

a good background for the understanding of Soviet Foreign policy.

Dr. Schlesinger has much that is stimulating to say on Marxist theory. In answering the question: Is Soviet theory and practice really Marxist to-day? he points out very truly that "some of the divergences supposed, by most observers, to exist between Stalinist and original Marxist ideology are based upon misunderstandings of the Marxist theory current in the Western Labour movement."

He discovers evidence, however, of determinism and crudely mechanistic ideas as to the entirely derivative character of the institutional and ideological superstructure, the existence of which among any influential circles is debatable. Nor is his division of Marxism into a materialist side which overstates objective limitations to action, and an idealist side which emphasises inevitable change and transformation, quite convincing. But it is a pleasure even to disagree with Dr. Schlesinger because of the essential reasonableness and fairness of his approach.

It would be impossible indeed in a book which honestly faces up to so many of the real difficulties in Soviet understanding to find no errors of interpretation or mistaken judgments. They detract little from this invaluable book—in fact, they stimulate the kind of discussion and revaluation that is above all things necessary in the present condition of extreme tension in Anglo-Soviet relations.

JOHN LEWIS.

The Great Cossack. By Cecil Field.
(Herbert Jenkins, Ltd. 7s. 6d.)

DESPITE an evident interest in the subject and a brave attempt to bring Sten'ka Razin to life, Mr. Cecil Field's "The Great Cossack" sacrifices too much of the historically significant for the obviously picturesque.

Mr. Field's research—if his bibliographia of fourteen books is any indication—is extremely limited. Except for a book published as recently as 1940, there is nothing more contemporary than 1931. Nor is there anything to show that the author has ventured into the rich field of Soviet literature concerned with the Sten'ka Razin rebellion. Much of the history belongs to the "primer" versions, and Mr. Field has a fondness for description of externals, which tends to distract from the narrative rather than supplement it.

The Sten'ka Razin of Mr. Field's portrayal remains a nebulous, violent, colourful personality—the epitome of the popular song, rather than a force which for a brief half decade, directed the revolutionary energies of the Don Cossacks and peasantry against the impositions of serfdom. There is little to show why when Razin and his men sailed up the Volga, the "streltsi" (Tsar's soldiers) and the peasantry joined him, or why, when the cossacks besieged Astrakhan and Tsaritsin, the people opened the gates to the "Ataman of the Poor". "It is no rare thing", says Struys ("The Voyages and Travels of John Struys", London, 1684) "to see the Rabble

assemble together in heaps, and before the doors of the magistrates, to cry out with bitter, infamous railings: 'Now, now the times begin to alter, it will be our turn next to Lord it, you villains come out and show yourselves to the world . . .'".

Perhaps if Mr. Field had told us why this was "no rare thing", and had provided something of an economic guide to the labyrinth of conflicting personalities, aims, and conditions of this period of Russian history, the historical significance of the Great Cossack would have stood out in bolder and clearer relief. As it is, we can hope this monogram of 125 pages is but the prelude of a more serious and richer study which Mr. Field's patience and interest in the subject could well provide.

DAVID TORRELL.

Catherine the Great and the Expansion of Russia. By Gladys Scott Thomson.
(English University Press. 5s.)

THIS book, the only volume planned so far in the series "Teach Yourself History", which deals with the political history of pre-revolutionary Russia, has been criticised on the ground that the author does not make use of Russian sources and makes an eclectic choice of the spelling of proper names.

I agree that it is rather shameful that there are so few English historians who know Russian, but it would be a pity for all study of Russian history to cease until this gap in the equipment of Mr. Rowse's team is made good. It is strange, however, that Miss Thomson does not mention either the translations of Klyuchevsky or of Pokrovsky that are easily obtainable.

Klyuchevsky is particularly enlightening on this period when serfdom was more firmly nailed down on the Russian people, and the gentry lived intellectually as well as physically on the labour of others. Pokrovsky is misleading in that he exaggerates the role of merchant capital and insists that it gave rise to new state forms, but he nevertheless gives valuable detail on the economic history of Russia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The main criticism of the book, despite the fact that it is very readable, is that it does not fulfil the aim of the series which is, according to the general introduction, to induce the general public to learn from history and in particular to increase its understanding of present politics by the study of past development. Miss Thomson is given a difficult task in that she has, as Mr. Rowse explains, "by way of a biography of a great man to open up a significant historical theme" which involves her in the view expressed on the cover of the book that Catherine the Great was "the driving force of the expansion behind which lay eight hundred years of history". But was she really the driving force? Was she much more than the tool of the Russian nobility to whom one-and-a-half millions of state peasants were transferred during the reign?

