



David Ben-Gurion

A GREAT JEW

by Emanuel Litvinoff

BEN-GURION: A Political Biography, by Maurice Edelman (Hodder and Stoughton, 30s).

WITH David Ben-Gurion once again the centre of turbulence in Israel it would clearly be foolish to memorialise him in alabaster prose. Mr Edelman skirts the danger, avoids the reverential, and makes it abundantly obvious that his subject is very much alive. Most of the book is concerned with Ben-Gurion's central rôle in Zionist history leading up to the wresting of statehood out of the catastrophic events of the war. B.G. is a great Jew of biblical stature but a personality, some critics say, too overpowering for a small nation to live with. Like Churchill, he was an able leader who leaped to meet the challenge of the hour and reached greatness. He led a demoralised, decimated people out of the D.P. camps, brought them to 1948 and commanded them in a war in which there was no alternative but victory. It is a wonderful story, told with eloquence and lucidity, but it has been told before and one looks to Mr Edelman's promised political biography for as yet unrecorded insights.

Unfortunately, in this the book is inadequate. It has no more than 40 pages on the 15 years that Ben-Gurion spent, in and out of office, in the cockpit of Israeli politics before he chose to retire to the Negev settlement of Sde Boker in 1963. Of these 40 pages a third is concerned with the kidnapping and trial of Eichmann. In effect, therefore, we are treated to a postscript on modern Israel in rather familiar terms, although these were the years when Ben-Gurion effectively wielded power and imposed many of his ideas on a stiff-necked, argumentative people. One of the astonishing omissions in this book is an account of the deeply felt conflict between religious orthodoxy and secularism which even B.G.'s genius for manoeuvre and persuasion has not solved. It deserves a chapter and was worth at least a paragraph.

fiction of the month

THE novel by Nabokov which should have been named as our fiction of the month choice in last week's survey is, of course, *The Defence* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 21s), and not "Pale Fire," which was substituted in a moment of aberration (and which in fact has just been issued in a paperback edition by Corgi at 7s 6d).