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Introduction in Herzfeld

Erich Fromm
(1961d-e)

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The sixtieth birthday of Adolf Leschnitzer is an occasion on which his numerous friends and colleagues in America and in Europe can extend to him their expression of deepest appreciation and most cordial friendship.

Descended from a family of Silesian Yews, Adolf Leschnitzer was born in Posen shortly before the turn of the century. Although the spirit of political and religious liberalism characteristic of so many educated middle class circles of that time pervaded his parental home, there were present, also, living memories of the world of previous generations, the world of orthodox Judaism. The first ten years of his life coincided with a decade in which German-Polish tensions in Posen forced most other political and social questions into the background. During the second decade of his life he experienced in Berlin, to a degree existential in its scope, the critical situation of Jews in the Diaspora, as did many other young Jews of those days.

By the time Adolf Leschnitzer was ready to attend the university, he had already joined the Zionist movement, with which he has remained associated ever since. Nevertheless, he was so deeply anchored in the life of his German environment, and so deeply imbued with its culture, particularly its literature, that he decided to devote himself to the study of Germanic philology, with special emphasis on medieval literature, when he returned from military service in 1918. Yet, he soon gave up his original plan of preparing himself for a university career in this field for various reasons, not the least important of which were the problems inherent in the Jewish question in Germany. As a consequence, he became a teacher on the gymnasium level and was soon asked to participate in teacher-training activities. At the end of the nineteen-twenties he turned to scientific research in the fields of German literary history and methods of teaching German. He had just come out with a series of publications when the events of 1933 imposed upon him tasks of a quite different nature.

Adolf Leschnitzer was thirty-four years old when the newly founded National Federation of Jews in Germany (Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland) asked him to



assume a most responsible position. The Jewish youth of Germany, like their elders, were threatened in those early days of the Hitler era not so much with physical violence as with harmful attacks of a psychological nature. Some were at once expelled from the public schools, while others, although permitted to remain temporarily, were exposed--defenseless--to {14} insults, humiliation, and other forms of maltreatment. For many Jewish school-children this was a state of critical pedagogic emergency. To afford relief called for immediate, effective action. Schools had to be set up for Jewish children and youths in which, despite their hostile surroundings, they could be instructed in the precepts of Judaism, the best in the German heritage and, beyond that, the heritage of Europe so that they could be prepared for their eventual emigration. It was to the accomplishment of this task, unique in its demands upon the abilities of a creator of educational policy, that Adolf Leschnitzer was then called by Leo Baeck, Otto Hirsch, and other leaders of German Jewry. It was a task which caused him to postpone for a number of years his own previously planned emigration. With selfless devotion, considering only the welfare of tens of thousands of Jewish youngsters of school age, he brought into being, during the first half of the Hitler era, a modern Jewish school system. In so doing, he made a distinguished contribution to the unforgettable achievements which fell to the credit of German Jewry during the most tragic period of its entire history. When Dr. Leschnitzer was at last ready to emigrate, the officers of the Reichsvertretung expressed this tribute to his achievement: „This school system owes its formation, indeed, its very existence, to a very large extent to his initiative and to his spiritual influence.“

In 1939 Dr. Leschnitzer left for England, then went to America, and was finally able to resume scholarly research after many years of interruption. To be sure, he did not now limit himself to Germanics. Rather, his interest in Jewish history came into the fore ground. He was fascinated by the problems of the German-Jewish' relationship and the phenomenon of anti-Semitism. His book „The Magic Background of Modern Anti-Semitism“ which is dedicated to the illumination of these problems, is an achievement of lasting worth. It is the first truly comprehensive examination of a highly complex situation, revealing an expert knowledge of the methodology of history, sociology, and social psychology. It is a splendid example of - historical research and, at the same time, of historiography. Having come to the United States in 1940, Adolf Leschnitzer served his adopted country as field representative of the Office of War Information, as consultant to the War Department and as a lecturer in the Foreign Language and Area Program at Rutgers University. In 1946 Dr. Leschnitzer was appointed to the staff of the Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages of The City College, New York., N. Y. He was elected Chairman of his department in 1958. For years' he has combined an „overseas“ professorship with his {15} activities as a professor of German language and literature in New York. Every summer, since 1952, he has been lecturing at the Free University of Berlin on Jewish History, on the History of German Jewry in particular. He continues these scholarly tasks with surpassing ability and scientific precision, free from political bias and with a sense of personal dignity.

It seems appropriate here to attempt an analysis of Dr. Leschnitzer's activities in his respective scholarly spheres. His two professorships, the Germanistic and the Yudaistic, represent--in their rich depth and in their wide span--the integrated duality which must be the mark of the German Jew who has kept faith with both his origins and his goals.



This, too, is the character of Dr. Leschnitzer's literary and scientific achievements, their character in the true sense of the term, that is, their integrated penetration, no matter whether he speaks to us about the medieval church and synagogue, as he did in one of his early essays, or about a personality such as Heinrich Heine, or about German-Jewish symbiosis. But, above all, these two professorships afford him the opportunity to work directly and effectively at a task which has always meant so much to him--the task of furthering international understanding.

To this scholar and teacher on two continents who works in the service of mutual understanding among peoples, to this warm-hearted human being his friends and colleagues dedicate these essays on the subject of *The Search for Peace*. As they present this volume to the public, they desire not merely to honor Adolf Leschnitzer and to profess their unanimity with him but also to contribute, even if modestly, to the ultimate realization of the ideal of peace.

The Editors {16}

The wide personality of Adolf Leschnitzer is reflected not only in his own life-work, but also in the diversity of those who have joined forces in this volume in order to honor him and to give him joy. Jews and Germans, Americans and Europeans, believers and freethinkers, Zionists and their opponents are among them, as editors or as contributors.

In this book each person speaks only for himself, but all speak to Adolf Leschnitzer and bear witness to him.

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