

Devoted Opportunist

***“Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman,”** by A. J. P. Taylor* (Alfred A. Knopf, 286 pp. \$4.75), is a new biography which provides a highly readable (and long-needed) account of the career of the famous “Iron Chancellor.” It is reviewed here by Professor Gordon A. Craig of Princeton, author of *“The Diplomats, 1919-1932.”*

By Gordon A. Craig

OTTO VON BISMARCK was Minister President of Prussia from 1862 to 1867, Chancellor of the North German Confederation from the latter date until 1871, and thereafter until 1890 Chancellor of the German Empire. In the years before 1871 he more than any other single individual was the creator of German unity; in the later period he was the author of the diplomatic system which preserved the European peace during his lifetime and he was, among other things, the inspirer of the first modern system of Government-sponsored social security legislation.

Now in *“Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman”* A. J. P. Taylor does two things excellently. He provides a long-needed account in English of the main facts of Bismarck's career, an account which is at once

readable, up to date (that is, based on all the available Bismarck materials), and balanced (in the sense that it treats the domestic aspects of its subject's career as carefully as the foreign and the later phases of his career as fully as the achievements before 1871). In the second place, he paints a fascinating portrait of one of the most complicated personalities in an age which was filled with gifted and original minds.

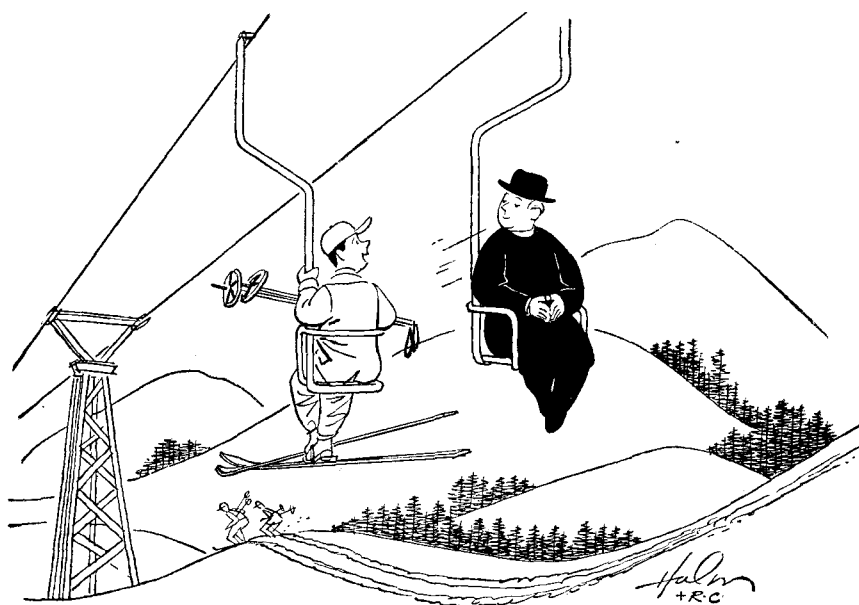
Bismarck was not content to let his record speak for itself. In various utterances during his active career and in the memoirs which he composed during his retirement he sought to convey the impression that he was a selfless and dedicated statesman, devoted to his sovereign and his nation, and guided in his policies by God rather than Mammon, by reason rather than emotion, and by principle rather than desire for personal advantage. Especially after 1871 Bismarck's contemporaries were willing to accept this estimate of Germany's greatest modern statesman.

Yet, as Mr. Taylor points out, this was hardly a true estimate. The son of a gifted and highly sophisticated mother, whom he disliked, and an easy-going, slow-witted country squire, with whom he had little in common but whose appearance and habits he sought to copy, Bismarck

was both genius and neurotic. Masquerading all his life as the typical phlegmatic Junker, the “Iron Chancellor” was in reality a bundle of nerves, given to long periods of solitary brooding and to nights in which he “lay awake hating,” and prone in moments of crisis to uncontrollable waves of fury and fits of hysterical weeping. A master in the field of diplomacy, he was more the opportunist than the man of clearly defined principle. Indeed, on one occasion he spoke of principles as being an encumbrance to the statesman; they were, he said, like a long pole held in the mouth of a man who was trying to make his way through a dense forest.

IN domestic affairs his opportunism was even more pronounced than in the foreign field, and this led him to indulge in sudden changes of course which in retrospect seem to have been motivated more by a desire to save his own position and to discredit his enemies than by anything else. That he was devoted to the State is doubtless true, but he always claimed the right to define the best interests of the State himself, just as in his frequent claim that he was only doing God's work he always seemed to know God's purpose a good deal better than did apparently God Himself. His devotion to his emperor was always most marked when the ruler was agreeing with him; on other occasions Bismarck was capable in private of speaking of his sovereign in the most opprobrious terms. Whatever loyalty and affection he possessed he reserved for a very few friends of his youth and for his family, but it is worth noting that for private political advantage he did not hesitate to prevent his eldest son's marriage and to persuade him to abandon a promising diplomatic career.

