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**NEW TITLES**


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*History***A PERSONAL HISTORY**

by A. J. P. Taylor  
Atheneum, 1983  
278 pp. \$14.95

Taylor, 77, a British historian, has enjoyed both academic acclaim and general popularity during his lifetime. While some colleagues disparaged his success as a newspaper columnist and television debater, none could deny that he was a master of his profession. Taylor's 27 books are scholarly, readable and often provocative. In *The Origins of the Second World War* (1961), he argued that the Great Powers stumbled into a conflict because of diplomatic blunders on *both* sides. The story of his solitary and bookish life, from his Lancashire boyhood to his career as a Manchester and Oxford don, is less absorbing. But as a picture of mandarin irresponsibility, it is instructive. Taylor's reflections on the political events that shaped this century and his own life seem willfully iconoclastic: The man "who was never troubled by communism" believed that Stalin's first Five-Year Plan was nothing more than "socialism in action"; Britain's intervention in the Suez Crisis in 1956 was "comparable to Hitler's invasion of Poland"; the Soviet invasion of Hungary (1956) was all for the better. Taylor rehashes old academic squabbles and indulges in disingenuous self-mockery, claiming that he was regarded "as pretty much of a joke" in school, that he learned "precisely nothing" while a student at Oxford, and that he never became a great historian. But most of Taylor's works prove otherwise.

**LANDSCAPE  
TURNED RED:**

**The Battle of Antietam**  
by Stephen W. Sears  
Ticknor & Fields, 1983  
431 pp. \$17.95

On the sunny morning of September 17, 1862, George B. McClellan's Army of the Potomac met Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia outside the village of Antietam, Maryland. Twelve hours later, 22,719 Americans lay dead or wounded, casualties of a day of fierce, inconclusive struggle, a day that still ranks as the bloodiest in American history. Sears, a former *American Heritage* editor,



supplements his vivid chronicle of the battle and the maneuvers leading up to it with excerpts from regimental diaries and recently discovered letters from survivors of the engagement. Southern audacity and Northern ineptitude enabled the shoeless, underfed Confederates to punish a larger, better-equipped Federal force. McClellan, "Little Mac" to his troops, "Tardy George" to his critics, failed to exploit his two-to-one advantage in troop strength, even when presented with a captured copy of the Southern order of battle. "His deep concern for his men," writes Sears, "his fixation with avoiding casualties, revealed a sensitivity of nature admirable in most of life's pursuits but crippling when making war." Lee's battered army, still intact, slipped south across the Potomac. But the battle's political effects helped to seal the fate of the Confederacy. For the Union, avoiding total defeat was in itself a victory, and, thus encouraged, Lincoln's fractious cabinet members papered over their disputes. England and France, starved of cotton and sympathetic to the South, were waiting for another Northern defeat as the occasion to recognize the secessionist government. Lee's narrow escape from disaster at Antietam persuaded them to remain aloof.

**THE RETURN OF  
MARTIN GUERRE**  
by Natalie Zemon Davis  
Harvard, 1983  
162 pp. \$15

In the 1983 film *The Return of Martin Guerre*, set in rural 16th-century France, Bertrande, a beautiful peasant woman, welcomes home her husband, Martin, after a mysterious eight-year absence. Four years later, Martin's uncle and other relatives accuse him of being an impostor. Near the end of the ensuing trial at the Criminal Chamber of Toulouse, a man claiming to be the real Martin enters dramatically. The court finds against the "husband" of four years, sentencing him to be hanged. Improbable as it may seem, the plot is based squarely on fact. Princeton historian Natalie Davis, the film's consultant, was nevertheless troubled by certain departures from the surviving record, and she resolved to "give this arresting tale its first full-scale historical treatment." Among the questions she hoped