

A PILGRIMAGE OF IDEAS
or
THE RE-EDUCATION OF SHERWOOD EDDY

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by

SHERWOOD EDDY

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FOREWORD

A PILGRIMAGE OF IDEAS notes the milestones passed by one person during the last sixty-three years. To change the figure, it tries to record at least the captions of the moving picture of life that runs itself off before the eye of memory. It is frankly autobiographical. There is always an element of presumption in any book, especially if it is about one's self. But I will not start with an apology. At first the book began almost to write itself; frankly it seemed as if I had to write it. I am less interested, however, in myself than I am in the ideas which successively captured the inner fortress of prejudice and took possession of my often unwilling mind. I was driven steadily to the left from conservatism to liberalism and then to radicalism.

If the book began to write itself it did not continue to do so. I soon confronted obstacles. The twenty-two chapters originally outlined would have filled two large volumes and several years of time. When I had written more than enough for one volume I decided to cut it down and let it go as it was. Perhaps I shall live to perpetrate the second volume but more probably the reader will be spared.

The very uncertainty of the present situation leads me to cast off the book now. I am just starting on another long journey through China and around the world. The world situation may change kaleidoscopically and the film of world events will run on without ceasing, but I shall cut off the reel of the past three score years of my own life at this point and let it go as it is, in the rough. As the scope of this book covers more than the period of the last forty years, I have drawn freely upon facts and materials from several of my previous books.

My thanks are due to my beloved critic, Edward Jenkins,

president of the George Williams College, to my esteemed fellow worker Kirby Page, and to Benjamin Kempel for valuable criticisms and suggestions regarding portions of the manuscript. I am often led to wonder whether any man ever had, undeservedly, better friends. It has been a pleasure to deal also with such publishers—and no man ever had better—upon a plane above the sordid level of profit.

I have dedicated this volume to my mother who is eighty-six years young at the time of writing and to my dear little grandson, Arden, who is approaching the august age of two. I have just taken him to his first play-school perched high on my shoulders. In a moment he had left me, toddling out into Life, joyous and unafraid, with eyes opened wide with wonder, as I hope they always will be. I cannot pass on to him the dearly bought experience of my own past nor prevent his making his own unavoidable and numerous mistakes. He is moving, however, into a new world—never perfect, never approaching Utopia—but a better world than ours. I only hope his generation does not make as sorry a mess of things as ours did in the war and post-war world.

I would like the title of the book to suggest a pilgrimage—not of an insignificant, egoistic individual—but of ideas; not in personally original thought of which I am incapable, but in the great ideas of our age. Of my past sixty-three years, forty have been spent in travel, both geographical and ideological. I have been seemingly forced both by outer events and an inner urge to travel as a joyous pilgrim a long and at times a rough road. I found myself in turn—often by no conscious choice—a part of the rising student movement of America, the crusade which took me across Asia, the terrific experiences of the World War which shattered the old world past repair, and the growth of the radical movement for a new social order. I have been happily driven in my pilgrimage geographically over a rapidly changing world and historically through the movements of men and ideas of the last four decades. I have watched the development of nationalism, of imperialism and of hard-pressed de-

mocracy; of capitalism, fascism, communism and socialism. I have watched the world pass through the darkness and light of war and peace and the post-war transition: the Orient in revolt with its newly emergent nationalisms and the Occident in a period of strife, of strikes and of revolutions, whether violent or nonviolent. Somewhat arbitrarily I have divided the narrative into two parts—the pilgrimage in living and the pilgrimage in thought. Since life fortunately is seldom logical, and I, unfortunately never am, I hope there will be found some ideas in the living and some life in the ideas. Owing to pressure of time and space I have left out several chapters from what was originally the latter half of the book.

As I read over the entire manuscript a few days before sailing, I am appalled to find it bristling with faults that are painfully evident even to my view which cannot be wholly objective or adequately critical. But if so it is truly characteristic of my life. Regretfully I must leave it as it is and hope to correct some of its failings in a later volume.

New York.

June 20, 1934.

