

Southeast Passage

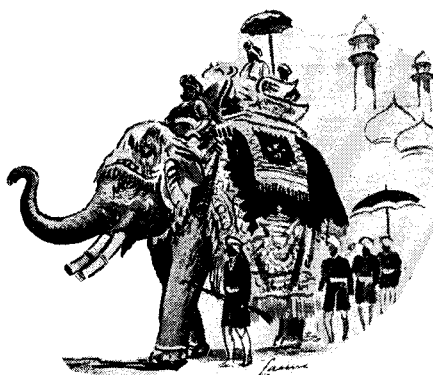
INDIA INK. By Philip Steegman.
New York: William Morrow & Co.
1940. 246 pp. \$3.

SANDA MALA. By Maurice Collis.
New York: Carrick & Evans. 1940.
328 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by I. A. R. WYLIE

THESE two books, very different in style and form, have two factors in common; they concern India and are written by Englishmen. "India Ink" is directly autobiographical, in the Peter Fleming manner, and like all such travel books runs the risk of making the reader thankful he was not a fellow-traveler. But after wandering with Philip Steegman, who is primarily a portrait painter, through the length and breadth of India in search of princely "sitters," one decides, with an amused twinkle, that he is a likable young man, spirited, at times painstakingly cynical and often honestly emotional, reckless of convention but able to admire convention, when it falls, as it so often does in official India, into a noble pattern. Occasionally he is outrageous, *pour épater les bourgeois*, but it is rather a self-conscious effort and doesn't quite come off. When he is writing spontaneously he is charming, sympathetic, and amusing as his numerous and very various hosts seem to have found him. At least he was accepted freely in places closed to the average European and his two months within the sacred and closely guarded quarters of Nepal—from his account a sort of Paradise Regained—form the most vivid and valuable section of his book.

Mr. Steegman was obviously moved by India, not only by its native peoples but by their British administrators. He can scarify, but he can also admire and pity both. There is a sensitive and touching portrait of the Viceroy; "walking slowly with a slight stoop and a little wearily . . . casting



wan smiles at the crowd as he passed." And Mr. Steegman's mysterious and mystic relations with one of India's Holy Men, which he accepts but does not attempt to explain, illustrates the Englishman's unique capacity to identify himself with the people he governs. Lawrence of Arabia and Brian Haughton Hodgson, who single-handed won Nepal's allegiance to the British Empire so that in 1914-1918 its people fought freely in its defense, are perhaps the British Empire's most lucid explanation. Such men and their sensitivity and almost religious sense of duty which Philip Steegman recognized with respect, but no special wonder, have at least made it possible for a handful of his countrymen to maintain themselves with dignity and, considering the mountainous difficulties, amazing success among alien millions, and even on occasion and in spite of political hostility, win their uttermost devotion.

Mr. Collis was at one time one of India's administrators and, though he has written several books on the East, I should judge from internal evidence that "Sanda Mala" is a first novel. It has a certain stiffness of style like that of a good athlete taking up an unfamiliar form of sport, and once at least the writer falls prone over the novelist's booby-trap, the first person singular. The reader feels, too, the poet who lurks shamefacedly in the average English soul, struggling in the meshes of official red-tape. In his efforts to free himself and to express his love for a country he helped to govern, Mr. Collis has written, in fact, a rather awkward but charming grown-up fairy story with a princess and an almost but not quite defeated prince, and a fairy god-mother in the form of a remarkable Burmese mother-in-law, who waves a wand in the nick of time. But in spite of technical defects and its conventional pattern, the story has charm and distinction. When the administrator in the author has succumbed finally to the artist, we may look for more original stories, more freely told.

I. A. R. Wylie is the author of numerous novels, some of them with an East Indian background.



Drawings on this page from the jacket of "India Ink"

Three Sisters

THESE WERE THE BRONTËS. By Dorothy H. Cornish. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1940. 491 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM C. DE VANE

DURING the last few years the story of the Brontë family has been used as material for many forms of literature, notably biography, fiction, and drama; and sometimes these forms have been mingled, rather to the detriment of the Brontës, the authors, and the products. It only remains now for a poet to apostrophize one of the sisters, naturally Emily, and to weave her high and passionate thoughts into modern verse. This production, I have no doubt, is even now preparing.

All this is ample evidence that the delight in the Brontës has grown beyond the cult, and has become a public possession. And more than this, it seems that the story of the Brontës is a tale of challenging possibilities, and offers scope for the imagination, for invention and speculation, for tragic, pathetic, and even comic incident, and for partiality and special pleading. Emily, most naturally, since by common consent she is given the greatest degree of genius and least is known about her, has generally been the central figure in these imaginative ventures; but sometimes Branwell has been given the position of honor, or has shared it with Emily. Eighty years ago the major role would have been given to Charlotte, as Mrs. Gaskell's biography testifies. Perhaps the biographer must make Charlotte his major figure because she was more of this world than the others, held the family to its course, and lived longest of the children. Miss Cornish in the present novel has chosen Charlotte as her central character, not because she does not believe in Emily's greater genius, but rather because Charlotte's life is fuller of actual experiences in the real world. It is true that Charlotte desired fame, if she were allowed to define its terms; but neither Emily nor Anne seemed to yearn for it. How the proud shy women would have disliked their present notoriety!

