

Nehru on India

THE DISCOVERY OF INDIA. By Jawaharlal Nehru. New York: The John Day Co. 1946. 581 pp. \$5.

Reviewed by KRISHNALAL SHRIDHARANI

THIS is a one-volume history of India, but it is personal history. The massive book tells the long and variegated story of one of the two oldest civilizations (the other one is that of China). But more than that, it tells the story of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as an heir to India's hoary heritage. The present and the past are very curiously intermingled in this eloquent narrative.

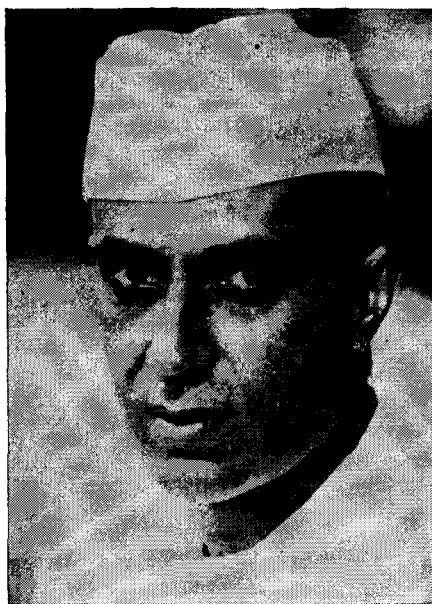
It could not have been otherwise. Nehru, primarily, is a man of action, and the dead past would not hold his interest for long. It was to avoid inactivity during his latest incarceration in 1944 that he took up the pen. The following, I believe, provides a key to his whole approach to history:

Even my seemingly actionless life in prison is tacked on somehow, by some process of thought and feeling, to coming or imagined action, and so it gains for me a certain content without which it would be a vacuum in which existence would become intolerable. When actual action has been denied me, I have sought some such approach to the past and to history. Because my own personal experiences have often touched historic events and sometimes I have even had something to do with the influencing of such events in my own sphere, it has not been difficult for me to envisage history as a living process with which I could identify myself to some extent.

His distinguished autobiography, "Toward Freedom," was also born in jail. In it he told us what he owed to the special circumstances of his birth, to the Nehru clan and to his lawyer-politician father, to Mahatma Gandhi, who became his as well as the nation's mentor. His monumental "Glimpses of World History," in which he told us what he owed to the human race as a human being, was written in prison. Now, in "The Discovery of India," he goes back to his grassroots and tells us what he owes to India. Here he discusses aspects of India's traditions in a way which leaves no doubt as to what went into the making of Nehru and what was clearly rejected by his rebel spirit. His dissents, perhaps, form the most fascinating part of the book. It must be remembered that, like many of his outstanding compatriots, Jawaharlal Nehru discovered India while he was a student in England. "To some extent," writes Nehru, "I came to her via the West and looked at her as a

friendly Westerner might have done."

It took him five months of prison solitude to pen these 581 closely printed pages, and one wonders, in passing, what will happen to his writing now that his jail-going days seem to have come to an end. India is now on the threshold of independence and the erstwhile rebel is destined



—Acme
"Jawaharlal Nehru discovered India while he was a student in England."

to be the most important government official of a free India, since Gandhi abhors any office and will prefer to remain behind the scenes as the father of the nation. It is time, therefore, to have a fresh view of India's man of destiny, and what could be more welcome than Nehru describing his own reflection in the mirror of India's history?

Nehru goes back five thousand years and begins with the Mohenjo-daro civilization, which flourished in the Indus Valley before the coming of the Aryans. Those Westerners who believe that India has perpetually remained intoxicated with God will be interested to note that this Indus Valley civilization, which was a contemporary of those of Persia, Mesopotamia, and Egypt, was "a predominantly secular civilization." Thence Nehru goes on with the Vedic period, which heralds the advent of the Aryans. The Aryans were more vigorous but less refined and civilized than the original Dravidians. The subsequent Buddhist period is less elaborately treated than the following Mogul period. Then we come to invasions from the West which culminated in the British Empire, over which the sun is only now setting after two hundred years. I would especially like to commend to the attention of the Western reader Nehru's treatment of the so-called Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. The other side

Your Literary I.Q.

