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"Rebels of Individualism"

IN the concoction of the myriad palliatives, remedies and panaceas which have been sponsored in endeavors to "do something" about the world's continuing discontent, varying degrees of intelligence have been applied. Those dictated by emotions, whether of love or hate, must of necessity be dismissed, if one demands a pragmatic solution. As worthless are the ubiquitous planned recommendations, most of which are superficial "deals" of divers kinds, few even pretending any value beyond that of temporary expediency. The handful of social-economic proposals that do bear a measure of authentic significance almost invariably fall short of the goal they so earnestly try to attain.

Happily for the hopeful, in the haystack of alleged cures for widespread economic misery, there are a few needles of honest thought to be found. Jack Schwartzman, in his new book, *Rebels of Individualism*, successfully locates a gratifyingly welcome number of these unfortunately obscured needles. To do so obviously required inspiration, intensive research and unstinting devotion to his subject. But to the challenge, "Seek and ye shall find," he can rightfully respond, "Here they are!" With delightful aplomb and rather engaging wit, he presents to his readers the unique group of thinkers he is able to admire, whom he describes as "fifteen great dreamers, whose lives span three thousand years and eight thousand miles."

But Schwartzman does more than merely introduce his fifteen friends. Assuming the role of literary interlocutor, he cleverly contrives a series of veritable dialogues, each of which clearly expounds the full essence of the particular philosopher's thinking. His own lucid style and copious quotations from the mouths of the fifteen sages combine effectively to produce an extremely valuable presentation. In his foreword, the author extends an amiable invitation to "let each of these Rebels of Individualism take you for a stroll in the garden of his mind."

For countless centuries, fervent proponents of antipathetic social, political and economic theories have quibbled and quarreled, each claiming his specific principles to be the unique Truth. Inevitably, and quite consistently through the ages, these differences of opinion have resulted in conflict of one kind or another. Some idealists have been content to use words as weapons; too many others—alas!—have resorted to the arms of war. Philosophers have inscribed their arguments on tablets, parchment and paper. Those less sanguine of the power of mental persuasion have turned to clubs, arrows, muskets and atomic bombs to spread conviction of their beliefs. History

is replete with reports of such struggles, a continuing series of ideological battles that has kept mankind in a state of semi-barbarism.

Yet, in spite of the intransigence of propagandists who have fought with pen or sword to further their views, there is curiously present in all of them a common denominator which makes them kin. This phenomenon, as slim a bond as it may be, runs like a thread through a thousand diverse credos, good and bad. It is the conclusion that "something" is wrong with the world, and that "something" must be done about it. Voltaire saw it thus, and so did

Hitler; Henry George, on this point at least, agreed with Marx; the ancient philosopher and the modern politician shake hands in accord with this concept. It is the reason for reform, the excuse for demagoguery, the justification for force.

Probably the single quality which, more than any other, distinguishes the pseudo-philosopher from the true thinker is the proclivity to pierce surface manifestations and seek fundamental causes. This connotes real science; only this can bring valid knowledge. The truth-seekers introduced by Schwartzman all employ this scientific approach. Each of them realized that the fundamental basis of any human investigation is the human being himself: the individual. However bitterly they may oppose each other's teachings, they are as one in their respect for man as a separate entity. By their selection of a recognizable human unit as against an amorphous social mass, they have discerned the one valid premise from which logical inquiry must stem.

The basic struggle in which mankind has for so long been involved is not essentially a conflict between superficial economic ideologies or social doctrines. It is not a war between what are glibly, if inaccurately, termed "capitalism" and "communism." It is not nationalization against private enterprise, nor yet the planned versus the free economy. These are but visible outgrowths from the less evident root of the matter, which is the contest between man as an individual and the system that would transmute him into a mere cog in a collectivized machine. Shall man enjoy his natural solitary integrity, or shall he yield his identity and succumb to a man-made Leviathan? That, to plagiarize a phrase, is the question.

The Rebels of Individualism chose an existence wherein each man is his own master as the natural, human, logical, decent way of life. Some of these sages were ancients, some were modern; but all are dead and none lived to see the present-day duel between the "free" West (itself deeply tainted with the collectivist virus it professes to abhor) and the "controlled" East. Yet they understood and keenly pointed out the problem. The current intensification of the battle for individualism establishes the value of their judgment and demonstrates the merit of their works. A study of their principles thus becomes a "must" for all who strive to conserve the light of individualism in this darkening world. As long as their words live, there will be hope.

Jack Schwartzman's anthology of individualistic thinking is a unique and valuable work. To include so rich and varied a store of philosophy within the pages of a slim volume is an accomplishment deserving of sincere commendation.

Sydney Mayers.

"Rebels of Individualism," by Jack Schwartzman. The Exposition Press, New York 7. 95 pp. \$2.50.