

of social organization are, of course, justified. No one can doubt that class, fostered by public-school education, eats like a canker into the economic fabric of a country in which birth rather than ability still controls promotion in industry and commerce. But these commentators—all at the top of their form in this lively and provoking book—concentrate, I think, too narrowly on the public schools, which are rapidly becoming the scapegoat for every manifestation of social injustice and snobbery. They remain immensely vigorous, for the *nouveau riche* will always buy social insignia in an affluent society, and Britain is certainly still affluent; their abolition is well-nigh impossible, no matter how deeply desired.

There are less strongly rooted institu-

tions that would make easier targets and that are just as snobbish. One or two of these commentators might have concentrated their fire on the outworn flummery of Britain's Honours system, with its ludicrous orders of chivalry, along with the rest of the idiotic hierarchies that proliferate like weeds in British society.

However, if you have a love-hate relationship with Britain, you will enjoy this book, every page of it; for its self-appointed physicians are ruthless almost to the point of sadism in their exposures of the diseases that rack their country. The only silly thing about the book is its title—old ladies, even if crippled, have a hunger to live that drives them on and on and on. Senility it may be, but suicide never.

these do seem to be the author's own. The analysis of Jawaharlal Nehru and his impact, from a succession of great thinkers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Tagore, and Gandhi, upon modern India is trenchant, if not as profound as it might have been. There are also comments upon unity and the factors of disunity which are not without significance.

It is a pity, however, that, while the author stresses planning and other methods used to achieve a socialist state, and the cultural and political aspects involved, he almost wholly ignores the decisive economic factors that are at the root of radical social change.

None of this, moreover, enlarges or clarifies his arguments as to why the West is not really "materialistic" and the East not really "spiritual." The serious student of contemporary India is well aware that somewhere in the ferment of new political upheavals, new economic and cultural objectives, and new definitions of humanism, the bewildered and hard-pressed Indian, trying to keep body and soul together amid all his problems, manages somehow to retain his universal spirit and something of his basic values. All this showed clearly enough when the Chinese struck in October 1962. The fissiparous elements, muddled and contradictory solutions to problems, the lust for power and privilege mentioned by the author vanished completely in an extraordinary solidarity of national resolve and high-minded, selfless determination.

The subject of this book is of very considerable importance; it deserved a more serious and scholarly treatment.

A Quiet Culture Out of Chaos

Is There a Contemporary Indian Civilization?, by Mulk Raj Anand (Asia Publishing House. 207 pp. \$5.25), offers historical as well as other explanations for the status of the Subcontinent today. Tara Ali Baig, an Indian writer and radio commentator, lectures on India's history and culture.

By TARA ALI BAIG

C. R. RAJAGOPALACHARI, India's last Governor-General, had a mind like a two-edged Moghul fist-dagger. He inaugurated the Asian Writers' Conference some years ago by telling the assembled writers (including the author of this book, who was secretary of the conference) that there was no such bird, for the most part, as an original writer. What one man wrote another copied. Research was only another name for repeating academic mistakes, scholarship merely diligence in reading other men's books.

The first part of the book under review lives up handsomely to this definition. Not only is it a mish-mash of history with many repetitions, but so varied are the styles of succeeding chapters that they read like the contributions of different authors in a symposium. Since the preface states, "This little book has grown out of my participation in the UNESCO Seminar on 'Traditional Values in India' in the dialogues between East and West," this might well be true.

The first chapter is historical, and

this is necessary to the theme. But the second chapter reminds one irresistibly of inter-university debates: it has the posture and stance of the uncertain but bookish debater, using invective rather than argument, purple prose in the place of reason, and quotations in a manner that was England's greatest educational disservice to India.

Fortunately, the last chapter on the "Emergence of a New Indian Civilization" has some coherence and clarity of thought. There are positive statements, for instance, about humanism. And



"Dammit! I knew what I was trying to say when I started it."

