

A. J. P. TAYLOR

THE ORIGINS
OF THE
SECOND
WORLD WAR

WITH A PREFACE FOR THE AMERICAN READER
AND A NEW INTRODUCTION, *SECOND THOUGHTS*

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PREFACE FOR THE AMERICAN READER

MOST wars begin raggedly. In the minds of Englishmen 4 August 1914 is unshakably fixed as the date when the first World war began; yet by then France and Germany had been at war for twenty-four hours, Russia and Germany for three days, Serbia and Austria-Hungary for almost a week. The second World war was vaguer still in its opening; the Russians date it from 22 June 1941, the Chinese from November 1937, the Abyssinians, I suppose, from October 1935, and the Americans from 7 December 1941. The American date is the most sensible. The war became truly world-wide—much more so than the first World war—only after Pearl Harbor. However, that is not how it seems to English people. We date the second World war from 3 September 1939, the day when Great Britain and France declared war on Germany (not, incidentally, from 1 September, the day when Germany attacked Poland); and among non-Americans, only professional historians can remember the date of Pearl Harbor. The point is of no great importance as long as the reader knows exactly what he is in for and does not feel that he has been sold a book under false pretences. This book seeks to explain the war which began on 3 September 1939. It does not attempt to answer the questions: why did Hitler invade Soviet Russia? why did Japan attack Pearl Harbor? or why did Hitler and Mussolini then declare war on the United States? It is directed solely to the question: why did Great Britain and France declare war on Germany?

This may also meet another possible complaint from American readers: that there is very little about American policy. This has a simple explanation: American policy had very little to do with the British and French declaration of war on Germany. Perhaps it would be truer to say that what it had to do with their declarations of war was of a negative kind, like the significant episode of the dog in the night, to which Sherlock Holmes once drew attention. When Watson objected: "But the dog did nothing in the night," Holmes answered: "That was the significant episode." Even so, the United States could not avoid playing a great, maybe a decisive, part in European affairs. The German problem, as it existed between the wars, was largely the creation of American policy. The first World war would obviously have

had a different end if it had not been for American intervention: the Allies, to put it bluntly, would not have won. Equally, the victory over Germany would have had a different character if the United States had been an Allied, not an Associated, Power. Everyone knows how the detachment of the United States from the European Allies was asserted when the Senate refused to ratify the treaty of Versailles and, with it, American membership in the League of Nations; but this detachment existed even in the days of closest co-operation, and ratification of the treaty would not have made all that much difference. Woodrow Wilson regarded the Allies with almost as much distrust as he regarded Germany, or perhaps with more; and American membership in the League, as he envisaged it, would have been far from an asset to the Allied side.

Nor did the action of the Senate imply a retreat into isolation. American policy was never more active and never more effective in regard to Europe than in the nineteen-twenties. Reparations were settled; stable finances were restored; Europe was pacified: all mainly due to the United States. This policy of recovery followed the doctrine of Keynes (and of other economists) that Europe could be made prosperous only by making Germany prosperous. The recovery of Germany was America's doing. It was welcomed by most people in Great Britain and even by a certain number in France. It would have happened, to a lesser extent, in any case. Nevertheless, American policy was a powerful obstacle against any attempt to retard the recovery of Germany and a considerable assistance to those who promoted it. What indeed—a thought which occurred to many Englishmen also—can you do with Germany except make her the strongest Power in Europe? Still, the process might have taken longer if Americans had not been so insistent that Germany was the main pillar of European peace and civilisation. The treaty of Locarno and the admission of Germany to the League won American approval; this was in fact a strong motive for them. The same applied to disarmament. Every step towards treating Germany as an equal and towards dismantling the special securities which France obtained at the end of the first World war received American backing, tempered only by impatience that the steps were slow and halting.

Until 1931 or thereabouts, the policy of the Western Powers,

Great Britain and France, met broadly with American approval. Then things changed. This was partly because of events in the Far East. When Japan acted in Manchuria, the United States wished to enlist the League of Nations against her; while Great Britain and France thought that the League had enough to do in Europe without attempting to extend its principles to the Far East. The divergence went deeper. Americans attached great value to "non-recognition"; with a fine old-fashioned loyalty to nineteenth-century liberalism, they believed that moral disapproval would be effective in itself. The belief had already been proved false. The United States had refused to recognize the Soviet Union ever since 1917 without the slightest effect on anyone. The British particularly thought that the same result, or lack of result, would follow if they applied the principle of non-recognition to Japan. In their opinion, it was more important to restore peace in the Far East than to preserve their moral virtue. They succeeded, but at the price of permanently offending liberal sentiment in the United States. All this was dead stuff when Republican rule was brought to an end and Franklin D. Roosevelt became President. His victory was, among other things, a victory for isolationism in American foreign policy; and there is no evidence that he disapproved of the isolationist legislation which the Democratic majority pushed through Congress. The British and French were told, in effect, by those who had been their closest friends in the United States that they must face the German problem unaided. More than that, American policy cut across their efforts. President Roosevelt's first act in foreign affairs was to wreck the World Economic Conference, by means of which the British government had hoped to make Nazi autarchy unnecessary.

American isolationism reinforced isolationism elsewhere. British students learnt from American historians that the first World war was a blunder and that Germany was a justly aggrieved Power. British liberals learnt from progressive American politicians that wars were caused by armament manufacturers. Americans, having repudiated the treaty of Versailles themselves, were now eager that others should repudiate it also. The effect of American isolationism was felt in more practical ways. It supplied a strong argument for those who hesitated to make collective security a reality. When it was proposed to cut off

Italy's supply of oil during the Abyssinian crisis, the objection was at once raised that American oil would supply the deficiency; and no assurance to the contrary came, or could come, from the American government. Again, when the British government were urged to close the Suez canal against Italy, in breach of the Constantinople convention of 1889, the same answer was given: the United States would not allow it. No doubt these obstacles could have been overcome if British and French statesmen had been sufficiently resolute; but where men hesitated, American abstention helped to tip the scale. In much the same way, the American attitude was invoked to justify non-intervention in the Spanish civil war; any attempt to interfere with Franco's supply of arms would, it was argued, meet with resistance from the United States as well as from Germany and Italy. Yet, at the same time, Great Britain and France earned censure in the United States for failing to do things which American isolationism prevented them from doing. In particular, they were condemned for refusing to prolong a barren "non-recognition" once Italy had conquered Abyssinia.

