

John G. Winant: Casualty of the Peace

"None More Genuinely American"

BY HERBERT PELL

IN JANUARY 1941, during one of democracy's darkest hours, President Roosevelt asked his old friend John Gilbert Winant, Director of the International Labor Office, to visit him at the White House so that Winant might tell him what he had seen of the German march through Western Europe and the situation then prevailing in Great Britain. Some days later Mr. Winant learned from the newspapers that the President had appointed him Ambassador to Great Britain.

In "Letter from Grosvenor Square,"* written shortly before his tragic death, Mr. Winant gives an account of his work at the Court of St. James from his arrival in February 1941 to the Japanese and German declarations of war on the United States the following December. He wrote it, Mr. Winant explains, because of "the growing disillusionment of today; which not only dims and obscures the present, but is trying to cloud the past."

His book is an important one because it helps illuminate eleven months crucial in the history of Western civilization, eleven months about which most Americans still know pitifully little. "You could not live in London in those early years and not realize how narrow was the margin of survival . . ." Mr. Winant writes. "Four specific moments in 1940 and 1941 are fixed in my mind . . . the Battle of Britain, Lend-Lease, the German attack on Russia, and Pearl Harbor."

Upon his arrival in London, Mr. Winant immediately became both a symbol and a tireless worker in behalf of Anglo-American cooperation in the war against Germany. Frankly and with winning simplicity, he tells how he directed the inauguration of Lend-Lease operations and consummated the exchange of over-age destroyers for bases. He tells something about reverse Lend-Lease—for example, how the British furnished us with scientific information that contributed to the development of the atomic bomb. He pictures England during the Battle of Britain, when there was a possibility that the island might be invaded at any moment. He describes the everyday life of the average Englishman, the sacrifices he made and the spirit with which he made them.

Particularly fine are Mr. Winant's portraits of the British leaders. Winston Churchill he calls "an old-fashioned eighteenth-century Whig"—a description that will strike anyone familiar with English history as most apt. Mr. Winant admired tremendously the common sense the British Prime Minister showed during the complicated negotiations involved in setting up Lend-Lease. It is characteristic of the close cooperation existing between the two men that they were together at Chequers, the Prime Minister's estate, during the first

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*LETTER FROM GROSVENOR SQUARE. By John Gilbert Winant. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1947. 279 pp. \$3.

"The Essence of Gandhism"

BY LOUIS FISCHER

WHEN you were with John G. Winant you felt you were in the presence of greatness. He was deep and simple. He went out to people without words. He could not express his warmth; it just shone out of his face. He had a big, handsome body and a beautiful head. There was an inner beauty in him. He reminded one of Abraham Lincoln. He often reminded me of Jawaharlal Nehru. Past fifty, he seemed very young, shy, eager, groping, yet wise. During the war, a member of the British government said to me in London, "Ambassador Winant looks naïve. But put a proposition to him and he sees through it and you in a minute and a half."

Aristocrat and Republican from New Hampshire, he was closest to the British working people. Intimate collaborator of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, he enjoyed the company of Fabian Laborites. When Churchill walked among blitzed English folk he delighted and excited them. When Winant went to them they silently loved him. And he loved humanity; not in a general way; he loved humanity individually.

"When all this is over," he said during the war, "I want to go home. I miss America."

"What do you miss in America?" I asked.

"I miss my neighbors," he replied.

Winant hated pomp and circumstance. Once he moved from the White House, where he was staying as President Roosevelt's guest, to a second-class hotel in Washington. A friend asked him why he had moved. "Oh," he said, "I didn't know what to do with my laundry. Here I just make a bundle and give it to the chambermaid."

Winant said he liked to get into new work and meet new people. He liked idealists, especially religious idealists. Next to Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom he adored, he was the most Gandhian figure in American official life. He was fair, honest, loyal to principle, and devoted to those who needed help. He was generous about others

but merciless in judging his own inadequacies. Our world tortured him.

Who can say why a man of his gigantic moral stature would kill himself with a revolver shot? He was tired. He was ill. He may have had troubles that no outsider can divine. Somebody has said he was a casualty of the Second World War. I cannot help thinking he was more a casualty of the peace we have failed to make.

Just fourteen days before Winant committed suicide he addressed the *Herald Tribune* forum in New York. It turns out to have been a kind of valedictory. It shows what bothered him. "And I'd like to put a question to you," he said with moving simplicity. "Are you doing as much today for peace as you did for this country and civilization in the days of war? I'm not."

Winant was a veteran of the First World War. At the forum he said:

I have often thought that if after the last war two thousand of us out



Winant: "Are you doing as much today for peace as you did during the war? I'm not."

of the two million who fought in France had volunteered to help the children of Germany we might have avoided this war, because peace needs a personal care as well as collective action.

Here is the essence of Gandhism, which holds that you are individually responsible for the errors and evils of your government and your society, and that you can individually remedy them by your personal conduct.