Bismarck could on occasion be the most charming of companions; but it is difficult for anyone who has spent much time studying his life and career to think of him as an admirable person. Mr. Taylor pays tribute to his subject's undoubted genius as a diplomat; but if he has a kind of esthetic admiration for Bismarck's adroitness, he tempers this with a firm conviction that the methods employed by Bismarck to gain his ends were often reprehensible. He points out also that the very magnitude of Bismarck's achievements led his German admirers to glorify “realism” at the expense of principle, and authority at the expense of liberalism and democracy. Mr. Taylor's chapter on the corrosive effects of the Bismarckian tradition in Germany's intellectual development is not the least interesting part of this highly provocative study.



“Going all the way, Father?”

Past Unprejudiced

"Modern Historians and the Study of History," by F. M. Powicke (Oxford University Press, 256 pp. \$2.60), and **"Use and Abuse of History,"** by Pieter Geyl (Yale University Press, 100 pp. \$2.50), are two books which take up the interesting question of how to write truthfully about history. Here the volumes are reviewed by Geoffrey Bruun, author of "Europe in Evolution" and other books.

By Geoffrey Bruun

THE responsibility of the historian toward his craft and his public are questions all serious writers ponder unceasingly. How much of the past is it possible to recover? What research techniques are most dependable? How completely can the inquirer divest himself of contemporary predilections? How neutral can he be when judging the mores of alien eras? How neutral should he try to be?

The two books under review here are both largely concerned with these dilemmas and the attempts that eminent thinkers have made to solve or evade them. Though dissimilar in their methods, both Sir Maurice Powicke and Professor Geyl reveal how some historians, seeking refuge in facts, fall

to counting grains of sand, how some re-edit the past to vindicate a present cause, and how some dissolve and reform the past to substantiate some doctrinaire philosophy.

Sir Maurice Powicke has long been famous in England as an authority on the Middle Ages as well as on more recent times. Half the essays and papers that comprise his volume deal with problems of historical study and the other half are tributes to noted historians of the last seventy years, most of whom Professor Powicke knew personally. In discussing their careers and contributions he traces the factors and the influences that have helped to give contemporary historical writing its professional character.

Sir Maurice is a master of the unemphatic British style and of casual sentences that unfold as if artlessly joined to carry his undirected thoughts. Yet each paragraph, each sentence, is evidence of the patient care with which he has sought out acceptable words, and each unstressed judgment is a triumph of sober discernment. Some of his quiet verdicts on men and methods impart that tingle with which one recognizes the finality of perfection—as when he mentions how "York Powell tumbled out the rich spoils won by his buccaneering mind." Or when, rejecting the narrow dogmatism of a strictly economic interpretation of politics, he observes, "There is a sort of dulness so intense that it must be false."

Pieter Geyl's "Use and Abuse of History" is less than half as long as the Powicke volume, but it is broader in focus. In this volume, which is a collection of the Terry Lectures delivered by Professor Geyl at Yale in 1954, one encounters the same gentle but obstinate distrust of doctrinaire conclusions that distinguished the late Carl Becker. He has the same gift of peering through a logical facade and of showing how often a verdict of historical necessity is a personal prejudice. Reading these lectures one realizes why Professor Geyl could not accept Arnold Toynbee. He cannot accept the likelihood that history when its "pattern" is discovered will oblige the inquirer by confirming his prefigurement of it so neatly.

Yet Professor Geyl is far from being a cynic. He insists repeatedly that the study of the past objectively pursued can make men wiser, and that this is the use of history. But to misread or misapply the lessons of the past is an abuse of history. In his final pages he expresses a modest wish that Americans, especially American statesmen, knew more about the history of Europe. "They might not in that case talk so lightly about European federation."



—From "The Sunset of the Splendid Century."

The Duc du Maine—"hot-house world."

Tender Bourbon

"The Sunset of the Splendid Century," by W. H. Lewis (William Sloane, 320 pp. \$5), is a sympathetic biography of a French nobleman who through the years has suffered at the hands of previous chroniclers. Our reviewer, Leo Gershoy, is professor of history at New York University.

By Leo Gershoy

THE Duc du Maine, eldest son of Louis XIV and Mme. de Montespan, deserved more than he obtained from life. And considerably more contends his sympathetic biographer than he received from the vindictive St. Simon, whose poisonous pen picture of du Maine has long been accepted as authentic. In the St. Simon version the Duc du Maine emerges as crafty, limping hypocrite who won his way into Louis XIV's heart and insidiously places himself, notwithstanding his illegitimacy, into line for succession to the throne.

W. H. Lewis, the author of the newly published "The Sunset of the Splendid Century," is otherwise minded, and most pungently so; as he follows the career of the young prince he reserves his sharpest barbs for St. Simon. The mood of this new biography is almost elegaic, and it humane and understanding.

One cause of the unfulfilled promise
(Continued on page 50)

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 647

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 647 will be found in the next issue.

FIND NAWB FN ENCWI

AEQF AEKBF NAWB

FN ENDOW.

SDINP.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 646

Prejudice squints when it looks,
and lies when it talks.

—DUCHESS DE ABRANTES.