

# Of the Past and for the Future

*IDEAS FOR THE ICE AGE.* By Max Lerner. New York: Viking Press. 1941. 432 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by FRANK KINGDON

**M**R. LERNER'S facile mind probes the whole contemporary scene in these fifty-three articles and general essays written for the most part during the past two years and now republished with occasional footnotes to bring them up to date.

He is acutely aware of the social revolution through which we are living, and sees the war correctly as one phase of the struggle for power within the revolutionary cycle. At the level of ideas Nazism represents a revolution of irrationality with a definite appeal to the unreason, a historic counter-movement against the Renaissance which began as a revival of learning and reached its political fruition in the democratic society resting upon the appeal to reason. Contemporary totalitarianism is the projection not so much of disillusionment with democratic machinery as of rejection of faith in the dignity of man as man. Darwin convinced us that man is a little higher than the animals rather than a little lower than the angels; Freud uncovered the essentially sub-rational bases of human behavior; and impersonal science has given us machines that dwarf us and can destroy us wholesale. The insights of Darwin and Freud have been translated into a cynicism neither of them would have countenanced and this cynicism in the service of the lust for power has made the machine its unprecedented engine of merciless conquest. In totalitarian eyes faith is romanticism and men are instruments to be manipulated for ambitious and selfish ends. Thus Nazi-fascism strikes at the core of democracy, and democracy can meet it dynamically only by rediscovering and revitalizing its own inner drives. Can it do this? Mr. Lerner believes that it can and suggests how. He pleads for tough-mindedness and is specific enough in his proposals to point the way a tough-minded democracy must take.

An interesting feature of the book, and one that sheds a flood of light on Mr. Lerner's own habits of thought, is the second section which is devoted to sketches of Machiavelli, Justice Holmes, Randolph Bourne, and Franz Kafka. At the two extremes are Machiavelli, the advocate of cold political



Irwin Edman



Max Lerner

power, and Kafka, the philosophical and religious novelist. Between them, almost as mediators, Lerner puts Holmes, the humanistic conservative, and Bourne, the humanistic radical. He finds his most compatible subject in Bourne, with the result that this sketch is the best single chapter in the book.

The whole volume is a brilliantly written exposition of a free intelligence flinging against the threatening ice-age of unreason the bright darts and arrows of independent thought. Justice Holmes once wrote: "Between two groups that want to make inconsistent kinds of worlds I see no remedy except force." Mr. Lerner accepts the uncompromising alternative and takes his stand for his kind of world with persuasive conviction. His book makes stimulating reading.

*FOUNTAINHEADS OF FREEDOM.*

By Irwin Edman, with the Collaboration of Herbert W. Schneider. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock. 1941. 563 pp., and index. \$3.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE SCHUSTER

**R**EALIZING that for many persons democracy is something relatively modern, and therefore possibly of only temporary significance to the race, Professor Edman set to work with the commendable intention of showing that the democratic spirit is of ancient and respectable ancestry. His book offers a sort of genealogy of freedom. A succinct but still generously discursive critical essay finds that legal principles based on the assumption that man is a person thriving on such liberty as his circumstances will permit him to acquire are present in the Jewish, Greek, and Christian traditions. Nevertheless that which we habitually refer to as "freedom" seems in large measure the achievement of the English, and, indeed, of one particular Englishman, whose name was John Locke. Perhaps this precious concept, for which an unnumbered legion has suffered, was only a step towards the ultimate realization by mankind of broader liberties, to be founded on the emancipation of the many from economic and social inequality. These conclusions Professor Edman illustrates with readings from philosophic and political literature. The selections range from the Bible to Bernard Shaw, and it is evident that the editor who wove them together was keenly aware of the development of a fundamental idea through many and changing intellectual and social concerns.

I have a great regard for Edman's ability to be a painstaking realist in the midst of sometimes quite nebulous and impractical reflections of men's thought on the disturbing problems of their individual and gregarious conduct. What is more necessary than all else, in these years so crowded with foreboding and menace, is awareness of the fact that the race has been carrying on for quite a while, that it has had a relatively clear vision of certain desirable objectives, and that not everything in the record of its attempt to attain to those objectives is either futile or deplorable. This book will communicate to many, especially young people, at least a desire to share in that awareness. It will help to evoke

confidence and courage. Any volume which does that intelligently is, to my way of thinking, a good book.

