

CURRENT MAGAZINES

PROSPECTS OF EUROPEAN PEACE

Munich and After—Prof. R. W. Seton-Watson, in the *Fortnightly*.
The Nazi International—Editorial, in the *Quarterly*.
Patriotism—But How?—Mr. H. Mumford Jones, in the *Atlantic*.
The League and the Swastika—Mr. R. Dell in the *Nation*.

NEARLY twenty years have passed since the negotiators at Versailles gave to Europe their pledge of "a firm, just and durable peace". With what ironic effectiveness their critics can now recall this description, it is needless to point out. Whether the fierce parliamentary detractors of Mr. Lloyd George in England, of Woodrow Wilson in the United States, of Clemenceau in France, even of Orlando in Italy, would themselves have done better if they had been entrusted with the same task in the early months of 1919, is a question which the satiric vigor of their criticism leaves still open. But to dismiss their reproaches with such facile jest is inappropriate. Those who have watched a failing enterprise for long years may well detect what must have been wrong with it from the first, even though they acknowledge in all humility that it was planned by minds far superior to their own. It is for the sake of wiser methods in the future, not for the zest of finding fault with anyone in the past, that the most vigorous comment should be fostered. At the same time, those who remember how critical doubt was hushed in 1919 before the prestige of the leaders at Versailles, how the onlooker was bidden to applaud in humble trustfulness what was done by negotiators so much more discerning than himself, find it difficult just now, in presence of new authoritative advice, to recapture that mood of happy acquiescence. Here is another experiment, but memories of its predecessor discourage a repetition of uncritical enthusiasm. Especially when such suspense of criticism is demanded so peremptorily as to make one suspicious.

The so-called "Big Four" at Versailles have been judged by nearly twenty years trial of their scheme for world peace: just three months have now passed since the Big Four at Munich launched an amending scheme. Its significance is still the topic of fiercest controversy on British platforms and in the British press. Of what was said and written *immediately after-*

wards, it is desirable to forget a great deal. No good purpose would here be served by reviewing again those interchanges of party boastfulness and party resentment which not even so grave a national emergency could silence. Taunts of cowardice or irresolution in "failing to stand up to the dictators" alternated with tiresome commonplace about the horrors of war and fatuous truisms about the value of an Anglo-German accord, "if this can somehow be obtained", for preservation of the peace of Europe. In consideration of informed judgments on this matter, as shown by the principal magazines, I shall limit myself to two matters: (1) the price that has been paid; and (2) the likelihood that the promise of peace, for which such a price was judged not too high, will be fulfilled.

I

All serious writers, who are true to the British conception of life and government, agree that a disaster of the first magnitude has taken place. The Great War was fought to rescue from the menace of lawless, faithless tyranny that particular "way of life" which the democracies value. Why such lawless, faithless tyranny should be resented, and the democratic way of life preferred, this is not the place to discuss. For readers of the DALHOUSIE REVIEW I am entitled to assume that the historical evidence on that point is familiar, and that the verdict is not in doubt. What has now to be noted is that the victorious outcome of these four years of democratic struggle, 1914-1918, has been undone. As Mr. Churchill says, quite truly, it is "gone with the wind". What was threatened twenty-five years ago was the German military domination of Europe: by gigantic effort this was prevented: now, owing to a succession of blunders and negligences on the part of the victors of 1918, exploited with daring ingenuity by the vanquished, it is incomparably nearer to realization than it ever was before.

Efforts to minimize the gravity of what has happened are thus worse than useless. Great Britain is quite capable of recovering from a disaster of the first magnitude, as she did more than once during the Great War, when Mr. Lloyd George insisted on telling his countrymen the unpleasant truth, despite hostility in the same quarters where he is now unpopular again. Despite, for example, the resistance of Sir John Simon, who urged parliament to reject the Conscription Bill, and of the financiers of the City of London, who burned on the Stock

Exchange the newspapers which were disclosing real facts about shells and shrapnel! The first condition of recovery for a people of the British temper is that they shall realize to what peril their official guides have brought them. Public advisers who still rely upon some further artifice of concealment are underestimating the national spirit, as they are overestimating their own craft.

