

The Problem of Jack Jones

ME AND MINE. By Jack Jones. Hamish Hamilton.

(Reviewed by Ormond Burton)

JACK JONES, a Welsh miner, an ex-professional soldier, one of the unemployed in the Rhondda Valley, at the age of 50 wrote an autobiography, *Unfinished Journey*. This was extraordinarily well received. Lloyd George, who wrote the preface, described the book as "a tender, deeply understanding picture," J. B. Priestley said it was "a blazingly honest and vivid picture" and James Agate that it was "just staggeringly good." High praise! Now how does the continuation of Jack Jones's life story fit in with these eulogies? In *Me and Mine* he covers the period of World War II and recounts in great detail all that befell himself and his family. He is a garrulous soul who just runs on, so we have now a reminiscence of the terrible depression—"families on the dole or broken up and dispersed over Britain. Pits closed and works lying idle and good men rotting for want of something to do. Women and children necessitous and helpless and hopeless in face of the ghastly man-made muddle." Then comes a note on his broadcasting talks at "a guinea a time" and how "People liked to hear me talk in a free and easy fashion and without notes of any kind on such subjects as 'Men and Memories' or 'The Making of a Novelist.'" (Jack Jones, you feel, liked it even more than his audiences.) After this there may be a word about his son Lawrence who is at Oxford, a tiff with Laura, his wife, his "lovely girl," a baby grandson's stomach-ache, the latest flattering remarks from a review and then the account of a big meeting he has spoken to. The book runs on just like that.

For long periods during the war Jones was employed on speaking tours throughout England and Wales, the United States and with the troops in Italy and on the Western Front. One feels that he must have been a singularly safe speaker as he was allowed and indeed encouraged to hold sessions in which no question was barred. He apparently felt that all was for the best in the best of all possible wars. Even a British Military Prison Camp becomes idealised into something like a rest cure run on fraternal lines. He had no difficulty in believing what he ought to believe. He found that parsons in the U.S.A. were finding it difficult to reconcile the war "with the Gospel they preached, but they were trying hard to adapt themselves to the war-time design for living." He sympathised with them in their dilemma, he says, but ex-coalminer though he was, we sense scarcely any such tension within himself. Almost his only criticism is that perhaps the war was being made too soft for the ordinary soldier. It is rather a contradiction perhaps to find the ex-working miner a government agent in breaking the Welsh coal strike in 1944—the explanation is of course that the Cause is over-all.

The most sincere thing in the book is the story of Lawrence, the bright boy of the family who had done so well at Oxford, and after winning the Military Cross fell at Ruweisat Ridge. The pride and sorrow of Jack and Laura Jones will

kindle again the same feelings in many other hearts.

The style of the book is not dissimilar to that of Defoe. He gives all the small detail that is appropriate to the situation and where he has anything significant to say he can say it well. He is dealing with situations familiar to nearly all his readers and because he does so objectively and correctly he is able to catch interest and provided you don't try to read too much at one time he can hold it, as he recalls to the reader's mind the well-known everyday interests which both have.

In the account of his propaganda meetings Jack Jones says that he was assigned audiences from the "middle downwards." This was probably true because nowhere does he show signs of any real power to think through a situation. He is the type that takes colour from his immediate surroundings and especially from those who are his immediate "betters." The terrifying thing about the book is that you feel that the writer represents so very well that large percentage of reasonably decent men of all nations who fall so readily for propaganda of all sorts. In Russia he would have given us the slogans determined by the party line, in Germany he would have followed Hitler, in Occupied France it would probably be a toss up as between Petain and de Gaulle, in U.S.A. half-a-dozen things according to the concentration of opinion in his immediate neighbourhood or the particular broadcasting stations he listened-in to. He represents one of the major world problems of the time—the man who has some gift of expression, with an appeal to a large section of the community very like him in feeling, and who, lacking both fundamentals of belief and critical capacity, is able to be swayed by any demagogue.

CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS

RICHARD HAKLUYT AND HIS SUCCESSORS. Edited by Edward Lynam (The Hakluyt Society, London). Through the N.Z. Secretary, C. R. H. Taylor, Turnbull Library.

THE conversion of the English to the sea, a self-conversion of the sanguine and the unscrupulous in that Queen's reign which makes the very name Elizabethan synonymous with bold, hardy, and ruthless enterprise stretching across oceans to wrest prizes from the grip of giant antagonists, is one of the remarkable and heartening facts of history. The English, late-comers in sea-going for all Chaucer's Shipmaster (a more outrageous pirate than any Elizabethan) or the *Libelle of English Policie* (by an anonymous 15th Century Mahan), had not the "natural" impulse of the Dutch, fenced into a narrow room by their oppressors, to plant their strength in their ships. The Elizabethans chose the sea; it did not choose them.

The superb achievements of Elizabethan navigators were celebrated with equal love and industry by Richard Hakluyt, parson turned geographer, whose collections of the voyages of his countrymen and of seamen of other nations were virtually best-sellers in 1666; and he, more than any other man, captured the imagination of his landsmen contemporaries and taught them to look to the sea for fulfilment and for greatness. His collections were eagerly read because their subject was already popular, but sea adventure was recog-

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