes" is an honest and dramatic story of what happened to an American rifle squad engaged in what was known as mopping up Germans at the end of the war. We also recommend "The Wedding," by Hana Stein, an emotional and finely written novel about a day in the life of a Jewish family in New York's Lower East Side, and L. P. Hartley's "The Boat," a deft and amusing tale of rural life in England during the war.

Calculated, Methodized Murder

WORLD WITHOUT HEROES. By Arthur C. Fields. New York: Whittlesey House. 271 pp. \$3.

By SIEGFRIED MANDEL

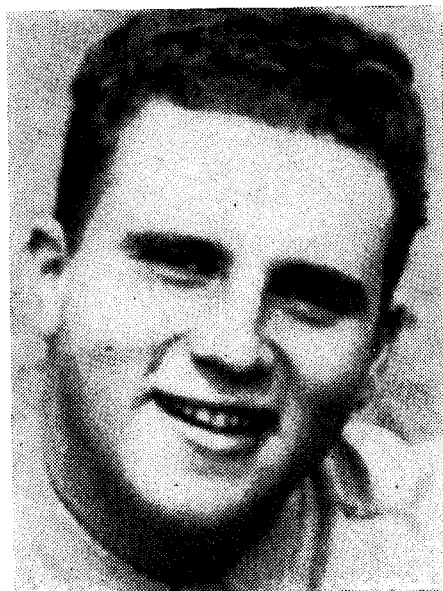
WARS have had their commentators in two main streams, from Euripides to Hemingway and from Thucydides to Churchill. Every historian and artist in some measure has recreated a slice of history and of life, but each stream has different values and perspectives. It would be futile to ransack literature from "The Trojan Women" to "For Whom the Bell Tolls" for an answer to the question of "why war?" Literature at best can recreate only the human and inhuman dimensions of war. This is the main accomplishment of Arthur C. Fields's

provocative first novel, "World Without Heroes."

Mr. Fields points out that "mankind had not grasped the immensity of self-destruction," and the terror of the world situation lies in the fact that the scars of war heal so quickly, allowing men to forget what they have done. What is particularly pleasing about this novel is that there is a minimum of freighted sermonizing, which usually bores the reader and consequently wastes the message. The sermon is implicit within the novel.

In "World Without Heroes" war is very much like life back home: competitiveness, subtleties of persecution, problems of survival. Yet there is the difference that in war all the competitive and survival factors are brought into sharp focus and the process of calculated murder is scientifically methodized. The subject of the novel is the experiences of an American rifle-squad taking part in the mopping-up of World War II German Army units engaged in their last frantic combat tactics. With unusual skill and clarity Mr. Fields bares the psychology of men under fire, plodding from one exhausting combat situation to another. Here is a group of men who, unlike civilians, have no choice of associations—they can avoid neither each other nor the enemy. Their backgrounds and sensitivities are vastly different and come into edged conflict as the action of the novel moves through well-planned, intense incidents.

Joe Slate is the rifle-squad leader, whose hard-boiled, merciless attitude and brutal efficiency intimidate the men about him. It is impossible to communicate with him except on a



Arthur C. Fields: "Mankind has not grasped the immensity of self-destruction."