CONTENTS

PART I

A PILGRIMAGE IN LIVING

	PAGE
FOREWORD	xi
I. A ROLLING STONE.....	3
II. HOME IN KANSAS.....	24
III. EDUCATION AND MIS-EDUCATION.....	31
IV. THE PILGRIMAGE BEGINS.....	45
V. FIFTEEN YEARS IN INDIA.....	83
VI. KALEIDOSCOPIC CHINA.....	111
VII. AWAKENING ASIA AND AMERICA.....	138
VIII. THE VOLCANO OF THE WAR.....	162
IX. THE PILGRIMAGE TO EUROPE.....	183
X. DYNAMIC PERSONALITIES.....	200

PART II

A PILGRIMAGE IN THOUGHT

XI. THE ETHICS OF WAR.....	225
XII. SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE ECONOMIC ORDER...	240
XIII. THE REVOLUTION IN MORALS.....	260
XIV. THE SEX PROBLEM.....	272
XV. A WORKING PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE.....	286
XVI. RUSSIA AND THE DIALECTIC OF HISTORY.....	313

CHAPTER I

A ROLLING STONE

LIFE, as I look back upon it from this my sixty-third birthday, runs vividly before my mind's eye as something objective that just happened of itself. I never consciously chose to travel over the Orient and Occident and watch nations in transition, where history was in the making, during the great revolutionary period of the World War and the volcanic upheavals that followed. Rather, I find myself looking on, as a spectator at a drama.

As it was "bliss" for Wordsworth to see the new world begotten by the French Revolution—and to be young was "very heaven," so at this far more significant period—which I believe to be the greatest transitional epoch in all history—I have found life to be one long glorious adventure. I can sympathize with the natural feeling of frustration on the part of youth during this time of the disintegration of an old economic order which cannot offer security nor even self-respecting employment to multitudes. But instead of the cynicism engendered by the death of the old ideals, I find life a disturbing but most stimulating challenge full of nascent zest. For, if we look beyond the inevitable suffering accompanying all the major transitions of history, the future is surely big with the promise of a better day.

I have thoroughly enjoyed life—almost every day of it, save for a short period thirty-seven years ago, of which I shall speak later. It has seemed to me supremely worth living. I am vividly conscious of the limitations, the faults and the failures of my

life—it fairly bristles with them. But I am not in the least morbidly depressed by them. I have seen life—a pretty wide stretch of it. I would like to try to write the scenario, or at least the captions for the moving picture of life as I have seen it. If it is of use to anyone else, I shall be glad. At least I should like to try to save others from some of the mistakes I have made, for I have made more than my share.

If I was robbed of an education through my own folly and a most faulty system, perhaps I can forestall someone else being defrauded of his birthright. If I have had to re-educate myself, perhaps others are in the same predicament. If I have been forced in this hard school of life over a long pilgrimage, perhaps others may be traveling the same road. At any rate, I shall attempt to set down in black and white the running script of this fascinating film of life, with its crowding events, its interesting persons, its succession of ideas, and the lessons, glad and painful, which it forces one to learn.

I was born in a small town on the plains of Kansas, on the banks of the Missouri River. The country was flat and the landscape prosaic. As I return now to the cornfields and brush of those river bottoms I see brooding beauty everywhere, but I did not see it in my early years.

My Spartan mother, to whom humanly I owe most in life, went to school with Buffalo Bill in the early Wild West shooting days when the fight was on as to whether Kansas should be a slave or free state. Herds of buffalo had recently roamed over the adjacent plains, and two of our neighbors had made fortunes out of buffalo hides, which were almost daily shipped into our town from farther west. I bought bows and arrows from the Indian boys who had been captured and brought into Fort Leavenworth in the Indian wars which were still being waged with the retreating Sioux and other warlike tribes.

My boyhood was happy and healthy, without morbid tension or complexes. Camping and shooting with the other boys were the delight of my early years, with expeditions in covered wagons upon which, as the artist of the gang, I used to paint "Pike's Peak or Bust," "Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show," etc. We were organized in two rival and joyous factions of Indians and Scouts. And it was then I learned to love boxing. In my high school days I shot prairie chickens in the old Indian Territory, which is now the state of Oklahoma. It was this early life that later made me crave the relaxation and abandon of big game shooting in India, the going out periodically when tired from work to hunt for wild elephant, tiger, bear and bison.