In the autumn of 1937 American policy began to change. This was mainly due to the outbreak of war between Japan and China in the Far East, where Americans would have liked to see action by the European Powers, though they could promise none themselves. More than this, President Roosevelt set out to educate American opinion. As always, he proceeded with great caution, anxious not to outrun his people. His famous "quarantine" speech against aggressors hinted at something more than non-recognition. But how much more? Would the United States even now have supported sanctions against Germany if any such had been imposed? In any case, the "quarantine" speech was ill-received in the United States. Roosevelt retreated, explaining that he had meant nothing in particular. Soon afterwards he renewed his attempt at education. His proposal for a world conference to consider the grievances of the dissatisfied Powers was made in the hope of demonstrating to Americans the mounting dangers throughout the world; but it contained no prospect that the United States would actively support the Powers who were trying to maintain some sort of peaceful order in the world. Roosevelt seems to have hoped, so far as one can follow the devious workings of his mind, that events would educate Americans

where he had failed to do so. He wanted public opinion to push him into supporting the Western Powers. When, instead, these Powers tried to push him, he had to react into isolationism for the sake of the very public opinion which he was seeking to educate. Thus, at the height of the Munich crisis, he repudiated sharply the attempt by Bullitt, American ambassador in Paris, to commit the United States on the French side; it was, he said, "one hundred per cent wrong"—yet he secretly wished it was right.

American policy was not altogether negative in the last year of peace. It was made clear to Great Britain and France that they would be able to buy supplies in the United States if they resolved on war; at the same time, since there was no prospect of active American support, they were left to make their own decisions—just as Sir Edward Grey had hesitated to encourage France and Russia before 1914. Unofficial American observers were busy exposing German and Italian designs, perhaps even in exaggerating them. They sounded the alarm in order to rouse American public opinion. In practice they succeeded more in alarming people in Great Britain and France, but not in the way they intended. They made British and French policy more fearful of war, instead of more resolved on it. No one is likely to underrate the effect which Lindbergh had with his inflated picture of the German air force. Like most people, he was taken in by Hitler's propaganda. The general moral of this book, so far as it has one, is that Great Britain and France dithered between resistance and appeasement, and so helped to make war more likely. American policy did much the same. A resolute continuance of isolationism might well have choked Great Britain and France off from war altogether; a resolute backing of them, based on rearmament launched long before, might well have choked off Hitler. Hesitation between the two helped war on. No one is to blame for this. It is very hard for a democracy to make up its mind; and when it does so, often makes it up wrong.

I would add one general word. Some English critics of this book complained that I had "apologized" for Hitler or for the appeasers. Nothing could be further from my thoughts. I have a clean record here. I was addressing public meetings against appeasement—and very uphill work it was—when my critics were confining their activities to the seclusion of Oxford common

rooms. But I do not believe that a historian should either excuse or condemn. His duty is to explain. I have tried to explain how Hitler succeeded as much as he did and why the British and French governments finally declared war on Germany. If it be objected that Great Britain and France should have counted more firmly on American backing, it is worth bearing in mind that the United States were not drawn into the war either by the fall of France or even by Hitler's attack on Russia, and that we had to wait for the unlikely event of Hitler's declaring war on the United States before they came in.

SECOND THOUGHTS

I WROTE this book in order to satisfy my historical curiosity; in the words of a more successful historian, "to understand what happened, and why it happened". Historians often dislike what happened or wish that it had happened differently. There is nothing they can do about it. They have to state the truth as they see it without worrying whether this shocks or confirms existing prejudices. Maybe I assumed this too innocently. I ought perhaps to have warned the reader that I do not come to history as a judge; and that when I speak of morality I refer to the moral feelings at the time I am writing about. I make no moral judgment of my own. Thus when I write (p. 28) that "the peace of Versailles lacked moral validity from the start", I mean only that the Germans did not regard it as a "fair" settlement and that many people in Allied countries, soon I think most people, agreed with them. Who am I to say that it was "moral" or "immoral" in the abstract? From what point of view—that of the Germans, of the Allies, of neutrals, of the Bolsheviks? Some of its makers thought that it was moral; some thought it necessary; some thought it both immoral and unnecessary. This last class included Smuts, Lloyd George, the British Labour party, and many Americans. These moral doubts helped towards the overthrow of the peace settlement later on. Again, I wrote of the Munich agreement (p. 189): "It was a triumph for all that was best and most enlightened in British life; a triumph for those who had preached equal justice between peoples; a triumph for those who had courageously denounced the harshness and short-sightedness of Versailles". I ought perhaps to have added "(goak here)" in the manner of Artemus Ward. It was not however altogether a joke. For years past the best-informed and most conscientious students of international affairs had argued that there would be no peace in Europe until the Germans received the self-determination which had been granted to others. Munich was in part the outcome of their writings, however unwelcome its form; and its making would have been much more difficult if it had not been

felt that there was some justice in Hitler's claim. Even during the second World war a Fellow of All Souls¹ asked President Benes whether he did not think that Czechoslovakia would have been stronger if it had included, say, a million and a half Germans fewer. So long did the spirit of "appeasement" linger. As a matter of fact, there was no half way house: either three and a half million Germans in Czechoslovakia or none. The Czechs themselves recognised this by expelling the Germans after the second World war. It was not for me to endorse, or to condemn, Hitler's claim; only to explain why it was so widely endorsed.

I am sorry if this disappoints simple-minded Germans who imagined that my book had somehow "vindicated" Hitler. I have however no sympathy with those in this country who complained that my book had been welcomed, mistakenly or not, by former supporters of Hitler. This seems to me a disgraceful argument to be used against a work of history. A historian must not hesitate even if his books lend aid and comfort to the Queen's enemies (though mine did not), or even to the common enemies of mankind. For my part, I would even record facts which told in favour of the British government if I found any to record (goak again). It is not my fault that, according to the record, the Austrian crisis was launched by Schuschnigg, not by Hitler; not my fault that the British government, according to the record, not Hitler, took the lead in dismembering Czechoslovakia; not my fault that the British government in 1939 gave Hitler the impression that they were more concerned to impose concessions on the Poles than to resist Germany. If these things tell in favour of Hitler, it is the fault of previous legends which have been repeated by historians without examination. These legends have a long life. I suspect I have repeated some. For instance I went on believing until the last moment that Hitler summoned Hacha to Berlin; only when the book was in proof, did I look at the records again and discover that Hacha asked to come to Berlin, not the other way round. No doubt other legends have slipped through.

