

The Phenomenon of Gandhi

WHAT DOES GANDHI WANT? By T. A. Raman. New York: Oxford University Press. 1942. 113 pp., and index. \$1.25.

Reviewed by LOUIS FISCHER

BERNARD SHAW said: "Why, that's not a man, that's a phenomenon." He was speaking of Mahatma Gandhi. John Gunther, in "Inside Asia," described Gandhi as "an incredible combination of Jesus Christ, Tammany Hall, and your grandfather." He is certainly an incredible combination of saint, shrewd political leader, and human being.

T. A. Raman, an Indian journalist, has chosen one side of Gandhi and tried to reveal it by stringing white pearls from Gandhi on a black thread. This is the "Jesus" side of Gandhi, the "give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's," and the "turn the other cheek" side of the Mahatma. The little book consists almost entirely of quotes from Gandhi on peace, non-violence, and non-resistance. The Christ that is in this strange Hindu man is only a part of him, however. Gandhi wants more than that. He wants freedom from England, he asks national self-assertion for India, he wants a new order for his country and the world. All that is not in this volume. One finds here none of the typical Gandhi-esque denunciations of British rule, none of his hopes for a better life, or scorn for the corruption of Western man.

As a matter of fact, the Christ in Gandhi is in constant conflict with the nationalist leader in him, and the leader often wins. Gandhi, the non-resister, has been resisting the British for several decades. He is trying to break up the British Empire which he regards as an anachronism. Another revolutionary might have attempted it with violence and mutinies. In a disarmed India, Gandhi attempts it with more effective technique: non-violence.

What Gandhi wants is very simple; America wanted it in 1776: liberty for his native land, an end of foreign domination. No Indian I met in India this summer believes that England will voluntarily leave India, and when Churchill says: "I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British empire," their pessimism is confirmed. They become desperate. Gandhi said to me as I sat with him on the earthen floor of his little mud hut: "Your President talks of the Four Freedoms. Does that include the freedom to be free!" Answer that one. If, as Churchill said in the same speech, the French empire is to remain, and the British empire is to remain, then

the old world of 1939 is to live again after this war is over, and in that old world this war was born. Is that what the war is for, Gandhi wonders.

The Indians are ready to fight for a new world in which they will be free. It will be a new world because they and the Chinese and other colored races will be recognized as equals. I have many quotations from Gandhi on his readiness to cooperate with the United Nations in this war. He told me that an Indian national government, consisting of Princes, Hindus, and Moslems, would sign a treaty of alliance with Britain and the United Nations to help win the war.

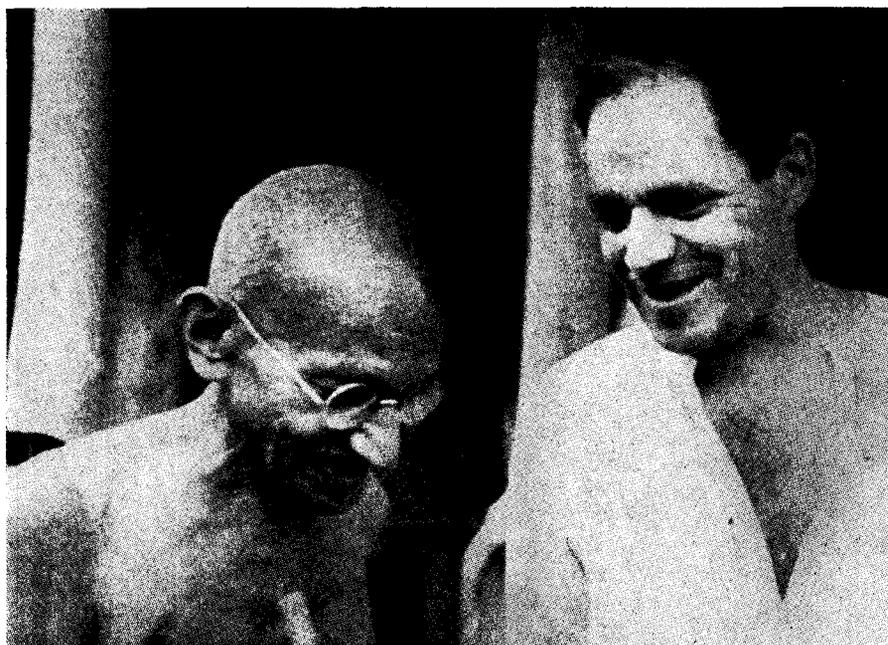
Gandhi knows that his best friends believe in war. He collaborates with them. He has designated Nehru as his successor. But Nehru is a militant anti-fascist. He is ready to enlist with the United Nations. He told mass meeting in Bombay which I attended: "I would fight Japan sword in hand. But I can only do so as a free man."