By Howard Collins

THE SAILOR'S LIFE

From the following descriptions of the crews of famous literary ships, can you name the stories in which they appeared and the authors who created them? Allowing 5 points for each correct answer, a score of 60 is par, 70 is very good, and 80 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 23.

1. *The Times* and *Saturday Review* beguiled the leisure of the crew, all of whom were related by marriage to the captain.
2. So that they would be unable to hear the song of the Sirens, the ears of the crew were stopped up with wax.
3. The crew were tenderly treated by their captain, who never (or hardly ever) used bad language or abuse and always followed up his commands with an if-you-please.
4. One hundred twenty members of the crew of a Roman battleship were rowers, who were chained to their places before a battle.
5. The crew consisted of one man, who was cook, captain, mate, bos'un, midshipmite, and crew of the captain's gig.
6. After lying dead for a week, two hundred members of the crew rose up and joined the lone survivor in sailing the ship.
7. The cook was Dutch and behaved as such, for the food that he gave the crew was a number of tons of hot-cross buns chopped up with sugar and glue.
8. All of the crew could understand the map by which their course was steered, for all "merely conventional signs" such as islands and meridians had been omitted and it was an absolute blank.
9. The crew of a gigantic old sailing vessel, which raced through a never-ending violent storm in the south polar regions, was made up of men who appeared to be centuries old.
10. Disdaining the advice of the cabin boy (who favored arbitration) the 13-man crew of a British battleship overcame a fleet of a dozen French ships.

of the medal is presented here, and those who are familiar only with the British version and with a Hollywood picture called "Clive of India" have an eye-opener coming to them. Indians still call it the "War of Independence," but the curious logic is that every revolution that fails is regarded as a mutiny, and that every mutiny that succeeds is regarded as a revolution.

Glimpses of a Revolutionary

SUN YAT SEN: A PORTRAIT. By Stephen Chen and Robert Payne. New York: John Day Co., Inc. 1946. 242 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by JOSEPH G. HITREC

ON February 15, 1912, the National Chinese Assembly at Nanking followed Sun Yat Sen's suggestion and elected Yuan Shih-Kai provisional president of the new republic. The Manchu dynasty, in whose service Yuan Shih-Kai had enjoyed the reputation of a strong man, was finally off the throne. The ancient gods must have smiled on Yuan Shih-Kai on that day, for after many years of the game of power which brought him only occasional gratification, genuine and practically unlimited power was now dropped in his lap without his having to work for it. Indeed, he had opposed republican ideas and often fought them. He may well have wondered why Sun Yat Sen, who had done more than any other single revolutionary to overthrow the Manchus and give the Chinese people a square deal, should thus sign away, at one misguided stroke, the hard and often dangerous labor of 25 years. But he took the nomination and proceeded to shape the republic to his own requirements. This unbelievable idealism (naïveté would probably be more apt) and its price in delusion are typical of the post-Manchu history of China—the real subject of Stephen Chen's and Robert Payne's book. They perhaps also explain why that history is so racked by turbulence and deceit that even a most patient reader must soon recoil in an utter daze.

What sets out to be a portrait of the father of the Chinese republic winds up as an amorphous narrative of the background against which he lived and worked. The preface warns us that most of the material for a complete life of Sun Yat Sen was destroyed by a Japanese bomb, and that the present work has been compounded from scanty and hitherto unpublished documents. The warning is amply justified by the overall impression of the book. Many readers are

The first forty-odd pages of this book form a second instalment on his autobiography written some years ago. Herein one finds an intimate portrait of Nehru's heroic wife, Kamala, and a moving record of their life together which ended in her tragic death in Switzerland. But out of all this personal tragedy emerges a hope that many more chapters are to come of this interesting life-history.