Destroying these legends is not a vindication of Hitler. It is a service to historical truth, and my book should be challenged only on this basis, not for the political morals which people choose to draw from it. This book is not a contribution to "revisionism" except in the lesser sense of suggesting that Hitler

¹ Mr. A. L. Rowse, as recounted in his book, *All Souls and Appeasement*.

used different methods from those usually attributed to him. I have never seen any sense in the question of war guilt or war innocence. In a world of sovereign states, each does the best it can for its own interests; and can be criticised at most for mistakes, not for crimes. Bismarck, as usual, was right when he said of the Austro-Prussian war in 1866: "Austria was no more in the wrong in opposing our claims than we were in making them". As a private citizen, I think that all this striving after greatness and domination is idiotic; and I should like my country not to take part in it. As a historian, I recognise that Powers will be Powers. My book has really little to do with Hitler. The vital question, it seems to me, concerns Great Britain and France. They were the victors of the first World war. They had the decision in their hands. It was perfectly obvious that Germany would seek to become a Great Power again; obvious after 1933 that her domination would be of a peculiarly barbaric sort. Why did the victors not resist her? There are various answers: timidity; blindness; moral doubts; desire perhaps to turn German strength against Soviet Russia. But whatever the answers, this seems to me the important question, and my book revolves round it, though also of course round the other question: why did they resist in the end?

Still, some critics made a great fuss about Hitler, attributing to him sole responsibility for the war or something near it. I will therefore discuss Hitler's part a little more, though not in a polemical spirit. I have no desire to win, only to get things right. The current versions of Hitler are, I think, two. In one view, he wanted a great war for its own sake. No doubt he also thought vaguely of the results: Germany the greatest Power in the world, and himself a world conqueror on the pattern of Alexander the Great or Napoleon. But mainly he wanted war for the general destruction of men and societies which it would cause. He was a maniac, a nihilist, a second Attila. The other view makes him more rational and, in a sense, more constructive. In this view, Hitler had a coherent, longterm plan of an original nature which he pursued with unwavering persistence. For the sake of this plan he sought power; and it shaped all his foreign policy. He intended to give Germany a great colonial empire in eastern Europe by defeating Soviet Russia, exterminating all the inhabitants, and then planting the vacant territory with Germans.

This Reich of a hundred or two hundred million Germans would last a thousand years. I am surprised, incidentally, that the advocates of this view did not applaud my book. For surely, if Hitler were planning a great war against Soviet Russia, his war against the western Powers was a mistake. There is evidently some point here which I have not understood.

Now, of course Hitler speculated a good deal about what he was doing, much as academic observers try to put coherence into the acts of contemporary statesmen. Maybe the world would have been saved a lot of trouble if Hitler could have been given a job in some German equivalent of Chatham House, where he could have speculated harmlessly for the rest of his life. As it was, he became involved in the world of action; and here, I think, he exploited events far more than he followed precise coherent plans. The story of how he came to power in Germany seems to me relevant to his later behaviour in international affairs. He announced persistently that he intended to seize power and would then do great things. Many people believed him. The elaborate plot by which Hitler seized power was the first legend to be established about him and has been the first also to be destroyed. There was no long-term plot; there was no seizure of power. Hitler had no idea how he would come to power; only a conviction that he would get there. Papen and a few other conservatives put Hitler into power by intrigue, in the belief that they had taken him prisoner. He exploited their intrigue, again with no idea how he would escape from their control, only with the conviction that somehow he would. This "revision" does not "vindicate" Hitler, though it discredits Papen and his associates. It is merely revision for its own sake, or rather for the sake of historical truth.

Hitler in power had once more no idea how he would pull Germany out of the Depression, only a determination to do it. Much of the recovery was natural, due to the general upturn in world conditions which was already beginning before Hitler gained power. Hitler himself contributed two things. One was anti-semitism. This, to my mind, was the one thing in which he persistently and genuinely believed from his beginning in Munich until his last days in the bunker. His advocacy of it would have deprived him of support, let alone power, in a civilised country. Economically, it was irrelevant, indeed harmful. His other con-

tribution was to encourage public spending on roads and buildings. According to the only book which has looked at what happened instead of repeating what Hitler and others said was happening¹, German recovery was caused by the return of private consumption and nonwar types of investment to the prosperity levels of 1928 and 1929. Rearmament had little to do with it. Until the spring of 1936, "rearmament was largely a myth".² Hitler in fact did not apply any prepared economic plans. He did the nearest thing that came to hand.

The same point is illustrated in the story of the Reichstag fire. Everyone knows the legend. The Nazis wanted an excuse for introducing Exceptional Laws of political dictatorship; and themselves set fire to the Reichstag in order to provide this excuse. Perhaps Goebbels arranged the fire, perhaps Goering; perhaps Hitler himself did not know about the plan beforehand. At any rate somehow, the Nazis did it. This legend has now been shot to pieces by Fritz Tobias, in my opinion decisively.³ The Nazis had nothing to do with the burning of the Reichstag. The young Dutchman, van der Lubbe, did it all alone, exactly as he claimed. Hitler and the other Nazis were taken by surprise. They genuinely believed that the Communists had started the fire; and they introduced the Exceptional Laws because they genuinely believed that they were threatened with a Communist rising. Certainly there was a prepared list of those who should be arrested. But not prepared by the Nazis. It had been prepared by Goering's predecessor: the Social Democrat, Severing. Here again there is no "vindication" of Hitler, only a revision of his methods. He expected an opportunity to turn up; and one did. Of course the Communists, too, had nothing to do with the burning of the Reichstag. But Hitler thought they had. He was able to exploit the Communist danger so effectively largely because he believed in it himself. This, too, provides a parallel with Hitler's attitude later in international affairs. When other countries thought that he was preparing aggressive war against them, Hitler was equally convinced that these others intended to prevent the restoration of Germany as an independent Great Power. His belief was not altogether unfounded. At any rate, the British and French

¹ Burton H. Klein, *Germany's Economic Preparations for War* (1959). Mr. Klein is an economist with the RAND Corporation.

² Klein, p. 16-17.

³ Fritz Tobias, *Reichstagbrand* (1962).

governments have often been condemned for not undertaking a preventive war in good time.