At this time, notable for both the worst and the best that journalism can do in a national emergency, great British organs of opinion have shown a courage and a resourcefulness deserving of all praise. Granted that the Munich Agreement was the only way of escape (as it probably was), on September 29 of last year, from an alternative still worse: how tempting to the lower order of English journalist was an article such as not a few papers published! They argued that it was no mere least of evils, but intrinsically the best, that had been done at Munich; that Czechoslovakia, instead of being weakened by it, would find herself stronger than ever through riddance of her unreliable Teutonic fringe; and that, on dispassionate review of the Sudeten German case, those areas did seem to have suffered much ill-treatment from Czechs, against which—on the principle of self-determination—they should be protected for the future. In the individual it is not only an amiable but a wholesome quality to look thus ever on the bright side of personal misfortunes, and to conjecture how a disappointment, once it is unalterable, may well "turn out for the best". But even in the case of the individual a too obvious straining of evidence for a desired result is bad for truthfulness; and where other parties are involved in an argument that what on the surface looks so disastrous may "after all" be the right thing, the sophistry is still worse.

II.

In detail, what the Munich Agreement did was, in the first place, to abandon all that still remained of safeguards for Central Europe, so carefully planned at Versailles, against the revival of German projects of expansion eastward.

The Republic of Czechoslovakia was set up, no doubt, in part, as an act of restitution to a brave people who three centuries before had actually suffered the fate which in 1914 was planned for Belgium. But this was not its only purpose. A glance at the map of Europe in an atlas of pre-war days, followed

by a glance at the same in an atlas of 1938 (drawn before September 29), will show how Czechoslovakia had its boundaries so chosen as to enable its armies to block the way most effectively against a German drive to the Black Sea. When Herr Hitler complained that this new and monstrous State was thrust like a spear into the heart of Germany, one may disapprove of so lurid a simile, but one can understand his exasperation at the presence of so formidable an obstacle to the ambitions avowed in *Mein Kampf*. The shade of Georges Clemenceau, who planned the topographic scheme, might have smiled sardonically at such anger. Clemenceau's reason for delimiting the frontier so, for making Czechoslovakia safe within the natural boundary of the Sudeten mountains, for assigning to Yugoslavia and Rumania just such areas of the old Hungary as should keep the "enemy" Powers encircled (in the event of their resolve to act as enemy Powers again), was precisely Herr Hitler's reason for deciding that at any cost the frontier so set must go.

It has gone. Not indeed until after numerous other safeguards devised at Versailles had gone: the demilitarization of the Rhineland, the neutralization of rivers, the limitation of German armed forces. But this last change, in view especially of the route eastward which the Fuehrer had bidden his followers pursue, was the gravest abandonment of all. Nothing would then remain to stop at least the economic dominance of Germany as far as the Black Sea. This meant that the wheat-fields of Hungary and the oil wells of Rumania would fall under her control, supplying exactly what she most required for her next enterprize of conquest.

Probably on 29th September last, in the circumstances which then prevailed, it was better to accept even this peril than to face the alternative which had been allowed to develop. But that is no reason why we should deceive ourselves with soothing reflection that "Not very much was sacrificed, after all". What is rather urgent is that Great Britain and France should so realize the magnitude of the catastrophe, which—by negligence, or worse than negligence—was precipitated, as to take measures against the like ever happening again. The Munich Agreement was an emergency resort, not a pattern for the future. How much will have to be done, in determining measures and appointing men, to make certain that it will remain an isolated blot on a national record very different indeed, is the problem of British statecraft for the future.

III.

Very wisely do the best British magazines dismiss with a few contemptuous sentences the argument that Czech inconsiderateness brought this misfortune, and that the German complaint against President Benes, though naturally exaggerated in the heat of the Fuehrer's rhetoric, had substantial ground.

