

Ground of Hope and Conflict

Two Reviews by Frederick Gruin

THE FORGOTTEN ALLY. By Pierre Van Paassen. New York: Dial Press. 1943. 343 pp. \$2.75.

PIERRE VAN PAASSEN, who has become one of Zionism's ardent adherents, has written an impassioned plea for the Jewish national home in Palestine and a stinging "J'accuse!" of the British Colonial Office. Several years ago, in an illuminating chapter of "Days of Our Years," Mr. Van Paassen charged that old-guard English imperialists were sabotaging the building of Zion. In "The Forgotten Ally" he takes up the indictment again. In the process he thunders like a Jeremiah, or perhaps like an angry dominie of the Dutch Protestant Church, for which he once studied.

Christendom, as well as a small "clique" of antediluvian colonial agents, gets some of the author's purple lashing. Mr. Van Paassen believes that leaders of Christian society, particularly the churches, have long been derelict in crusading against anti-semitism, which he calls a fundamental "assault on civilization." Moral abdication, he says, fatally encouraged Adolf Hitler:

Then the Beast, eternal Ashur, could go on stealing and calumniating and massacring without break or check. Then it went beyond the deeds of Nero and Attila, befouling human nature, growing drunk on the blood of saints, and no longer assassinating human dignity, but tearing it to pieces and finishing it off in the slime of its own saliva.

From this warmup Mr. Van Paassen proceeds to a discursive chapter of background. He dips into the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, recalls how Britain and Russia struggled for dominance in the Near East, carefully dispels "the myth of Arab revolt" against the Turks in World War I, sweeps through a vivid, romanticized travelogue on those parts of the Arab world he toured as a foreign correspondent in 1927. The reader is thus prepared for the author's main business: a biting analysis of Britain's role in Palestine.

Mr. Van Paassen is convinced that no conflict exists between the British World War I promise to promote a free united Arabia and the pledge to support a Jewish national home. His point, backed by impressive documentation, is that the British Foreign Office and Arab leaders of 1915-18 understood Palestine was reserved for Zion-



Pierre Van Paassen



John Van Ess

ist settlement. Moreover, he says, Arab and Jew had gotten along amiably.

But the Foreign Office and tradition were stabbed in the back by the Colonial Office. Its agents, led by Sir Ronald Storrs, an *arabisant* and first British Governor of Jerusalem, "corrupted" Arab-Jewish relations. These reactionary empire-builders, says Mr. Van Paassen, feared Zionism's enterprise, its upsetting of the *status quo*,

(Continued on page 24)

MEET THE ARAB. By John Van Ess. New York: The John Day Co. 1943. 229 pp. and index. \$3.

FORTY-ONE years ago a young Protestant missionary, John Van Ess, journeyed from America to begin a life of service in the Middle East. In time he saw the Old Turk rulers go out, the British come in, the Palestine problem arise, the new Arab states take shape. He poked around the countryside. He taught Arabic to Arabs, broke bread with Bedouin and effendi, became a counselor of sheikhs and kings. In brief, he built up an understanding that makes "Meet the Arab" shine like a mellow lamp in a dark space. For anyone who may be tired of the average war reporter's discovery that Arabs are dirty, clamor for baksheesh, and sell eggs at gyp prices, Mr. Van Ess's book may be recommended as a lively, level-headed refresher.

Mr. Van Ess introduces the "Arab of Asia," whom he knows best, as "an intensely human person" of "generous hospitality, agile mind, and vivid imagination." This Arab is also, by all Western standards, abysmally poor, chronically underfed, tribal-minded, and a problem child for international society. To understand him you have to go a long way back and consider many factors. Mr. Van Ess goes back and considers the factors.

He does it a little bit like a school-teacher; he has a fondness for sugaring the lessons with humor, pointed anecdote, and sprightly chit-chat. Arabia treads upon six-thousand years of history. Her people say they live on an island—water-washed on three sides, desert-washed on the fourth. The religion of the Quran and the Traditions colors everything: "Allah's name is breathed into the ear of every newborn infant and is the last word on the lips of the graybeard as Azrael takes his soul." The Arabic language—the "sacred" language to 250,000,000 of the world's population—is rich beyond the average Westerner's comprehension. Without the Arabian Golden Age—the five centuries of the Abbasid dynasty—Europe might not have had its own Renaissance.

All this is primer stuff. But Mr. Van Ess is informative without being dull. From background he moves to foreground. He escorts the reader to the nomad's tent, shifts deftly to the plaster palace of his good friend, puritanical King Ibn Saud. There is a

chapter by Dorothy Van Ess on Arabia's women. Then, back in Mr. Van Ess's hands, the narrative skips across Arabia, from the Mada'an marsh-dwellers to the leper who lived in the ruined palace of ancient Palmyra's Queen Zenobia. Nuggets of information keep turning up: you can disgust an Arab by taking your coffee cup in your *left* hand instead of right; you can offend him by exposing in his presence the soles of your feet.

