



Communion of Modern Saints

GANDHI'S LETTERS TO A DISCIPLE. Introduction by John Haynes Holmes. New York: Harper & Bros. 234 pp. \$2.50.

By PIERRE VAN PAASSEN

HERE ARE some 351 of the letters written by Gandhi to that extraordinary woman, for a quarter century his faithful disciple and companion in the struggle for India's liberation, Madeleine Slade, the daughter of a British admiral, who gave up her social position in England, her wealth, home, friends, and all to follow in the steps of the Indian Master.

Although there is not the least attempt at metaphysical speculation or literary expression in these utterly simple documents—Gandhi was neither a theologian nor a poet—they nevertheless trace something of the outline of the Mahatma's own and of his beloved disciple's heroic march to the divine. Everything in his life, also the trivial and the menial, of which a good deal is mentioned in this volume, proceeded from a spiritual experience informed by the exigencies of moral action and tempered by the methodical rigors of an inner discipline. But he had also a great good humor. He could laugh like a child, and he never took himself too seriously.

A great deal can be learned from these letters about the inner workings of Gandhi's mind in the long non-violent battle he waged for the truth. Here we still have the human being before the inevitable legends transform him into some blinding myth. The negative structure of the term nonviolence should not hide from us the eminently positive character of Mahatma Gandhi's doctrine and his work.

Not to hurt anyone does not merely mean abstaining from maltreating anyone and, more generally, all that lives and breathes. It means the use of spiritual weapons only, force of soul and not bodily strength in the struggle against evil and for justice and truth. This is essentially the Christian weapon of precision which will yet be universally accepted as men grow aware that the Nazarene was right when he said that the devil cannot be driven out by Beelzebub.

According to his own testimony, the reading of the Sermon on the Mount, accompanied by the Tolstoyan commentary, led Gandhi to explore the ancient themes of the Indian tradition of nonviolence, and to rethink them in terms of the political, social, and economic anguish in which his people lived. But to him alone goes the merit of having bound them together in a luminous and coherent synthesis and to have applied them to the reality with infinite and irresistible goodness.

This book will live when much that is fashionable in literature today is remembered no more. Dr. Holmes's prefatory essay is on a par in felicity of expression and depth of feeling with his great introduction to Renan's "Vie de Jésus." Gandhi, Tolstoy, Romain Rolland, Charles Freer Andrews, John Haynes Holmes, and Madeleine Slade, who all figure in this volume, are a wonderful company to be in—a communion of modern saints.

Pierre van Paassen, minister of a New York Unitarian Church, is the author of "Days of Our Years," "Earth Could Be Fair," and other books. Before becoming a clergyman Dr. Van Paassen served as a newspaper correspondent in Europe and the Near East.

Cosmos of Man

SCIENCE AND ENGLISH POETRY: A Historical Sketch, 1590-1950. By Douglas Bush. New York: Oxford University Press. 166 pp. \$3.50.

By DONALD A. STAUFFER

PROFESSOR DOUGLAS BUSH has already written an illustrious line of books on classical mythology, on the English Renaissance and romantic and modern periods, and on their interconnections. As much as any scholar in America, he has cultivated the knack of generalizations and comparisons concerned with important literary subjects. His virtues are wide and deep knowledge, centrality, relevance, humor, and—though this may not be critically fashionable—sound sense.

This small volume, growing out of a series of lectures delivered in 1948-49 at Indiana University, is made to his hand. It is lightly and modestly written, yet the reader feels that the author might expand many a paragraph into a chapter or any of the chapters into a separate book. From the medieval heritage down to modern science and modern poetry the panorama is kept in proportion, quick and deft. All of the expected trees are there but the forest can always be seen as well as the hills beyond it and the sky above. The ruminant reader will find green pastures in every chapter. The particular illustrations, selected with tact, always illuminate.

The subtitle, "A Historical Sketch," might indicate that the book is purely descriptive but Mr. Bush has given it an argument. He acknowledges the services of science to truth and man, but his particular theme focuses upon "the liabilities and negations, apparent or real, that scientific progress has entailed." He frames science and poetry within philosophy and religion. In these clear pages great forces are juxtaposed: truth and virtue, fact and desire, order and freedom, the great cosmos and the little cosmos of man. The major figures—say, Donne or Newton or Tennyson—see beyond their home grounds, perhaps towards "the wholeness of individual experience in a mysterious world."

Anyone who wishes to be deeply aware of the intellectual foundations of Western civilization will add this small volume to his limited shelf of thoughtful books.

Donald A. Stauffer, chairman of the English Department at Princeton University, is the author of "The Nature of Poetry" and other books.

Effective Wisdom

DEMOCRACY IN POLITICS AND ECONOMICS. By Charles P. Taft. New York: Farrar, Straus & Co. 69 pp. \$2.

By T. V. SMITH

IF WE ARE not to indulge in the ignoble sport of "criticism without a fulcrum" we must disclose our point of view, indeed two points of view.

