

The People Who Invented the Zero

"India: A Modern History," by **Percival Spear** (University of Michigan Press. 467 pp. \$10), and **"A History of India,"** by **Michael Edwardes** (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. 444 pp. \$7.50), sum up the evolution of an increasingly controversial nation. T. Walter Wallbank teaches Indian history at the University of Southern California. In 1956 he made an extensive study tour of India and Pakistan.

By T. Walter Wallbank

INDIA is the most significant case study posing the question whether an underdeveloped country, with a huge population, can substantially raise its living standards within the regimen of a democratic society. Or must the favorable answer be obtained under the totalitarian way of Moscow and Peking regimentation? The ultimate result achieved in India will influence the course of politics in at least half of the world's population.

Percival Spear has been recognized since the last world war as a distinguished scholar and productive author in the field of Indian history. His work in revising the modern chapters in the old reliable "Oxford History of India" received generous recognition for his mastery of the facts and the penetration of his interpretations. It is natural, therefore, that his latest work should have been eagerly anticipated by the growing American circle of general readers and scholars interested in India both old and new.

They will not be disappointed, for Professor Spear's history is one of the most significant works in its field to appear in the past several decades; it is unusual to find so much solid information clothed with such felicity of style. Perhaps one reason stems from the author's long residence in India. In speaking of its challenge to the historian, the author eloquently observes:

It inspires by its vast range and scope, its color, its variety, its rich cluster of personalities; it challenges with its complexities, its long periods of obscurity, its unfamiliar movements, and its stark contrasts between luxury and

poverty, between gentleness and cruelty, creation and destruction.

A single volume of Indian history must cover an immense time span from the earliest civilization in the Indus, 2500 B.C., to the present. The essentials of the ancient and medieval eras, however, are adequately described, especially the "twin peaks of Indian civilization," the Maurya and the Gupta periods. The author really gets into his stride with the brilliant Mughal period, followed by the all-important span of British rule, which lasted little more than a century. The main theme of the latter is the transference of Western culture. From this impact upon Indian life arose industrialism, social change, and the growth of nationalism. The post-independence era, since 1947, is dealt with somewhat summarily; it might have been desirable for the author to have found more space for a fuller treatment of Nehru's India.

However, several features of his history are noteworthy. The chapter on Hinduism is a brilliant capsule description, a simple yet penetrating explanation of this most complex of all religious ways of life. Mr. Spear has two heroes, each of whom is given a chapter: Akbar the Mughal emperor, "one of the few successful examples of Plato's philosopher-king," and Gandhi, who "made

himself poor like a peasant and the people made him holy like a saint or guru."

Professor Spear exposes the mistakes and weaknesses on both the British and Indian sides. Old recriminations about the evils of imperialism or the irresponsibility of Indian nationalism tend to seem outdated as the author, with the benefit of the perspective of time and aided by his judicious scholarship, recounts his story. Nevertheless a criticism might be leveled against his treatment of Indo-Pakistani relations: there is a tendency to excuse and mitigate the former, especially in the Kashmir imbroglio.

Michael Edwardes's volume is the latest in a series of national histories designed by Farrar, Straus & Cudahy to provide an adequate, readable survey for the student and general reader. The publishers have more than done their part in providing a handsome cover, readable print, numerous full-



—Fujimera from Monkmeier.

Potter in small village in south India.



—Chapelle from Monkmeier.

First school in Bastar District, Madhya Pradesh, assembled before new building constructed by villagers.

page maps and chronologies, and, above all, a section of 127 illustrations. The text, unfortunately, does not measure up.

The author asserts he is concerned with "the broad sweep of the movement of [Indian] history," yet segments of the subject vital to the average reader are almost completely neglected. In the so-called Periclean Age of the Guptas there is no mention of the great strides in mathematics—the invention of the zero, the perfection of "Arabic numerals," and achievements in algebra. There is no reference to Indian gifts to the world in the field of textiles, and no credit given for the rich treasury of fable literature in the "Panchatantra." A singular omission is the complete exclusion of the stirring story of Indian expansion overseas. Indians are proud that their colonists and traders, more than a thousand years ago, established flourishing Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms throughout South Asia. Today the massive temples of Angkor Wat and Borobudur stand in

mute testimony to their greatness.