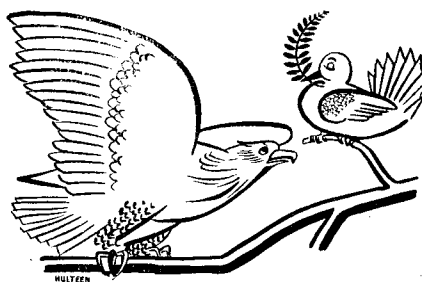
Sometimes when Winant was sitting and talking, or even when he was making a speech, he would suddenly stop. For many seconds, which seemed like minutes, he would be still. He had gone away, disappeared into himself. His eyes always gave the impression of being turned backward and looking into his head. He must have had trouble living with himself. He was his own sternest taskmaster, self-critical, ready to accept blame.

I saw Winant in the United States Embassy in London in the summer of 1941, just after Roosevelt and Churchill published the Atlantic Charter. Its idealism thrilled him. Winant looked for a good peace. But by 1946, he commenced to despair. The peril to which Turkey was then exposed worried him and he expected to discuss it with President Truman. He saw the possibility of a clash and walked restlessly up and down his apartment with long strides. He still hoped, however, and wanted to avoid creating any impression that the road to peace was blocked.

World events in the last few months cannot have quieted his apprehensions. Certainly private matters might have depressed him. But they could be fatal only because anybody who is sensitive to what is happening on this earth depends so much nowadays on the comfort of the friendship, love, and understanding of the people around him. For the morning paper is salt on an open wound.

Some therefore escape into personal life or take to drink. Some eschew politics and serious public problems. One pulls the trigger.

Winant is thus a victim of all of us who have abandoned peace-making to statesmen and diplomats. Governments can only negotiate truces between wars. Peace is built by peoples. The British and American Quakers won the 1947 Nobel Peace Prize though they had nothing to do with peace conferences or peace treaties. Perhaps they won it because they had nothing to do with peace conferences and treaties. Their contribution to the prevention of World War Three is the feeding, clothing, and healing of miserable human beings. The Quakers are friends in need, and they do not investigate the color, creed, politics, or nationality of the needy.



If the advocates of world government undertook to keep alive the bodies and spirits of ten thousand progressive political, religious, and trade-union leaders and writers and artists in Europe and Asia they would be much further ahead on their road, which is the shortest road to peace.

If the women who (though their Government was fighting the war) rolled bandages, drove ambulances, ran blood banks, and collected funds to cure the wounds of battle would now give as much time, energy, and money to cure the gangrenous wounds of peace (though their government allocates billions for the same purpose), there would be less chance of another war.

IF THE airmen of America rebuilt Hiroshima it would do more for world peace than all the peace treaties that have been or may be signed.

If the veterans of two wars, instead of marching, meeting, and passing resolutions, sent two thousand men to each of twenty foreign countries to do what the Quakers are doing, the way the Quakers are doing, they might deserve the Nobel Peace Prize of 1948.

The arrogance and violence of individuals and of racial, religious, and economic groups add up to national arrogance and war. The waters of hate are so high that the dove cannot

come back with an olive branch to gladden, and reassure, a Winant. If everyone were fighting intolerance of those who are different we would be civilized, and if we were civilized we would not want to kill enemies or allow Winants to kill themselves.

Americans gave their sons, their blood, their money, their time, their nerves to win the war. But individually we are giving little to win the peace. Yet it is harder to win a peace than to win a war. The Western powers fought one war to make the world safe for democracy, then they did nothing after the war to make the world safe for democracy and so they had to fight another war to make the world safe for democracy. Winant knew that if we did not save democracy in peace we would have to save it in war a third time.

Winant often used the word "care." Do you care about peace? Then you have to take personal care of it. He was oppressed by the fact that we did not realize the urgency of the matter. We were leaving it to the government to help and leaving it to the government to sound the Voice of America. But a Friendship Train loaded with food and clothing for Europe, speaks louder than the radio.

Winant should have stayed and worked with us. He succumbed in a moment of weakness. It is our loss and, at least in some measure, our fault. "Are you doing as much for peace as you did for this country and civilization in the days of war?" May that death cry of Winant's do his work after him.

Louis Fischer's latest book is "Gandhi and Stalin" (Harper). Mr. Fischer is at present in the United States writing a biography of Lenin.

In the Beginning

(After reading "Between Heaven and Earth")

By Evelyn Ames

THERE were no other tongues to borrow from,
No stored-up language, waiting to be used,
But only that impulsive speech whose words
Sprang fresh and living from the lips of men
As blades of green spring sunward from the ground.
Creation itself was no more marvelous
Than this spontaneous hymn which it evoked,—
When stars flamed out from anonymity
And took their place as gods in the night sky,
When hill and water, bird, and leaf, and cloud
Received a gift beyond the gift of being:
Each man was then a poet, himself the lyre
Whose songs unlocked the reticence of stones
And charmed the trees away from their dark roots;
Like children, who endow familiar things
With unfamiliar glory in their games,—
Men loved, and gave beloved things their names.