

The Scorpions of Power

QUINCY HOWE

WILLIAM L. SHIRER has added another chapter to the autobiography of our time.* It takes the form of a nostalgic travel diary of the journey he made during 1950 to Austria, France, Germany, and Britain and the recollections that absorbed him during and after his excursion. When Mr. Shirer first went to Europe in 1925, newly graduated from Coe College, he expected to return in two months. He stayed for fifteen years, with time out for a visit to India and a few quick trips to the United States, working first for the *Chicago Tribune* and eventually becoming Berlin correspondent for the Columbia Broadcasting System. Having covered the fall of France from the German side of the lines, he returned to the United States to write "Berlin Diary" and continue his broadcasting career. Several radio and newspaper assignments took him back to Europe, and in 1950 he revisited the four capitals he knew best—Vienna, Paris, Berlin, and London. Since then, he has taken permanent root in New York where he wrote this mid-century appraisal of the world in which he had seen and reported so much history in the making.

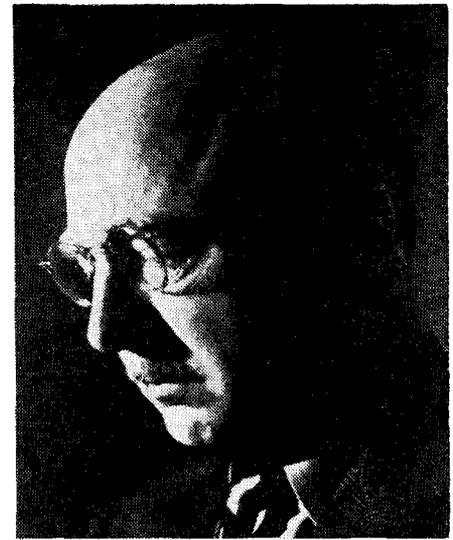
Whether Mr. Shirer fell in love with Mrs. Shirer because she is Viennese or whether he fell in love with Vienna, back in the early 1930's, because it is his wife's native city need not concern the reader of this volume. What concerned this reader was that the chapter called "Glimpse of an Indestructible City" gives more than a glimpse of the author at his excellent best. Here his literary talent, his reflective turn of mind, and his journalistic skill have combined to evoke the character of a people and a city that survived the civilization of the Hapsburgs and the barbarism of Hitler, only to find themselves fighting for their lives against the exploitation of Stalin.

In Mr. Shirer's book, forty million Frenchmen can be more wrong than six million Austrians. During the 1930's Dollfuss and Schuschnigg set the stage for Hitler to conquer Austria while Laval and Daladier dug the grave of France. In 1950 Mr. Shirer found more vitality in shattered Vienna than in unscathed Paris, and the

Germans seemed to him utterly unregenerate and our State Department invincibly ignorant. Yet it is not necessary to hold the German people chiefly responsible for the agonies of our troubled century to agree with Mr. Shirer on two points. He may exaggerate the evil elements in the German national character, but he never pretends that no such thing as national character exists. Nor has Mr. Shirer qualified the harsh judgments he passed on the Germans during the war. Others who preached hatred of Germany ten years ago now preach hatred of Russia. Mr. Shirer still argues that we have more to fear from Germany than from Russia, especially from a rearmed Germany allied to Moscow. And he believes that a North Atlantic Treaty Army, incorporating German units, offers the best hope of checking Soviet aggression before it begins. He praises the United States for having maneuvered the United Nations into taking the kind of strong stand in Korea that the League of Nations never took in Manchuria, Ethiopia, or the Rhineland.

Nevertheless, the moral decay of France and the economic decline of Britain lead Mr. Shirer to sell Europe short. The anti-Communist hysteria here in the United States disturbs him even more, especially as it has curtailed academic freedom and free speech on the air. But what caused these worldwide evils that Mr. Shirer describes and deplors? As he interprets the events that have shaped our world, the tyranny of the Russian czars gave rise to the tyranny of the Russian Bolsheviks. The White Terror gave rise to the Red Terror. Fear of Communism gave rise to Fascism. The German Junkers and industrialists raised Hitler to power. Dollfuss and Schuschnigg, Laval and Daladier, Chamberlain and Halifax abetted the Nazi *Drang nach Osten*. The Munich Conference threw Stalin into Hitler's arms. But the Nazis learned the tricks of their trade from the Communists; Stalin has survived Hitler. Half a century before Ortega y Gasset was describing the revolt of the masses, Nietzsche had already predicted it.