Here, it seems to me, is the key to the problem whether Hitler deliberately aimed at war. He did not so much aim at war as expect it to happen, unless he could evade it by some ingenious trick, as he had evaded civil war at home. Those who have evil motives easily attribute them to others; and Hitler expected others to do what he would have done in their place. England and France were "hate-inspired antagonists"; Soviet Russia was plotting the overthrow of European civilisation, an empty boast which indeed the Bolsheviks had often made; Roosevelt was out to ruin Europe. Hitler certainly directed his generals to prepare for war. But so did the British, and for that matter every other, government. It is the job of general staffs to prepare for war. The directives which they receive from their governments indicate the possible war for which they are to prepare, and are no proof that the government concerned have resolved on it. All the British directives from 1935 onwards were pointed solely against Germany; Hitler's were concerned only with making Germany stronger. If therefore we were (wrongly) to judge political intentions from military plans, the British government would appear set on war with Germany, not the other way round. But of course we apply to the behaviour of our own governments a generosity of interpretation which we do not extend to others. People regard Hitler as wicked; and then find proofs of his wickedness in evidence which they would not use against others. Why do they apply this double standard? Only because they assume Hitler's wickedness in the first place.

It is dangerous to deduce political intentions from military plans. Some historians, for instance, have deduced from the Anglo-French military conversations before 1914 that the British government were set on war with Germany. Other, and in my opinion wiser, historians have denied that this deduction can be drawn. The plans they argue, were precautions, not "blueprints for aggression". Yet Hitler's directives are often interpreted in this latter way. I will give one remarkable example. On 30 November 1938 Keitel sent to Ribbentrop a draft for Italo-German military talks which he had prepared on Hitler's instruction. Clause 3 read: "Military-political basis for the Negotiation. War by Germany and Italy against France and Britain, with the

object first of knocking out France"¹. A responsible critic has claimed that this provides clear proof of Hitler's intentions and so destroys my entire thesis. Yet what could German and Italian generals talk about when they met, except war against France and Britain? This was the only war in which Italy was likely to be involved. British and French generals were discussing war against Germany and Italy at this very time. Yet this is not counted against them, still less against their governments. The subsequent history of Keitel's draft is instructive. The Italians, not the Germans, had been pressing for military talks. After the draft had been prepared, nothing happened. When Hitler occupied Prague on 15 March 1939, the talks had still not been held. The Italians grew impatient. On 22 March Hitler ordered: "The military-political bases. . . are to be *deferred* for the present"². Talks were held at last on 4 April. Keitel recorded: "The conversations were started somewhat suddenly in consequence of Italian pressure"³. It turned out that the Italians, far from wanting war, wished to insist that they could not be ready for war until 1942 at the earliest; and the German representatives agreed with them. Thus, this marvellous directive merely proves (if it proves anything) that Hitler was not interested at this time in war against France and Great Britain; and that Italy was not interested in war at all. Or maybe it shows that historians should be careful not to seize on an isolated clause in a document without reading further.

Of course, in British eyes, their government only wanted to keep things quiet, while Hitler wanted to stir them up. To the Germans, the *status quo* was not peace, but a slave treaty. It all depends on the point of view. The victor Powers wanted to keep the fruits of victory with some modifications, though they did it ineffectively. The vanquished Power wanted to undo its defeat. This latter ambition, whether "aggressive" or not, was not peculiar to Hitler. It was shared by all German politicians, by the Social Democrats who ended the war in 1918 as much as by Stresemann. No one defined precisely what undoing the defeat of the first World war meant; and this applies also to

¹ Keitel to Ribbentrop, 30 Nov. 1938. *German Foreign Policy*, Series D, iv. No. 411.

² Keitel directive. 22 March, 1939. *Ibid.* vi. Appendix I.

³ Keitel report. 4 April, 1939. *Ibid.* Appendix III.

Hitler. It involved recovering the territory lost then; restoring the German predominance over central Europe which had previously been given by the alliance with Austria-Hungary; ending of course all restrictions on German armaments. The concrete terms did not matter. All Germans, including Hitler, assumed that Germany would become the dominant Power in Europe once she had undone her defeat, whether this happened by war or otherwise; and this assumption was generally shared in other countries. The two ideas of "liberation" and "domination" merged into one. There was no separating them. They were merely two different words for the same thing; and only use of the particular word decides whether Hitler was a champion of national justice or a potential conqueror of Europe.

A German writer¹ has recently criticised Hitler for wanting to restore Germany as a Great Power at all. The first World war, this writer argues, had shown that Germany could not be an independent Power on a world scale; and Hitler was foolish to try. This is not much more than a platitude. The first World war shattered all the Great Powers involved, with the exception of the United States, who took virtually no part in it; maybe they were all foolish to go on trying to be Great Powers afterwards. Total war is probably beyond the strength of any Great Power. Now even preparations for such a war threaten to ruin the Great Powers who attempt them. Nor is this new. In the eighteenth century Frederick the Great led Prussia to the point of collapse in the effort to be a Great Power. The Napoleonic wars brought France down from her high estate in Europe, and she never recovered her former greatness. This is an odd, inescapable dilemma. Though the object of being a Great Power is to be able to fight a great war, the only way of remaining a Great Power is not to fight one, or to fight it on a limited scale. This was the secret of Great Britain's greatness so long as she stuck to naval warfare and did not try to become a military power on the continental pattern. Hitler did not need instruction from a historian in order to appreciate this. The inability of Germany to fight a long war was a constant theme of his; and so was the danger which threatened Germany if the other Great Powers combined against her. In talking like this, Hitler was more sensible than the German generals who imagined that all would

¹ Wolfgang Sauer in *die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung* (1960).

be well if they got Germany back to the position she occupied before Ludendorff's offensive in March 1918. Hitler did not however draw the moral that it was silly for Germany to be a Great Power. Instead he proposed to dodge the problem by ingenuity, much as the British had once done. Where they relied on sea power, he relied on guile. Far from wanting war, a general war was the last thing he wanted. He wanted the fruits of total victory without total war; and thanks to the stupidity of others he nearly got them. Other Powers thought that they were faced with the choice between total war and surrender. At first they chose surrender; then they chose total war, to Hitler's ultimate ruin.