The intelligent layman is rightly most interested in the immediate background of Indian independence, the fortunes of the new nation since it gained independence, and a reasonably thorough evaluation of its leaders. But there is no adequate survey of the rapid progress of Indian nationalism, the Kashmir dispute, the role of Gandhi and Nehru, India's attitude in foreign policy, and the progress of the three five-year plans. Admittedly, the book was in print before Goa, but Chinese aggression is not even mentioned.

Moreover, Edwardes's style is incredibly prosaic; in places his book is nothing more than a compendium of facts. The author is to be commended for listing his sources, but the space could better have been used to extend the coverage of the text and to have achieved in some degree the test of good history: facts presented with some literary art and treated with scholarly insight and judgment.

(right-wing Socialist) party of Canada? Has any other country, starting from scratch with no military forces at all, produced so quickly such a flaming galaxy of heroes as did Canada in the First World War?

Ralph Allen would certainly be included in any objective list of the top half-dozen of contemporary Canadian journalists; and this at a time when Canadian journalism has more competent and informed practitioners than ever before. As editor of *Maclean's* magazine (until his recent resignation to devote himself to writing) he raised that popular bi-weekly into its present firm status as a national institution.

IN this book, which is Volume 5 in the Canadian History Series edited by Thomas B. Costain, Mr. Allen has interpreted the life of Canada from 1910 to 1945 in terms of its more significant figures and organizations. A considerable part of the book is devoted to the events and personalities, the tragedies, the bestialities, and the triumphs of the human spirit that characterized the two great wars. That this is justified by the impact of those wars on the political, constitutional, economic, and social life of the country no one who knows Canada can doubt.

It will be said that "Ordeal by Fire" is journalism, not history. By academic standards this is true. But until very recently the writing of history in Canada has been such a dreary profession that the color and exuberance of Mr. Allen's treatment is a gratifying relief. And who is to say that in general, if not in detail, it is any less accurate? It is not a full and rounded picture of the generation it covers, but that was not its author's intention. He has done what he set out to do with clarity and imagination; with indignation when that is justified; with insight, charity, and good taste. It is a glowing and stimulating book.

Inevitably Mr. Allen has much to say about the United States and the impact on Canadians of their colossal and powerful neighbor. For this reason as well as because of the dramatic interest of the story itself his book is recommended for American readers. It is difficult to think of any better single introduction to the life and times of the Canadian people in this century. And the Canadians, with all their similarities, are not indistinguishable from the people of the United States. "Ordeal by Fire" illuminates many of the differences.

Our Amazing Neighbor Up North

"Ordeal by Fire: Canada, 1910-1945," by Ralph Allen (Doubleday. 492 pp. \$5.95), dispels some popular U.S. myths by introducing the startling characters and episodes in the recent history of the Commonwealth. H. L. Keenleyside, former Canadian ambassador and deputy minister, is now a senior official of the U. N.

By H. L. Keenleyside

CANADIANS are often described, particularly by their native Menckens, as dull, stodgy, unimaginative, colorless, and boring. They are alleged to sit on every fence, to stroll slowly down the middle of every road; at the United Nations they refrained from committing themselves on so many votes that Canada was once known as "The Great Abstainer." Canadian history is usually thought to have had few spectacular heroes, no monstrous or gaudy villains. "Ordeal by Fire" is a book that should explode these queer myths forever.

What other country, engulfed in the most appalling war in its history, could boast a Minister of Defense who was palpably mad and yet remained five years in office? Where could be found

a finer pair of robber barons than Sir William Mackenzie and Sir Donald Mann, the small-town schoolteacher and the divinity student who parleyed their energy, ambition, brashness, and persuasive oratory into immense personal fortunes and a bankrupt trans-continental railway? R. B. Bennett (who when defeated left Canada for England and became Viscount Bennett) started his term as Prime Minister in 1930 well to the right of Herbert Hoover, but unlike Hoover was five years later advocating policies described by some of his own followers as Communistic. What other country can boast two Social Credit Governments? What American "boss" had a more unsavory record than Duplessis of Quebec? Or was a more successful mountebank than Mayor Houde of Montreal? The Canadian Prime Minister who established the record for the longest term of office in British parliamentary history was a firm believer in spiritualism and was convinced that through his favorite female mediums he was in constant communication with departed friends, including his pet dog, Pat—and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt! Where, except in Gandhi, can one find a man who combined sainthood and practical politics more effectively than J. S. Woodsworth, for thirty years the head of the C. C. F.

LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

10; 4; 7; 8; 1; 12; 11; 13; 3; 2; 14; 6; 9; 5.