

THE MIND OF THE FASCIST

THE all-pervading menace of the growth of Fascism in the modern world and its brutal anti-Democratic ideology and practices have attracted the attention of many present-day writers of diverse outlook. The theme has been debated from every angle of opinion, and, certainly, the last word has not been said on the extraordinary issue concerned.

In the volume under review a further attempt is made to outline the totalitarian state and its nefarious activities in its true setting against the background of the contemporary troubled age. Mr. E. B. Ashton, an American, has essayed to treat his subject objectively, and his work deserves some consideration.

Although the author declares himself an anti-Fascist, yet he is inclined to believe that Fascism is more frequently employed as a term of abuse for a political opponent than as a description of political philosophy. Thus: Trotsky is a Fascist plotter to the Stalinists, and Stalin is a Fascist dictator to the followers of Trotsky. Generally, Mr. Ashton argues that Fascist doctrines may well be suited to the peculiar psychology of the Germans or of the Italians, but assuredly not to other folk. He writes: "To recognise the validity of Fascism for others—and to realise and emphasise and strengthen the distinctions which make it unsuitable for us—is our only chance to offset the proselytising effect of future Fascist successes abroad." In that regard, he is especially anxious that American democracy should not be endangered by the Fascist cobwebs.

None-the-less, some of Mr. Ashton's interpretations cannot be accepted by those who are acquainted with current events. Here, for instance, is one of his startling statements: "Yet even in Germany," he opines on page 159, "there can be no doubt that violence has for some time considerably abated. Arrests are now made in orderly fashion; the concentration camps have been cleared of the more outrageous sadists and begin to resemble American prison farms; even the Jews (although the drive toward their elimination from German life goes on with undiminished fervour) are practically secure from what the Nazis euphemistically termed 'individual actions.'

"Only to a limited extent are these developments due to the fact that all excesses are strongly discouraged from above. Chiefly responsible for them is the love of order and discipline which is inherent in the German national character; after the first outbursts had passed, Germans preferred an orderly procedure to the individual satisfaction of their grudges."

Some of Mr. Ashton's standpoints are rather involved, and his book, therefore, must be read with more than usual care.

S.R.

"THE FASCIST: HIS STATE AND HIS MIND," by E. B. Ashton. Publishers: Putnams, London.

elling could it have been if it had run to only half the length and been more sustained in power." And this, finally, is the best note on which to end this review.

E.B.

"THE FALSE NERO," by Lion Feuchtwanger. Translated from the German by Willa and Edwin Muir. London: Hutchinson and Co. South Africa: The Central News Agency, Ltd. Price 8s. 6d.



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A Portrait of a Dictator

LION FEUCHTWANGER'S NEW NOVEL

THE ways of art are strange and incalculable. In one novel a writer may produce a brilliant, polished piece of work; in another he may be thorough, painstaking, accurate—but uninspired.

This has happened to Lion Feuchtwanger, author of the superb "Jew Suss" and the masterly "Josephus" and "Jew of Rome," in his latest book, "The False Nero."* The book is good, and well worth the reading; but it comes nowhere near the heights of his previous work.

"The False Nero" is the story of a would-be dictator nearly two centuries ago, who bears in many respects a remarkable similarity to the dictators of to-day. He was the potter Terence, who, thirteen years after Nero's death, tried to impersonate the emperor in one of the Mesopotamian provinces of the Roman Empire. He bore a striking resemblance to the dead emperor, and was able to speak with rich melodrama, in the manner of the typical demagogue; hundreds of people believed in him, and there was nearly a war in the Near East because of him.

Yet it is not so much the potter Terence as the diverse forces using him that form the chief theme of this book. Terence in himself is nothing—an empty actor, drunk with the love of playing the big man. He is the puppet of the former Senator Varro, who schemes with him through a quarrel with an old rival, the Roman Governor of Syria; and the irony is that in the sequel Varro himself is wellnigh swept away by two of his own underlings, Knops, Terence's erstwhile slave, and Trebonius, a Roman officer who deserts to the potter pretender, and becomes the commander of his troops. For once the mob has been roused, its movement, like that of some vast boulder bounding down a hill, without thought and without design, simply through blind circumstance, gathers momentum, and the restraining hand of the conservative Varro is unable to hold it in check. It is then that Trebonius and Knops, savage atoms of the mob, become its guiding powers, and no scheme is too devilish for them to perpetrate in order to maintain their ruthless rule. They institute a fiendish "week of daggers and knives;" they arrange for the breaking of a flood-gate and the turning of a river

onto an entire town, drowning hundreds of its inhabitants, so that they may lay the blame on certain of their enemies. Such deeds call vividly to mind the burning of the Reichstag in Germany, and the horrible purges Hitler has carried out from time to time; and you may be sure the Nazi demagogue was not far from Feuchtwanger's mind when he penned this tale, nor are Goebbels and Goering so different from Knops and Trebonius that the feeling of a parallel fails to cross the mind.

Here, doubtless, was the material for a remarkable novel; but in this instance at least Feuchtwanger has failed to rise to the occasion. The book begins on a good note; but it falls off markedly until the climax is reached, and then it sustains a fair level to the end. Many impressive characters cross and recross the pages; but they leave the reader with a certain sense of incompleteness; their forms and their deeds and a few of their thoughts are depicted, but their souls are not laid bare. They lack the depth which would raise them to the level of the characters of "Jew Suss." Sometimes, too, the writer allows himself certain tricks of the professional novelist which were not evident in his other work. And a trick, when it comes from an artist of such high rank, is unsatisfying: it leaves one with a sense of defeat, a feeling that the reader does not enjoy the writer's confidence as he should—the disappointed feeling of having been "let down."

The book is long, too long. Bulk is justifiable in a novel only when there is depth all the way through, so that the work as a whole looms large and profound, and you have the feeling at the end—whatever may have been your impatience at one or another point in the story—that you would not have had any portion omitted, since each little incident, no matter how irrelevant it may have seemed at the time, plays its part in the massive structure of the whole and contributes to a deeper understanding of the characters and the denouement. This is the feeling you had at the end of "Jew Suss" and "Success;" but it is not there when you put down "The False Nero." "Interesting," you feel, "vastly interesting. But how much more com-

(Continued at foot of first column)



LION FEUCHTWANGER
—whose latest work is reviewed
on this page.

SONG FOR ONEG SHABBOS

A TREASURE of melodies is awaiting the collectors of Jewish traditional songs, and only few of them have seen the light of publication. Here is an attractive little book of the traditional zemirot. The author is the reader of the Great Synagogue, London, whose authority can be accepted as authentic. The texts are by the best-known Hebrew poets of the middle ages and numerous tunes have been preserved by various families in different countries. The author gives in each case the source of the tune as well as biographical data of the poets, both of which are of considerable interest.

The three dozen songs contained in the book are classified as those to be used on Friday night, Sabbath eve and evening. They are all sung after respective meals on those days. Most of the tunes are in popular melodic presentation, some have been given an harmonic dressing by the author, to be used by choirs. The object of the book is to supply musical material for the ever-increasingly popular "Oneg Shabbos" ceremony, where the songs are sung in unison by the community. It has certainly supplied a long-felt want.

The book also contains the blessing for children and the prayer of grace. It is highly recommended for "Oneg Shabbos" institutions and the author is to be complimented on his efforts. J.I.

"ONEG SHABBOS," Anthology of Ancient Hebrew Table Songs (Zemirot). Compiled and arranged by Rev. H. Mayerowitz. London: Edw. Goldstein, Ltd.

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