

Two Countries and Two Worlds

MY INDIA, MY AMERICA. By Krishnalal Shridharani. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce. 1941. 647 pp. \$3.75

Reviewed by
WILLIAM HENRY CHAMBERLIN

THIS is a portrait, animated, discerning, and not excessively "highbrow," of two of the world's largest and most contrasted countries, by a Hindu who combines an Eastern background with a long period of study and residence in the United States. The result is an uncommonly interesting book, ranging over a wide variety of subjects without losing certain connecting threads of thought and analysis.

Like many foreigners, the author is impressed by what he considers the favored position of the American woman. "Men over here," he says, "belong to what we call in India 'the depressed class.'" Along with the familiar observations about America's love of superlatives he notes one trait of our national character that must have also impressed many thoughtful Americans. This is the belief that a recipe for almost everything, including such intangible things as happiness and success, can be extracted from a book. This is the explanation for the extraordinary popularity of what Mr. Shridharani appropriately calls the "How to" books, of which "How to Win Friends and Influence People" is one of the most conspicuous recent examples.

While he is a keen, amusing, and witty critic, Mr. Shridharani does not approach the United States with the attitude of an assumed superiority of a mystical, other-wordly East over a pushing, materialistic West. He belongs to the class of modern nationalists, familiar in every Oriental country who, while wishing to preserve what is dignified and beautiful in their national tradition, also feel the impulse to change and to reform. He shows a lively appreciation both for American social democracy and for American material achievement. And he criticizes as unjust the tendency to draw unfavorable conclusions about American culture by comparing the "average American," the "common man" who counts for little in Europe and Asia, with the representatives of the small cultivated upper social layers of foreign countries. It is possible that the author overdoes this point and overlooks such circumstances as America's comparative youth and the fact that the problem of reconciling quantity with quality is not always solved in American education.

The author was an associate of Gandhi in the Indian leader's march to the sea to defy the government ordinance against making salt. This lends a special quality of authority to what he has to say about two interesting subjects, Gandhi and pacifism. Gandhi, as he says, is "the best thing we have" and he gives the following summary of the Mahatma's virtues in a wild and brutal world:

He never makes the air blue with vituperation (Hitler), he is not without humor (Stalin), he is not led by the nose (Mussolini), he clings to no passé crown (several people), he does not persecute the helpless (Hitler), he never scoffs at God (Stalin), he denies himself the world, the flesh and the devil (you and I).

He shows Gandhi in several aspects, negotiating with Lord Irwin (now Lord Halifax), receiving everyone who visits him in the simple home where he lives on a sub-vegetarian diet, interrupted by frequent fasts, exacting in the discipline which he requires of his followers, ten times more exacting with himself. Always sustained by an unwavering faith in the invincible force of spiritual ideals, Gandhi's name may some day be as refreshing and consoling in the present dark age of world civilization as the figure of Saint Francis of Assisi is against the background of thirteenth-century cruelty and ignorance.

Mr. Shridharani also describes India's venerable sage, Tagore, and the Westernized leader of Indian nationalism, Jawaharlal Nehru, whose extraordinary combination of a spiritually aristocratic Brahmin ancestry with the Western culture symbolized in Oxford is mirrored so eloquently in his remarkable autobiography, "Towards Freedom." Freedom for Nehru has always been an unrealized ideal, nationally and personally. As Mr. Shridharani says:

Although Nehru is the most significant and devoted democrat alive, he found himself behind the bars of

a prison maintained by the very champions of democracy.

Approaching Western pacifism from the background of the Indian non-cooperation movement which he knows at first hand, Mr. Shridharani finds it too individualistic, too lacking in mass appeal. He has already explained the technique of the Indian movement in his earlier book, "War without Violence."

He believes that the typical Western pacifist is too much concerned with saving his own soul, and that Western pacifist groups have failed to work out a satisfactory method of mass resistance to invasion and oppression without war. Despite Gandhi's deep concern with the moral and spiritual aspects of non-violence, Mr. Shridharani maintains that Indian non-cooperation is an essentially secular and practical movement, "to be wielded by masses of men for earthly, tangible, and collective aims and to be discarded if it does not work."

Mr. Shridharani's ideal does not represent the individual pacifist or conscientious objector who may suffer physical or spiritual persecution for his belief. It is rather the mass movement which, as he believes, would alone be capable of altering the course of history by overcoming a conqueror without violence. As forms of such a mass movement, he suggests that people should lie down at the frontier, forcing the invader to kill them in order to pass, and also large-scale demonstrations, boycotts, and strikes.

It may be that we shall witness certain forms of non-violent resistance to the Nazi yoke in conquered European countries. But it seems doubtful whether the Indian technique will ever be consciously adopted on a large scale in any Western country. Indian conditions were especially favorable to the practice of this technique. There was a large mass of people, some of them nationalist intellectuals, some of them peasants who were untrained in the use of arms, who scarcely possessed the means to carry out a violent revolt, even if this had been in accordance with their principles, but who were willing to endure a great deal of passive suffering. In the West it seems probable that the division between a minority who will refuse to take part in war on pacifist or humanitarian grounds and a majority which will fight at the order of its government will persist.