Occasionally, for the purpose of getting on in her narrative, Miss Cornish's novel utilizes pure biography. But Charlotte Brontë, more than most novelists of her order, drew upon reminiscence for the materials of her work, and we are not surprised that those who write about the Brontës are compelled to draw upon "Jane Eyre," "Villette," and "Shirley." Miss Cornish makes skillful use of these novels. For example, the heroine of "Jane Eyre" is, in the eyes of the world, a plain

person; but in the eyes of a Rochester, and in her great moments, she becomes beautiful and possesses a power of rousing great passions in men. Of course, it was part of Charlotte Brontë's purpose to deepen the ordinary conception of physical beauty. In Miss Cornish's novel, she ascribes, and rightly, this kind of attractiveness to Charlotte herself. The climactic scene in this new novel is suggested by the scene in "Villette" where Lucy Snowe in her distress visits the confessional in Brussels. Here, Charlotte is drawing upon her own experience, as we know. Miss Cornish manages the whole affair between Charlotte and Monsieur Heger with considerable tact and success, and does not transgress the bounds of known fact. Charlotte's letters to Heger, the four which have been preserved, show the ardent devotion of the pupil for the master, and hardly justify the legend of Charlotte's passion for him. It takes delicacy and restraint to depict the relationship as it probably really was, suppressed, unspoken, transmuted into literature. Miss Cornish has done this admirably.

The result is a good, imaginative book upon the Brontës—not so good as a careful biography, and not so exciting as a novel might be that is not bound to the earth by facts. Here Emily is not the wild and wonderful creature she is often portrayed as being, but rather one who performed her household tasks with cheerful regularity. This is probably a truer picture of her than we usually get. And Branwell is allowed to die here with quietness and dignity, after he has told Emily what to do with the story of "Wuthering Heights." The imagination must be allowed some scope in a book that is called a novel; it must be restrained by probabilities, or at least by possibilities, when the subjects are historical characters. It is my impression that Miss Cornish has generally succeeded in her task of navigating these difficult straits.



Dorothy H. Cornish

A Teacher's Two Worlds

A TEACHER AND HIS TIMES. A Story of Two Worlds. By William Adams Brown. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1940. 390 pp., with index. \$3.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM LYON PHELPS

THE rapidly increasing number of autobiographies is a sign of the times; is the long reign of the novel fading with other reigns? Two hundred years ago in England theological and religious poems were best sellers; but in the nineteenth century the novel dominated the field so thoroughly that various treatises on politics, economics, and religion were cast in the form of prose fiction. Many of those pseudo-novels were like the instance (*fact*) where in a church prayer-meeting the minister called on Mr. Brown, saying "Brother Brown, will you lead us in prayer?" to which Mr. Brown replied, "Well, I was about to make some remarks, but perhaps I can throw them into the form of a prayer."

Anyhow, here is another autobiography which resembles Mary Ellen Chase's "A Goodly Fellowship" in this respect. The latter writer was known chiefly as a novelist; but her chosen profession was teaching, and the published story of her life is confined to experience in the classroom; almost immediately it became a best seller. Now the Rev. Dr. William Adams Brown is a scholar in church history and theology, has written many learned and important books in those fields, was for years a member of the Yale Corporation, has done much work in many countries and in the World War, and yet he calls his book "A Teacher and His Times," emphasizing his life-work as a Professor in Union Theological Seminary. I repeat therefore what I said in this periodical of Miss Chase's book; of all occupations, teaching is the most exciting.

Professor Brown is emphatically a city man. Born in Manhattan, with metropolitan grandparents and parents, graduating from Yale Phi Beta Kappa and fourth scholar in his class (1886) at the age of twenty, taking a long term of graduate study in Berlin, he began teaching in New York City at Union Seminary when he was twenty-six, and held that post for forty-four years.

It was a wise decision when he chose a professorship rather than a pastorate. For while he loves many different kinds of human relationships, he is primarily a scholar, and in Milton's phrase, he was foreordained to behold "the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful

studies." That is what it used to be at Union Seminary; but in the twentieth century, to make the Miltonic sentence fit the case, we should have to change the word "truth" to "youth" and "quiet and still air" to "tumultuous and stormy"—for Union Theological Seminary is one of the hottest battlefields in the world. Fortunately indeed it is that two men, its President Henry Sloane Coffin and one of its professors William Adams Brown, have combined religious consecration with extraordinary diplomatic tact. Personally I had rather be an opera impresario or a lion-tamer.

Dr. Brown is not only a theologian; he is a Christian. I am not a Catholic; but one reason for the advance of the Catholic Church in power and numbers is that the Catholic Church really believes something; it has never substituted political and economic reform for individual spiritual regeneration. Now Dr. Brown's statement of his faith is very fine and largely accounts for his success as a teacher of men preparing for the ministry.

What that gospel was, I did not doubt. It was the good news of a God who had made Himself known in the man Christ Jesus, as the righteous and loving Father who was giving Himself for the life of the world. It was a Christo-centric gospel. But the Christ in whom God was supremely revealed was not simply the man of Galilee and Jerusalem, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, though he was this, but the one in whom God had Himself entered humanity in self-imparting love; in whom, therefore, we could find a window through which we could look into the heart of God.

In addition to his professional work as a teacher and the details of the changes wrought at Yale when he was a member of the Corporation, there are many adventures in city slums, in the war in Europe, in "fifty years of Mount Desert," in English and Scots Universities—he has had and is having an exciting and happy life, filled with enjoyment with family and friends, and the consciousness (never emphasized by himself) of having done a great deal of good.

As he mentions one of his teachers who insisted on minute accuracy, may I suggest that in the next edition some trifling errors be corrected?

Newman "Smythe," Rev. Joseph "Twitchell," "Centre" Church in New Haven, Professor "Thatcher" are all spelled incorrectly. Mrs. "Charles" Cushing should be Mrs. William Lee Cushing. "Terracina" Peck should be Teresina. It was not Poe of Princeton who made the famous run for a touchdown in 1885, it was Lamar.