

# American Discovery

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

Reviewed by LOUIS ADAMIC

**F**IRST 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

**M**R. 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.

# The Elusive "Mr. Big"

**ROOSEVELT: DICTATOR OR DEMOCRAT?** By Gerald W. Johnson. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1941. 303 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ERNEST K. LINDLEY

FRESH appraisals of Franklin D. Roosevelt are needed. He has ceased to be a mere partisan or even a mere national figure. He has become one of the two—certainly not more than four—men on whom the future shape of the world now seems to depend.

No other American President has been as well known to such a large percentage of his fellow-citizens—in word, picture, voice, and person. None has opened himself to such close inspection by trained journalists for so long a period. None has been more thoroughly dissected by his contemporaries. Yet as the circle of knowledge about him widens, the greater becomes the perimeter beyond which lies the unknown. Like all men important enough to deserve intensive study, he remains a good deal of an enigma, even to his closest friends and most attentive observers. They may know, by experience, how he is likely to react to a particular situation, but the search for the "why" remains fascinating. And, of course, Roosevelt's place in history is still to be determined.

Gerald W. Johnson has attempted an analysis for the benefit of the Roosevelt-doubter or the Roosevelt-hater who wants to be patriotic in this time of crisis. The book is dedicated "to every man who cast an honest vote for Willkie." Johnson is a Roosevelt supporter, although not an uncritical one. He uses neither the magnifying glass of Raymond Moley, nor the tinted lenses of Emil Ludwig. Neither does he lean on the explanatory matter for the Roosevelt papers prepared by Samuel I. Rosenman—matter colored here and there by afterthought. And Johnson profits from a lack of first-hand personal observation, and emotional entanglement with Roosevelt. He seeks perspective and understanding—and he achieves both.

The question he poses, rhetorically, is whether Franklin D. Roosevelt is really fit to represent American democracy. His answer, of course, is yes. When put to the test, only a handful of irreconcilables would say otherwise. Yet Johnson does not appeal to the judgment of the hundreds of millions of persons throughout the world who regard Roosevelt as the greatest living symbol of democracy. Instead, Johnson examines Roosevelt's career with a steady, and often a shrewd, eye.

What was the source of the superb confidence with which Roosevelt electrified the nation in his first inaugural address? He was, as Johnson points out, the one man in public life "to whom paralysis was an old story," a calamity he knew could be overcome, because he himself had been able to overcome it.

There are many flashes of insight in this book. There are passages, too, which waste argument on such old issues as whether or not Roosevelt lived up to the 1932 platform of his party. More attention might have been given to the origins and development of the President's views on international affairs.

But no one book can encompass what already has become the raw material for a library. This is a well-grounded, discriminating analysis by a first-rate journalist, who has also a knowledge of history and a sense of the epochal nature of the events with which Franklin D. Roosevelt, as our representative,



Gerald Johnson

must grapple today and in the days ahead.

*Ernest K. Lindley, Washington correspondent for Newsweek magazine, is the author of "The Roosevelt Revolution," and "Half-Way with Roosevelt."*

## Shoulders of the Sky

**HIGH CONQUEST.** By James Ramsey Ullman. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 1941. 334 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by HASSOLDT DAVIS

THIS exhaustive story of mountaineering is told by James R. Ullman, himself a climber of note, though he makes no mention of his own exploits. Unlike others, he doesn't try to explain the lure of climbing, to rationalize it as sport or science, but matter-of-factly tells its history, from the late eighteenth century when it got its first great impetus in the Alps, to the most recent assault on Everest in 1938. The mountains of Europe, both Americas, Africa, and Asia are scientifically described, with complete and dramatic stories of every important climb that has been made upon them.

Mountaineers will read with unusual interest, though they may know Ullman's bibliography well, of the heart-breaking early attempts at the Matterhorn, which is now almost a tourist climb, of the foolhardy but successful "sourdough" expedition up Mt. McKinley, of the Duke of Abruzzi's courageous conquest of Ruwenzori, the African "Mountains of the Moon," in the face of continuous blinding rain. And for the layman with his slippered heels on the fire screen, the tales of the Himalayan climbs make a record of aspiration and tragedy without parallel in the annals of adventure. Men

died by the hundreds of exposure and exhaustion; they dangled from the ends of ropes and froze within a few feet of their comrades; in the white wastes five miles high they saw visions and went mad, as if the "snow men," the demons whom half of Asia fears, were possessing them.

A good deal of this is a story of horror, but the author feels that the ugliest part of it has been, since the decade preceding the first World War, the intrusion of nationalism into mountaineering, the bull-headed, belligerent climbing, usually ill-organized, for the sake of Vaterland or Patria; these were the so-called suicide climbs which most often ended successfully in death. Ullmann writes: "We at least can hope that when peace comes again and men's thoughts can turn to such things as sport and adventure, that the faith-and-friction school of storm-trooper heroes will have disappeared, and that the mountains will be given back again to those who understand and love them."

This book has an excellent report on climbing for amateurs in the United States, a discussion of equipment and method, an appendix of statistics and mountaineering terms, a thorough bibliography, fine maps, and the best photographs of their kind. It should be of interest to all who like stern adventure and clean conquest now.

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