Although my early training was Puritan, it was nevertheless liberal. In the early prohibition state of Kansas drinking, betting and gambling were not to be thought of. But no healthy amusements were taboo in our home, whether playing cards, or attending the theater, or dancing. We never wanted to go out to pool rooms or to leave the home in order to have a good time. Home was a happy place. My mother sent me to dancing school because of my excessive timidity. I was afraid of girls, since I had no sister. Dancing and shooting were my favorite sports. The atmosphere was one of freedom and of real democracy. We still felt the pulse of the open frontier. I was reared on such books as *The Boys of '76* and liberty, equality and fraternity seemed to be axiomatic first principles, or semi-religious convictions which must be self-evident to everyone. These principles made me later look without envy, though with full appreciation, upon the far riper culture of England and the Old World with their rigid hierarchy of social caste, yet view with initial hostility and suspicion the harsh dictatorships of communism and fascism.

After graduation from the Leavenworth High School I studied first in Phillips Andover Academy and then in Yale University, finishing with the class of 1891—graduated but uneducated. During my college course, in 1889, my father became

the receiver of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railway. I traveled a good deal with him each summer. His passes for private "car and party" enabled me one summer to sail a cat-boat on the Atlantic, the Pacific, the Great Lakes and the Gulf.

While we were out hunting deer in the mountains of Colorado in the summer of 1894, my father died suddenly of heart failure. As the eldest son I became responsible for his business investments. He left me a small competence which has given me freedom and independence to carry on my work without obligation to anyone for the views I hold or teach, or the manner of life I live. I valued this liberty and security and came later to work for a system which would give it to every man, not as an isolated individual but as a member of a socialized community.

After college, to try myself out and to discover my aptitudes for a vocation, I spent a year in New York City as a secretary of the Twenty-third Street Branch of the Y. M. C. A., then the largest city association in the world. Later in New York I was a student assistant to Dr. Parkhurst while he was making his fight against the vice, crime and corruption of Tammany Hall. Engaged in this fight were a little-known newcomer, Theodore Roosevelt, as police commissioner, Jacob Riis, a worker in the slums, young Lincoln Steffens, a cub reporter, and others. During this trial year of service in New York I made up my mind as to my future work and decided to become a foreign missionary. It meant a wrench and almost a death-blow to my personal ambition at the time. Up to my senior year in college all my plans had centered on making money. I believed that money was power, and I wanted the power. But during that year I turned from the thought of civil engineering to human engineering.

To prepare for mission work in China—although I was diverted at the last moment to service in India—I studied for two

years in the Union Theological Seminary of New York, after which I took a final year in Princeton. Between the periods in these two institutions, I spent a year in visiting the American colleges, as traveling secretary of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions. My portion of the field covered the principal institutions of the East and Canada in 1893-94; my classmate, Harry Luce, worked in the South; Horace Pitkin, who later fell as a martyr in the Boxer Uprising in China in 1900, visited the colleges of the West.

In our missionary purpose there was never any thought of a harsh dogmatism, of forcing our religion down the throats of unwilling peoples. We held no ideas of a narrow orthodoxy of "perishing millions" who were eternally lost. This I never believed and never preached at home or abroad. But we were swept into the mid-current of enthusiasm in the great world crusade of that day.

In the winter of 1895 I crossed the Atlantic on the Cunarder *Cephalonia* to attend the Liverpool Conference of the British Student Volunteer Movement. We were shipwrecked on a precipice near Holyhead, but though the ship went to the bottom, we escaped in the lifeboats, landing in pyjamas and overcoats. As I came in contact with the British and Continental leaders of this student uprising, the conference was even more thrilling than the shipwreck, though I keenly enjoyed both.¹

In 1896 I sailed for India, landing in Bombay in September. I spent the next fifteen years in that fascinating land, the home of philosophy and the arena of the great religions of the world. Now began my tutelage under the totally different technique of the Orient. Here was a new world for a practical-minded Westerner whose foot-rule of measurement had been efficiency.