It is this sort of plea in justification that weakens rather than strengthens the case for the Munich negotiators. Notoriously the Czechoslovakian treatment of minorities, especially of the German minority, was on the whole (apart from the fault of individual officials) a model which minorities everywhere in distracted Europe might well invoke. Contrast it, for example, with the behavior of Poland to her subordinate stocks, not to speak of the behavior of Italy to Germans in the South Tyrol!

Equally deplorable is the pretence that concessions of great value were made at Munich, so that it was but fair to meet a conciliatory Fuehrer, and a conciliatory Duce, in the spirit of their own new statesmanship. The truth is that Herr Hitler's original demands upon Czechoslovakia, which British and French diplomacy set out to persuade him to reduce, were very much below the demands which, after negotiation, he was able to make good, and that once German armies had established themselves in commanding strategic positions within Czech territory, even the limits set to German conquest by the Munich Agreement itself were ignored. It is a vassal State which now has its nominal capital at Prague, vassal to German purposes, already responding to the Berlin control by such measures as the suppression of a radical press and discrimination against Jews. They feel in Czech circles that they can now do nothing else. How their actual preferences run, is disputable: most probably they have already begun to run on the side of the Rome-Berlin Axis, and it is freely predicted that in another war Czech regiments will fight quite willingly on the side opposite to that which they took last time. It is too soon, however, to be sure on such a point. At the moment, we do know how unwilling the Czechs were to drop the allegiance which, under Masaryk, they had developed. And their spokesmen abroad, very naturally, resent the pretence either that their calamity was their own fault, or that they have exaggerated their misfortunes. They appropriate the words of William Watson, in another reference:

What need of further lies?

We are the sacrifice.

IV.

But what else could have been done that day at Munich, which would not have meant disaster on a vastly greater scale than even these perils which I have taken pains not to understate?

For the decision which Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier took, it is urged that if they had not so yielded, there would have been an immediate outburst of European war, on a scale so much worse than that of 1914-1918 as the development of new agencies of destruction—especially by air—has made possible. No one can pretend to judge for certain whether this would have taken place or not: quite possibly the "bluff", for which the dictators are notorious, would have failed on defiance to proceed any further. On the other hand, what began as a bluff may pass beyond the control of its initiator, and it does seem appallingly probable that abrupt refusal of his terms would have been met by Herr Hitler with immediate invasion of Czechoslovakia, even though he had been warned of British and French support for the Czechs against him. In that event, whatever might have been the ultimate upshot, the world horror would have been probably such as Europe had never before seen, and Czechoslovakia would have been the first to suffer, beyond words to describe.

That a dilemma of this desperate character was possible, is explained by most of the more temperate journalistic commentators as due, primarily, to the British disarmament, meant to serve as an example, but acting rather as dangerously suggestive abroad. Critics who have been profuse in complaint against Great Britain, for failing to fulfil her engagement under the Versailles Treaty to reduce her fighting force, are thus met with the opposite complaint, that her anxiety to keep faith in just that respect has been the source of her present trouble.

That in a world war, with the combinations such as they would certainly have been last summer, the German-Italian side could in the end prevail, no serious observer of comparative strength seems to suppose. At least if the war should be one long drawn-out, in which the German and Italian economic deficiency, shortage of food-stuffs, lack of minerals and of many another war essential must be decisive. But for a *short* war, with a quick decision possible—through that still somewhat problematic efficiency which resides in an air force—the answer is not so plain. And with one-sided disarmament having pro-

ceeded so far, with consequences already so increasing German while it reduced British strength, the gamble might appear at Berlin not too dangerous to risk. Especially as Nazi so differs from British valuation of the sanctity of life! According to that sparkling French commentator, Genevieve Tabouis, it is Herr Hitler's avowed conviction that he will always get what he wants from the British, because "They are not willing for battle, and I am."