The issue in India is not whether India is ready to assist us towards victory. India is anti-Axis. As Mr. Raman points out, Gandhi is anti-Axis. But Gandhi wants the United Nations to prove they are fighting for freedom by giving India freedom. Gandhi does not ask complete freedom now. He does not ask complete independence during the war. He is not asking England to quit India until the fighting is over. Gandhi has said these things time and again. But he does insist that the British immediately make a first installment on India's ultimate lib-

eration from imperialist domination.

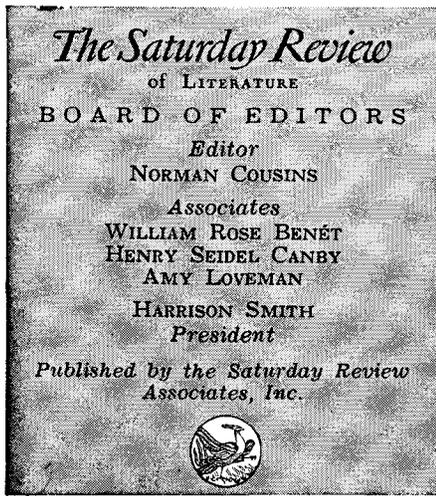
I should have liked to see all these views and facets of that remarkable phenomenon called Gandhi revealed in this book. Gandhi emerged from Raman's hands a strange person, a two-dimensional person. But as I listened to Gandhi last summer I almost decided that he had four dimensions. I tried hard to understand them all. That attempt was for me an overwhelming experience. History will put Gandhi among the very great men of our age, a Jesus among the generals, a wise man of the East among the illiterate statesmen of the West. Raman and his British associates do not fully realize this. They say, Gandhi is not helping us win the war. Gandhi replies, Are you pure enough to win the peace? Wars are fought to win the peace. Many wars have been lost after they were won. Gandhi is a warning to the world against losing the peace, against losing the war while we are winning it. Gandhi says, The West won one war for democracy, yet twenty-five years later India is neither democratic nor free. What will happen to India after this war? Will India and Asia continue to carry the burden of the white man? Will Churchill's imperialism remain in the saddle, or will there be a new England? Gandhi really wants a new England and a new America and a new world. Such a new world could not possibly keep India in bondage.

Jan Christian Smuts has said: "To assert that Gandhi is a fifth columnist is a solemn absurdity. He is one of the very great men of the earth." Raman does not paint the picture of a very great man.



—From "A Week with Gandhi."

Mohandas Gandhi chats with Louis Fischer on the latter's visit to India several weeks ago.



THE WAR AND JANE AUSTEN

SOMEONE once described the novel as a literary form resembling the amoeba, which can squeeze itself out in any direction without bursting. That is not quite true. Under pressure (both external and internal) to help save the country, novelists in this wartime are stuffing themselves with facts and ideas and producing some of the most useful propaganda ever written. No writing (except "Mein Kampf") has had such a powerful effect upon the imagination, has done so much to raise opinion to those heights of emotion where it begins to be powerful and to act, as the novels-with-a-message written by Americans and by British, as well as by refugees from Germany especially, in the last half dozen years.

