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THE WORLD IN BOOKS . . .

By *John Chamberlain*

IF universities that are about to succumb to student pressure and institute courses in fascism and communism are on the lookout for first-rate collateral reading they would do well to order Vincent Sheean's *Personal History* (Doubleday, Doran, \$3) in car-load lots. It is true that Mr. Sheean does not tell us how many numbers and kinds of corporations go to make up a corporate State, nor does he make it plain how a modification of the price system has been made to serve socialism in Russia. But if one wants an overview of the past fifteen years in world history, a sense of all important shifts in the political atmosphere of our epoch, *Personal History* is worth a hundred more articulated and factual volumes.

Mr. Sheean began as an innocent undergraduate at the University of Chicago. He just missed the World War, and thereby felt cheated of adventure, but he was to make up for his loss in the years to come. Before a decade was well begun he had worked for the *Chicago Tribune's* European service and for the North American Newspaper Alliance, he had covered the Franco-German troubles in the Ruhr and the Rhineland, he had been detailed to follow Poincaré about, he had had his taste of Geneva and the League of Nations, and he had been jailed by Primo de Rivera in Spain for writing stories that were inimical to the proper exchange value of the peseta.

All this, however, was just a start. Mr. Sheean's really important journalism began with his two interviews with Abd-el-Krim, the Riffian chieftain, and reached its apex when he went to China after Chiang Kai-shek's march on Shanghai. His last fling in newspaper work was in Palestine in 1929, when the Arabs and the Jews became involved in open conflict over possession of the Wailing Wall. Although Mr. Sheean had originally gone to Palestine to write for a Zionist publication, he reached the conclusion, on the spot, that the Arabs, who had been living in Jerusalem for centuries, had a legitimate grievance both against Great Britain and against the Zionists.

* * *

The real contribution to current history that is contained in Mr. Sheean's book is the section called "Revolution." When André Malraux's *Man's Fate* (Smith & Haas, \$2.50) was published here Pearl Buck objected that this remarkable novel did not really repre-

sent China in revolution. But Mr. Sheean shows how close Malraux cut to the mark in his dramatization of the shifting forces that almost succeeded in plunging China into communism in 1927. Malraux's characters were, mostly, "international" in flavor; and Sheean, in corroboration, tells us that German Communists, French Socialists, British Independent Labor party men and unattached radicals from everywhere turned up in Hankow in 1927, when Borodin, the Russian adviser to the Kuomintang, was breaking with Chiang Kai-shek. Radicals knew, he says, that the turn of the wheel in Hankow would decide the fate of communism as a world movement for years to come; that if the Kuomintang fell completely into the hands of Borodin and the Communists, China would "go red," that if Borodin were to fail Stalin would be compelled to fall back on "socialism in one country," thus leaving the rest of the world to its own different brands of "national socialism." When Chiang Kai-shek moved against the Communists and started killing them off, and when Borodin fled Hankow, world history, in Mr. Sheean's opinion, was abruptly altered.

It is the contention of many Communists that Borodin should have "proclaimed the Soviet" in Hankow, which controlled part of the Yangste valley. But Mr. Sheean shows that this would have been impossible; even when Borodin dominated Hankow, he says, "private capital was at liberty to move where it liked, to lock out strikers, to emigrate, to shift, and to re-invest. * * * The operations of exchange, credit and transfer were at all times free in Hankow." There was, therefore, never any temporary "Communist experiment" in Hankow, as is widely believed in the West; Borodin had too wholesome a fear of what the foreign gunboats in the Yangste would do if he were to institute such an experiment.

* * *

China might have gone Communist in 1927, says Mr. Sheean, if Chiang had taken Borodin's advice and marched on Peiping instead of halting to seize the tempting port fees of Shanghai. With Peiping and North China captured and solidified in the name of Sun Yat-sen, who had more or less "accepted" Moscow before he died, it would have been relatively easy to encircle Shanghai and proclaim a united Communist China. In that event there would have been no easy inges-

tion of Manchuria and Inner Mongolia by Japan. If world capitalism is looking for a hero, then it might properly find him in Chiang Kai-shek, who, in turning away from Borodin and Mme. Sun Yat-sen, played the part of an effective Canute in rolling back the red tide. The origin of the paralysis of the Communists in pre-Hitler Germany may be traced, on the basis of Mr. Sheean's analysis, to the events of 1927 in the Far East. The Communists rightly execrate Chiang; he killed, at least for a good many important years, their international movement.