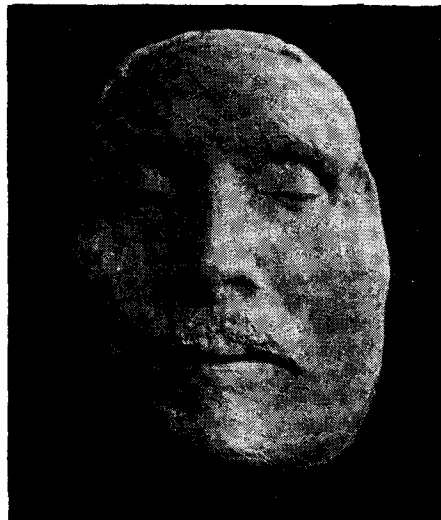
likely to find that the "portrait" is after all only a telescopic view. I know that my own choice of title would have been: "Photomontage, with apologies to a ghost." This is not meant as an aspersion on a most interesting life and figure, but as a forthright essay in accuracy.

That one of the most important careers of modern China should receive such a pale tribute is unfortunate, though perhaps inevitable in view of the preface. Here and there we catch glimpses of Sun Yat Sen as he must have been, but they are the merest glimpses. Pages of intrigue and double-crossing intervene constantly; inefficiency and confusion prevail; guns go off and heads roll and the uprisings—who could possibly remember them all!—fizzle out in so many mountain retreats. When we next espy the frail figure of the father of the republic, it is on the railing of some departing steamer, destined either for San Francisco or Kobe or England. We don't know how he feels or what he thinks, though he must have been doing a good deal of both all the time. He commutes in this fashion between China and the rest of the world and flits from continent to continent, and the louder grows the ovation of his compatriots, the less is it comprehensible. Somehow we do

not get a sense of reality, and we don't get it because of the dense chiaroscuro of warlords, emperors, presidents, generals, and secret societies. We are even uncertain whether Sun Yat Sen achieves his revolution consciously or whether it is forced on him, as cod-liver oil is forced on children, by some obscure outside agency. At least one rebellion occurs at a moment when it is most inconvenient to his other plans—of which we also have only a vague knowledge.

The only portrait painted with anything like a stout grip of the brush is of the Chinese national scene at the turn of the century and later. Here is something like sweep, almost a tidal bore, although the effect on the reader is very nearly crushing. It is possible that it would take a historian of Carlyle's or even Vincent Smith's calibre to patch together an organic and intelligible history of modern China, and in default of that perhaps the task must await a superior type of German professor. Nevertheless, we do here get a sense of upheaval and fatalism, and a very great deal happens in a very brief space of time. Protagonists lead short but exciting lives, Tatar emperors alternate with upstart usurpers, numerous cowardly generals engage numerous inefficient generals. Somehow, organized government carries on in one shape or another, but it is broken up into so many sub-units that it is a little hard to identify with any realism.

I should like Messrs. Chen and Payne to forget about the Japanese bomb that fell on the documents of Dr. Sun Yat Sen and look upon the present work as an exploration of their subject and a test of their qualifications, and then, if they still feel disposed, to endeavor to get hold of the personality behind the photomontage. They themselves admit that the chances of a biography are likely to diminish with the lapse of time; surely something ought to be done about it while the people who have known Sun Yat Sen are still alive. It would be regrettable if so prominent an Asiatic as he were to pass into limbo with nothing more satisfactory to his name than a legend. A speculative but definitive interpretation of his life would most certainly be better than no interpretation at all. The authors have the sincerity and ability for such an undertaking. Let them now remember that there is another side to a man besides the carefully stated quintessence of his political philosophy, and that this side is interesting because it is human and because, after all, it is a side that most appealed to the four hundred million Chinese who made up Sun Yat Sen's following.



Death mask of Sun Yat Sen.