

Old high hat diplomacy

by Emanuel Litvinoff

THE shocking collapse of Summit diplomacy in Paris makes Charles Thayer's book **Diplomat** (Michael Joseph, 25s) seem delightfully—and nostalgically—old-fashioned. Here is exposed the upholstered interior of the world of rank, protocol, and diplomatic privilege, where policies are promoted with inflexible irony and the international chancelleries tinkle with chandeliered dismay at the curt bow of an offended ambassador. It is, as they say, a sobering thought that Mr Khrushchev would never have been entrusted with the responsibilities of a Third Secretary of Chancery by any of Mr Thayer's schools for diplomatists. It is equally sobering to realise that the world as it is to-day was made with few of the contrivances of traditional diplomacy, but by a series of bloody dismemberments at Versailles, Geneva, Yalta, and elsewhere.

Perhaps this points to the need to return to traditional diplomatic practice, but is it possible? Mr Thayer's witty, scholarly dissertation on the history and practice of the methods of foreign policy negotiation known as diplomacy is an elegant defence, but it is not persuasive. The old-fashioned ambassador employed his arts to preserve peace, but in the modern world of strident and irreconcilable rivalries the aim of diplomacy has been to win wars. We have no peace to preserve and the avowed intention of the contending Powers is to win advantages for themselves by every means short of mutual annihilation. In this phase the career diplomatist becomes an often subordinate unit in psychological warfare, speaking mild civilities to the enemy while his masters bombard the ether with truculent propaganda, unloose their sputniks and rockets, conduct nuclear experiments and contend for the support of lesser Powers and dissident minorities.

This is not Mr Thayer's view. While he does not specifically concern himself with the problems created by the emergence of super powers and modern techniques of war—which have deprived statesmen of their ultimate foreign policy weapon—he does consider the relationship of scientific intelligence and propaganda to diplomacy. He is firmly of the opinion that "new techniques of intelligence will remain a useful auxiliary of, but never a substitute for, the established methods of diplomatic intelligence gathering, reporting, and evaluation." and that propaganda is "the cowcatcher of diplomacy, attached integrally to it and designed essentially to sweep the impediments from the path of the man who is implementing policy—the diplomatist. Alone, propaganda has no creative force. It cannot forge alliances without friends or spark revolutions to annihilate our enemies. But as the handmaiden of diplomacy . . . it can and frequently has furthered our international interests."

But, surely, the point here is that science, technology, psychological warfare, and the historical developments they have brought about have so changed the world we live in that traditional methods of settling international differences are no longer effective. The frock-coated ambassador riding in his ornamental state coach to present his engraved credentials is a colourful, but inconsequential, symbol of pre-nuclear diplomacy.