Even so it could have been a better book, I believe; and to say that is not to be captious but to observe that our heritage is even richer than Edman has shown it to be. There will be no believer in democracy who will quarrel with what is done in this treatise, except inevitably over details, but there may well be some judicious grieving over what is not done. For example: it is one thing to approach "democracy" through the eternal debate between justice and injustice, and another, greater experience to come to it through concern with the whole complex field of human limitations. Hitler can make something of a case for his being the creator of a new and broader democracy if the question of "justice" alone is raised. But when one examines with Von Hügel the wider, more fateful question of suffering, of which injustice is only one form, and then proceeds to consider how our human world has been transfigured by the Judeo-Christian effort to liberate the human spirit through triumph over all limitation and pain, one sees very clearly—more clearly than one can in any other way—the reasons why Hitlerism detests democracy and is bent on destroying the roots from which it springs. Or to take another example: It is one thing to approach "democracy" through the printed pages of more or less professional thinkers, and another to come to it through the popular *mores* and traditions of Europe. What accounts for the radical difference in attitude towards the human person and its liberties which distinguishes the Basque from the Spaniard? Or the Westphalian from the Pomeranian? Or the Swiss from the German? To know of these differences and the reasons for them is to have a deeper faith in the potential vigor of the democratic spirit.

I may add that Edman's careful scholarship is productive of an agreeable feeling that one is on solid ground historically. His book is far from being a rehash of old ideas or a breezy voyage into the half-known and half-imagined. It will give you the essence of what many investigators have found. After having said so much, I am perhaps entitled to wish that in a revision the proof-reading will be attended to anew.

#### For Information on Yugoslavia

Mr. I. S. Ivanovic, Yugoslav member of the inter-allied information center, has set up, for those who are interested in information regarding Yugoslavia, a temporary information service in Room 586 at 11 Broadway, New York City.

## Still the Enigma

THE KREMLIN AND THE PEOPLE.

By Walter Duranty. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock. 1941. 216 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by LOUIS FISCHER

DURANTY says: "the Russo-German Pact of August, 1939 . . . may be said to have raised the curtain for the war." That is a serious indictment of Stalin's policy. "Without the purge," Duranty thinks, "Hitler would never have dared to attack the U.S.S.R." Then the purge was a disaster to Russia although it may, in the end, prove a disaster to Germany too. "From sixty to seventy per cent of the leaders in every field of Soviet activity and endeavor were 'purged,' and of these at least one-third, and perhaps one-half, were shot." Moreover, "Soviet industry had run down badly during the purge." And "I still maintain that the purge did incalculable harm and set back the country's progress a full five years." These are rather grave charges. Yet Duranty intended this thin volume as a song of praise for Stalin.

The book is just a bit too flippant for the tragic subject it attempts to deal with. Half the little volume is devoted to the Moscow trials, confessions, and purges, but I hope Mr. Duranty will pardon me for saying that he makes no new contribution to an understanding of those phenomena. He suggests, by indirection, that in purges Stalin killed Russia's "Fifth Column." Others have recently made similar assertions. It is easy to make the assertion. But neither Duranty nor anybody else proves it.

If it weren't so sad it would be funny: Says Duranty: "Piatakof's execution and the execution of Muralof are to me the strongest proof that they were guilty." What a principle of jurisprudence! He writes that Marshal

Tukhachevsky and the other leading Red Army generals whom Stalin had shot in 1937 "began to dicker with outsiders for foreign aid." Any proof given? No. When the secret police came to arrest one of the generals, Gamarnik, he committed suicide. Duranty regards the suicide as proof that he "had engaged in some deal with the Germans." Well, how do we know Gamarnik committed suicide? The Soviet press said so but that is not objective data. And suppose he did? There had been rumors of the impending arrest of the military chiefs, and Gamarnik knew what it meant, so he might easily have decided to die in honor rather than be one of those of whom it could be said, later, that they confessed. "Remember, too," Duranty urges, "that the Bolshevik 'Generals' were condemned by a court of their peers." But he himself subsequently states that most of those "peers" were then executed. Did they know too much? Duranty thinks the generals were guilty because "the accused all confessed guilt." How does he know they confessed? Maybe they didn't. The trial was secret and all we learned about it came in an official press communique. The Soviet government said they confessed, but nobody who could tell another tale is alive today. Finally, Duranty is of the opinion that "it is unthinkable that Stalin and Voroshilof and Budenny and the Court-Marshal could have sentenced their friends to death unless the proofs of guilt were overwhelming." How naive of the cynic! To me it is most thinkable. A dictator executes or otherwise removes people who, he imagines, may be potential rivals even if they are not guilty and even if they are his "friends."

Duranty accepts the confessions at the Moscow trials as true because the Russians are Russians. That is not a sufficient reason especially since many Russians refused to confess. Were they less Russian? What about the Russians who confessed only after eight months in GPU prisons? Did it take them that long to become Russians?

Duranty pays the Russian army a deserved tribute for its magnificent bravery and stamina. As a result of events not of its own making, the Stalin regime is fighting on the side of the angels. If the angels want to remain angels and remain alive they had better help Stalin. But because Russia is now fighting Germany is no reason for trying to paint Stalin as a lover of Jesus Christ and a sweet moderate who would never kill a fly. The blood of millions of fine young Soviet men cannot whitewash Stalin.



Walter Duranty