

CONSTANT READER



Still Another 'Confession'
From Herr Valtin; This One
Seems to Have Some Truth
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By SENDER GARLIN

WHEN an habitual liar makes a habit of "confessions," it is difficult to determine which "confession" deserves credence and which does not. This time, however, a slip of the tongue has betrayed the ex-convict, Richard Hermann Krebs, whose "literary" drivel appears under the monicker of Jan Valtin.

Speaking at the final meeting of the New York Library Association Conference held recently at Lake Mohonk, N. Y. (as reported in the N. Y. Times of Sept. 27, 1941), Herr Valtin "admitted that not all the material he used was autobiographical." According to the Times, Valtin said: "I added the experiences of some other people to make the book as effective as possible."

In other words, Valtin's much-publicized book was not an autobiography, as he and his publishers and the Book-of-the-Month Club and the majority of the book reviewers insisted.

This is a rather belated confession, having been made after several hundred thousand Americans—members of the Book-of-the-Month Club—had been hoodwinked into purchasing "Out of the Sewer." But it is a valuable confession, nevertheless.

Commenting on Valtin's lurid book several days after publication date, this column asserted that it "purports to be the autobiography of a 'Communist agent.' My own view is that it is a melodramatic piece of gutter fiction in which a number of professional red-baiters and anti-Soviet liars of the Eugene Lyons-Isaac Don Levine-Krivitsky type actively collaborated."

We charged Levine specifically with being a partner-in-crime in the concoction of the book. At the same time a reviewer in PM detected in the narrative "the clumsy, pulpy hand" of Mr. Levine.

We followed up our first comment on "Out of the Sewer" with subsequent remarks which included this statement:

"The Nazi concentration camp scenes are melodramatic rewrites from the library of anti-Nazi literature; but the rest is a witch's broth from the anti-Soviet slanders by Tchernavin, Krivitsky, Victor Serge, Isaac Don Levine and Eugene Lyons." (Daily Worker, Jan. 24, 1941.)

Herr Valtin and his gang raved that a promising young author was being "hounded" by the Communists and insisted that Valtin had written the book with his own little axe. But shortly thereafter, in an interview with Mr. Robert van Gelder of the Sunday Times of Feb. 9, 1941, Valtin made this bland admission:

"It is true, as the Communists say, that Isaac Don Levine had a hand" in "Out of the Night."

Valtin carried on a two-front war. While making this admission to Mr. van Gelder, Valtin (or one of his "collaborators") wrote a half-page screed in the New Leader which appropriated the complete vocabulary of the traditional fishmarket in denouncing the Daily Worker for exposing his fantastic and scurrilous tale. He saved his venom especially for the Daily Worker and maintained silence in the face of the assertion of the New York Times reviewer who, though praising the book had asserted that "there are times when you imagine Valtin must be at least three or four men." Previously PM's reviewer had shown the book to be undocumented and added pointedly that "the author, as the story shows, was an unscrupulous crook and liar. . . ."

Having tricked hundreds of thousands of people into reading his "Out of the Sewer," and having lined his pockets with gold out of the royalties and fat fees for lectures, Herr Valtin now coolly admits that he "added the experiences of some other people to make the book as effective as possible"!

Librarians, reporting at the Library Association Conference at which Valtin was one of the featured speakers, told of the falling off of interest in "light" reading matter and of the heightened interest in political, economic and social affairs. The world situation, they explained, had made readers more curious to know the forces behind the dispatches in the newspapers.

From this it would appear that the librarians would have invited speakers who could clarify them on vital issues, particularly the central one—the common front against Hitlerism. Instead they had their intelligence insulted by an unscrupulous adventurer who served a prison term for robbing and attacking a Jewish storekeeper in Los Angeles in 1926, a man who was described by the judge who sentenced him as "not entirely normal-minded."

The honor of speaking to the Library Conference is generally accorded serious scholars. But Valtin got this distinction for perpetrating a crude hoax compounded of slanders and pornography.

Herr Valtin was one of the chief hawkers of the "Communazi" myth. Now events have exploded this criminal myth. The question therefore arises: who is coddling Valtin and for what purpose? Is he being refurbished for a new anti-Soviet drive in the offing?

Valtin's most recent confession before the Library Conference that his book is a potpourri of other people's "experiences" should be taken note of by the Book-of-the-Month. Moreover, their subscribers deserve an apology.