

PAPERBOUNDS

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EUROPE OF THE DICTATORS: 1919–1945. By Elizabeth Wiskemann. 286 pp. \$4.95

Cornell reprints, 1980

The intricacies of modern European history seem to defy condensation. Yet these volumes, by British and French scholars, clear that hurdle neatly. Complete with maps and reading lists, Cornell's "History of Europe" series illuminates the political, social, economic, and intellectual shifts during five critical eras. From the so-called Defenestration of Prague in 1618—during which Protestant Bohemian legislators, angry at the dissolution of their parliament, hurled two Catholic regency officials from the royal palace windows—to the 1945 occupation of Berlin by the victorious Allies, war, revolution, and upheaval dominated European experience. Parker opens the saga by quoting a dissatisfied 17th-century Muscovite taxpayer: "The whole world is shaking, and the people are troubled." Wiskemann ends it with the birth of the United Nations as the Cold War dawns.

THE GREAT HUNGER: Ireland, 1845–1849. By Cecil Woodham-Smith. Dutton reprint, 1980. 510 pp. \$8.95

The luck of the Irish, such as it was, ran out in 1845. When the peasants harvested black potatoes that summer, English Prime Minister Robert Peel shipped grain

to them. But there were few harbors in which to unload it, few mills to grind it, and few wives who knew how to use it for bread and porridge. Peel's other relief schemes included fattening Irish income via public works projects. Opposing him were Parliament (made up of "fervent" believers in laissez faire government) and Britain's formidable Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, Charles Edward Trevelyan. Ireland's problem, opined Trevelyan, was "not the physical evil of the famine, but the moral evil of a selfish, perverse and turbulent" people. Contemptuously, Parliament did fund various relief efforts. But in 1846, with another blighted crop in Irish fields, "money was useless"; there was no food to buy. Thousands of Irishmen fled, with 37,000 settling in Boston, Mass., in 1847 alone. That summer, England washed its hands of the disaster. All aid ceased. The great famine, concludes British historian Woodham-Smith, hardened the enmity that had "lain like a sword" between England and Ireland for centuries.

THE ITALIAN PAINTERS OF THE RENAISSANCE. By Bernard Berenson. Cornell reprint, 1980. 488 pp. \$14.95

Lithuanian-born, Harvard-educated, Bernard Berenson (1865–1959) devoted his life to attributing Renaissance paintings to the correct artists. His method was unique. He ignored written evidence (signatures, bills of sale) and concentrated on painting style—the way an artist shaped ears or knuckles, for example. Berenson's word on a painting satisfied any art dealer or buyer; his name and "connoisseurship" became synonymous. In these four essays (accompanied by 400 black-and-white plates), written between 1894 and 1907, Berenson delineates the