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By Maren Elwood

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The Kingdom of Individuals

SPRINGBOARD. Poems 1941-1944. By Louis MacNeice. New York: Random House. 1945. 63 pp. \$1.75.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

NO introduction is needed of Louis MacNeice to readers of contemporary poetry. These poems were written in England, probably in London, during the past war years. Mr. MacNeice is an accomplished technician, and knows how to say almost precisely what he means to say. His apprehension is like that weapon that they tell us was invented in this war, the gun that could shoot round a corner. He is usually shooting round a corner, and surprising you.

A phrase, a line here and there, pin the subject so unerringly to the cork board that one is delighted. The flickering imagination is always present. The raiding bombers are Trolls, and fire is Brother Fire even as he might have been interpreted. The havoc of fire in wartime London has never been more starkly set before us than in this apparently almost playful "Brother Fire." As for his own interior adjustment, Mr. MacNeice regards his daemon as partly monster, as in the haunting "Prayer in Mid-Passage" which reminds us of the brilliant beginnings of certain young English poets of our time.

But what interests me chiefly in this book is the poet's interest in other people, and his ability to make us see other people both inside as well as out. The wartime working girl in "Swing-Song" is a simple type, though the very lilt of that little song looks a lot easier than it is. So does "Nuts in May." But the man in "Bottleneck" is anything but a simple type. "The Conscript," "The Mixer," "Schizophrenia," "Alcohol," and "The Libertine" present people encountering various kinds of disaster against which only the Conscript triumphs because

though on the flat his life has no Promise but of diminishing return,
By feeling down and upwards he can divine
That dignity which far above him burns
In stars that yet are his and which below
Stands rooted like a dolmen in his spine.

Then there are "The Satirist," and the man in "This Way Out," with the striking last verse

He always broke off so, abrupt but shy
In knowledge of his mission, veered and tacked
To his own breezes—till as a variation

His explanation cracked and threw the words awry:
You're not going yet? I must; I have to die.

There is the man in the title-poem, the potential Redeemer, who

will dive like a bomber past the broken steeple,
One man wiping out his own original sin
And, like ten million others, dying for the people.

—where the ironic thrust is in that lastline phrase. There is "The Casualty," a poem in memoriam, doing for a man in our own time not quite what Matthew Arnold did for the Scholar Gypsy; and the next-to-last, long poem, "The Kingdom," which gathers together varieties of the individual, all conceived as incorruptible souls that belong to a spiritual "underground movement under the crust of bureaucracy." Mr. MacNeice has already viewed the individual's future pessimistically in his "Epitaph for Liberal Poets." That is a view. It does not seem to me a long one. But few poets today can excel this poet in painting portraits of assorted human beings. That is one of his great gifts. Another is the tang of his turn of phrase.

A Rabbi's Credo

THE JEWISH DILEMMA. By Elmer Berger. New York: The Devin-Adair Company. 1945. 257 pp \$3.

Reviewed by ROBERT PICK

THIS is the credo of a young American rabbi who fervently dissents from the Zionists. Dr. Berger retells their saga with many a critical sidelight and many a well-put point. He especially passes censure upon the fateful intermingling of charitable and nationalistic motives in the Palestine venture. He violently takes issue with Jews and well-meaning Christians alike who want to "segregate" the Jews; to "pack them off" to a country of their own seems, to his mind, nothing short of "abdication of the fight for Christian morality" in those countries where Jews have been living for generations as "ordinary human beings who happened to be Jews."

Here, then, is as controversial a piece of writing as has for a long time come from the pen of a Jewish scholar. It is not only highly interesting reading on practically every one of its pages, but is also a valuable antidote to the growing belief—undeniably nurtured by Zionism—that "Jews are an unassimilable group and want to be understood as such." The apparent failure in

Europe of Jewish emancipation, culminating in Hitler's policies and what went with them, makes Dr. Berger not despair of it, but rather call for an emancipation on the part of European Gentiles.

