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## BOOKS

# Trotsky Before the Fall

THE PROPHET ARMED. by Isaac Deutscher; Oxford University Press. English price 30/-.

(Reviewed by R. M. Burdon)

"ALL armed prophets have conquered," writes Machiavelli, "and the unarmed ones have been destroyed." This affirmation, though surely questionable, has suggested to Mr. Deutscher the titles for his two-volume study of Trotsky—the first of which takes us up to the year 1921 when the famous revolutionary had reached the zenith of his success.

Leon Bronstein, alias Trotsky, a name borrowed from one of his many gaolers, lived a life so crowded with action that only the briefest summary of its course is possible within the available space. When the Social Democratic Party split in two on a question of doctrine at the Congress of Brussels in 1903, Trotsky opposed Lenin and took sides with the Mensheviks, only becoming reconciled with the Bolshevik leader 14 years later. Involved in the abortive revolution of 1905, he was sentenced to deportation for life to Siberia, but escaped soon afterwards and went to live in Western Europe.

Once in Vienna, when he was drinking tea with a friend named Skobelev, "there entered from another room a man of middle height, haggard, with a swarthy greyish face, showing marks of smallpox. The stranger, as if surprised by Trotsky's presence, stopped a moment at the door and gave a guttural growl, which might have been taken for a greeting. Then, with an empty glass in his hand, he went to the samovar, filled the glass with tea, and went out without saying a word. Skobelev explained that this was a Caucasian, Djughashvili (Stalin), who had just become a member of the Bolshevik Central Committee, and seemed to be acquiring some importance in it."

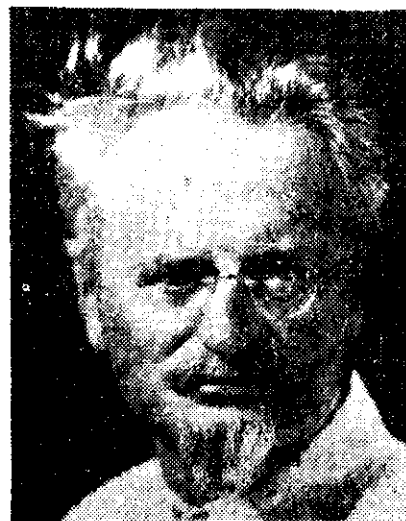
The revolution of February, 1917, found Trotsky in the United States, whence he returned to Russia in May—and almost at once became reconciled with Lenin. As head of the Military Revolutionary Committee he organised and directed the October revolution which placed the Bolshevik Party in power. As leader of the Russian delegation at Brest Litovsk he confounded the negotiations by announcing his policy of "neither peace nor war." As Commissar for War he brought the wars of intervention to a successful close, by which

FOUR books—all works of fiction—will be discussed in ZB Book Review for June 20. The titles,

and the names of the reviewers, are as follows: "The Feared and the Fearless," by Guthrie Wilson (O. N. Gillespie); "Set All Afire," by Louis de Wohl (Pat Lawlor); "Prime of Life," by John Brophy (R. T. Robertson); and "Fiesta," by Prudencia de Pereda (Gordon Troup).



Guthrie Wilson



LEON TROTSKY  
A life crowded with action

time his position as a national leader was unique and apparently unassailable.

Mr. Deutscher's assessment of Trotsky's mental transitions and changes of political front is at the same time an illuminating commentary on the deviation of a movement which aimed at the greatest possible freedom and ended by creating the monstrous phenomenon of the monolithic state. The man who had once condemned Lenin for wishing to act as proxy for the working classes, regardless of what they thought and felt, was foremost in advocating the militarisation of labour and the application of force, if necessary, in requisitioning food from the peasants. Circumstances imbued Trotsky with the conviction that government by coercion was a necessary though temporary phase in the building of socialism. By vehemently insisting on his views long before they had become generally acceptable, he raised up a host of enemies whose plots for his ruin he seems to have ignored. Though rejected at first, his proposals were all subsequently put into effect, some of them recoiling disastrously upon himself.

Mr. Deutscher's penetrating study of a wayward genius foreshadows either triumph or disaster on the grand scale, and as one approaches the end of this book the atmosphere of impending doom that gradually envelops his hero may be recognised as the natural sequence of all that has gone before. Trotsky began by sacrificing everything for his principles and then proceeded to throw his principles overboard at the behest of expedience. He had set out to abolish tyranny, yet it was largely through his agency that the way was prepared for a dictator, and as this story ends the dictator is already waiting in the wings.

## OLD TUNES RE-SUNG

FIDDLING WHILE ROME BURNS. by George Dyson; Oxford University Press, English price 15/-.

IN 1924 George Dyson, not yet Sir George, nor yet Director of the Royal College of Music, wrote a book on contemporary music. *The New Music*, as Dyson called it, was a brave book because such inquiry into "modern"

N.Z. LISTENER, JUNE 11, 1954.