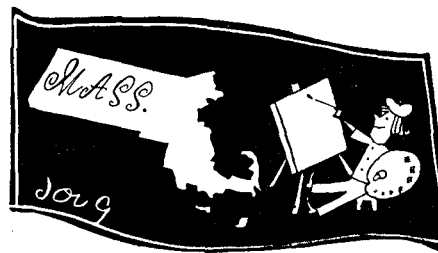
If, for instance, in the spirit of this book rather than of its title, we place ourselves in the pew, letting Charles Taft occupy the pulpit, we will hear a sermon nobler than most sermons and not of looser logic. The Taft who now speaks is the personal Christian and the public lay representative of Protestant Christianity, even a former and late president of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. His plaint is of a humanity divided against itself and of a virtue come largely to nought because of competition between its parts. The theme is that if men knew more they would do better, that if they could find a proper cause they would pull together, and that if their hearts were right their knowledge and their enterprise would both be more fruitful. From the vantage of such unction most important intellectual questions are begged, but are begged because it is assumed that pure religion and undefiled should and could redeem the world.

If, however, we leave the pew, shake hands with the preacher complementarily, go out into the street and next day to our business as usual, we shall, as usual, find different preoccupations. We may even meet at Monday luncheon the other Charles Taft: the politician, the public-spirited servant, the labor conciliator, the large-minded man of the world going about his business, with neither of us remembering the day before the morning after or getting much aid from the view of life which the pulpit disclosed. The major plaint of this book is indeed that the pew-pulpit vantage does not yield much advantage for anybody in the world of affairs.

The three lectures which make up this small volume were indeed delivered at a secular university, the Rice Institute at Houston, and they take seriously to task the effectiveness of the church in daily life. They trace the origins of democracy, emphasizing the role of Christianity therein, leaning heavily on Lord Lindsay's (excessive) emphasis upon the part played in the evolution of Anglo-American democracy by the dissenting churches and especially

playing up Cromwell's accommodation to the Levellers. With little claimed or contributed that is original, we nevertheless find subsequent to the historical sketch much that is enlightening and not a little that is diverting in the personal experiences of an honest and intelligent man intent upon doing good. We are made vividly aware of the remoteness of religious men from the problems of human organization and administration. We hear Mr. Taft's painful narrative of how he had to learn by trial and error what the actual incentives of men are. We hear complaint against American education because it is not more deeply religious (among other defects) and equal complaint against the innocence and ineffectiveness of those who are religiously educated. We watch Mr. Taft slowly achieve moral knowledge from secular-scientific studies (as from Elton Mayo and Mary Follett), a fine achievement which he seems to regret was not bequeathed him from youth through his devotion to religion. "My education in religion and philosophy," he complains, "gave me little preparation to deal with that. I've had to dig it out myself the hard way."

Well, who didn't and doesn't? It is this naivete which alone we would remark adversely. There is much in the volume to praise. Its nonhistorical content is fresh and personal. Its spirit is uplifted and yet practical. Its specific injunctions are filled with common sense and sweet reasonableness. But Mr. Taft seems not to see what he continuously demonstrates: that religion (he speaks as though it were exhausted by Christianity) is defined by and indeed constituted from the problems of life, rather than being a magic formula given for the solution of those problems. He seems to expect to be saved by what he is all the while having himself to save as he goes along. He sees, but does not seem to see, the significance of the fact that not all good men ever agree upon goodness, that not all just men ever agree on justice, that not all holy men ever agree on holiness. Successful living, either personal or corporate, consists in applying wit and will to that radical and discrepant reality. It is each man's privilege to call effective wisdom whatever he will. And there is no law against calling it religion. But whatever we call it, it is something got, not given. And it is logically absent-minded to substitute a name for what is named, to confuse a reason with a cause. To make this mistake is to originate a plaint so precious that it can never be placated. Mr. Taft indeed enables us to define preaching as the self-creation of what is castigated, an enterprise as endless as it is artful.



Ideas & Studies Notes

THE GOOD LIFE, by E. Jordan. University of Chicago Press. \$5. The name of E. Jordan, wholly unknown to even the most voracious of general readers, is rapidly becoming something to conjure with in philosophical circles. For many years a professor of philosophy at Butler University in Indianapolis and now retired from that position, Mr. Jordan here gives us the fourth in a series of profound and original philosophic works, the first three being "Forms of Individuality," "Theory of Legislation," and "The Aesthetic Object." Other philosophers are beginning to discuss these works in the learned journals and doctoral candidates are writing dissertations on them. In the present book Jordan is wrestling with the nature of the good in an effort to construct a system of ethical theory. Discarding all traditional systems, whether naturalistic or idealistic, whether psychological or sociological in emphasis, he decides that terms like "good" and "bad" are not adjectives at all, but adverbs. The good lies not in the person, not in intentions or motives, not in emotions or feelings, not in states of mind, and not in the consequence of action, but in action itself. Action is the basic objective fact upon which all morality depends. The analysis of action bridges the gap between fact and value and between nature and culture. The thesis thus spills over into other disciplines and has an especial relevance for metaphysics, sociology, and political philosophy. Although the argument proceeds on an abstruse and difficult level, it is also coherent and systematic, rich in insights, and comprehensive in scope. It is a book to study rather than to read. It will almost certainly have an honorable and enduring place in the ethical theory of this century.

PATTERNS OF PROGRESS, by Horace M. Kallen. Columbia University Press. \$1.75. Cloaking a relatively simple argument in a distressingly involved and jargon-laden style, Dr. Kallen tries to pull down to philosophic fundamentals the idea and ideal of Progress. The story of mankind in its search for Happiness, he says, reveals the story of progress; but the forces that make for progress