Grover Clark, in *The Great Wall Crumbles* (Macmillan, \$3.50), provides the background—and a vivid and fascinating background it is—that is necessary to full understanding of Mr. Sheean's Chinese interlude. His "Great Wall" is, of course, merely symbolic of the system of defenses which China has built up against the foreign devils. The book concludes with a discussion of Japan's Chinese policy, a policy which Mr. Clark believes will defeat itself in the end.

* * *

If, as many observers believe, the next world war is to commence in the Far East with a border quarrel between Japan and Russia, anything that happens in the desert hinterlands of Asia is important. Egon Erwin Kisch, in *Changing Asia* (Knopf, \$3), has written a brilliantly slapdash, sardonic, highly pigmented book about the alterations wrought by the Five-Year Plan in Soviet Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Here, in the shadow of the High Pamir, which is just a little to the north of the passes which go down into British India, the Soviet Government is irrigating the desert in an attempt to become self-sufficient so far as cotton is concerned. Herr Kisch barely says so, but the coming of the railway to Tajikistan, and the completion of the Turksib Railway to the north, have evidently increased Soviet prestige in the Chinese Province of Sinkiang, thus giving Great Britain and Japan something else to worry about as the drama of empire continues to play itself out.

Herr Kisch would have one believe that the Russians have solved the problem of dealing with racial minorities, and points to the satisfaction of the Mongoloid Uzbeks and the Iranian Tajiks, who speak the original Persian, to prove his contention. Robert Nathan, however, will take no nation at its word. His novel *Road of Ages* (Knopf, \$2.50), which the Book of the Month Club is sending out, is a realistic fantasy of an imagined future in which practically every nation, including both Palestine and Russia, have banished the Jews. The Mongols, however, still possess some kindness of heart and have offered the

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Gobi Desert to the outcasts. Mr. Nathan seems at first blush to be protesting to Gentiles, in his delicately written story, that the Jews do not differ from other people, that they are just as divided among themselves as Englishmen or Frenchmen. But it is equally possible that he may be lamenting the lack of solidarity among Jews that prevents them from solving their difficulties on a collective basis. The ambiguity at the heart of *Road of Ages* is understandable in an ironist, but it is a question whether gentle fantasy is appropriate to so tragic a theme as Mr. Nathan's. Irony may be of the sort that forgives even as it stings, or it may be of the sort that lashes and excoriates. Just why Mr. Nathan should indulge here in the "forgiving" variety is not made plain by any facet of his otherwise perfect bit of writing.

* * *

Alexander Werth, in his *France in Ferment* (Harper's, \$3), tries to make it plain that Frenchmen just woke up in time a year ago to save themselves from a Gallic version of Hitlerism. His book is centred on the figure of Stavisky, who tried to use his connection with the police and the government to work a version of the Ponzi get-rich-quick scheme. The Stavisky pawnshop bond swindle was of no great magnitude, Mr. Werth observes, but it served to bring to a head the mounting dissatisfaction with unstable Parliamentary government. The Royalists and the Fascist organizations, such as the Croix de Feu, hoped to use the Stavisky business as a point of leverage whereby to abolish the rule of Parliament, but the forces of the Left came to their senses after the street riots of Feb. 6. The one-day general strike, the first ever called by the Left to save a bourgeois government, worked; Parliament survived. The attitude of the French may be cynically summed up, on the basis of Mr. Werth's report, as: "Better corruption and Parliament than corruption without Parliament."

* * *

Liberal German and Central European writers, these days, are assaulting the Fascist Third Reich by indirection. Last Spring Thomas Mann published his Biblical story of *Joseph and His Brothers* (Knopf, \$2.50), which Dorothy Thompson interpreted as being a cryptic plea for toleration of the Jewish race. Stefan Zweig's recent *Erasmus of Rotterdam* (Viking, \$3) was, on the surface, just another biography of the great Humanist who fought the intolerance of early Lutheranism; in reality, every line was aimed at the intolerance of Hitler. Franz Werfel, in *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* (Viking, \$3), dressed Hitler up in the clothes of the Young

Turk, Enver Pasha, and put Armenian costumes on the proscribed classes of Germany. And now Alfred Neumann, whose previous historical novels have been innocent of modern implications, has told his story of Hitler by writing a novel about Napoleon III and the Second Empire in France, *Another Caesar* (Knopf, \$3.)