The case, then, for the British and French Governments is that they submitted to terms of whose unjust and humiliating character they were acutely conscious, because the alternative *as things at that moment stood* was one which in the general world interest, and certainly not least in that of the Czechoslovakian victim they were forced to immolate, it was impossible to accept. Naturally the leaders do not thus characterize a deal they had to make with an international pirate. But the press which supports their policy is less reticent, if not in actual statement, at least by implication.

V.

Among the reckless charges which have been bandied to and fro, as journalists have sought for some plausible account of a surrender so unlike the British past, one that is a favorite in certain papers is against the Labour Party. It was Ramsay MacDonald, they say, or Philip Snowden, or the evil influence of the British Trade Unions, starving the Defence Services in the interest of some visionary project of "uplift", that so altered the proportionate strength of Great Britain and her foes as to make it unsafe for her to adopt her traditional decisiveness.

But the blame cannot be thus laid at the door of Labour. Not since 1931 has Labour ruled in the British parliament, and as far back as 1931 the peril of German rearming was not yet real. One man in England has demonstrated his reliability on this matter beyond all others, by warning after warning given at an early date and confirmed in melancholy series by events: I mean, of course, Mr. Winston Churchill. His volume of speeches, entitled *Arms and the Covenant*, should be read by everyone who wants to understand by whose fault—of omission or of commission or of both—Great Britain drifted into the danger which came to a head last Fall. Seldom indeed has any man had his diagnosis and his forecast on public affairs so

rapidly and decisively corroborated. It is not upon leaders of British Labour, little as he likes or esteems them, that Mr. Churchill lays this particular blame. His speech entitled "Mr. Baldwin's Confession" will repay study. Mr. Chamberlain, it should be noted, at that time, was Mr. Baldwin's chief colleague.

Even as Madame Roland deplored much that was done in the name of Liberty, we might make a list of public disasters due to an over-concern for "Politics".

VI.

Has the peril of war, thus for the time averted at such huge cost, been reduced for the future?

It is the report of the American ambassador to Great Britain, lately arrived on a visit to his homeland, that "Appeasement", so far as he can judge, has made no progress at all. A glance at the daily press is enough to show how demands "with menace" have multiplied and continue to multiply; how the tone of international abusiveness, so far from being softened, has been hardened of late after a manner one should have thought impossible; how every gesture of indulgent good will made by the democratic countries is construed as a sign of weakness, and every concession they grant is made the basis for yet more ambitious dictatorial programs. Like the argument, well meant and altogether natural, that—after all—not much was yielded at Munich by Great Britain and by France, there is an argument, or rather an announcement, equally pathetic, that—after all—the international atmosphere is plainly much healthier and less dangerous than it was a year ago. In Missourian fashion the British public, especially at by-elections, has persistently asked to be "shown".

But on this at least we may congratulate ourselves, and through this we may take courage: there is no longer a problem or a dispute about rearmament, and in the new temper of British, of French, by no means least of American democracy the preparations being made, with the economic resources available and used to the utmost, improve the situation month by month. Whether the dictatorial Powers would have ventured a desperate risk if they had been defied three months ago, is doubtful: that the progressive massing of forces against them, together with their own increasing economic difficulty, has given them the

most serious concern, is obvious. As Mr. Chamberlain has well said, there is no inconsistency in pursuing alike the project of appeasing abroad and that of rearming at home: in the present world situation and with such threats from outside, rearming seems rather a method than an obstacle of appeasement. And although at this time of writing the clouds are thick once more, at least the genuine course is beginning to be discerned. In Rooseveltian idiom, "we are on our way".

H. L. S.

GRIEF

ANNE MARRIOTT

The last leaves drip from the walnut tree
To a lawn made yellow and dank with rain;
The sky is the roof of a granite tomb
Where my weak prayers bruise themselves in vain.

"Never more spring!" sneers the wind, "Nor summer!
Even autumn is dead!" Do I not know?
Here by the bare tree I kneel to winter,
Pleading the silence and peace of snow.