This is splendid—and more power to their typewriters. But in our desire to swing every energy into the winning of the war, let us not get our values confused. The novel can be instructive, discriminating, satiric, symbolic, even epic—although when it does become epic, as in "Moby Dick" and "War and Peace," it is questionable whether it is not just that—a prose epic—and not really a novel at all. Nevertheless, the novel, and particularly the English novel, is at its purest a story of manners, the word being used in its broadest and deepest senses. And it is noteworthy that what are probably the two most impressive recent novels sprung directly from the world conflict—Hemingway's "For Whom the Bell Tolls" and Anna Segher's "The Seventh Cross"—are not really war novels, or thesis novels at all, but narratives of varied human nature under the stress of danger and high emotion. War, actual combat, sudden death, paralyzing fright, spasms of rage are, apparently, not good material for the novelist, who is most effective when he deals with familiar people and familiar emotions high-lighted by circumstance but not distorted. The great scenes from war

novels of the past which have lasted, would seem to bear that out—Waterloo as Stendhal saw it, Stephen Crane's vignette of our Civil War, even Remarque's "All Quiet on the Western Front."

The greatest novels (in English at least) written in wartime are unquestionably Jane Austen's. In these ironic narratives of a tiny county circle, where good sense or its lack, good character or its lack, supply incident enough to carry on the story of unimportant people who are yet so unforgettable, the war, if we remember correctly, is never mentioned except in the last. And then it enters the narrative only with the appearance on the English scene of naval officers enriched by the sale of French prizes and become good *partis* for English daughters seeking both love and financial security, a combination hard to find.

YET that Napoleonic period of wide upset and constant conflict is the nearest parallel we have in modern history to the world of 1914 to 1942. Were these memorable stories, which even Walter Scott felt to be finer work than his own, the effort of a woman's imagination to escape from the tumult and the shouting that surrounded England, the tension, the doubt, the conflicting ideologies that filled even the island fortress? Not at all. It would be more true to say that Jane's stories are absolutely conditioned by the threats to the security of that marvelously integrated country life of England. In the lurid light coming from overseas, the character of the Englishman, the temperament of the English woman, took on a heightened importance. The

English countryside which they had built seemed fairer, more desirable than ever before. The country life of parson, squire, and privileged neighborhood acquired an importance which it did not possess, because of its happy contrasts with confusion, loss, and breakdown abroad. In this provincial Utopia, bad temper, pomposity, servility, sentimentality, snobbishness, and greed were seen as especial dangers because they were the cracks which might topple down the magnificent stability of a society which had lost a new world in the West, won a new world in the East, and was standing fast when all of Europe fell. Did Jane feel all this? Perhaps, probably, not. But her imagination was lit by the heightening of human values which resulted, and she wrote of a familiar, provincial society as if it were important enough to illustrate human nature in any light. And since she wrote with confidence, it was.

This editorial is not a plea for novels of manners in wartime, though if they come, they will be welcome. It is a study in values, an attempt to show that the artist will find his own way to respond to the stimulus of great events. And if that artist happens to be a writer of novels, and if blood, sweat, and tears, do not seem to be his thesis, he need not despair of usefulness in a time of crisis. The behavior of men and women in such a time is as significant as their opinions, and only the novelist (or dramatist) without too much "message" to get over, is likely to portray and interpret this behavior truly. Nor can the effect of great art (even if seemingly irrelevant to the headlines) ever be calculated in advance. One of those reservoirs of good will of which Mr. Willkie spoke recently is good will for England and the character and temperament moulded there through the centuries. Thank Jane Austen as much as anyone for that.

It takes good journalists to make and handle good propaganda. But the best propaganda, the pervasive, lasting propaganda that changes antagonism to understanding, and creates types of emotional thinking, is the product of high, and usually independent, imagination. One hopes that those who are pressing writers and artists generally to enlist their talents in the war will remember this, and not hand out too many "party lines," give too specific assignments, ask for too much conformity to the blueprint of the moment. What the best writers need is not to be told, but stirred. Great novels—and great propaganda—cannot be ordered by government specification. There are plenty of lesser folk to do what is ordered.

H. S. C.

Death of a Friend

By Witter Bynner

I HAD not known, in friendly life attached,

That death cleaves suddenly yet leaves two legs

That both still bear their weight, two legs still matched

And walking still among the sticky dregs.

I had not known that body was so much,

That so bereaved it still would walk and thrive:

I had not known that, with no sense of touch,

An individual could stay alive.