And therein, I submit, lies the weakness of his point at this particular moment. Obviously writing before reliable post-surrender news reached him from the Continent, the author could still hope that the remnants of European Jewry had a reasonable freedom of choice whether to live on as "citizens of Jewish faith" in their original homelands or start a new life in Pal-

estine. Unfortunately, all correspondents today agree that Continental anti-Semitism is far from decreasing; even in Czechoslovakia, a country repeatedly referred to by Dr. Berger as the Central-European model state, public opinion is by no means favorable to its returning Jewish compatriots—not to speak of such lands as Poland, Rumania, or Hungary. In the light of such news—and there's plenty of it—Dr. Berger's anti-Zionism cannot but shrink in its present-day importance. His book ought to be read just the same by anyone interested in the Jewish "dilemma."

Two-Dimensional History

USSR FOREIGN POLICY. By Victor A. Yakhontoff. New York: Coward-McCann. 1945. 292 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by LOUIS FISCHER

ON page 2 of this book, General Yakhontoff says: "On these instructions a Revolutionary Military Committee of the Petrograd Soviet was set up. On October 16 (29) a Party Center was elected headed by Joseph Stalin." Now the chairman of this Revolutionary Military Committee was Leon Trotzky and as such he directed the Bolshevik insurrection. But his name is omitted by Yakhontoff. The Party Center worked under the Committee and was of subordinate importance. Stalin's role was so minor that John Reed's "Ten Days That Shook the World" pays no attention to him while it shows Trotzky as the key figure in the revolution. Although Lenin read John Reed's book twice and wrote an introduction to it, the little volume is no longer printed or circulated in the Soviet Union; according to the new mythology Stalin made the revolution and Trotzky just wasn't there. Yakhontoff follows the same line. He summarizes the Soviet civil war and foreign intervention without mentioning that Trotzky organized the Red Army and served as first Commissar of Defense. He blames the Soviet defeat at Warsaw in 1920 on Trotzky and Tukhachevsky, although any serious historian knows that the fault was Budenny's who, advised by his commissar Stalin, persisted in heading his cavalry army for Lvov instead of obeying Tukhachevsky's repeated telegraphic orders and coming to the aid of the main Red Army whose goal was Warsaw.

Yakhontoff has also discovered that Litvinov "resigned" as Foreign Commissar in May, 1939. I thought he was dismissed as a preliminary to the signing of the Soviet-Nazi pact.

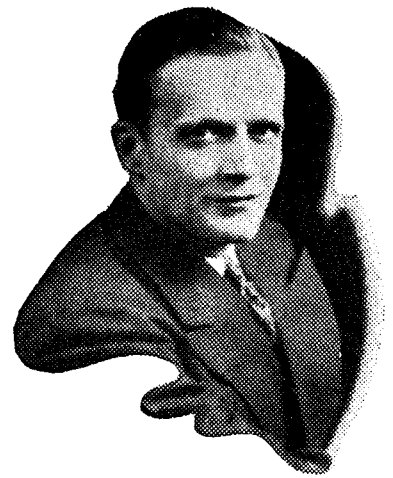
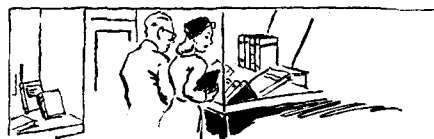
This is typical of the book. It is completely devoid of critical judgment or

evaluation. It accepts the Stalinist interpretation of Soviet foreign policy without the slightest doubt or question. Most of its sources are Soviet Stalinist or foreign pro-Stalinist. The author even goes to "Soviet Russia Today" for quotes from the *New York Herald Tribune*, *PM*, and the *New York Times*. That is no way to write history.

Yakhontoff always keeps within two dimensions. He records an event as it was recorded in its time by the newspapers and then quotes at length from Molotov, Stalin, Voroshilov, Litvinov, or some other official or non-official person or publication to justify the Soviet policy in the given instance. That is all. When he gives his own opinion it never deviates from the well-known Kremlin viewpoint.

The book therefore would go very well as a textbook in a Soviet high-school. Even so, it has many defects. Of the volume's two hundred and ninety-two pages, only the last fifty-four pages are devoted to the relations between Russia and the world after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. Yet it is this period from June 22, 1941, to date which has special interest in the present critical era. Moreover, to judge by Yakhontoff's treatment of these four crucial years all ought to be sweetness and light today, and everybody in Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Persia, not to speak of London and Washington, should just love the Big Father in the Kremlin. He leaves his reader altogether unprepared for today's difficult world situation.

Yakhontoff was a general in the Imperial Russian army. He was born in Warsaw in 1881 and has been living for some years, as a United States citizen, in this country.



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