

Books and the Tiger

Some of the Beliefs of War
 Rex Stout Discusses
 Are Weapons for War Again?

By REX STOUT

BOOKS and the war. When did the war start? 1931, Japan into Manchuria? 1934, Italy into Ethiopia? 1937, Germany and Italy into Spain? March, 1939, Germany into Czechoslovakia? September, 1939, Germany into Poland? June, 1941, Germany into Russia? December, 1941, Japan into Pearl Harbor? Surely, history will reject all of those and will take as the starting date of the war, July 28, 1914. That breathing space after 1919 was merely an entr'acte during which we went to the smoking room and took bromo-seltzers while Germany and Japan whetted their knives behind the curtain, temporarily lowered.

The record of books on the war is bad enough if we speak only of the present world-wide hostilities, but if we mean the war in its true chronological dimensions the record becomes infinitely worse. During the knife-whetting interim one of the major objectives of Germany was to persuade us that she was Cinderella and we were the wicked sisters, and at least four-fifths of the books written and published in this country—those which treated of the subject at all—did their best to help Germany out. Here and there were warning words between covers such as those of Bernadotte Schmidt, but they were few and far between. Any one in the United States reading the hundred most widely read books on the international situation would have been convinced that Germany was misunderstood, mistreated and falsely accused; and we were greedy, selfish and not much account morally. The less said about those books the better; but the comment may be permitted that the men who wrote most of them, consciously or unconsciously, fatally deceived and misinformed their fellow-citizens. And was it too much to expect that the guiding spirit of at least one or two of our large publishing houses might have taken the trouble to learn a little of the facts of life and make them purchasable in book stores? Apparently it was.

I think it is fair to say that during that period—roughly from 1919 to 1937—the writers and publishers of books failed more utterly and spectacularly to fulfill their most important function than in any comparable period since the invention of movable type.

Then, what? Not much. If anything, worse. Oh, there were books which didn't like Hitler, or Franco, or Mussolini; there were books which thought it was naughty of the Japanese to tell that lie about the railroad bridge and march into Peiping; there were books which deplored the

befuddlement of those lovable homebodies, the German people, by that jackass Hitler; but where was the book which effectively aroused the American people from their own befuddlement and presented to them, readably and persuasively, the hazardous and menacing situation of their world? If any one wrote it, which I doubt, nobody published it. The result was that on Pearl Harbor Day nine Americans out of ten were astonished to find their country at war, though they had already been at war twenty-four years and eight months.

And then, what? Well, there have been a lot of war books, and a few good ones. There have been narratives of heroism and hardihood such as "They Were Expendable," "There Go the Ships," "Into the Valley," "Dress Rehearsal," "Guadalcanal Diary" and "Battle for the Solomons."

There have been useful reports by correspondents and diplomats such as "Berlin Diary," "Tokyo Record," "Last Train From Berlin," "This Is the Enemy" and "Report From Tokyo."

There have been good angry books, fighting books like "Prelude to Victory," "Make This the Last War" and "This Time for Keeps."

There have been many valuable and informative books on our armed forces, the parts of the earth where they are fighting and will fight, our production front and all other aspects of those multifarious activities which may be summed up in that infelicitous and repugnant phrase, "the war effort."

There have even been a few books which get deep into the meat of the matter and approach the bone. "Germany's Master Plan," by Joseph Borkin, treats

of one of the prime ingredients of the poisonous German hash—the industrialists and cartels. They are the kind of Germans for whom individuals like a Bismarck or a Wilhelm II or a Hitler are merely the hired help.

"Europe and the German Question," by F. W. Foerster, covers more territory, both spiritually and chronologically. If any American cares enough about what happens in the next twenty or fifty years to read one book, and only one, this is certainly it. Foerster, now over 70 years old, was born and bred a Prussian and was for many years an outstanding educator in Germany. He ought to know and he does know. In 1940 he offered his knowledge in this book to the people of America and 3,409 of us bought the book!

Dr. Richard M. Brickner has written a book called "Is Germany Incurable?" which will be published the first of April. It will probably start a controversy. Dr. Brickner, a psychiatrist of high professional standing, first describes in detail the symptoms and characteristics of an individual man or woman afflicted with the disease called paranoia and then proceeds to the thesis that the German people, as a whole, have displayed similar symptoms and characteristics for many years in their dealings with other peoples. It is fascinating, persuasive and a good tough job.

It might be suspected, since I make extended comment only on those three books, that I share with the Germans their conviction that the German Master Race is the only bunch of humans worth writing about. Not so. There are several other books on various other subjects that are equally vital to an understanding of this world at war, but it is im-

possible for me to comment upon them because they have not been written—at least they haven't been published. Here they are:

