

**Ideas.** *Three of us were talking one day. The specialist in tropical diseases praised Schweitzer's medical work in Africa. "I've heard about it," the minister said, "but to me Schweitzer is the author of 'Paul and His Interpreters'—a great, a profound book. I've read it many times." "Yes, but have you heard Schweitzer's organ records of Bach?" we asked. "The playing's magnificent, but you get more out of them if you also read his life of Bach." "Each of you knows part of the man," the philosopher interrupted. "Schweitzer, it's true, is a genius in many fields, including mine. But to me it's not only his work. Schweitzer shows us in his life what a man can be. He's a whole man. In my opinion Schweitzer is the one great man of this century."*

## The Thirteenth Disciple

**ALBERT SCHWEITZER.** *An Anthology.* Edited by Charles R. Roy. Boston: The Beacon Press. 1947. 323 pp. \$5.

**ALBERT SCHWEITZER:** *The Man and His Mind.* By George Seaver. New York: Harper & Bros. 1947. 346 pp. \$3.75.

**PROPHET IN THE WILDERNESS:** *The Story of Albert Schweitzer.* By Hermann Hagedorn. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1947. 221 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ROBERT PICK

ONE OF the anecdotes often related by Albert Schweitzer's admirers relates how the Old Doctor of Lambaréné, forced one day to bring some building timber under cover in great haste—the rains were approaching—asked an "educated" native visiting with one of the hospital patients to lend him a hand. Watching the doctor's manual labor with some bewilderment, the man said he was an intellectual and didn't drag wood about. "You're lucky," Schweitzer replied, "I too wanted to become an intellectual, but I didn't succeed."

That "retort courteous" was more than a good-humored *mot*. This doctor of theology, doctor of philosophy, doctor of medicine, doctor of music; this surgeon, preacher, judge, agriculturalist, and missionary, this great writer and world-famous organist is no intellectual—no mere intellectual; or to put it more correctly, he did not succeed in staying a mere intellectual. He reversed, as it were, the decision of his namesake, Albertus Magnus: contrary to the *doctor universalis* who renounced his public and pastoral functions to devote himself to the sciences and philosophy, Schweitzer was prepared to sacrifice his scholarly pursuits to active discipleship among the most pitiable and most wronged of his fellowmen. That he, "like Abra-

ham," was spared the ultimate sacrifice, and that his service did not impair but enhanced his multifarious intellectual and artistic activities—this is one of the marvels of his life.

He was born, in 1875, in Alsace—"between two nations," as the linguistic, or ethnic, "anomaly" of his native province is often referred to. It was this very "anomaly" that prevented him from being exposed to nationalism in his childhood and youth. And to add another "anomaly" to his early experiences, the little church of Günsbach, his father's Lutheran parish, was one of the few in Europe used for both Catholic and Protestant services. To Albert Schweitzer, that historical phenomenon was "a prophecy and an exhortation to a future religious unity."

There was never any room for ecclesiastical doctrine in his belief. "The Quest of the Historical Jesus,"



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the first full-length book of the graduate from Strasburg and the Sorbonne, came as a shock to tradition-bound piety. Its young author proved that Jesus thought the end of the world to be at hand, and therewith showed Him as having been subject to human error. But these findings could not interfere with Jesus's religious authority, and the truth of his message:

... There is silence all around. The Baptist appears, and cries: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man, lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him. Instead of bringing the eschatological conditions, He has destroyed them. The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurable great Man... is hanging upon it still. That is His victory and His reign.

Already in that book, Schweitzer's own future is forecast:

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same words: "Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands. He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the suffering which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.

While still immersed in writing "The Quest," Schweitzer began to work on his classic biography of Johann Sebastian Bach. He disproved the concept of Bach as the foremost representative of "pure, absolute, mathematical" music, and demonstrated that, in his Chorale Preludes, Bach aimed at that poet-painter-musician unity which alone makes the true artist. Outwardly, his thesis seemed to be but another echo of the Wagner-versus-Brahms discussion still raging at the turn of the century. But at the bottom of Schweitzer's views lay the idea of wholeness which was to find its acme in himself.

His own Bach recitals on the organ—he has given them in scores of European cathedrals and churches for the benefit of his African hospital—may be called a *restitutio in integrum* of Bach's music when compared to the "effective" Bach playing widely in vogue before. His love of Bach's favorite medium has also made Albert Schweitzer the greatest living authority on organ building.

This, briefly—and without trying to do any justice to Schweitzer's Kant studies and the beginnings of his Pauline research (which later re-

sulted in his books "Paul and his Interpreters" and "The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle")—this, then, was the man who in his thirtieth year resolved to follow literally Jesus's last command to His disciples: "Preach the word, heal the sick, cast out devils. Freely ye have received, freely give."