This is not guesswork. It is demonstrated beyond peradventure by the record of German armament before the second World war or even during it. It would have been obvious long ago if men had not been blinded by two mistakes. Before the war they listened to what Hitler said instead of looking at what he did. After the war they wanted to pin on him the guilt for everything which happened, regardless of the evidence. This is illustrated, for example; by the almost universal belief that Hitler started the indiscriminate bombing of civilians, whereas it was started by the directors of British strategy, as some of the more honest among them have boasted. However, the record is there for anyone who wishes to use it, dispassionately analysed by Mr. Burton Klein. I have already quoted his conclusion for Hitler's first three years: until the spring of 1936 German rearmament was largely a myth. This does not mean merely that the preliminary stages of rearmament were not producing increased strength, as always happens. Even the preliminary stages were not being undertaken at all seriously. Hitler cheated foreign powers and the German people in exactly the opposite sense from that which is usually supposed. He, or rather Goering, announced: "Guns before butter". In fact, he put butter before guns. I take some figures at random from Mr. Klein's book. In 1936, according to Churchill, two independent estimates placed German rearmament expenditure at an annual rate of 12 thousand million marks.¹ The actual figure was under 5 thousand million. Hitler himself asserted that the Nazi government had spent 90 thousand million marks on armaments before the out-

¹ Churchill, *The Second World War*, i. 226.

break of war. In fact total German government expenditure, war and nonwar, did not amount to much more than this between 1933 and 1938. Rearmament cost about 40 thousand million marks in the six fiscal years ending 31 March 1939, and about 50 thousand millions up to the outbreak of war.¹

Mr. Klein discusses why German rearmament was on such a limited scale. For one thing, Hitler was anxious not to weaken his popularity by reducing the standard of civilian life in Germany. The most rearmament did was to prevent its rising faster than it otherwise would have done. Even so the Germans were better off than they had ever been before. Then the Nazi system was inefficient, corrupt, and muddled. More important, Hitler would not increase taxes and yet was terrified of inflation. Even the overthrow of Schacht did not really shake the financial limitations, though it was supposed to do so. Most important of all, Hitler did not make large war preparations simply because his "concept of warfare did not require them". "Rather he planned to solve Germany's living-space problem in piecemeal fashion—by a series of small wars".² This is the conclusion at which I also arrived independently from study of the political record, though I suspect that Hitler hoped to get by without war at all. I agree that there was no clear dividing line in his mind between political ingenuity and small wars, such as the attack on Poland. The one thing he did not plan was the great war, often attributed to him.

Pretending to prepare for a great war and not in fact doing it was an essential part of Hitler's political strategy; and those who sounded the alarm against him, such as Churchill, unwittingly did his work for him. The device was new and took everyone in. Previously governments spent more on armaments than they admitted, as most do to the present day. This was sometimes to deceive their own people; sometimes to deceive a potential enemy. In 1909, for instance, the German government were accused by many British people of secretly accelerating naval building without the approval of the Reichstag. The accusation was probably untrue. But it left a permanent legacy of suspicion that the Germans would do it again; and this suspicion was strengthened by the evasions of the disarmament imposed by the treaty of Versailles, which successive German governments

¹ Klein, 17.

² Klein, 26.

practised, though to little advantage, after 1919. Hitler encouraged this suspicion and exploited it. There is a very good illustration. On 28 November 1934 Baldwin denied Churchill's statement that German air strength was equal to that of Great Britain's. Baldwin's figures were right; Churchill's, supplied by Professor Lindemann, were wrong. On 24 March 1935 Sir John Simon and Anthony Eden visited Hitler. He told them that the German air force was already equal to that of Great Britain, if not indeed superior. He was at once believed, and has been believed ever since. Baldwin was discredited. Panic was created. How was it possible that a statesman could exaggerate his armaments instead of concealing them? Yet this was what Hitler had done.

German rearmament was largely a myth until the spring of 1936. Then Hitler put some reality into it. His motive was principally fear of the Red Army; and of course Great Britain and France had begun to rearm also. Hitler in fact raced along with others, and not much faster. In October 1936 he told Goering to prepare the German army and German economy for war within four years, though he did not lay down any detailed requirements. In 1938-39, the last peacetime year, Germany spent on armament about 15% of her gross national product. The British proportion was almost exactly the same. German expenditure on armaments was actually cut down after Munich and remained at this lower level, so that British production of aeroplanes, for example, was way ahead of German by 1940. When war broke out in 1939, Germany had 1450 modern fighter planes and 800 bombers; Great Britain and France had 950 fighters and 1300 bombers. The Germans had 3500 tanks; Great Britain and France had 3850.¹ In each case Allied intelligence estimated German strength at more than twice the true figure. As usual, Hitler was thought to have planned and prepared for a great war. In fact, he had not.

It may be objected that these figures are irrelevant. Whatever the deficiencies of German armament on paper, Hitler won a war against two European Great Powers when the test came. This is to go against Maitland's advice and to judge by what happened, not by what was expected to happen. Though Hitler won, he won by mistake—a mistake which he shared. Of course the Germans were confident that they could defeat Poland if they were left undisturbed in the west. Here Hitler's political judge-

¹ Klein, 17.

ment that the French would do nothing proved more accurate than the apprehensions of the German generals. But he had no idea that he would knock France out of the war when he invaded Belgium and Holland on 10 May 1940. This was a defensive move: to secure the Ruhr from Allied invasion. The conquest of France was an unforeseen bonus. Even after this Hitler did not prepare for a great war. He imagined that he could defeat Soviet Russia without serious effort as he had defeated France. German production of armaments was not reduced merely during the winter of 1940-41; it was reduced still more in the autumn of 1941 when the war against Russia had already begun. No serious change took place after the initial setback in Russia nor even after the catastrophe at Stalingrad. Germany remained with "a peacelike war economy". Only the British bombing attacks on German cities stimulated Hitler and the Germans to take war seriously. German war production reached its height just when Allied bombing did: in July 1944. Even in March 1945 Germany was producing substantially more military material than when she attacked Russia in 1941. From first to last, ingenuity, not military strength, was Hitler's secret of success. He was done for when military strength became decisive, as he had always known he would be.

