

NEW BOOKS: Tribulations of the Persecuted Jews; Thumbing Other Works

"Some of My Best Friends Are Jews." By Robert Gessner. 381 pp. (New York: Farrar & Rinehart; \$3.)

"Jews are like everybody else—only more so."

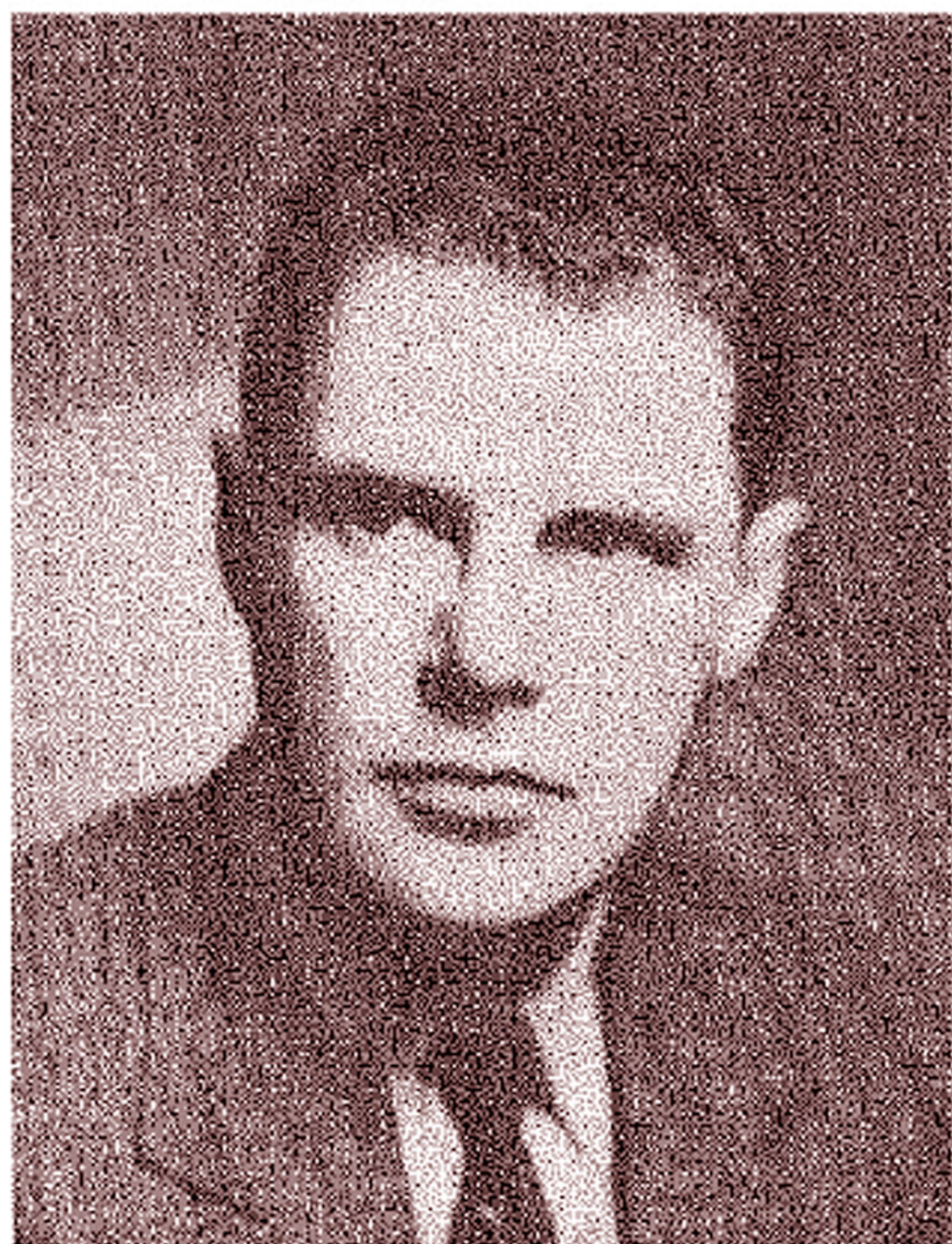
So clicked the typewriter of the epigrammatic Dorothy Thompson, syndicated columnist and wife of Sinclair Lewis.

"Are they?" queried Robert Gessner, twenty-nine-year-old instructor of English at New York University. "Then why are they so persecuted?"

To answer his own question, the young Michigan-born Jew traveled to Europe, saw Hitler-swayed Jews march from meetings shouting: "Down with us! Down with us!" Less fantastic were his experiences in Poland, Palestine, the Soviet Union and England. Sobered by the scene, Gessner returned to America with camera shots, note-books and 4,000 feet of as yet unedited movies. Three years later, experiences weighed, facts checked, "Some of My Best Friends Are Jews" appears as his account of a modern Odyssey.

Author—Into the early Gessner life in the lumber regions of Michigan little anti-Semitism had fallen. True, he fought as a child when people insulted his race. Later, he found a college romance shattered because he was not an "Aryan." But it was not until he came east, saw the contrast between Park Avenue and East Side Jews, that the racial question disturbed him. How were things for the Jews elsewhere? Had anti-Semitism "worked" in Germany? What was life like in a Polish Ghetto? Was Palestine really the answer to the Jewish question?

In search of the truth, the young instructor bought a movie camera, typewriter, note-book and a steamer ticket. Then he sailed for England.



Robert Gessner: "Why so persecuted?"

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There he found American rich-poor contrasts repeated. He met the German Jews who had fled for safety from their native land. One, wealthy cotton manufacturer, told Gessner he had been quite fortunate in leaving Germany. Through the kindness of some Nazi officials, he had been able to transport his cotton mills to England. Now he sold cloth regularly to the Nazis.

Business — The young American was shocked. "You support Hitler?"

"Oh, that's business," answered the manufacturer. "What else could I do? Give up my business, all my connections—go and dig ditches in Palestine?"

Suddenly the refugee grew angry. "But look here!" he exclaimed. "Mosley must be stopped! Fascism in England must be stopped!"

"Why?" asked Gessner.

"Mosley must not be permitted to arouse the people against the Jews!"

"And why?" pursued the American, curious at this about-face.

"Why?" snapped the refugee. "Because if he isn't stopped I'll be compelled to move my factory to South Africa or Brazil or Palestine—and just at a time when I have more orders than I can fill!"

Zion—Elsewhere Jews had less choice in their dealings with dictators. In Germany, the traveler found a return to the theory and practises of the middle ages. In Poland, where persecution has been in effect for many years, he saw Jews hooked over sewing machines eighteen hours a day, trying to earn a livelihood. Others, unemployed, stood helpless. They did not know where to turn—unless to Palestine. All who could were gathering money enough to get to the Zionist colony. Gessner joined their trek.

Tel-Aviv, center of Jewish Palestine, had a Ghetto, Gessner discovered. Again he was shocked. Of course no one had wittingly put the poor Jews in shackles, but the old-world system of segregation on the basis of wealth had been maintained. This interpretation of Zionist Palestine as a city much like any other promises to bring forth loud protest from the leaders of the worldwide movement.

However, the iconoclast has adequate refutation. Seeing is believing. His book presents a photographic confirmation of his contentions, with unposed, obviously truthful shots. "Some of My Best Friends Are Jews" may raise hot controversy in the next few months.