Save for innovations in political manipulation made possible by the invention of the radio and by the work of modern psychologists on the conditioning of man's reflexes, every trick used by Hitler to reach power was used by Louis Napoleon in the middle of the nineteenth century. Neumann does not go out of his way to stress the parallels, but they are obvious. "The book," Neumann wrote to his publishers some time ago, "is of peculiar timeliness. The reader who is interested in contemporary problems should give this work serious thought." Well, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* shows that the upper classes used the developing early Christian movement as the German industrialists have used the German National Socialist movement, to give the illusion of revolution while preserving (for a time, at least) the underlying essentials of the status quo. Possibly the next German novelist to join the anti-Hitler movement will find his analogy in Roman times, or maybe the Neolithic Age will serve.

* * *

There is, evidently, a law that governs the periodic recurrence of horrors for sensitive literary men, such as Alfred Neumann, to protest against. Sacco and Vanzetti, Mooney and Billings, the Scottsboro boys, the Dreyfus case—not a decade that has lacked for its *cause célèbre*. Back in the early Nineteen Hundreds the "Congo atrocities" were calling forth the invective of E. D. Morel, Mark Twain and Conan Doyle. Ludwig Mauer, in his *Leopold the Unloved* (Little, Brown, \$3.50), has told the story of the Belgian King who, in his lust for profits from tropical rubber, was behind these atrocities. The biography goes deeply into the root characteristics of the nineteenth century, when exploration, the Protestant missionary spirit, political imperialism and financial exploitation of the "backward" regions of the earth were all bound up together. No shady professional company promoter could show Leopold II of Belgium a thing about the business of starting with little and ending with much. The same spirit of controlled avarice that guided Leopold guides the character of Marliese Bertaud in Charles Braibant's *The Iron Mother* (Harpers, \$2.50). This novel is Balzacian in spirit and in method; its chief virtue lies in its evocation of the flavor of French provincial life throughout the nineteenth century.

After being immersed, willy nilly, in so

many books bearing on fascism in Europe and reaction in past centuries, one begins to appreciate the psychological reason for the American Federation of Labor's fear of a strong central government. Conceivably a strong central government might be for labor, but the chances are otherwise. In his *Labor, Industry and Government* (D. Appleton-Century, \$2) Matthew Woll, one of the A. F. of L. vice presidents and the "purest living representative of the Gompers mind," urges labor not to count upon the friendship of central government under Roosevelt. Mr. Woll is particularly impressed with the need for the preservation of the right to strike. The A. F. of L. has been attacked for its addiction to the principles of craft unionism in an age of growing mass production, but Mr. Woll says this addiction is not irrevocable. His organization, he implies, would be more than happy to organize labor in such basic industries as steel and automobile manufacturing on an industrial union basis. Mr. Woll does not answer his numerous critics who have denounced him for his "red baiting," nor does he come to grips with those who see in the A. F. of L. leadership an intolerable bureaucracy dedicated to maintaining its own "vested interests."

* * *

Two utterly contrasting aspects of the American character may be studied in Thornton Wilder's novel *Heaven's My Destination* (Harper's, \$2.50) and in Norman Archibald's war memoir *Heaven High—Hell Deep: 1917-1918* (A. and C. Boni, \$2.50). Mr. Wilder's story is of a traveling textbook salesman, George Brush, who sees all life in moral terms. A Fundamentalist, a teetotaler, a non-smoker, a believer in the sanctity of the American home and the need for saving one's neighbor from Hell, Mr. Brush represents everything that we have been taught to consider typical of the holier inhabitants of the Bible Belt. If George had gone to war, it would have been to save Christian civilization from the Hun. Mr. Archibald, on the other hand, may have thought he believed in the necessity of making the World Safe for Democracy, but he really joined the aviation corps for the excitement of the thing. His book represents an attempt to recapture the atmosphere of 1917, when much of young America welcomed the war as a release from school and home. If Mr. Wilder's character had gone to an Eastern college he would have been a "Christer" and prominent in the college Y. M. C. A.; Archibald would have been a fraternity man of the type that used to be known as a "slicker."

* * *

The final instalments of Douglas Free-

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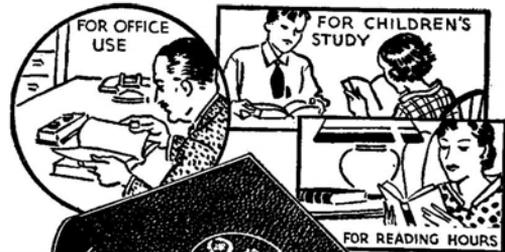
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