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The Past Masters: Politics and Politicians 1906-1939

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standing of such Arabic political motives and positions as Mr. Sadat's 1977 peace initiatives.

If Patai evinces any failing in his effort, it might be his unmasked admiration for the Arabic culture. However, one should expect any specialist, Arabist or other, to be enthusiastic in a portrayal of the subject of his competence. Overall, the book is very readable and instructive. It clearly is a "must read" candidate for all persons interested in the Arabic peoples and the political plight of the Middle East.

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Macmillan, Harold. *The Past Masters: Politics and Politicians 1906-1939*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975. 240pp.

Harold Macmillan was Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1957 until 1963. Succeeding Sir Anthony Eden in the wake of the Suez debacle, Macmillan ended conscription, accelerated the dissolution of empire, and brought England to prosperity. In the 1959 general election he carried his Conservative Party to triumph with the candid slogan, "You never had it so good." This book, however, is not about his time as Prime Minister, when political cartoons portrayed him in tights and cape as "Super Mac." Rather, it is about politics and politicians as he observed them from the first years of this century, when he was a schoolboy, to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, when he was an experienced politician and Member of Parliament who had not yet, however, served even as a junior minister.

Harold Macmillan's great-grandfather was a poor Scottish crofter, whose son Daniel came south to London and founded a business which eventually became the great British publishing house of Macmillan. Although he has considerable pride in his humble

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Scottish ancestry, Harold Macmillan himself grew up in the eminently comfortable and self-confident world of the British upper classes just before the First World War. In this book, written in his old age (he was born in 1894), Macmillan is inevitably nostalgic for those halcyon days of his youth, when the British Empire was at the peak of its power and prestige. Although admitting that he sees his "past masters" through the haze of passing years, he nevertheless rightly observes that these men moved on a larger stage. Since the end of the Second World War Great Britain has lost her leading role in the world balance of power, and we may wonder whether she will ever again produce statesmen equal to the commanding figures Macmillan describes.

The book abounds in astute comments on British political life. Macmillan reflects on the decline of the great aristocratic Whig tradition in the 19th century, and on the decline of the Whigs inheritors, the Liberal Party, in the 20th century. His dedication to the House of Commons and to the civilities of the British political tradition is obvious. He himself started out in the progressive wing of the Conservative Party, and as Prime Minister he proved a master at carrying out change which was more real than apparent. Never an ideologue, he observes that a successful party of the right must always recruit new strength from the center, and even from the left of center.

The book's fascination, however, lies less in Macmillan's general comments than in his sketches of politicians he has known. His assessments of Britain's two great modern war leaders, David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, are of obvious interest to the readers of this journal. His accounts of the failures of those peacetime Prime Ministers of the late 1930s, Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain, are perhaps even more pertinent today.

Before Lloyd George, British

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political leadership had been the preserve of the privileged, those who were either born to position and riches, or who had achieved academic or professional distinction. Recounting Lloyd George's devastating attacks on hereditary privilege, Macmillan credits him with creating a new type of politician, "the man of the people." Faced with the House of Lords refusal to pass the Liberal Government's 1909 budget, Lloyd George took the offensive against the inherited wealth and power of the peerage. A fully equipped duke, he observed, not only cost as much to keep up as a battleship, but was just as great a terror and lasted longer. An eloquent opponent of the Boer War, Lloyd George as Chancellor of the Exchequer fought vigorously to reduce defense spending right up to 1914. Yet Macmillan describes how in the First World War Lloyd George first created the great Ministry of Munitions and then went on to become the Prime Minister who brought Britain to victory.

In Macmillan's view, Lloyd George proved himself a far better war leader than those British cavalry officers who commanded "the finest body of infantry ever put into the field." Macmillan, of course, was part of that body of infantry, having left Oxford in the golden summer of 1914 just in time to become a subaltern in the Grenadier Guards. Many of his Eton and Oxford contemporaries were killed on the Western Front, and Macmillan just barely survived his wounds on the Somme in 1916. Looking back on that war, Macmillan's admiration for Lloyd George is tempered only by his regret that he never succeeded in imposing his authority on the generals, whose "insatiable appetite for grandiose attacks" produced only minute gains at the price of immense casualties.

Although he considers that Stanley Baldwin was in many respects an admirable peacetime Prime Minister in the 1920s, Macmillan nevertheless con-

cludes that his second administration, from 1935 to 1937, was a disaster for Great Britain. Baldwin's distaste for foreign affairs and his inability to understand defense policy led him to delay the beginning of Britain's rearmament too long, and to conduct it as a "slow motion affair" when he did begin.