Thus I feel justified in regarding political calculations as more important than mere strength in the period before the war. There was some change of emphasis in the summer of 1936. Then all the Powers, not merely Hitler, began to take war and preparations for war seriously into account. I erred in not stressing this change of 1936 more clearly, and perhaps in finding too much change in the autumn of 1937. This shows how difficult it is to shake off legends even when trying to do so. I was taken in by the Hossbach Memorandum. Though I doubted whether it was as important as most writers made out, I still thought that it must have some importance for every writer to make so much of it. I was wrong; and the critics were right who pointed back to 1936, though they did not apparently realise that, by doing this, they were discrediting the Hossbach memorandum. I had better discredit this "official record", as one historian has called it, a little further. The points are technical and may seem trivial to the general reader. Nevertheless scholars usually and rightly attach importance to such technicalities. In modern practice, an official

record demands three things. First, a secretary must attend to take notes which he writes up afterwards in orderly form. Then his draft must be submitted to the participants for correction and approval. Finally, the record must be placed in the official files. None of this took place in regard to the meeting on 5 November 1937, except that Hossbach attended. He took no notes. Five days later he wrote an account of the meeting from memory in longhand. He twice offered to show the manuscript to Hitler, who replied that he was too busy to read it. This was curiously casual treatment for what is supposed to be his "last will and testament". Blomberg may have looked at the manuscript. The others did not know it existed. The only certificate of authenticity attached to it was the signature of Hossbach himself. One other man saw the manuscript: Beck, chief of the general staff, the most sceptical among German generals of Hitler's ideas. He wrote an answer to Hitler's arguments on 12 November 1937; and this answer was later presented as the beginning of the German "resistance". It has even been suggested that Hossbach wrote the memorandum in order to provoke the answer.

These are speculations. At the time, no one attached importance to the meeting. Hossbach left the staff soon afterwards. His manuscript was put in a file with other miscellaneous papers, and forgotten. In 1943 a German officer, Count Kirchbach, looked through the file, and copied the manuscript for the department of military history. After the war, the Americans found Kirchbach's copy, and copied it in their turn for the prosecution at Nuremberg. Both Hossbach and Kirchbach thought that this copy was shorter than the original. In particular, according to Kirchbach, the original contained criticisms by Neurath, Blomberg, and Fritsch of Hitler's argument—criticisms which have now fallen out. Maybe the Americans "edited" the document; maybe Kirchbach, like other Germans, was trying to shift all the blame on to Hitler. There are no means of knowing. Hossbach's original and Kirchbach's copy have both disappeared. All that survives is a copy, perhaps shortened, perhaps "edited", of a copy of an unauthenticated draft. It contains themes which Hitler also used in his public speeches: the need for *Lebensraum*, and his conviction that other countries would oppose the restoration of Germany as an independent Great Power. It contains no directives for action beyond a wish for increased armaments. Even at

Nuremberg the Hossbach memorandum was not produced in order to prove Hitler's war guilt. That was taken for granted. What it "proved", in its final concocted form, was that those accused at Nuremberg—Goering, Raeder, and Neurath—had sat by and approved of Hitler's aggressive plans. It had to be assumed that the plans were aggressive in order to prove the guilt of the accused. Those who believe the evidence in political trials may go on quoting the Hossbach memorandum. They should also warn their readers (as the editors of the *Documents on German Foreign Policy* for example do not) that the memorandum, far from being an "official record", is a very hot potato.¹

The Hossbach memorandum is not the only alleged blueprint of Hitler's intentions. Indeed, to judge from what some historians say, Hitler produced such blueprints continually—influenced no doubt by his ambition to be an architect (yet another goak). These historians even underrate Hitler's productivity. They jump straight from *Mein Kampf* to the Hossbach memorandum, and then to the *Table Talk* during the Russian war.² In fact Hitler produced a blueprint nearly every time he made a speech; this was the way his mind worked. Obviously there was nothing secret about these blueprints either in *Mein Kampf* which sold by the million after Hitler came to power, or in speeches delivered to large audiences. No one therefore need pride himself on his perspicacity in divining Hitler's intentions. It is equally obvious that *Lebensraum* always appeared as one

¹ Hossbach's account: affidavit in *International Military Tribunal*, xlii, 228, and, with variants, in Hossbach, *Von der militärischen Verantwortlichkeit in der Zeit vor dem zweiten Weltkrieg* (1948), 28. Kirchbach's copy and subsequent doubts: G. Meinck, *Hitler und die deutsche Aufrüstung 1938-37*, (1956), 236. Beck's counter-memorandum in: W. Foerster, *Ein General kämpft gegen den Krieg* (1949), 62. Beginning of the Resistance: Hans Rothfels, *Die deutsche Opposition gegen Hitler* (1951), 71. At Nuremberg, Blomberg, Goering, and Neurath testified against the authenticity of the memorandum. Their testimony is generally held to be worthless; or rather of worth only so far as it tells against Hitler.

² Now they can halt also at Hitler's second or, as it is called in the English edition, his secret book, which he wrote in 1928 and which remained unpublished until recently. Of course there is nothing secret about it. It is a rehash of the speeches which he was making at the time; and it was unpublished merely because it was not worth publishing. The "secret" is typical of the romantic fancies with which everything to do with Hitler is treated.

element in these blueprints. This was not an original idea of Hitler's. It was a commonplace of the time. *Volk ohne Raum*, for instance, by Hans Grimm sold much better than *Mein Kampf* when it was published in 1928. For that matter, plans for acquiring new territory were much aired in Germany during the first World war. It used to be thought that these were the plans of a few crack-pot theorists or of extremist organisations. Now we know better. In 1961 a German professor reported the result of his investigations into German war aims¹. These were indeed "a blue print for aggression" or, as the professor called them, "a grasp at world power": Belgium under German control; the French iron-fields annexed to Germany; the Ukraine to become German; and, what is more, Poland and the Ukraine to be cleared of their inhabitants and to be resettled with Germans. These plans were not merely the work of the German general staff. They were endorsed by the German foreign office and by "the good German", Bethmann Hollweg. Hitler, far from transcending his respectable predecessors, was actually being more moderate than they when he sought only *Lebensraum* in the east and repudiated, in *Mein Kampf*, gains in the west. Hitler merely repeated the ordinary chatter of Rightwing circles. Like all demagogues, Hitler appealed to the masses. Unlike other demagogues, who sought power to carry out Left policies, Hitler dominated the masses by Leftwing methods in order to deliver them to the Right. This is why the Right let him in.