If Mr. Shirer were an ordinary journalist, his interpretations of current history would have the same interest as the events he has devoted so much of his life to reporting. But be-



William L. Shirer—"more than dissent . . ."

cause he sees beneath the surface and has attempted in this book to draw some conclusions from his work during the past quarter century, those who admire that work may be permitted to express disappointment that he did not go beyond the judgments he has already delivered in his newspaper columns and radio broadcasts. The point is not that he should revise these judgments but that he should amplify them.

For instance, Mr. Shirer can retain and even justify all his suspicions of the Germans by pointing out that other peoples have shown symptoms of the same mass neuroses that Hitler cultivated. Indeed, the Soviet leaders from whom Hitler and Goebbels learned so much have in some respects caught up with and surpassed the Fuehrer himself. As for our own country, not all the current mass hysteria stems from *Red Channels*, Senator McCarthy, and the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Our revolt against reason not only opposes dangerous ideas; it opposes any ideas at all. More than dissent has come under attack. Opinion, thought, and free expression have all become suspect, not only in commercial radio and television but among the groves of Academe. But Americans have always gone to extremes; ultimately they tend to strike a balance. To despair of the Republic in view of certain current inanities is to succumb to ignorance as well as to despair. Moreover, the appearance of "Midcentury Journey" is no mere isolated phenomenon, but a sign of the times.

Quincy Howe, associate professor of journalism at the University of Illinois, is completing the second volume of his three-volume "World History of Our Own Times."

*MIDCENTURY JOURNEY: *The Western World Through Its Years of Conflict*. By William L. Shirer. New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 310 pp. \$3.50.

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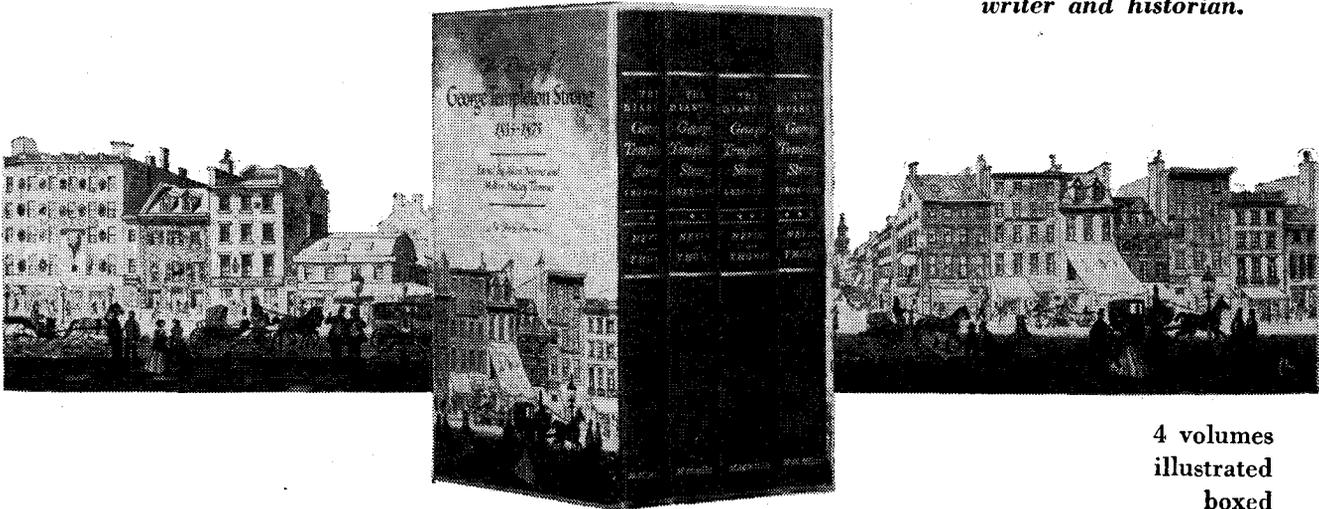
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Broadway Postscript**TAKING A READING**

