



Page 6

A family name that sounds like

THE ARMS OF KRUPP, 1587-1968. By William Manchester. Illustrated. Little, Brown. 976 pp. \$12.50.

By Anthony Hartley

From *The Death of a President* to a study of merchants of death is perhaps a natural transition. More important, Mr. Manchester's overripe prose finds a subject suited to it in the baroque history of the Krupp family — a sort of *Buddenbrooks* with Wagnerian overtones. From the hard-working but eccentric genius, Alfred Krupp, who was the real founder of the great armaments house, through the homosexual Fritz, driven to suicide by scandal, to Alfried Krupp who was judged at Nuremberg and then recovered the family fortunes — only to run the firm into the ground through a combination of old-fashioned management and over-ambitiousness — it is all a little like Mann's demonstration that nothing is so destructive of a patrician bourgeoisie as excessive talent. The last Krupp, Arndt von Bohlen und Halbach, is apparently one of the jet set. It is hard

to blame him. His forebears do not seem to have enjoyed themselves much.

What are we to think of this dynasty who built themselves a family residence of great luxury and equally

Anthony Hartley is the editor of Interplay and a contributing editor of Encounter.

BOOK WORLD December 1, 1968

a cannonball hitting the earth

extreme ugliness, who were kind to their workmen and brutally indifferent to the sufferings of their enslaved foreign workers during the Second World War? To begin with they were merchants. Alfred Krupp is commonly associated with the rise of Prussia but when, at the time of the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, Roon, the Prussian war minister, tried to get an undertaking from him not to deliver cannon already ordered by the Austrians, he received a very elusive answer. But soon the family was closely associated with the pseudo-medieval absurdities of Wilhelmian Germany, and the fact that it received official (not to say imperial) protection at the time of Fritz Krupp's scandal and the later revelation that the firm had been employing its own agents inside the Ministry of War implied a special position within the empire. When World War I came, the reigning Krupp, Gustav, noted in his journal: "The greater the foe the greater the honor" — a sentiment ridiculously typical of the ponderous patriotism of a moment when the Kaiser's Germany had united against it practically all possible enemies.

The enemies were too numerous, and Gustav Krupp soon had to cope with the French occupation of the Ruhr. Later the firm was to recover its traditional role in secret production of war material for Seeckt's elite Reichswehr. Gustav Krupp seems to have been less implicated than a Stinnes or a Hugenberg in Hitler's rise to power. But his attitude showed the family's tra-

ditional determination to make the best of a nationalist regime, which would certainly require the services of the machine shops of Essen. Alfred Krupp, his son, had been associated with the Nazis as a student and became a party member in 1938, but his political activity does not appear to have been very great. The Krupp family conformed to the Nazi regime and made profits out of it. What this meant in the way of brutality to foreign workers, exploitation of occupied countries and implication in appalling crimes was to become clear at Nuremberg. In a way the Krupp story is that of German nationalism: a failure to appreciate that there are some things that must not be done for one's country.

The trial of Alfred Krupp, his subsequent release by the American High Commissioner in Germany, John J. McCloy, and the restoration of his property are still controversial subjects — and not only in Germany. Manchester does not throw much light on Alfred's degree of personal responsibility for what was done in Krupp's name during the Nazi *Götterdämmerung*. Any attempt at judgment is lost in a sea of determinedly colorful prose, which later produces the obviously false description of Alfred as the "most powerful man in the Common Market." To assess the guilt of any prominent German who stayed in Germany under Hitler is a very difficult task. Mr. Manchester has certainly not brought it off.

The phrase "merchants of death" is evocative and

invites the harshest verdict, but looking at the Krupp history with its progression from munitions to steel-works in India and bridge-building in East Europe, one wonders whether countries do not get the capitalists they deserve. It is as if the firm reflected the state of German history in the 19th and 20th centuries rather than having been a principal cause of it. The case against Krupp is the case for businessmen to examine their presuppositions, and it is not only in Germany that they should do so. Anyone engaged in organizing a huge company will tend to regard that company and its freedom to operate as it wishes as the most important end of life. This, of course, is a false assumption and, if it is pursued under all circumstances, one which will lead those holding it into crime. In this respect the Krupp story is not peculiar to Germany, however extreme an example it may be. Industrialists, like the rest of us, are part social symptom, part social cause. For all their talent, the Krupps lacked the ability to see what they were doing with their unquestionable power. What they finally did was to take part in the dance of death of the traditional nationalist paternalism which they valued. Their final symbol is Gustav Krupp, paralyzed in a local inn, in the autumn of 1945, unable to comprehend the devastation that had overtaken Germany.

Attached to Manchester's book is an enormous bibliography, which is like a gangster's funeral: full of decoration that seems more pretentious than useful. *