But was *Lebensraum* Hitler's sole idea or indeed the one which dominated his mind? To judge from *Mein Kampf*, he was obsessed by anti-semitism, which occupies most of the book. *Lebensraum* gets only seven of the seven hundred pages. Then and thereafter, it was thrown in as a final rationalisation, a sort of "pie in the sky" to justify what Hitler was supposed to be up to. Perhaps the difference between me and the believers in Hitler's constant plan for *Lebensraum* is over words. By "plan" I understand something which is prepared and worked out in detail. They seem to take "plan" as a pious, or in this case impious, wish. In my sense Hitler never had a plan for *Lebensraum*. There was no study of the resources in the territories that were to be conquered; no definition even of what these territories were to be. There was no recruitment of a staff to

¹ Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (1961).

carry out these "plans", no survey of Germans who could be moved, let alone any enrolment. When large parts of Soviet Russia were conquered, the administrators of the conquered territories found themselves running round in circles, unable to get any directive whether they were to exterminate the existing populations or to exploit them, whether to treat them as friends or enemies.

Hitler certainly thought that Germany was most likely to make gains in eastern Europe when she became again a Great Power. This was partly because of his belief in *Lebensraum*. There were more practical considerations. For a long time he thought, whether mistakenly or not, that it would be easier to defeat Soviet Russia than the Western Powers. Indeed, he half believed that Bolshevism might break down without a war, a belief shared by many western statesman. Then he could collect his gains with no effort at all. Moreover *Lebensraum* could easily be presented as an anti-Bolshevik crusade; and thus helped to win the hearts of those in western countries who regarded Hitler as the champion of Western civilisation. However he was not dogmatic about this. He did not refuse other gains when they came along. After the defeat of France, he annexed Alsace and Lorraine, despite his previous declarations that he would not do so; and he carried off the industrial regions of Belgium and north-eastern France for good measure, just as Bethmann had intended to do before him. The rather vague terms which he projected for peace with Great Britain in the summer of 1940 included a guarantee for the British Empire, but he also intended to claim Irak, and perhaps Egypt, as a German sphere. Thus, whatever his theories, he did not adhere in practice to the logical pattern of *status quo* in the west and gains in the east. The abstract speculator turned out to be also a statesman on the make who did not consider beforehand what he would make or how.

He got as far as he did because others did not know what to do with him. Here again I want to understand the "appeasers", not to vindicate or to condemn them. Historians do a bad day's work when they write the appeasers off as stupid or as cowards. They were men confronted with real problems, doing their best in the circumstances of their time. They recognised that an independent and powerful Germany had somehow to be fitted into Europe. Later experience suggests that they were right. At

any rate, we are still going round and round the German problem. Can any sane man suppose, for instance, that other countries could have intervened by armed force in 1933 to overthrow Hitler when he had come to power by constitutional means and was apparently supported by a large majority of the German people? Could anything have been designed to make him more popular in Germany, unless perhaps it was intervening to turn him out of the Rhineland in 1936? The Germans put Hitler into power; they were the only ones who could turn him out. Again the "appeasers" feared that the defeat of Germany would be followed by a Russian domination over much of Europe. Later experience suggests that they were right here also. Only those who wanted Soviet Russia to take the place of Germany are entitled to condemn the "appeasers"; and I cannot understand how most of those who condemn them are now equally indignant at the inevitable result of their failure.

Nor is it true that the "appeasers" were a narrow circle, widely opposed at the time. To judge by what is said now, one would suppose that practically all Conservatives were for strenuous resistance to Germany in alliance with Soviet Russia and that all the Labour party were clamouring for great armaments. On the contrary, few causes have been more popular. Every newspaper in the country applauded the Munich settlement with the exception of *Reynolds' News*. Yet so powerful are the legends that even when I write this sentence down I can hardly believe it. Of course the "appeasers" thought firstly of their own countries as most statesmen do and are usually praised for doing. But they thought of others also. They doubted whether the peoples of eastern Europe would be best served by war. The British stand in September 1939 was no doubt heroic; but it was heroism mainly at the expense of others. The British people suffered comparatively little during six years of war. The Poles suffered catastrophe during the war, and did not regain their independence after it. In 1938 Czechoslovakia was betrayed. In 1939 Poland was saved. Less than one hundred thousand Czechs died during the war. Six and a half million Poles were killed. Which was better—to be a betrayed Czech or a saved Pole? I am glad Germany was defeated and Hitler destroyed. I also appreciate that others paid the price for this, and I recognise the honesty of those who thought the price too high.

These are controversies which should now be discussed in historical terms. It would be easy to draw up an indictment of the appeasers. Maybe I lost interest from having often done so already at a time when, to the best of my recollection, those who now display indignation against me were not active on the public platform. I am more interested to discover why the things I wanted did not work out than in repeating the old denunciations; and if I am to condemn any mistakes, I prefer to condemn my own. However it is no part of a historian's duty to say what ought to have been done. His sole duty is to find out what was done and why. Little can be discovered so long as we go on attributing everything that happened to Hitler. He supplied a powerful dynamic element, but it was fuel to an existing engine. He was in part the creation of Versailles, in part the creation of ideas that were common in contemporary Europe. Most of all, he was the creation of German history and of the German present. He would have counted for nothing without the support and co-operation of the German people. It seems to be believed nowadays that Hitler did everything himself, even driving the trains and filling the gas chambers unaided. This was not so. Hitler was a sounding board for the German nation. Thousands, many hundred thousand, Germans carried out his evil orders without qualm or question. As supreme ruler of Germany, Hitler bears the greatest responsibility for acts of immeasurable evil: for the destruction of German democracy: for the concentration camps; and, worst of all, for the extermination of peoples during the second World war. He gave orders, which Germans executed, of a wickedness without parallel in civilised history. His foreign policy was a different matter. He aimed to make Germany the dominant Power in Europe and maybe, more remotely, in the world. Other Powers have pursued similar aims, and still do. Other Powers treat smaller countries as their satellites. Other Powers seek to defend their vital interests by force of arms. In international affairs there was nothing wrong with Hitler except that he was a German.

