

The Nature of the Crisis

FREEDOM FORGOTTEN AND REMEMBERED. By *Helmut Kuhn.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 1943. 267 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HANS KOHN

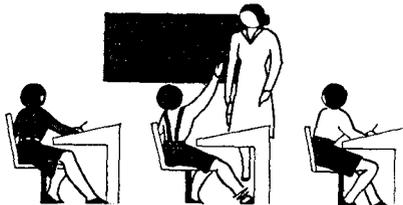
THIS book carries a motto from St. Augustine: "They came to life again by remembering their proper life which they had forgotten." This has come true to a large extent of Britain and to a lesser extent of the United States in the present war. The significance of this war, the deeper meaning of the crisis of which it is the outward expression, forms the subject of the present book. The author, a philosopher born and trained in Germany, deals with his subject in a way which makes this book an outstanding contribution for the understanding of our time. The book has great depth, and yet it is written with a lucidity and brilliance which render reading a pleasant effort well rewarded.

The author opposes the two worlds in conflict which have brought about the present war. Both show signs of a profound and pernicious malady, but in different stages. The one, the German world, was bent upon the destruction of the idea of freedom. That was not the work of Hitler or of the National Socialists but a deep malady embedded in the German mind and expressed by many of its philosophers and thinkers, historians and political scientists, long before Hitler came into power. This German philosophy proclaimed the relativism of all values and attacked the rationality of man and his freedom of choice. The author quotes a highly revealing statement by Mussolini written as far back as 1921, well before Hitler's name emerged into the limelight of the future duce's attention and of worldwide publicity: "In Germany relativism is an exceedingly daring and subversive theoretical construction" (Germany's philosophical revolt against the West heralding the military revenge); "if relativism signifies contempt for men who claim to be the bearers of an objective truth, then there is nothing more relativistic than fascist attitudes. From the fact that all ideologies are of equal value, mere fictions, the modern relativist infers that everybody has the right to create his own ideology and to enforce it with all energy." The Germans absolutized relativism. Out of German "depth" the German mind felt itself confronted with the "tragedy" of life, with the "decline" of civilization, with the inevitable "destiny" of despair, in

which man and his rational freedom are lost.

The author gives one of the most brilliant and incisive analyses of the German mind at the beginning of the twentieth century which this reviewer has ever read. He is not afraid of drawing certain conclusions against the myth of a German democracy to whom the future of Germany and of the peace of Europe could be safely entrusted after this war. "The Weimar Republic was a democracy without democrats. The history of German political liberalism had been a succession of disastrous defeats and a protracted agony. The brilliant Rathenau adhered to Nietzsche's doctrine of the master-race, Stresemann belonged to the group which had bartered liberalism for Realpolitik." Yet while there was in Germany no living and strong tradition of freedom, this tradition, once so strong and living in the Western world, still alive there, was even there being more and more forgotten. The West was sick too, and its sickness revealed itself in the wide and uncritical acceptance of German legends and attitudes, in the often repeated statements that Hitler restored the Germans to self-respect and a sense of honor, in a deterministic submission to "inevitable" revolutions and waves, in a pacifism which believed that democracy was unable to challenge the totalitarian menace without sacrificing freedom and that therefore freedom could not be defended.

The author's analysis of the pre-war mind of many in the democracies, of their fears, pretexts, and wishful evasions, is almost as brilliantly done as his analysis of the German mind. Only it is more familiar to the American reader, though he may rarely have found the case presented with similar clarity and forcefulness. The democratic world, or rather many of its representatives and most of its masses, shares the responsibility for the war and the crisis. "The refusal to recognize Nazism for what it is constitutes the first degree of complicity. . . . As people had set their minds on not seeing what happened, they eagerly listened to those who demonstrated that nothing happened." To these words of the author the reviewer would only add that it was not only a question of the refusal to recognize Nazism for



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what it is but also to recognize the workings of the German mind and their implications before Nazism arose.

There is no space here to discuss the author's remarkable pages on Nietzsche and on the meaning of rational freedom and its limitations. No more can be done than to refer those who wish to penetrate below the surface of the crisis of the last decades to the book itself. As to the democracies and the future, the author rightly and hopefully points to the war as a process of slow and painful learning, as a creative recovery, an act of recollection. "The elements of the knowledge which we need are stored in our tradition, we are called upon to decipher the truth which they contain." The war teaches us two things: to understand the ultimate basis of our civilization and its value, and at the same time the dignity and importance of those realities, like the nation, which are the instruments by which the world is ordered and civilization made possible.