¹The Cunarder *Cephalonia* ran on the rocks near the South Stack Lighthouse, Holyhead, and sank January 1, 1896.

Here was a spacious and timeless calm under a tropical firmament of the Absolute, suggesting new values in life.

I had passed to the antipodes, both geographically and ideologically: from utilitarian America, with its boast of bigness, of wealth and of material accomplishment, to a conception of life which ignored or despised these things and sought goals and ends wholly incommensurable with those of the West. Here was a need for re-education for myself if I could ever get beyond my own dogma. I believed that I had something priceless to give in a new conception and way of life. But I found also that I had much to learn. That ancient, Oriental half of humanity, which had produced nearly all the great religions, including Christianity, and many of the great philosophies, had not lived in vain.

Materially poor but intellectually and spiritually rich, India was a fascinating field for study and for activity. I have no words adequate to describe the winsome character and charm of her people. For some reason the great masses of men in the larger and more impoverished countries have always made the most immediate appeal to my heart, particularly the peoples of India, China and Russia.

I saw Lord Curzon land in Bombay as a proud young viceroy, with ruddy cheeks and a very high hat. He was one of the three ablest, though not one of the wisest, of India's thirty great viceroys. He seemed to embody all the power and efficiency of the imperious and imperialistic West. His insolent accusations concerning India's lower moral standards, when Britain was holding this one-sixth of the population of the world helpless at the point of the bayonet,¹ and his seemingly arbitrary partition of the province of Bengal only added fuel to the flame of the revolt of

¹ With overweening pride Lord Curzon informed India that truth was "rather a Western than an Oriental virtue, and that craftiness and diplomatic wiles have in the East always been held in much repute."

India which was springing up after the victory of little Oriental Japan over the Occidental colossus, Russia. The beginnings of this revolt of all Asia I was privileged to witness for the next four decades. Gandhi was even then building up his technique of non-resistance in his twenty years of apprenticeship in South Africa. But I did not know him until later, upon his return to India, when he was leading the non-violent revolution, followed by silent millions.

I saw Swami Vivekananda return in triumph from the first Parliament of Religions in Chicago and traveled with him by ship from Madras to Calcutta. I can hardly believe now that I had the effrontery and the presumption to challenge him to a debate before the entire ship's company on the deck. I *felt* like a young Samson smiting with the jawbone of an ass, contending with this brilliant and subtle Vedantist. But as I see myself now I was the ass, boneheaded beyond belief. I was sure my cause was right but I was no match for this brilliant man. The swami maintained that the Vedas are to be received upon authority and are not subject to the test of reason. All men are manifestations of God and there is no such thing as sin. Our individual existence and all human history are, in fact, a mere illusion. These and similar affirmations were characteristic of the swami's vague and subtle, pantheistic Vedantism which was very hard to meet. He impressed me as a clever charlatan who had aspirations, nevertheless, toward the saintliness of his great master, Ramakrishna.

I can still see myself alone with the swami after that debate, when with the mien and condescension of a god incarnate he told me that he had left thousands of converts to Hinduism at Harvard and in Boston. But I was fresh from the land of Buffalo Bill—*very* fresh. Hoping to puncture his inflated composure, I leaned forward, pointed my finger in his face so that he might not mistake to whom I was alluding, and said, "Swami, you lie." With unbroken condescension he smiled and said pityingly,

"Young man, you need some cooling food." No doubt I did, both mentally and spiritually, though at that time I was too self-confident to be aware of my own needs; I was too fully occupied with reforming the timeless Orient. The swami won at this point but, fortunately or unfortunately, I came from a land that did not realize when it was beaten.