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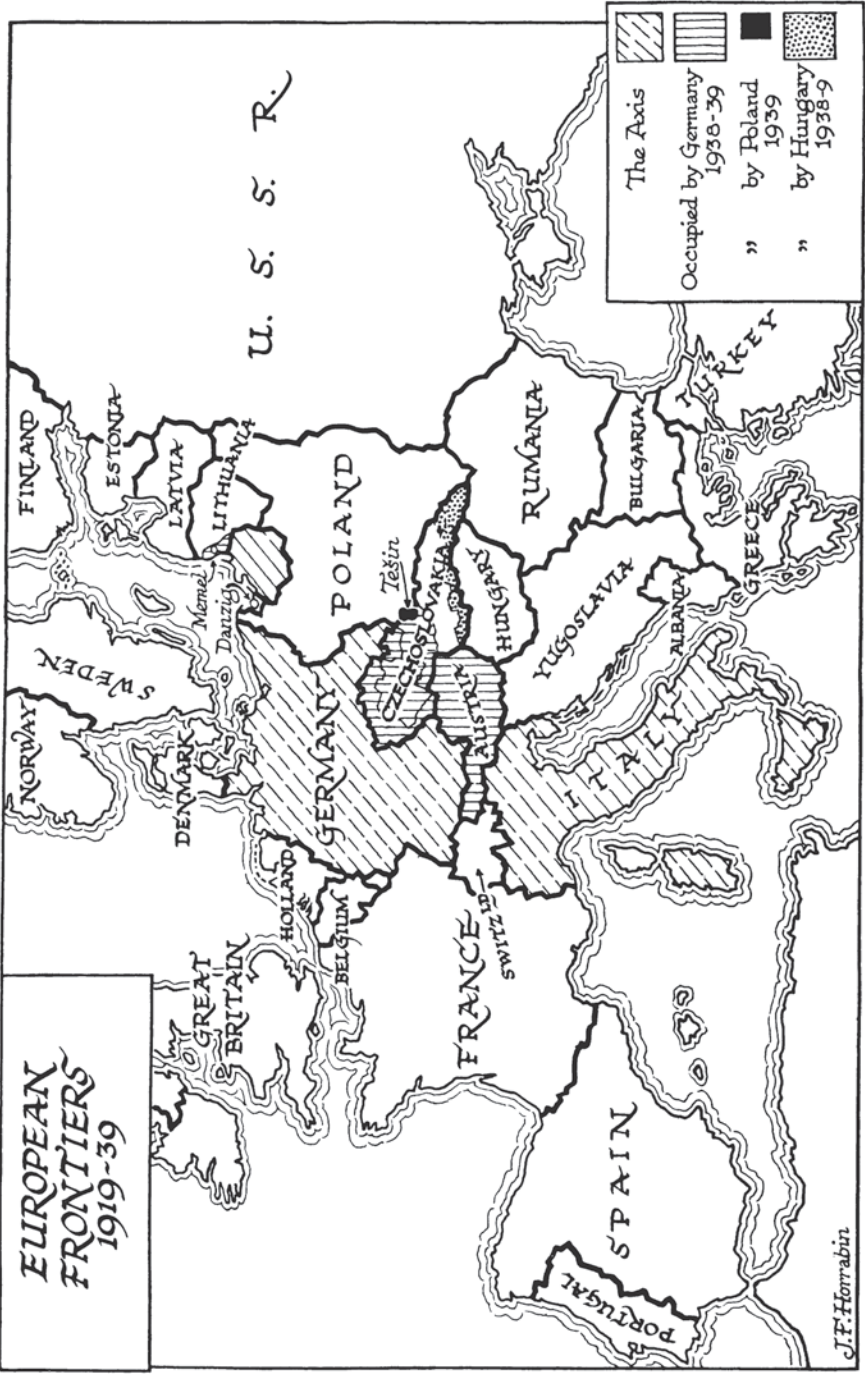
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GERMANY BETWEEN THE WARS

EUROPE BETWEEN THE WARS

EUROPEAN FRONTIERS 1919-39

U. S. S. R.



J.F. Horrabin

CHAPTER ONE

Forgotten Problem

MORE than twenty years have gone by since the second World war began, fifteen since it ended. Those who lived through it still feel it as part of their immediate experience. One day they suddenly realise that the second World war, like its predecessor, has passed into history. This moment comes for a university teacher when he has to remind himself that his students were not born when the war started and cannot remember even its end. The second World war is as remote to them as the Boer war was to him; they may have heard anecdotes of it from their parents, but more likely, they have to learn of it from books if they learn at all. The great figures have left the scene. Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and Roosevelt are dead; Churchill has withdrawn from leadership; only de Gaulle is having a second innings. The second World war has ceased to be "today" and has become "yesterday". This makes new demands on historians. Contemporary history, in the strict sense, records events while they are still hot, judging them from the moment and assuming a ready sympathy in the reader. No one will depreciate such works with the great example of Sir Winston Churchill before him. But there comes a time when the historian can stand back and review events that were once contemporary with the detachment that he would show if he were writing of the Investiture conflict or the English civil war. At least, he can try.

Historians attempted this after the first World war, but with a different emphasis. There was relatively little interest in the war itself. The dispute over grand strategy between Westerners and Easterners was regarded as a private war between Lloyd George and the generals, which the academic historian passed by. The official British military history—itsself a polemical contribution to this private war—proceeded so leisurely that it was only completed in 1948. There was no attempt at an official

civil history, except for the Ministry of Munitions. Hardly anyone examined the attempts at a negotiated peace. No one studied the development of war aims. We have had to wait almost until the present day for detailed study of such a decisive topic as the policy of Woodrow Wilson. The great subject which eclipsed all else and monopolised the interest of historians was how the war began. Every government of a Great Power, except the Italian, made copious revelations from its diplomatic archives. The conscientious historian saw his shelves filling with books in every major language and regretted that he could not read others. Periodicals in French, German, and Russian were devoted exclusively to the subject. Historians established their reputation as authorities on the origins of the first World war—Gooch in England, Fay and Schmitt in the United States, Renouvin and Camille Bloch in France, Thimme, Brandenburg, and von Wegerer in Germany, Pribram in Austria, Pokrovsky in Russia, to name but a few.

Some of these writers concentrated on the events of July 1914; others ranged back to the Moroccan crisis of 1905 or to the diplomacy of Bismarck. But all agreed that here was the field of consuming interest for the recent historian. University courses stopped abruptly at August 1914, as some still do. The students approved. They wanted to hear about William II and Poincaré, about Grey and Izvolski. The Kruger telegram seemed more important to them than Passchendaele, the treaty of Björkö more important than the agreement of St. Jean de Maurienne. The great event which had shaped the present was the outbreak of war. What happened afterwards was merely a muddled working-out of inevitable consequences, without lessons or significance for the present. If we understood why the war began, we should know how we got where we were—and of course how not to get there again.

With the second World war it has been almost the exact opposite. The great subject of interest, for reader and writer alike, has been the war itself. Not merely the campaigns, though these have been described again and again. The politics of the war have also been examined, particularly the relations of the Great allies. It would be difficult to count the books on the French armistice of 1940, or on the meetings of the Big Three at Teheran and Yalta. The "Polish question" in relation to the