BEFORE making that lightning change out of seersucker and into a new Broadway season, it might be well to pause for a look at the present theatre climate. A pair of recent books plus a sheaf of newspaper clippings will serve as weathervane and anemometer.

John Gassner, who likes to anthologize anything he gets his hands on, has in his latest collection, "Best American Plays, 1945-1951" (Crown, \$4.50), not only gathered together an excellent sampling of seventeen of Broadway's brightest, but has anthologized, as well, much of the prevailing opinion on the state of the theatre.

While Mr. Gassner indicates things are not well by labeling the drama of the past six years "a reprise with variations," in which language is limited and realistic representation has replaced the more intellectual and detached attitude of the Twenties, he seems to prefer the vitality of our theatre such as it is to what a literary elite would have it be. Himself an admirer of "The Cocktail Party," he at the same time rejoices that although "T.S. Eliot has captured a number of our graduate schools, he has not yet captured our theatre." He mitigates the case against the respected poet by pointing out that Eliot does not consider himself to be as good a playwright as do his followers. Yet later on in the volume the drama historian cannot resist praising William Inge's middle-class drama "Come Back, Little Sheba" by proclaiming, "It does not varnish a St. Louis background with a British accent. Is it for that reason any the less universal?"

As a matter of fact, Gassner finds considerable merit among our dramatic output, particularly in the work of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, both of whom are twice represented in his anthology as is Sidney Kingsley, whose "Detective Story" he describes as "Kingsley's Measure for Measure." He even goes so far as to call Robinson Jeffers's "Medea" the one distinguished high tragedy ever to be written by an American poet. In general, however, the liberal-minded Queens College professor voices a fear which was strengthened in *The New York Times* articles by James Thurber and Arthur Miller. Says Gassner, "That criticism of our way of life which had rarely been more than a lovers' quarrel in the Twenties could be construed as disloyalty in a tense and increasingly

intolerant period." He goes on to predict that the sense of confidence and direction, even in negation, which gave us our first modern dramatists in the Twenties and Thirties would have to be recovered if the present decade was to prove sufficiently fruitful.

Turning to more practical matters. Gassner attacks "show biz" by intimating that the curtailment of the number of plays produced to one-third those presented in the Twenties was principally due to rising costs of production. These costs, he charges, leave no room for the mildly successful play or even for smash hits such as "Darkness at Noon" or "The Rose Tattoo," both of which failed to recover their original investments. "If a similar situation had existed in America and Europe twenty-five, fifty, and seventy-five years ago," he states, "the modern theatre would have been deprived of most of its authentic masterpieces, including those by Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Shaw, Synge, and O'Casey."

The problem of rising costs is indeed a serious one. In England, where the expenses of production have been held down to about one-fourth what they are here, there are currently four times as many plays on the boards.

FOR further evidence of what sizable part low costs can play in a theatre which develops new playwrights, one has only to read playwright Lennox Robinson's official history of the theatre that has probably developed more writers for the stage than any in our time. Ironically, "Ireland's Abbey Theatre" (Macmillan, \$6), which tells of a year-to-year struggle for survival and identity that was won through the austerity and devotion of its often rebellious members, is priced too high for the general reader. Because it comes complete with portraits of the famous personalities associated with it, plus cast listings of all plays presented in its first fifty-one years of operation, it is a must for the theatrical reference shelf. Because it implies that a permanent acting company, a willingness to produce unpopular contemporary plays, and a genuine humility where art is concerned are among the basic tenets of this kind of creative national theatre, it deserves a wider readership—particularly during a season when talk is liable to be cheap and production expensive.

—HENRY HEWES.