

THIRTEEN WITNESSES

The Men Who Saw It Happen

ARE we post-war or pre-war in this generation? In less time than it takes to grow from infancy to adolescence nations have thrown aside the post-war veneer of internationalism and uncovered all the pre-war flares of racial hatred.

Abyssinnia's groping idealism has been shattered by machine guns. Spain has danced her horrible tarantella to the music of bombs. More of the patient blood of China has flowed down her rivers. Czecho-Slovakia has been protected. Austria has been rationalised. Albania has disappeared. All the splendid resources of the Earth have been twisted out of shape to serve death. Martians have invaded a terrified America. And 9,000,000 dead have lain quietly waiting in their graves for company.

The story of the last two decades has been a story of hope giving place to hysteria, of decency overcome by delirium; of fear, of suspicion, of utter madness.

Yet there are reassuring touches of humanity through it all, and these have not been missed by the thirteen witnesses whose testimony appears in "We Saw It Happen," the latest, and probably the best, of the journalists' current histories. As correspondents of "The New York Times" they have all been closely in touch with events. They base their books on facts but gain their effects by wise selection rather than excessive documentation. They do not attempt to tell the whole story, but they tell enough of it to make it sound very real and anything but reassuring.

In Central Europe

An Englishman, G. E. R. Gedye, has been watching insanity brew in the pot of Central Europe since 1922. He saw the one democracy, Czecho-Slovakia, surrounded by hostile autocracies. Greece had a militarist-Fascist dictatorship unparalleled outside Germany. Austria was a dictator state, its rigours lessened by a desire to run also with the democratic hares. Parliament in Bulgaria and Rumania was a facade and a farce. Yugoslavia was governed by a dictatorship in decline. Hungary, kingdom without a king, was ruled by a feudal caste in uneasy co-operation with an autocratically-minded small bourgeoisie. Albania's king had won his throne by force but ruled uncrowned because the Austrian State Museum had his iron crown in a glass case.

The eight countries he covered have now become five, and Gedye himself has had a small taste of pillar-to-post existence. He watched most of the process although his

chapter does not cover last year's climaxes. He is yet another journalist who saw with clear eyes those so obvious things to which politicians were blind, or closed their eyes. A history of diplomacy in the last two decades will have much to answer for when it is compared with the best of the journalism of the time. Gedye covers an amazing field in his 40 pages.

Fertile Ground

Under the heading "Land of the Free," F. Raymond Daniell says that he knows from his travels to all parts of the United States that the mental attitude on which Fascism feeds exists there just as it does in Germany or Italy, while the seeds of Marxism fall on barren ground. He concludes, "... this resignation, acceptance of the inevitable,

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—Douglas W. Churchill

shirking of responsibility, and flouting of the rights of minorities, are the most alarming phenomena of these unhappy times." His pen probes the New World as effectively as Gedye's dissects the Old.

Frank Nugent and Douglas W. Churchill, the New York motion picture editor and his Hollywood correspondent, collaborate in a humorous but pointed account of the distortion that is Hollywood. "Nothing we hear is too incredible to believe and, incredibly, most of the unbelievable things are true. It goes beyond geography, beyond finance, and beyond industry. It is Graustark."

Fall of Wall Street

Elliott V. Bell is almost entirely serious in an excellent review of the cause, effect, and decline of the money barons of Wall Street. His analysis of their moral psychology amounts to "they know not what they do." His description of the market crash and the subsequent shift of control from private enterprise to the State is lucid and unbiased. Finance, he says, found itself playing with something that had grown too big for it to handle. More and more it was forced to turn to the State for help. Wall Street went through, and is still going through, the bitter process of deflation.

An Uncomfortable Chapter

Ferdinand Kuhn does his best to make every allowance for "The British Way," but his carefully searching chapter on England and British politics and diplomacy will leave most readers feeling at least uncomfortable. England's greatest achievement since the war, to him, has been the retention of so much of her power at a moment when it seemed she was going to lose it all. He sees and records all the good points but does not try to avoid the conclusion that the cost of retaining this power has been too great; that England's recipe for success will not last for ever. There is insanity recorded in these pages as much as in any other part of the book. It is a refreshing piece of cool criticism.

Russell Owen, on explorers and exploration, is merely interesting. John Kieran talks of sport and modern promoting methods, and William R. Conklin of the fall of Tammany at the hands of La Guardia in New York.

The Mild and the Bitter

Preoccupied like the others with "two mad decades, broken treaties, crisis, earthquakes, murders, mutinies, madness," Hugh Byas can still turn aside to take delight in the human qualities he sees in Japan, the blend of mild and bitter.

"Off Stage and On," by Brooks Atkinson, makes no pretence at building or breaking any illusions. Louis Stark revives the story of Sacco and Vanzetti. He reported most of the proceedings and his account easily justifies the repetition. He presents the facts clearly and concisely and shows without saying so that it will do no harm to take them as a reminder of man's duty to be just to man.

On Roosevelt

Arthur Krock boils down the essentials of recent American political history: "As the N.R.A. effort flagged into failure it was to be seen that nature had once again neglected to add the patience, purpose, and high humility of the long term administrator to the fire and force and deep compassion of the gifted and essential reformer."

If history goes the wrong way in the next 10 years (or will it be 10 months, or 10 weeks?) the survivors will indeed think it strange, when they find copies of such books as this, that men could record with such dispassionate interest the story of their own madcap journey. If the lights do come on again in our time it will all seem very unreal.

WE SAW IT HAPPEN. By 13 correspondents of "The New York Times." Edited by H. E. Baldwin and S. Stone. Harrap, London. 372 pp. 8/6 net.