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First World War

THROUGH THE FOG OF WAR. By Liddell Hart. New York: Random House. 1938. \$2.50.

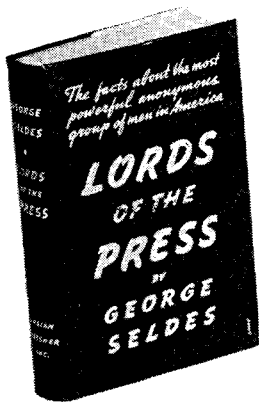
Reviewed by LT.-COL. DONALD ARMSTRONG

AT first glance this survey of the World War appears to be an incongruous medley of history and biography with an examination of certain personal memoirs and detailed considerations of a few campaigns and episodes. Nevertheless it achieves unity in its constant search for truth. It extends the boundaries and enlarges the horizons of military history by exploring the souls of leaders against a background provided by an unusually successful condensation of the story of the World War. In Haig Captain Hart finds the "quintessence of pre-war Britain." His admirable qualities of character and his innate intelligence were unfortunately hampered by his education and environment. Foch never understood the growing power of defense over attack. He constantly underestimated the material factor of armament and put his predominant faith in moral power. "As a conductor of war he only rivaled Napoleon in the qualities which brought Napoleon to St. Helena. As a commander of armies he rivaled Napoleon in will, but not in art." Of Joffre he writes, "heavy in body and intellect, he was obviously no Cassius." Ludendorff "is an outstanding lesson in the dangers of the expert who has so concentrated on his own department that he is unable to see the part in relation to the whole. He proclaimed the doctrine of national war while regarding it as merely a super-size soldiers' war." His comments on Generals Pershing and March are not always flattering, but his views are usually supported by citation of chapter and verse from their writings.

Liddell Hart is frequently blamed for advocating an exclusively defensive policy and for apparently assuming that battles can be fought without risk to human life or that wars can be won without battles. Such distortion of his teachings is absurd. This book makes clearer than ever his conception of war. For Britain itself, policy should be based on applying economic pressure through sea power. For the success of an offensive the vital quality is surprise. Above all the most effective form of warfare is the defensive-offensive. This plan allows the enemy to exhaust himself in a fruitless assault and then launches a counterstroke against his worn out forces. Examine our Civil War if you want confirmation of the soundness of these views. Or go back two thousand years to Caesar's strategy and learn that his success was based on these same concepts.

The professional soldier sometimes finds Captain Hart's medicine extremely bitter to swallow, but it is salutary for him as well as for the layman. For the will to victory is essential for winning a war, but the spirit of sacrifice must be backed by adequate armaments and above all by intelligent leadership. This leadership will be sounder if the lessons of this book, which is deeply sincere, brilliantly written, and most convincing, are acknowledged.

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An Irish Democrat

KING OF THE BEGGARS. By Seán O'Faoláin. New York: The Viking Press. 1938. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ERNEST BOYD

AS one rightfully expected, if any Irish Catholic of Mr. O'Faoláin's generation ever wrote a life of Daniel O'Connell, it would differ sharply from its predecessors. O'Connell, "the Liberator," owes his chief claim to fame to his advocacy of the movement which culminated in the Emancipation of the Catholics in Ireland in 1829. It is characteristic of this volume that, while the agitation for Emancipation runs through some two hundred and forty of its more than three hundred pages, the reader who consults the index in the hope of finding out when the Bill was passed will see no reference to "Catholic Emancipation," and the passing of the Bill itself is mentioned rather casually and without the precision of the conventional historian as to dates. Mr. O'Faoláin has preferred to present O'Connell as the founder of modern Irish democracy and to regard Catholic Emancipation as an incidental part of the whole process of emancipating modern Ireland. So much sentiment has been expended on the old Gaelic order in Ireland, which ended finally with the defeat of James II at the Battle of the Boyne and the Siege of Limerick, that Mr. O'Faoláin's realistic summary of the fruits of that Gaelic civilization and especially of the literature in its last phase, will provoke certain sentimentalists.

Although Mr. O'Faoláin presents O'Connell as the protagonist in the drama of the rise of democracy in Ireland—which has been essentially a struggle against England and Protestantism—he does not gloss over the defects of his hero, which were many and often irreconcilable with what other countries would define as heroic or democratic. A lot of the history which is necessary to an understanding of this book is obscure or unknown to most American readers. Yet, there is one factor in O'Connell's story which they will easily grasp, one which I might never have appreciated had I not come to this country—or rather, to New York. Mr. O'Faoláin says frankly "he was a Tammany lawyer and a great patriot," that all his life "he twisted and dodged, canted and recanted." His money-making abilities, his utter ruthlessness in argument, his personal physical courage, his delight in manipulating mobs, his shifty, tortuous, dishonest legal mind, his unscrupulous opportunism, made of him a super-Tammany man, or a Tammany superman. Had he come here after the Famine, as half the population did, he would assuredly have found an honored place in the Wigwam and merit a chapter like that consecrated to Tweed in Bryce's "American Commonwealth."

Mr. O'Faoláin, as I have said, does not spare O'Connell, but regards his faults as the result of circumstances and as redeemed by what he accomplished. It is a sign of the new times that so distinguished a figure of the new generation of Irish writers should make him the subject of one of the finest Irish biographies, packed with learning and information.