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Mann, Erika

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War and the German Mind: The Testimony of Men of Fiction who fought
at the Front.

By Wm. K. Pfeiler. With a Foreword by George M. Shuster.

(New York: Columbia University press. 1941. Pp. xx, 349. \$ 3.25.)

Reviewed by Erika Mann.

This is a highly interesting effort to elucidate from a particular point of view a problem in the discussion of which several able writers have recently engaged. Instead of tracing the ideas of Nazism throughout the 19th and 20th centuries - a method not without danger - Dr. Pfeiler concentrates on the first World War and the following period. Thus limited in time and space his subject becomes all the more suggestive in its various aspects. The question he tries to answer is not: How did Nazism emanate from the war? But, rather: What was the German reaction towards the war? How did the different feelings, opinions, characters shaped by the War tell on German literature and politics? Why was it that certain trends gradually absorbed the others? Is there any specifically German attitude towards war in general? Dr. Pfeiler undertakes to answer these vital questions, not with a few sweeping affirmations, but through the painstaking examination of several hundred German books about the war, written between 1914 and 1939. This task he performs with scholarship, literary taste, strong powers of analysis, and an admirable objectivity.

Perhaps with a little more objectivity than the subject of his study would seem to impose. The author, we learn from the foreword, is a resolute foe of Nazism, and it must have been extremely difficult for him to present - sine ira et studio - a philosophy he detests. Now, it easily happens that, while trying to overcome an inner resistance to a hostile

phenomenon, one actually comes out in its favor, and that justice towards the enemy becomes injustice towards ourselves. "Beware of explaining everything," - a Frenchman has said - "lest you end by excusing everything!"

To begin with, Dr. Pfeiler's principal distinction between "egocentrics" and "ethnocentrics" among the German war writers works rather in favor of those who are fond of war and the German manner of waging it. To be "ethnocentric" is certainly nobler than to be "egocentric". Yet, according to Dr. Pfeiler, all of the German pacifists belong to the "egocentric" school, whereas the militarists are the "ethnocentrics". To us it would seem that a sincerely peace-loving author may be just as interested in the happiness of the community, as the most ardent worshipper of slaughter; and that an "ethnocentric" American or Englishman may very well believe in the necessity of taking up arms for his country and the freedom of the human race, without indulging in the brutal mysticism of the Nazi type. Dr. Pfeiler's scheme is neither exhaustive, nor quite fortunate in itself.

Nazi philosophy must not be viewed regardless to Nazi reality. A Nazi book on the war like Joseph Magnus Wehner's "Seven before Verdun", written three years before Hitler came to power, has as much to do with the second world war as with the first. Its subject is the past, its object the future. Wehner's philosophical German soldiers want to give "true liberty to all peoples of the world" and to build a "Reich of peace, justice, and love". What the same type of man actually did give to the world, we know. They gave us the memory of Lidice and of those men and women hung in Poland because they'd handed out milk to Jewish children. Herr Wehner, however, has his "heroes" talk of "love". Can he be called sincere? Doesn't he falsify reality? And, if so, can his work have any real human or artistic validity?

Dr. Pfeiler fails to ask these questions. So far goes he in his

endeavor to be fair and sympathetic, that he takes even the peace-loving
a few days before "Munich"
assertions made by Himmler's sheet "Das Schwarze Korps" at their face
value. In order to explain the puzzling contradiction between Nazi "paci-
fism" and Nazi militarism he delves into the great German philosophers.
Once, it is true, he reminds the reader of the difference ^{that might possibly exist} between a book
and the actuality it claims to picture. It would not be fair, he says,
to confront the perfection of Nazi writing with the sad reality of the
Weimar Republic. "If German republicanism is called a failure because of
what it did, National Socialism cannot be called a success until it has
proved itself by deeds." As for these deeds, however, the author apparently
had not yet an adequate concept in 1941. Consequently his sole concern
is with the ideal realm of literature. Not even the most accomplished
scholarship can quite reconcile us with so one-sided an approach.
