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## BOOKS

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[With his latest play LUTHER, John Osborne has carried forward his deepening dramatic development (examined at a previous stage in Labour Monthly, March, 1958, pp. 101-104) from the early relatively limited LOOK BACK IN ANGER to the richer canvas of THE ENTERTAINER, and now, through the very much deeper-cutting WORLD OF PAUL SLICKEY—which proved too strong meat for the conventional critics—to a historical tragedy, wherein the individualist rebel is exposed against the background of class society and the living class struggle in relation to which he is finally revealed on the side of reaction. We have pleasure in printing a review of this

important play by the well-known historian and authority on the Reformation, Archibald Robertson.—Ed., L.M.]

### Luther

John Osborne  
Faber & Faber. 102pp. 10s. 6d.

IN THIS SHORT PLAY John Osborne turns away from the angry young men of our own day to tell the story of a rather important 'angry' of the sixteenth century. In a series of effective scenes we see Martin Luther as a morbidly religious young man (the morbidity due in large measure to chronic constipation) burying himself in a monastery for the salvation of his soul, to the annoyance of his father, a practical man who has worked his way up

from a mining job into business. We see the angry and angular Martin unhappy in his religious life and at last, after an interview with his father, asking himself: 'But—but what if it isn't true?' He boils over when the fraud, John Tetzl, appears publicly hawking indulgences for the remission of sin and the replenishment of the papal exchequer. To the scandal of his superiors he nails to the church door at Wittenberg his theses against indulgences, and thereby throws down a challenge to the whole papal racket.

Not that Luther had done a new thing. For a century and more the rising bourgeoisie had been simmering with revolt against the papal racket. But the revolt now gathered such force that the lay princes of northern Europe, instead of repressing it, put themselves at its head. We are shown Pope Leo X exclaiming in alarm: 'There's a wild pig in our vineyard, and it must be hunted down and shot'. Easier said than done! Luther burns the Pope's Bull, and at the Diet of Worms refuses to recant with his famous, 'Here I stand; God help me; I can do no more'. As many German princes and all the burgher class are with him, he gets away with it. The tragedy comes when the south German peasants take Luther at his word and rise not only against the papal racket, but against the whole feudal system which it consecrated. Luther, the protégé of princes and rich burghers, eggs on the princes (not that they needed any egging) to massacre the rebel peasants, justifying himself by Paul's tirade against those who resisted Rome in his day. The curtain falls on Luther happily married to an ex-nun, and with a little son of his own, but so far as the movement of the world goes, still the spokesman of princes and

burghers, and to the common people a lost leader.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

### Selected Stories of Lu Hsun

*Foreign Languages Press, Peking, and Central Books, London. 324pp. 7s. 6d.*

If you want to know, as though you had experienced it yourself, the effect of decadent feudalism and foreign colonial rule on the lives of ordinary folk, read these eighteen moving stories about Chinese people. Written between 1918 and 1926, a period of intense revolutionary ferment, these *Selected Stories* are part of the all-too-small literary legacy of Lu Hsun, who is known as the founder of China's socialist literature. Though at the time these were written Lu Hsun had not yet reached the clear political stand he later took up, his hatred for the rottenness of the ruling clique and his intense, agonising compassion for the poor and op-

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