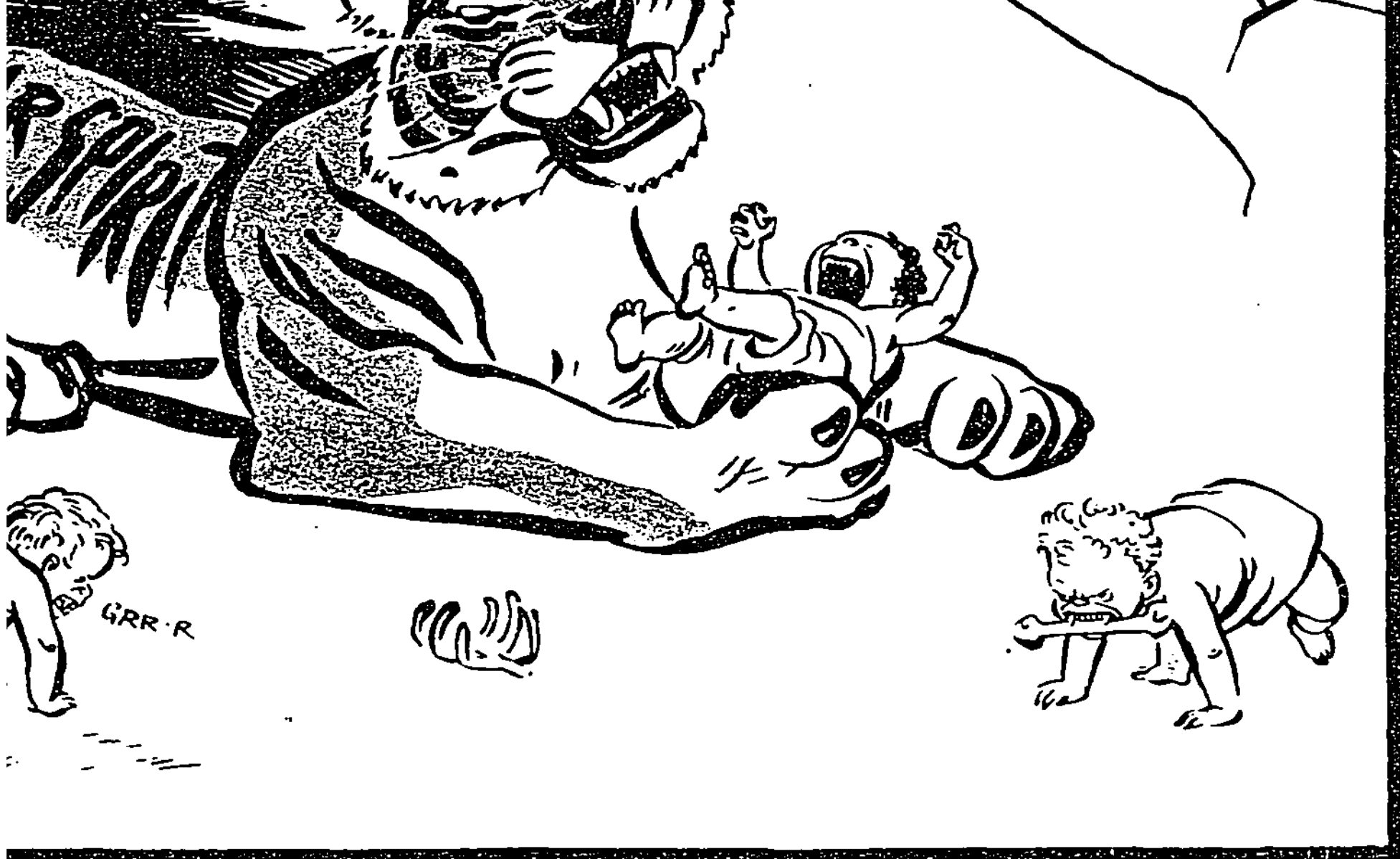
1. At dinner tables and street corners Americans are arguing whether we should take part in the organization of the world. We might as well be arguing whether sunshine, meeting a solid object, should cast a shadow. One book, well enough done, could drive it home that we no longer have any choice in the matter. On that December day in 1903 when that weird contraption of the Wright brothers stayed in the air for fifty-nine seconds it became completely impossible for the people in Chicago to disassociate their affairs, in war or in peace, from those of the people of Chungking. If you say we have grasped that fact, I say we haven't. If we have, why all the argument, and why all the obvious preparations of the isolationists to try to drag us back into that hole, with their wisecracks about Hottentots drinking milk and a TVA on the Danube? Having a Senator Wheeler, a Mr. McCormick and a New York Daily News, we need a book.

2. Since the world is now so small that it will inevitably be organized, who is going to organize it? Hitherto the conflicts between fascism and democracy (by whatever names they were called at the moment) have always been localized. The arena was the Eastern Mediterranean or the Iberian Peninsula or the Continent of Europe. Henceforth it is the world and cannot be anything less. There will no longer be new lands to flee to from oppression, as there were for the Pilgrims of 1620 or the German revolutionaries of 1848. Therefore it is vitally necessary that all of us shall understand the true

nature and meaning of those contrary concepts of human society, fascism and democracy, so that each of us will be able to say, "This is my side. I am for this." We need a book.

3. While there are plenty of Fascists, too many for comfort, in all parts of the world, including ours, there are only two countries, big and powerful enough to threaten world domination, where the fascist conception of society has prevailed for so many decades that the people themselves may fairly be said to be Fascist, Japan and Germany. Our chief concern is Germany, because only a minority of us are under any delusions regarding the Japanese, while a large majority of us still believe that the Germans are on the whole—people of good-will, temporarily misled by the Nazi gangsters. It does no good for me to say that that opinion of the Germans is utterly false. Who believes me? But a book could do it.

We need other books too, but this is supposed to be a report, not a requisition. I have not been going around peering at shoulders, looking for chips, but I think it is demonstrable, and, to put it mildly, deplorable, that during the third and fourth decades of this century the writers and publishers of books failed us miserably, and there is no present evidence that they are either prepared or inclined to take up the slack. Of course no publishing house would hire Jeremiah for an idea man, but at least both publishers and writers should realize that, whereas they, like every one else, had formerly to keep up with stage coaches and railroad trains, they now have to keep up with airplanes. If they don't, it is quite possible that in the near future there will be no books at all worthy of the name.



The Uninformed Are Choice Food for the Tiger.