

LEAD, KINDLY LIGHT. By Vincent Sheean. (Cassell; 17s. 6d.)

This interesting study of Gandhi's life and teaching by an eleventh-hour disciple from America may be recommended as by-passing the *longueurs*, and supplying the omissions of the Mahatma's autobiography. But it is much more than that. Seeking out his predestined *guru* in India and making his acquaintance in the very last days before his death, the author conveys to us something of the moral earthquake which the brief intercourse, followed by the scene of martyrdom, produced in his own being. It reads like nothing but the last hours of Socrates, and the eye-witness has caught something of Platonic inspiration from the words and presence and passing of a great spirit.

Gandhi's ideas and religious background, rather than his political achievements, are the theme of this book. He is placed in the setting of immemorial Hinduism, with the Bhavad-gita as the scripture which above all others inspired and shaped his life. But he is shown, too, as a great innovator, conscious of his debt to the gospel of Christ, and giving a long-needed practical twist to Indian spirituality. This may well, as the author thinks, mark one of the great spiritual turning-points in history. For Gandhi's semi-Christian interpretation of the *karmayoga* (way of action) of the Gita is a powerful corrective of the main defect of Indian religion and philosophy hitherto: its negative attitude to the world and its absorption in the liberation of the self through contemplation to the neglect of altruistic action and charity. His busy but selfless life and the mystique of the spinning-wheel are in complete harmony with the spirit of the Catholic saints: a golden mean between eastern acosmism and western worldliness, between Sankarâcharya and Henry Ford. Gandhi's pacifism was not absolute, and his conception of non-violence was nearer to Christian charity than the negative *ahimsa* of his spiritual ancestors. Mr Sheean foresees an equally important future for Gandhi's other great creative idea, *satyâgraha*, or self-sacrifice for truth, as an alternative to the desperate prospect of military action in an atomic age. Be that as it may, there is no resisting the impression of sheer, uncompromising sanctity which Gandhi made on those who knew him, and he may well be the harbinger of something much greater than the political emancipation of his country.

The book has a bibliography and over a hundred pages of appendices, including a useful account of Gandhi's nineteenth-century forerunners and the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement. The allusion in the title is to Gandhi's predilection for Newman's hymn.

B.W.