

Anglo-Jewish chronicle

by Emanuel Litvinoff

PROFESSOR Norman Bentwich, one would imagine, is a man without enemies. It is a remarkable thing to say about someone who has always been actively involved in the maelstrom of Jewish politics, for the dissensions there can be charged with more passion than any international disarmament conference. But Professor Bentwich is, in fact, a remarkable man, calm, rational, firmly principled, charitable, and immune from hatred. From 1933 onwards he was actively engaged in the rescue and rehabilitation of victims of Nazi oppression in Germany and Central Europe; at the end of the war he was in Belsen; yet when he attended the Luneberg trial of the SS degenerates who carried out the Belsen atrocities, "listening for a week to the horrible story and watching this bunch of gaoler men and women, most of them young, who were charged with the outrages against humanity, I could not repress a feeling of compassion."

This quality of buoyant humanity is the marrow of Professor Bentwich's autobiography *My Seventy-Seven Years* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 30s). He was one of the first Anglo-Jewish Zionists at a time when the mandarins of English Jewry treated the notion of Jewish political nationalism with a distant hauteur inherited from their aristocratic Spanish forebears, and since his student days Palestine has been as much his home as England. Indeed, he is more concerned to chronicle the rise of Zionism and the struggle for Jewish survival than to relate a personal narrative. Rather disarmingly, he confesses to having no gift of evocation, but it would be hard to find a book that outlines more clearly the dramatic history of the Jewish people in the present century. On yet another level it is the story of the transformation of Anglo-Jewry from a small culturally negligible minority of 60,000, governed by a group of aristocratic families, to a great community of some half a million which is making vivid impact on all aspects of English society. The young Bentwich, a student social worker in Whitechapel, saw the Jewish proletariat begin its rise to middle-class security in the suburbs of North-west London; he saw the scattered agricultural settlements of Palestine erupt in violence and grow into a populous independent Jewish State; he watched men, women, and children shake off the ashes of the concentration camps and begin to live again. And in all these happenings he played his part.