The introduction to the Arab of Asia is complete and solid by the time Mr. Van Ess gets to the controversial problem of Palestine. "It must be solved," he says. Then, drawing on a first-hand study (he lived with Jewish friends in Palestine, he has a fair command of Hebrew), he offers a tolerant, sense-making solution. His plan first appeared in the *Palestine Post* in 1937.

Briefly, Mr. Van Ess proposes a United States of the Near East to include Lebanon, Syria, Jebel Druze, a Jewish state carved out of Palestine, and an Arab state composed of the

remainder of Palestine plus Transjordan. He is certain Jew and Arab can live together in peace. Within their community the Jews would be responsible for their own immigration, which is the crux of their dispute with the Arabs. As to Europe's tortured Jews, who might need haven: "Let them return after the war to their homes. . . . If this is impossible, well, what are we fighting for?" Mr. Van Ess records a comment on his proposed U.S.N.E. from Palestine High Commissioner Sir Arthur Wauchop: "I see no objection to this program except this—it is too plausible!"

For the larger problems of the Arab world, Mr. Van Ess has a three-point solution: "Ta'aam, Midhaam, Salaam"—Food, Order, Peace. He believes that "Britain, by and large, is not guilty of the sordid imperialism so often imputed to her." Yet, evidently, he does not consider Britain willing or capable of handling the Middle East's complex troubles on her own. He wants America to help. He argues persuasively.



Norwood F. Allman

the American company in the Shanghai Volunteer Corps. With this unit, he helped to guard the Foreign Settlement in days of war and revolution. In 1937, he became publisher and editor of China's greatest newspaper, and was promptly put on the blacklist by the Japanese Army and its Chinese puppets.

December 7, 1941, found "Judge" Allman in Hongkong. He went through the terrible siege, was captured, spent months in a hungry and filthy prisoner camp. Exchanged for Japanese prisoners, he returned home on the *Gripsholm*.

Essentially, this is an interesting life, and its skeleton is within the pages of "Shanghai Lawyer." But it is no more than a skeleton, and even that is misshapen. Potentially exciting vignettes of personal life are cut down to the bone (the story of the trip across the no-man's-land and the wedding is told in twenty-eight lines). Chapters II to V, covering Mr. Allman's earlier six or eight years in China, leave the reader confused and breathless. "Judge" Allman had witnessed events which left a heavy imprint on history: the civil wars of the early twenties, the nationalist revolution of 1926-27, the Japanese attacks on Shanghai in 1932 and 1937, and the Second World War. He had met men and women who made history, beginning with the Chiangs. Yet, the book dismisses them with an indifferent paragraph or page. The Chiangs, to whom Mr. Allman dedicates his book, receive less lineage and attention than his polo ponies.

*Back the Attack
with War Bonds*

"Judge" Allman in China

SHANGHAI LAWYER. By Norwood F. Allman. New York: Whittlesey House. 1943. 283 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by MARK GAYN

AN autobiographer must, above all, be a good story-teller. His life may be hum-drum and his environment drab, but a skilled writer can impregnate both with meaning and color. Once in a great while, a thrilling life overcomes the handicap of poor writing (e.g., Gordon Seagrave's "Burma Surgeon"). But such instances are rare. Steffens, Farson, Sheean, Van Paassen, Fischer are so successful at autobiography because primarily they are excellent story-tellers.

In my recent reading experience this rule has never been proven truer than in the case of Norwood F. Allman's "Shanghai Lawyer." What could have been an enthralling record of a rich life is anything but enthralling because "Judge" Allman and his collaborator, a former Shanghai newspaperwoman named Frances Russell Kay, have been unable to tell a good story well.

It is a pity, for Mr. Allman has lived a full and satisfying life in circumstances out-of-the-ordinary and in places out-of-the-way. It is a shock too, for in Shanghai "Judge" Allman was known as a fine raconteur and a highly literate man.

A hillbilly from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, Mr. Allman arrived in China in 1916 as a student interpreter in the U. S. Consular Service. In Peking, he learned the rudiments

of the Chinese language, history, law, and customs. (In the end he became so proficient in the language that he once served as a court interpreter, translating a defendant's Cantonese into the judge's Mandarin.) Promoted to consul, he lived in Chinese towns large and small, rubbed his rough edges smooth by contact with the protocol and people of strange lands, acquired a sound knowledge of and a great liking for the Chinese.

In the summer resort of Peitaiho, he married a missionary's daughter. To arrive at his own wedding on time, Mr. Allman had to travel in a Chinese civil war with a suitcase containing his white flannel wedding suit.

In 1922, he was assigned to serve on the Shanghai Mixed Court, to see that justice was done to Americans by a Chinese judge. In this court he took a postgraduate course in Chinese legal procedure which stood him in good stead when he finally resigned from the consular service to take up the private practice of law.

In 1927, "Judge" Allman helped to defend Bolshevik agents seized by the Chinese. On one of his trips to Nanking to see his clients, he was permitted by an obliging warden to room in a jail cell (hotel accommodations being scarce). In the years which followed he defended criminals, handled bankruptcy cases, dealt with insurance and real estate legal tangles, occasionally—and very gingerly—took on divorce cases. When not practising law, he played an excellent game of polo, made friendships, served as head of