

DAS SCHICKSAL DER DEUTSCHEN. Ein Versuch seiner geschichtlichen Erklarung. By Karl Thieme. (Kobersche Verlagsbuchhandlung Basel).

This is a strangely fascinating book. It is written with stern fervour and with a sovereign command of its complex historical subject-matter. Its message is important, and it reaches the reader even through the thickets of the archaic and over-latinised style. The author says that he chose this unwieldy medium deliberately, and he reproaches those readers who, "pampered by comfortable chatterers," find his book "too heavy." It is true that the complexity of the subject justifies, to a certain extent, the breath-taking density of a language unaccommodating to the point of bland defiance. But it is unfortunate that Herr Thieme should impose this additional strain on the reader, whose powers of comprehension he already taxes to the full by the wealth of detail, woven, with almost furious skill, into the extensive pattern of his argument.

Outwardly, this pattern is almost conventional. He surveys Germany's historical development as far as it seems to him causally connected with the picture which she presented to him at the outbreak of the war (the main part of the book was concluded in 1940). He chooses as a starting point the "beginning of the Prussian Revolution," i.e., the invasion of Silesia by Frederik II. He shows with quotations from Fichte and Clausewitz, how the "Frederician idea of the power state" gradually captured and perverted the minds of the German intelligentsia, and he traces, in a few bold strokes, "the straight line which leads from them over Treitschke and Bismark to Adolf Hitler." Hitler is to him "the new Pied Piper of Hamelin, whose bewitching melody led the German political children into the dark cave of the total state, while they themselves believed that they were wandering into the true German Liberty."

But Herr Thieme does not "write history," but rather tries to explain it. He examines the intellectual and even psychological processes which preceded and pre-determined Germany's actual historical development—in the sense of Berdyaev's "Things happen in the mind long before they happen in the sphere of historical reality." He is, therefore, not concerned with practical events and circumstances, but concentrates his observation on ideas, on minds and on men.

He points out, that the ideas of Fichte and his followers did not remain unchallenged, that in each generation men arose who lifted strong voices in defence of German's most natural and sacred traditions, and branded their compatriots' insane ambition for national unification as a betrayal of their country's true vocation and destiny. He quotes from Goerres, the editor of the "Rheinischer Merkur"; from Onno Klopp, the Hanoverian, who followed his blind king into exile; from C. Frantz, the vigorous and farseeing opponent of Bis-

mark; from F. W. Foerster, the lonely and fanatical Prussian anti-militarist, whose famous book "Europe and the German Question" can only be justly appreciated in its strengths and weaknesses, if it is put against the background which Herr Thieme's trenchant analysis sets out so clearly. These fearless and unpopular prophets deserve all the tribute, which Herr Thieme pays to them. Their thoughts are so lucid, so eminently reasonable, their beliefs so pure and harmonious within themselves. Their criticisms are free from prejudice, and their counsels free from passion. One feels that in their writings there is an unadulterated source of political wisdom which is truly universal, and yet peculiarly German, and a more comprehensive selection of their most important works should be published soon—perhaps under the auspices of the Control Commission?

But will their advice, their message which is still so topical, be accepted? Herr Thieme says, that the "deafness" of their contemporaries was due to prejudices and "ressentiment": "to those, who believed in a fictitious, all-embracing Germanity, these true Germans were suspect as 'Particularists' just because they were so deeply rooted in real native soil, in a concrete faith and nationality; and their supranational Universalism made them appear as betrayers of the nascent German nation-state to some nebulous 'International.'" And since he looks upon the last war as on a purgatory, from which the Germans will emerge "totally regenerated," he has no doubt that they will now be open for the truth of this sober message. It is the purpose of his book, to convey, as it were, a first instalment of this truth to his compatriots beyond the border, to whom he has addressed it.

At the same time, however, he appeals to the victors not to miss the opportunity, which is offered to them. In a postscript from 1945, which he calls, significantly enough, "Inferno and Regeneration," he deals briefly with the projected Zones of Occupation. As a native from Saxony (about whose peculiarly unhappy development he writes most instructively in one of the five scholarly separate essays which are appended to the book), he deplores the fate of the German lands which will come under Russian Occupation, and "buries all his hopes for them." But he insists all the more on the importance of "restoring the old German countries west of the Elbe and the Saale to their feet," and his grief about the loss of the eastern provinces is mitigated by his confidence that the drastic amputation may in itself be conducive to this restoration.

It is in these remarks about the future, that a certain weakness of the book reveals itself. Herr Thieme looks upon the last 200 years of German history as upon a coherent whole, a closed period. The fatal development, which started in 1740, has now come to an end on VE-Day. The underlying ideological forces have spent themselves, and their fallaciousness has been revealed in the final

catastrophe. The way is clear for a new beginning, for a return to the obedience of the old and fundamental laws of Germany's historical existence. The "Prussian Revolution," of which National Socialism was the natural (though not inevitable) final consequence, has ended in failure—now the old order, whose undying vitality has been proved by the witness of so many prophets and martyrs, and for which Thieme himself gives testimony, can be re-established.

In this sense, Herr Thieme regards National Socialism as a purely German phenomenon, the final product of the German political mind's fatal aberration. He does not realise—as indeed few of us did in 1940—that it is merely one form of a much more general perversion, of an all-pervading and infectious disease, against which no community is immune. Had he seen this, he would perhaps have been a little less confident about the old German order's eventual restoration, and consequently more explicit in his programmatic passages. As they stand, they will leave his followers somewhat dissatisfied, while exposing him to cheap attack from his adversaries. If there should be a second edition of this book, one would wish to see the Postscript amplified in this direction, together with a shortening of some of the sentences (one of these rambling constructions, on page 120, spreads itself out over 23 lines of fairly small, if beautifully readable, print!).

One thing might be said in conclusion: books about contemporary affairs can neither be fully accurate in their descriptions, nor fully convincing in their conclusions, unless they accept as true the word of Pope Pius XI: "Totalitarianism is the heresy of the 20th Century." Herr Thieme, who with his book has set such high standards of objectivity, of truthfulness, accuracy, and logic in argument to all those, who after him will wish to write about the phenomenon of National Socialism, could—in the opinion of this reviewer—still improve on them, if he would rewrite some of it in the light of this papal utterance.

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THE ARTISTS OF THE WINCHESTER BIBLE. By Walter Oakeshott. (Faber; 10s. 6d.).

The Winchester Bible is perhaps the greatest monument remaining from the 12th cent. English art. The fact that it took three generations to complete its illuminations gives it a primary value for the art changes in taste and style in one of the chief art centres in Europe between 1140 and 1225.

Mr. Oakeshott has published a selection from the illuminations in forty-four plates, and has added twenty-two pages as introduction to them. The only criticisms that can be made of the present volume is that the plates are too few and the preface too short; the first was perhaps unavoidable owing the present difficulties in production; the second is so much to be regretted precisely because of Mr. Oakeshott's minutely careful scholarship and *expertise*.