The yearning gaze and the "haunted sadness" of a Negro figure resting on the foot of a French admiral's statue in Colmar (a work of Bartholdi, the sculptor of the Statue of Liberty) had since his childhood drawn Schweitzer's thoughts to the misery of the Africans. He had learned of the diseases ravaging their tribes—sleeping sickness, elephantiasis, malaria, skin afflictions of every kind—of their superstitions and their great fear, all of which made a mockery of our notions of the "happy savage."

The parable of Dives and Lazarus seemed to have spoken directly of us! We are Dives, for, through the advances of medical science, we know a great deal about disease and pain, and have innumerable means of fighting them: yet we take as a matter of course the incalculable advantages which this new wealth gives us! Out there in the colonies, however, sits wretched Lazarus, the colored folk, who suffers from illness and pain as much as we do, nay much more, and has absolutely no means of fighting them. And just as Dives sinned against the poor man at his gate . . . so do we sin against the poor man at our gate.

For seven years Schweitzer studied medicine, and in March 1913 embarked for French Equatorial Africa with what funds he had raised by lectures, organ recitals, and the royalties



of his books, followed by the reluctant blessings of the Paris Missionary Society whose board was still somewhat apprehensive of his unorthodox exegetics.

Far from being a Tolstoian withdrawal from the world, his purpose in leaving civilized parts was, in fact, not caused by what is commonly known as a missionary spirit, or even by Christian charity alone. What he wanted was to atone—and atone by action—for the wrong done over the centuries by his, the white, race to the Africans. Years afterwards, in his Goethe Prize Address, Schweitzer explained his decision for service in secular terms. No line divides for him the secular from the religious.

The story of the Lambaréné hospital, hewn out of the wilderness of an "antediluvian landscape," the story of Dr. Schweitzer's medical accomplishments and his Sunday services, of his Herculean labors and the vicissitudes of his life in peace and two wars, and how his days, crowded with work beyond any ordinary man's imagination, have been followed regularly by nights which up to the small hours are given to philosophical research, to writing, and his beloved organ—all this has become widely known in recent years. It may be presented as one of the great success-in-adversity stories of this century, and as the saga of a man endowed with a great mind, a matchless will power, a robust physique, and the most tender of hearts.

As such it is told very well by Mr. Hagedorn. The recipient of recent autobiographical notes from Dr. Schweitzer's own pen, he is, despite his occasionally lyrical prose, very accurate in his data. He is not always equally careful in reconstructing the thoughts of Albert Schweitzer. Among the venerable builders of civilization of whom Mr. Hagedorn makes Schweitzer think at the outbreak of

the war he lists Descartes; actually, Schweitzer has accused Descartes of "having led modern philosophy astray by cutting the world into objects which have extensions and objects which think, and by going on, moreover, to refuse to each of them the power of influencing the other." ("Civilization and Ethics," p. 137).

"I am life that wills to live in the midst of life that wills to live"—this, in contradistinction to the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*, is the point of departure of his philosophy and his "Reverence for Life." He resigns himself to the fact that the world cannot be explained. But his pessimistic knowledge does not, at the same time, prevent him from affirming: ". . . my willing and hoping are optimistic." Or, to quote Mr. Seavers:

Reverence for Life pretends to no knowledge of the world or of what the world may mean; it formulates no "world-view." It has no love for "faith" (that is, theoretical belief); but it has faith (that is, has trust) in Love. This is its "lifeview." Not knowledge, but the will, is the true organ of spiritual understanding. "Whosoever doeth the will shall know the doctrine."

Shades of Schopenhauer, of Indian thought, of Nietzsche? Yes. But Schweitzer's conclusions are his only. And what is more, he has lived by them; and that, in our Western world, has become about as rare as a Christian who wished to follow Jesus's example, and has tried it. Schweitzer's "ethical mysticism" belongs to his life and religion as well as to his philosophy. In his "Philosophy of Civilization"—of which two volumes ("The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization" and "Civilization and Ethics") are published, with a third one to come—he refers repeatedly to the religious-ethical spirit of the much-maligned eighteenth century, that, to his mind, blended so well with the "rationalism" of that epoch.

Mr. Seavers has discharged admirably the task of presenting Albert Schweitzer and his discipleship, and of leading the layman through the various fields of his learned activities without ever losing sight of his wholeness. If Mr. Seaver's writing does not often reach the limpid simplicity of Schweitzer's own style, it yet nowhere obscures or encumbers his thoughts, and is never carried away by rhetorical enthusiasm.

The greatness of Schweitzer himself as a literary figure is, so to speak, incidentally borne out by the anthology, which Mr. Roy has prepared with the utmost care and understanding, and has furnished with a very fine introduction. Schweitzer has written both in French and in German, and sometimes he has written one and

FRASER YOUNG'S  
LITERARY CRYPT: No. 234

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 234 will be found in the next issue.

LWIKXW PD LCNMDA LWD

PICAB IMDC LI VHFB LWD

ODNKLHVKA PD GKRL QNCCS

HL PHLW KR IC PD VHFB HL

FIL.—C. DGDCRIF

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 233

Nothing is so good as it seems beforehand.—G. ELIOT.