Life Sketches of Delhi

***Like Birds, Like Fishes and Other Stories*, by R. Praver Jhabvala (Norton. 224 pp. \$3.95), in its variety of characters and situations, mirrors contemporary Delhi's middle and upper classes. William Clifford is a writer and editor with a special interest in Asian literature.**

By WILLIAM CLIFFORD

ONE OF India's best novelists writing in English is R. Praver Jhabvala, who was born Ruth Praver of Polish parents in Germany, where she spent the first twelve years of her life. During the next twelve years she continued her education in England, then married a Parsi architect, with whom she has resided in Delhi for the past twelve years. Seeming to take root the day she arrived on Indian soil, Mrs. Jhabvala finished her first novel, *Amrita*, in a year and a half. Everyone said it skilfully pictured society in modern Delhi; she had completely grasped the workings of the Indian mind, while at the same time exhibiting in herself no less than the gentle irony of Jane Austen.

"I cannot," she has remarked, "imagine myself ever living—or indeed ever having lived—anywhere else. If R. K. Narayan can go on writing all those novels about Malgudi, a much smaller place, I don't see why I can't write as many as I like about Delhi." The total is now five, and each is a delight. Through the pages of *Amrita* and *The Nature of Passion* march the progressive girls and dilatory young men, the important committeewomen and dishonest contractors, the esthetes and hangers-on, the poor relations and frightened underlings, the absurd but lovable characters of Delhi's upper and middle classes. *Esmond in India* has a darker coloring, concerned as it is with unhappy marriages (almost all marriages are unhappy, apparently, but some are more hysterical than others) and a search for God. *The Householder* moves to a lower economic level, but the human relationships are much the same. In *Get Ready for Battle* we return to a *nouveau riche* setting like that of the second book.

Through them all runs a rich vein of high humor. One of Mrs. Jhabvala's

best effects, which she employs with great skill and welcome frequency, is to have people talking at cross purposes, paying no attention to each other, but making a meaningful and hilarious counterpoint, sometimes even harmonizing, like the singers of an operatic quartet who may or may not be singing to each other. She misses very little that goes on anywhere, at any level.

Now, after five fine novels, five feasts, we are offered a book of eleven short stories, like a dessert tray of sweetmeats. There's something for every taste, even a masterful story not about

India but about German Jewish refugees, called "A Birthday in London." This and five others ran in *The New Yorker*—stories about a grandmother finding happiness for her spirit, about a widow turning to religion following the frustration of her desire for a young man, about a timid man going to apply for a job, about the young second wife of a high official, about a merchant with no sons who becomes the father of a sixth baby daughter.

Mrs. Jhabvala chooses as protagonists for the remaining five stories a little man who works his way up in a posh draper's shop, a poet who wins the Literary Academy prize, an English wife who keeps a stiff upper lip in her undisciplined Indian family, a neighboring loose woman, and a romantic vagabond who builds a brief following as a holy man. They are all life-sized and, combined, brilliantly mirror various aspects of India today.

A Writer Uniquely Human

***Late-Blooming Flowers and Other Stories*, by Anton Chekhov, translated from the Russian by I. C. Cher-tok and Jean Gardner (McGraw-Hill. 252 pp. \$4.95), offers seven comparatively unfamiliar tales by an author who combined esthetic and social conscience. Charles Simmons co-edited "The Creative Present."**

By CHARLES SIMMONS

CHEKHOV is excludingly seductive. While you read him you are ready to eschew all other writers. And if you add to an experience of his work a knowledge of the man—by reading, say, Ernest J. Simmons's recent biography—you become almost unfit for other literary intercourse. It is an illusion and transitory, but for a while everything else seems less. Homer is grandiose, Rabelais facetious, Dante deliberate and synthetic, Shakespeare oratorical, Cervantes over-artful, Goethe exhibitionistic, Joyce obsessive. As for Chekhov's fellow Russians, Pushkin seems primitive, Gogol cute, Turgenev cold, Dostoevsky insane, Tolstoy pompous. One could perhaps start with any of these writers and explain how they, similarly and for a time, cast the rest into the shade. But one is not tempted to do this, and so I assume there is something unique about Chekhov.



—From the book jacket.

I think it is this: there was in this profane saint so much of what one seeks in human beings that mere admiration does not encompass one's response to him. Only love does. This was a man who practiced his art with both an esthetic and a social conscience, neither interfering with the other as they are apt to do, and as they always do in small artists. This was a man who, having been trained as a doctor, understood that his skill was a sacred connection with society. He practiced medicine all his life. This was a man who, though sick with tuberculosis for years, never let his compassion diminish to despair, his understanding to cynicism, his