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Extracts from letters to J. W. W.-B. from H. B.

April 21st, 1939.

Just a few lines to go with the "Aquitania". I had a hurried visit this morning lasting only for ten minutes, but I shall see my friend again to-night, which would be too late to write to you. He says that full mobilization against Poland will begin earliest on 10th May. It might be that the Army was able to postpone it for another six weeks, but Hitler has made up his mind to risk a general war for the sake of crushing Poland. As matters stand that decision is unalterable. He realizes that on account of the new foreign policy of England there is no chance for him left after the summer. He and Mussolini will try to get hold of Yugoslavia by way of a veiled Protectorate before the mobilization against Poland begins. I suppose that Mussolini is trying to build up a predominance in the Balkans against the new British policy but will not go further. Judging from his and Ciano's speech he does not seem to be inclined to do more for Hitler than to immobilize a large part of the French and Italian forces, and to raise his price or fish in troubled waters. That would, of course, not prevent him from stirring up the fighting mood of Hitler, as that would increase his power and deliver him from the danger of a permanent strategical preponderance of Nazi Germany at his Northern Frontiers.

W. H. B. Bennett. April 21.

I think in this his policy he has been strengthened by the Roosevelt message and by the fact that he realizes that Mr. Chamberlain is no longer more than a figurehead in British foreign policy. Winston Churchill was cheered enormously when he came to speak at a dinner of the British Industrialists. The cheering was so pronounced that it looked like a demonstration against Mr. Chamberlain. I believe that the message of President Roosevelt combined with the despatching of the Fleet to the Pacific has had a very salubrious effect upon the Japanese. In fact, their position is at least as desperate as that of Hitler; for both nothing else is left than to risk the whole future of their country or else to back down, with unavoidable internal reactions. Mussolini is the only one who is still able to escape the necessity of passing between Scylla and Charybdis.

There are well-informed and serious people in Germany who believe that there will be riots as soon as the mobilization begins. Of course I am not so sure about this, but revolts will break out after the first military set-back. The number of deserters at the Polish Frontier is extraordinarily high already now. The Polish pretend that a fortnight ago the men of one whole battery, including the non-commissioned officers, deserted from Silesia to Poland. However that may be, there is no doubt about it that the French Secret Service, especially M. Comert,

is working hard together with German emigrants to lay the foundations for a great Danubian Confederation from the "Mündung bis zur Quelle". It is the same scheme already tried once before in the years after the war. The friends of Gerald Palmer and others assured me that England would not have anything to do with such schemes, but I have my doubts. As soon as the first German bombs are dropped over London brutal instincts will prevail here also and no reasonable people will have any power left in that respect.

April 24th, 1939.

From all that I heard from these visitors there can be no longer any doubt about the fact that earliest the 10th of May, latest the beginning of July, the drive against Poland will begin. The Army is only able to make opposition against a too early term but not against the adventure as such. Generaloberst von Bock, Commander-in-Chief of an Army group, has now been put upon the retired list as well. He was still good. Now with the exception of a very few, the General Staff officers are acquiescing in what Hitler says. Even one of the younger General Staff officers whom I still knew and who had still some experience from the last war has said recently that he gave up any critic after he heard that France and England did not take action

after the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia which gave them guns, ammunition and supplies for 40 divisions which so far largely existed only as cadres. He said if he had been the British or French Prime Minister, he would have rather committed suicide than to accept this new conquest as an accomplished fact without further reaction.

These decent people must get bewildered. I heard that Bonnet had arranged in January with Ribbentrop to sell to Germany 1,200,000 t. of wheat. During the last three months the export of scrap, iron and nonferrous metals from England to Germany was on a record scale. There are now such enormous stocks of grain in Germany that in spite of the fact that the drill halls of all schools are full of grain, the big estates have not been able to sell their harvest as the Government has no more room left for storing it.

The lead in international politics in the democratic camp is now definitely with France. I saw Margerie when I went to get my French visa for my journey to Switzerland. He shares my pessimism absolutely and said that there is hardly any chance to avoid war. He had the confidence now that the French Generals were preparing themselves for a long war of attrition -- 10 years he said smiling -- and that all hopes for a quick victory had gone except that they all thought that the morale of the German Army was a terribly low one. That seems to be true unfortunately. He tried

to explain to me that the main fault of the panic in September was with the French politicians who refused to give any hint last September even to suggestive questions put to them by Ch. and Sir John Simon if they were prepared to fight if Hitler asked for more than an autonomy for the Sudeten Germans. He said if the war really came, about which he had no longer any doubts, he was afraid that there would be just enough left of the French youth to make a victory parade at the Champs Elysees. What depresses me so much is that people like him who are very decent talk such things apparently without any emotion, perhaps because they prefer an end to the strain of the last years to any faint hope of saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

I was very interested in what you wrote about your conversations with Benes. I am glad he agreed with you about the turning point in 1932. I believe he is now again in a role for which he is better fitted than for constructive statesmanship. The Czechs are doing well in pinpricking demonstrations. They are the most gifted nation for that. But if Mussolini and Hitler win Jugoslavia over and can concentrate against Poland and Rumania they have to wait a long time before getting their freedom back.

But as regards Mussolini's policy, I have some doubt left if it is really a policy in loyal concordance with Hitler. I would be very sure of it and was so until to-day when reading in "The Times" that Mussolini is quite definitely following

a policy which increases his own power in relation to the Nazis. "The Times" have been always wrong which seems to be in England an essential condition to keep the favour of the public in politics.

The Nazis say that Mussolini had his first stroke -- if I remember well -- on Easter. They also tell some other nasty things about him. However that may be, there is no doubt that his voice in his speech at the laying of the cornerstone of the Exhibition was so weak and low that I was struck very much not having then heard these other news.

My heart is suffering even physically each hour of the day when I come to think with what brutality the German people will be treated if something similar happens or if the war is lost. The French have already made up their mind for destroying the German Reich for ever, and that is the fear of all these fine patriots who came to see me. But when I escaped so often during the war in a most miraculous way death and captivity against all expectations of my commanders, I often said to myself I shall have to go through a purgatory for that all my lifetime.