

Talk With Mr. Velikovsky

By HARVEY BREIT

LIKE some of the planetary protagonists of his "Worlds in Collision," Immanuel Velikovsky has sprung into the public consciousness overnight, as it were. His revolutionary (or quixotic) astrohistorical findings have at long last made their formal appearance in a book. But even now, when Mr. Velikovsky's ideas can be investigated in their finished and "final" form, total partisanship is perhaps premature: "Worlds in Collision" is after all only the first (the natural history section) of a three-part work.

Mr. Velikovsky calls his second part "Ages in Chaos." Already finished, its aim is the synchronization of cultural and political histories. The third part consists of the author's attempt to give his own explanation of the movement of the solar system; it is entitled "The Orbit," and will probably be finished by the end of the summer. Whatever the validity of his hypotheses and conclusions, Mr. Velikovsky obviously has a phenomenal knack for phenomenal titles.

To plagiarize from a lovely song of Shakespeare, who is Immanuel Velikovsky, and what is he? Mr. Velikovsky is 54, was born in Russia, and is, at this juncture, a citizen of Israel. To follow the peripatetics of the youthful Velikovsky one would need a scholar's Baedeker. For instance, he studied economy, law and history in Moscow; started anew in Montpelier; listened to Bergson at Edinburgh; traveled in the Middle East; studied medical law in the Ukraine; studied medicine in Berlin; went to Palestine as a physician; worked with the Brain Institute of Monakow in Zurich and Vienna, and specialized in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis; and, in 1937, while writing a book on Freud, he explored Egyptian history, the Greek myths and the Jewish legends—this latter preoccupation bringing Mr. Velikovsky to America (in 1939) and to his present voluminous work.

ABOUT his past Mr. Velikovsky says, "I was in the twentieth century a student of the kind there was 100 years ago. But I didn't stop studying up until today," he adds. "When we came here ten years ago, I, my wife and two girls, all of us became students. My wife, who was one of the leading musical spirits in Palestine, became a student of sculpture. I opened and closed the library at Columbia for eight or nine years (certainly I was the greatest exploiter of that institution). My girls? One was the only girl in a class of fifty taking post-graduate work in atomic physics; she felt the inner call to

return to Palestine when the fighting started. My other daughter studied arts and crafts and is now a teacher in California."

Mr. Velikovsky, tall and stooped and gray-haired, with a powerful, strong-boned face that has a touch of the student's pallor, smiled a little wistfully. "And so," he said in a sad, formal sing-song, as though he were reading from a Talmudic book, "our little bundle of four students are torn apart and only we two are left [he looked at his wife], and still we are good company."

FOR sixteen years Mr. Velikovsky was a doctor and psychologist in Palestine. "I had little time for writing books," he said, by way of explaining his recent burst of activity.

Did Mr. Velikovsky know he was being criticized for his theory on the origin of the planet Venus? Mr. Velikovsky knew. "I am aware of the Babylonian tablets," he said, "and it is all in my books. But these criticisms," he said, and left his thought unfinished. "Science today, as religion in the past, has become dogmatic—in the East as



Immanuel Velikovsky

in the West. A scientist must swear loyalty to the established dogmas. The first rule of the scientific attitude is to study, then to think, and then to express an opinion. A reverse of this is not a scientific approach, and this is exactly what has been done by a group of scientists who have expressed opinions about my work.

"If I had not been psychoanalytically trained I would have had some harsh words to say to my critics." But he dismissed his disagreement with a shrug. "I believe what I've performed is the collecting and ordering of neglected facts. At the end I could have said, 'Here is what happened—those who know better should explain them.' A physicist cannot dictate to a historian what events he should discover.

"There are footnotes in my book right on the page. I said to my publisher, 'I will not give you another book if I do not have footnotes on the page.'" Mr. Velikovsky's remembrance of his past determination to have footnotes sounded convincing. And, indeed, after having talked to him, one hoped the footnotes were convincing too.

"What I require from my reader," Mr. Velikovsky equatingly continued, "is courage. Courage in what? Courage to trust in his own ability to think. He should read the book and look into the references and make his own conclusions. He must remember that science is not licensed."



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