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Adventures in the O. S. S.

THE SCARLET THREAD Adventures in Wartime Espionage. By Donald Downes. British Book Center. \$3.50.

By H. H. Wilson

READ either as pure adventure story or for political education, this is a fascinating book. Mr. Downes, a Cape Cod school teacher, worked for British Intelligence and then for the American Office of Strategic Services from 1940 to 1945. He was engaged chiefly in establishing subversive movements in enemy territory, but he has some pithy observations on men and movements in the United States. When the public is being bamboozled by Senators and Representatives who pretend to be searching out subversion, it is invaluable for the layman to learn something of the nature of genuine intelligence and counter-espionage operations.

There is also utility in the reminder that our support of anti-democratic regimes did not need the excuse of building an alliance against Soviet imperialism. State Department personnel demonstrated an early affinity for reaction, and Mr. Downes is convinced that betrayal of those who worked with us against the Nazis and our failure to support the European non-Communist left undermined the possibility of a real post-war democratic movement. We short-changed the Italian partisans, tolerated the Communists because they had Russian support, and, says Downes, per-

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mitted the democratic non-Communist parties to wither. Through Lauchlin Currie, whom he defends against Congressional smearing, Downes tried to get reports to President Roosevelt that would counteract the official British line on Greece and Italy. He believes that Harry Hopkins diverted these reports and that the President never saw them. "Every report I wrote to the White House ended with a warning that if we did not take the side of democracy and reform, we should have to contend with a large Communist Party in the period after the war."

Unlike some observers who have been disturbed by Allen Dulles's connections with German financial and industrial cartels, Downes considers his work with O. S. S. brilliant, and for William J. Donovan he has highest praise: "I do not think that there was another American in 1941 capable of creating a functioning secret-intelligence organization overnight. His raw materials were thousands of enthusiastic amateurs. Maybe 75 per cent of the effort was fruitless. To my knowledge there were projects in the remaining 25 per cent which contributed enormously to winning and shortening the war, to saving many thousands of Allied lives. . . . Nothing was too fantastic for Donovan if you could convince him that it had a chance of success or that it would harm the enemy."

With the persistent glorification of J. Edgar Hoover it is sobering to read that both British Intelligence and O. S. S. "were constantly being hounded by the F. B. I." That organization, "with its police mentality, was jealous. While we were organizing our projects,

there was always the danger of the knife in the back from the F. B. I." People willing to risk their lives and undergo Gestapo tortures in the service of the Allies were constantly subject to F. B. I. sniping. "Baseless and indiscriminate charges of communism and disloyalty were brought against them." In the light of its subsequent coddling of police spies and professional perjurers, it is interesting that the F. B. I. should have treated those who were operating against the Nazis as "so many stool-pigeons [and] inferior people."

When the F. B. I. deliberately broke up an O. S. S. operation that had successfully looted foreign embassies in Washington, Downes asked the O. S. S. political adviser if President Roosevelt would not do something "about such near treason." He received an answer which is still pertinent: "No, he won't. No President dare touch John Edgar Hoover."