In the end we thought we had won the debate, and most of the ship's passengers seemed to think so, but his two English converts who sat at his feet on the deck thought the swami had won. It was all very exciting, but neither that debate nor the many discussions, arguments and question meetings which followed in India—as a kind of tug of war to prove that we had a better religion than they had and to expose the evils of Hinduism—ever got us far or won a single convert. I early abandoned this futile procedure of debate and argument. I am glad to see that the whole method of an appreciative and sympathetic approach to the great ethnic religions is so fully recognized in the Laymen's Report and by the majority of modern missionaries.

Upon arrival in India, and only half in fun, half a dozen of us founded the Bachelors' Anti-Matrimonial League, of which I was the self-appointed traveling secretary. But when I met my future wife in Madras in 1897 it was for me love at first sight, though that was not the case with my conservative English wife. We were married the following year and spent the happiest period of our life out among the Indian villages, miles from any railway. Roswell Bates called our mission station "the most God-forsaken spot" he had seen around the world, but we were utterly happy and at home among those lovable people.

My work in India was divided between the English-speaking students in the colleges and the impoverished masses out among the villages. I traveled through the colleges lecturing and holding meetings among the students of many faiths—Hindus,

Moslems, Buddhists, Sikhs and Christians; but also working among all classes, Indians, Europeans and Eurasians, now called Anglo-Indians. As I look back upon it I see that my work was zealous but painfully superficial and thin.

Since English was known only by college students, I was obliged to learn Tamil, a language spoken by nearly twenty million people. This vernacular gave me access to the great churches and mass movements of South India. When a missionary broke down and went home, leaving the mission short-handed, my wife and I moved out and for some years occupied the Batlagundu station of the American Board in the Madura district. Our station was far from the railway and thirty miles from the nearest white man, but we never in our lives felt more at home among any people nor were more happy than there.

We were made responsible in our station for a little square on the checkerboard of the map: about half a million people, sixty churches and nearly as many schools, which I visited on a motorcycle. Though I had taken a full theological course, I preferred to remain a layman because of the prejudice against a foreign proselytizing religion. I never baptized anyone and I took little interest in theological, ecclesiastical or organizational work. It was the life of the people that concerned me, as to whether it was impoverished or abundant, materially, spiritually, culturally and socially. I believed we had a way of life that would in time introduce a whole new civilization, with its religious, moral, educational, economic and social values, while preserving the priceless cultural and spiritual achievements of the great ethnic faiths of the Orient.

In 1907 as a delegate from India, I attended in Tokyo the first conference of the World's Student Christian Federation to be held in the Orient. The first break in the ranks of the Confucian students of "changeless China" occurred in Japan; fifteen thousand of them had poured into that country to get a quick educa-

tion, hoping to learn the secret of Japan's power in conquering Czarist Russia, the colossus of the Western World, in the Russo-Japanese War in 1904. The break which occurred among the Chinese students in Tokyo and Hongkong led to the first of a series of invitations for me to return to China for a number of campaigns and continued for twenty-seven years, from 1907 to 1934. The audiences rose from a thousand students, which China's initial invitation had promised, to three or four or five thousand a day. The meetings were often of dramatic intensity, lasting for two and three hours.

In social calls, and often in heart-to-heart personal interviews, we met the successive presidents, Cabinet ministers, governors and generals of China, such as Marshal Feng and the "Young Marshal," Chang Hsieu Liang. While in earlier years we met youths who were devout believers in Confucianism, Buddhism or Taoism, in later visits we had to face the rise of an atheist, anti-religious movement. In more recent years militant Chinese communists have tried to break up the meetings in open riots or to answer them by counter-propaganda. I have always respected an open foe and the communists included many of the most sacrificial and idealistic students of China. Big game shooting in India was tame compared with the dramatic moral conflicts of these students, or with witnessing the majestic, unfolding panorama of the rapidly changing history of this mighty race. No people ever appealed to me more powerfully than do the Chinese. There is indeed a natural affinity between the practical American and the Chinese mind.

In 1910, at the close of my second seven-year period in India, I attended the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference. It was presided over by John R. Mott, the outstanding organizing genius and missionary statesman of the generation. A world organization of missions was formed as a result of this conference and a call was extended to Mott, as chairman of the Continuation Committee of Edinburgh, to assume the executive