India is a comparatively blank spot in the war news of the day. But Mr. Shridharani shows that both the mili-

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American Discovery

FIRST PAPERS. By Martin Gumpert.
New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce.
1941. 310 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by LOUIS ADAMIC

"FIRST PAPERS" is the record of a German immigrant's discovery of America during the five years between first and final citizenship papers. And because its author is observant, receptive, contemplative, and intelligent—and knows how to write—his picture of America is engaging. He discusses practically everything: his own two professions, medicine and literature; New York's manners and customs; "the Hollywood myth in all its fascinating and sober reality"; Roosevelt and Lawrence Dennis; labor unions, legal procedure, standardization, and food. And everywhere he is struck by the friendliness of Americans.

"First Papers" is also a study in individual re-education. The newcomer has to overcome his "ignorance of the simplest customs and formalities, the difficulties of communication, uncertainty as to one's own future, and worry about those for whom one is responsible." "Weights and measures and distances are . . . called by different names, subdivided differently." And before he learns English he discovers that "to a man on an advanced intellectual level, loss of speech is an almost insupportable shock." But one can also learn to laugh. At first the gaiety of after-theater crowds startled Dr. Gumpert. "Laughter," he says, "is the highest and most sensitive human quality. It is an unmistakable sign of freedom."

With time most immigrants assimilate strange ways. What distinguishes "First Papers" is its penetration beyond the factual level to an inward and more profound re education. It traces the evolution of a mind and heart from a rather complacent class isolationism to a democratic internationalism. The cultivated, educated European intellectual was forced to "regain the capacity for primitive experiences," to learn that "in the end but one thing remains important—not to starve to death." Out of that bitter upheaval grew, in Dr. Gumpert at least, a deep faith in the future of America, "the only land in the world where . . . the prerequisites for true democracy are capable of being fulfilled. . . ." "The United States has been able to observe the great fallacies of the nineteenth century, nationalism and Marxism, from the outside without falling victim to either."

"The alien in America has become

a national problem," says the author, and he differentiates between those who come as agents of their governments, those who retain a full identification with "the destiny of their homeland," the indifferent, here from expediency, and those who "must and will live in America."

Dr. Gumpert sees both sides of the problem with the sympathetic but realistic detachment which is the reward of maturity. "Patience, will-power and flexibility" will help the immigrant "with the desire to assimilate," while native Americans might well listen to those who "have come here . . . to learn and to take part in the . . . struggle that has leaped into flame . . . for the future of the world." The book is also a valuable treatise on immigration—valuable because after reading it the American of long-established roots and he who is seeking to grow new fibers in a strange but exhilarating soil will be able to have a warmer understanding of each other.

"First Papers" is so simply written, so unassuming; it touches so many



—Eric Schaal

Martin Gumpert: "Laughter is an unmistakable sign of freedom."

subjects with so little apparent effort; indeed, it is so beguiling, that you don't immediately realize its scope and depth. It spreads far beyond its 300 pages, like a picture that is larger than its frame. It deserves every bit of the praise in Thomas Mann's preface.

Religious "Denominators"

FAITH FOR TODAY. By Stanley High, Frank Kingdon, Gerald Groveland Walsh, S. J., Louis Finkelstein, and Swami Nikhilananda. With an Introduction by George V. Denny, Jr. New York: Town Hall Press and Doubleday, Doran & Co. \$2.

Reviewed by GEORGE N. SHUSTER

MR. DENNY explains that the volume before us contains lectures designed to reveal "common denominators" in religion. This is, then, no sequence of differing presentations of varying faiths but an attempt to state what religion is and why a man who professes it deems it of importance. I find it interesting and illuminating, though doubt assails me as to whether the "agreement" or "common denominator" so eagerly coveted was actually achieved. With Dr. High's initial lecture there would, it is true, be no disposition to quarrel. He finds that the social implications of the Christian faith are anathema to the authors of the Nazi revolution, for the reverse of the reasons why those implications have been made a beloved, integral part of the American heritage. America is defined as the creation of three historic faiths—Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism.

With Dr. Kingdon we are already on the fairway rather than on the

green. He is concerned with how a man comes to faith, rather than with what he finds when he arrives. Eloquently, at times poetically and beautifully, he describes the process of finding God and being discovered by Him. Father Gerald Walsh, expressing the faith of a Catholic in scholarly and appealing fashion, discovers that in the world today there is a great "homesickness for faith"; and thus paraphrasing the Abbé Brémond's *soif de Dieu*, he analyzes a good deal of recent literature to show to what conclusions this "homesickness" has driven a great many contemporaries.

Dr. Finkelstein, speaking as a Jewish teacher, offers a religious defense of democracy in terms of historical reflection. His lecture is notable for the calm and definiteness with which complex trends of thought about the moral consequences of respect for God and man are set forth. Swami Nikhilananda offers a brief analysis of Hinduism, and then a plea for respect of religious faiths one by another. "Let us not say malicious words about anybody's faith," he urges. "Iconoclasts never do any good to anybody." At the end, Mr. Denny does pretty well by way of a summary. He is to be congratulated. This is far and away the best book which has grown out of intergroup discussion of religions in this country.