Although in his criticism of Stanley Baldwin Macmillan displays a sympathetic insight into his character and temperament, there is no evidence of admiration or affection in his account of Neville Chamberlain's performance as Prime Minister. There is also nothing new in his condemnation. Chamberlain, he explains, believed he had a mission to save world peace, and pursued that mission almost fanatically and in spite of all warnings. Only Hitler's occupation of Prague in March 1939 finally forced even Chamberlain to recognize the bankruptcy of his policy of appeasement. Macmillan does remind us, however, that Chamberlain's policies were generally popular at the time, and that it was Chamberlain's fate "to be at first obsequiously praised and then extravagantly abused."

As for Winston Churchill, Macmillan gives us some personal memories of the great man both in high office in the 1920s and in the political wilderness in the 1930s. Although not disputing that Churchill as Chancellor of the Exchequer made a colossal error in bringing Britain back to the gold standard, Macmillan points out that the pressure for this move from the Treasury and the Bank of England was overwhelming. "I have often since found," he comments, "that when a line of action is said to be supported 'by all responsible men,' it is nearly always dangerous or foolish." Yet to reject conventional wisdom is not always to be right. Churchill's prestige reached its nadir in the early 1930s when he opposed—unsuccessfully, and in retrospect, foolishly—his party's policy toward India. Once he began his campaign for rearmament after the

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1935 general election, however, he began slowly to emerge from his self-imposed political isolation. Yet Churchill was not brought back into office (as First Lord of the Admiralty) until after the outbreak of war in September 1939.

In the years just before the war, Macmillan notes sadly, there were only two giants in the House of Commons, Lloyd George and Churchill, and neither could exert any effective influence upon any party, Liberal, Labour, or Conservative. Lloyd George never saw what was needed, but by the mid-1930s Winston Churchill did. In the light of the missed opportunities and tragic errors of British policy in these years, Macmillan shows us how right Winston Churchill was in calling the Second World War "the unnecessary war."

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Oskenberg, Michel and Oxnam, Robert B. eds. *Dragon and Eagle*. New York: Basic Books, 1978. 384pp.

This collection of 12 essays by prominent American China scholars attempts to explain the basis for future interaction between the two nations by examining the historical background of Sino-American relations. Read individually, the essays are generally informative, if necessarily brief. Together, however, their common schema and subject matter lead to a book which is repetitive and which offers little in the way of fresh ideas.

Oskenberg and Oxnam provide introductions to five of the book's six "parts" (the sixth consists of a single article). The editors have also written three of the essays. The tone is set in the first, introductory, section, where the editors provide the "historical perspective" of Sino-American relations. The components of this interaction—military, economic, political, and cultural—are set forth, to be repeatedly addressed in the following essays.

The section entitled "Mutual Perceptions" contains essays by Warren I. Cohen and Tu Wei-ming. Both articles are well-written, and Cohen makes good use of public opinion polls in discussing American attitudes towards China. The two authors' conclusions are similar and unexceptional: the United States and China have operated and will continue to operate in different cultural and ideological contexts.

The section on "Bilateral Interactions" includes articles by Oskenberg, Lyman P. Van Slyke, Waldo H. Heinrichs, and Stanley B. Lubman. The first of these provides a brief, useful view of the Chinese foreign policymaking apparatus. Van Slyke discusses "Culture, Society, and Technology in Sino-American Relations" but offers no firm, comparative conclusions. Heinrichs attempts to survey the entire history of Sino-American military interactions but is best when discussing the 1950s. He also notes that in 1945 China held only a peripheral position among American foreign interests. Lubman addresses the trade issue and points out the similarity of the present Canton Trade Fair to the 19th-century *co hong* system used by China to control external trade. His attempt to describe China's drive for economic self-sufficiency in the 1950s and 1960s is inconsistent and appears to suffer from poor editing.

The fourth part of *Dragon and Eagle*, "Multilateral Interactions," is the most disappointing section of the book. The reader expects more from the expert Allen S. Whiting than is provided in his "Japan and Sino-American Relations." It would be particularly interesting to know with what reasoning the author concludes that significant Japanese rearmament will not occur. This points up a criticism of the book as a whole: no notes are provided to support the authors' views.

The essay by Steven I. Levine, "The Soviet Factor," is simplistic and subjective. For instance, his view that the