In 1762 Catherine's husband Peter III had finally released all members of the nobility from the obligation to serve the state; henceforth

they held their land unconditionally while the burdens of serfdom grew heavier and the institution spread into new provinces of Russia. Catherine could make a friend of Diderot; she could correspond with Voltaire; she could even refuse to torture state prisoners, but she could do nothing against the interests of the gentry. Sometimes Miss Thomson seems to agree that Catherine was powerless in certain fields. After describing the conditions of workers and peasants which caused the rebellion of Pugachev, she says that Catherine was not averse to proposing reforms but could not carry them through. Among the factors that prevented her from doing so was "her own dependence on the prejudices of those who helped her to attain the throne and were now keeping her there."

The position of the gentry seems to me to be the key to the period in foreign policy and cultural development as well as being the reason for the failure to combat serfdom. The gentry were willing for the Tsarina to assume the role of champion of the Orthodox in Poland and Turkey if it meant more land for them; the role did not prevent Catherine from confiscating the lands of the Church in Russia, a move from which they also benefited. The re-conquest of the former Russian lands of Eastern Poland was a legitimate Russian ambition, but it was not to the permanent interests of the Russian peoples to allow the partition of Poland to the aggrandisement of the German powers. Catherine and her backers were at first too occupied in Turkey and with Pugachev to prevent it, and later too greedy for land to desist. The author describes the course of foreign policy clearly and without unnecessary detail, though there seems no good reason for separating the chapters dealing with it, and the general public would gain more if there were a series of maps in the text rather than one map on the end papers showing Russian expansion through the reign.

Despite some encouragement to Russian institutions, including the founding of a girls' school by Catherine, the culture of the upper classes remained predominantly French, as hers was. The court aped Versailles and the nobility admired and followed their French counterparts. Catherine could draw up her instructions to the Assembly, in which she expressed sentiments of enlightenment in the style of Montesquien and Voltaire and at the same time hand over whole villages to the nobility, just as they could weep over a French novel and then beat their peasants to within an inch of their lives. This deep conflict between theory and practice accounts for the frustration and melancholy of every sensitive Russian intellectual of the nineteenth century.

What is really required for the understanding of this period of Russian history is a study of the composition of the class I have briefly called the gentry, of what divisions there were in it of its relationship to the bureaucracy and the great merchants. It might be brought out more clearly by the history of some individual Russian family such as Miss Scott Thomson has given us in her study of the Bedfords. The reader would then see in detail how such a typical family built up its fortunes, how it brought up the children, what they read, and what were their daily relationships with the peasants of Russia by whom, together with the workers of the towns, the New Russia was to be built.

JOAN BROWNE.

Fyodor Dostoevski, by J. A. T. Lloyd. 207 pages, 12s. 6d. (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1946.)

Dostoevski, by John Cowper Powys. 208 pages, 7s. 6d. (John Lane the Bodley Head, 1946.)

LAST year marked the centenary of the publication of Dostoevski's *Poor Folk*—the book which in a moment placed its author among the great; and it was but natural that both in the U.S.S.R. and in this country special critical and biographical work should be loosed upon a world which had already had plenty to read on this subject.

Broadly speaking, both the two books before us and the work done in Russia had somewhat the same general aims—to assess and discuss in the light of the contemporary political and social situation the permanent significance of Dostoevski. Yet how different is the impression made by the Soviet and the British critics, while heartily agreeing as to the fact that Dostoevski was a great novelist. And the most obvious criticism to be made on both the British books is that their authors seem precluded by the linguistic barrier from that knowledge of the work of their Soviet colleagues which might have given to their work that sense of proportion and perspective of which our literary criticism of Russian literature stands so much in need.

What, then, it may be asked, is the reason for the production of these two books? It may perhaps justly be answered that Mr. Lloyd seeks to present new biographical material (such as the translated work of the novelist's daughter), and that Mr. Powys—who has a mind at once deep and vigorous—wishes to show as a legitimate form of literary criticism how profoundly real has been Dostoevski's influence on the shaping of himself. For, while Mr. Lloyd gives us a biography, Mr. Powys writes a purely subjective series of essays on the impact of Dostoevski's mind on his own. The books may, therefore, be regarded as in some sort complementary.

Mr. Lloyd's book on Dostoevski, *A Great Russian Realist*, which attempted a critical estimate, is to a large extent served up again in the present biographical work, despite the author's assurance in a prefatory note. The "immense amount of accumulated material" referred to in the same note is in fact little more than such biographical work as has become available in English or French translations in the interval between the two books. Neither the original German of Dostoevski's daughter (her work on her father appeared at Zurich in 1920), nor the new *Letters of the Dostoevskis* published at Moscow in 1939, nor the biographical studies of such men as Grossman and Yemilov of late years in Russia, nor the more ephemeral journalistic articles which show the present Soviet attitude, have been made use of; and the "Bibliography" at the end of the book clearly indicates the limitations of its sources.

After a sketch of the "background", Mr. Lloyd traces Dostoevski's personal and literary career in a series of chapters which blend fact with literary criticism and illustrate fairly copiously from the novels. Then follows a