As regards the coming peace, the author makes the most sensible suggestion: the existing war alliance should be transformed into a peace alliance, in which the unity of the British Commonwealth and the United States might be much more intimate than the relations with China or Russia. "Not a uniform pattern should be imposed, but all existing affinities and loyalties should be sedulously fostered. Every existing cohesion is valuable, and none should be thought of as excluding any other. No doubt, by cultivating affinities, we incur the risk of perpetuating old divisions. But this risk cannot be avoided. If we are afraid of it we shall, by hankering after the mirage of a world republic, relapse into the chaos of national egoisms. . . . A true victory may prompt the enemy to acquiesce, morally and not merely factually, in the defeat as final and decisive. It is not intolerable, to be defeated by a real victor, by one who believes in the truth of his triumphant cause."

In 1919 the victors soon grew cynical about the cause for which they had fought, and thus fell easily victims to the German propaganda of the decline of the West and German legends about have-nots and recent history. There is hope that this time we shall have learned a lesson "both in faith and in realism." This distinguished book can do much to help us in that direction. It will convince every reader that profundity of philosophical thought can go hand in hand with lucidity of style and with a sane and courageous realism in facing the political task.

Between Calls to General Quarters

CONDITION RED. By Commander Frederick J. Bell, U.S.N. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1943. 247 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by FLETCHER PRATT

The new mess-caterer, after going into a huddle with the steward, announced with pride that there would be home-made cherry pie for dinner. But the steward had come under a spell. His pie was a beautiful St. Patrick's creation made entirely of green maraschino cherries.

THE U. S. Navy has been a highly literate service at least since the day when a certain captain got to meditating about what would happen if Hannibal had been able to strike directly at Rome across the Mediterranean instead of marching around its shores. But its literature had conspicuously lacked one element; the discursive, anecdotal, easy-going account of life at sea in war which the British have been producing ever since the time of Mr. Midshipman Easy. "Condition Red" steps into the gap; and into another as well, for it is the first book, almost the first literature, to deal with the destroyer services.

In case you didn't know it, these are the Saturday's children of war. When the fleet comes in the men on

the battleships and cruisers get forty-eight hours' liberty; the carrier squadron "assumed shore-based status," but the destroyers are handed orders for emergency refueling and stand by to go out in the morning with a ten-knot convoy while the officers' pants wear out and they don't have time to buy new ones. Destroyers see more action than any other type of ship, for there is no naval occasion that lacks a place for them.

Such a ship is a little, very lively world, which speedily develops its own traditions; a special way of life, sometimes violent and tragic, sometimes boring, always laborious. The individual's defense is usually philosophy as Ben Johnson would have used the term—but let's not get too intellectual about it, this is not a book in which people discuss life, it is one in which the steward makes maraschino cherry pies and a destroyer cruises from one end of the Pacific to the other with some fighting off Guadalcanal.

The accuracy of all the memoirs cannot be guaranteed (the book was evidently written aboard in the intervals between calls to General Quarters), but who cares? The accuracy of the psychological pattern, of what men think about and do in the least-known service of the war is beyond question.

The Story Behind the Wires

POWER UNLEASHED. The Story of Electricity and Power. By M. M. Samuels. New York: Dorset House. 1943. 300 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by WALDEMAR KAEMPFERT

ASK the average payer of electric bills what a kilowatt is, and he is stumped. Ask him how the current is generated and distributed to thousands of homes by a single central station and he answers in the vaguest generalities. The reason for this ignorance is to be found in the popular books on electricity. They explain electric phenomena, plainly enough, but they do little to explain the larger aspects of electrical engineering. Mr. Samuels, an experienced engineer, rises to the occasion with a book that stands apart. He knows not only his subject but how to elucidate it for the benefit of bill-payers who cannot even read a meter.

In this admirably written volume the reader is taken into the central station, and the machinery is explained to him. Or, more accurate, he is first taught what energy is and how it is generated by fuel, falling water, chem-

icals, and ocean tides. Nor are the economics of electrical engineering of the future of power generation neglected. It would seem as if Mr. Samuels has been asked several thousand silly questions in his time; for he answers them all as well as many that are cogent. He has not neglected a single phase of his vast subject, with the possible exception of electronics, which, it seems to this reviewer, was worth more space in view of the revolution that it has wrought in industry. For a good, straightforward account of electric energy in daily life and the operation of central stations there is no better book than this. Even the executives of utility companies and first-year students can profit by reading Samuels, though his appeal is to a public that does not know the difference between a volt and an ampère.

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