

THE GREAT DOCTOR

FROM a hospital in Lambaréné, French Equatorial Africa, the other day an 82-year-old doctor appealed to public opinion everywhere to demand the stopping of nuclear weapon tests. Broadcast from Oslo in Norwegian, French, German, English and Russian, Dr Albert Schweitzer's appeal was news throughout the world. It was another reminder that when he set out on Good Friday 44 years ago for a new home and a new, hard life on the edge of the primeval forest, leaving behind a brilliant future in Europe as musician, philosopher and theologian, Dr Schweitzer was not forsaking the world he had known. How did it happen that way? Dr Schweitzer's story is the story of a man of two worlds and many talents, who can build a house or a hospital, treat a patient for leprosy or sleeping sickness, mend an organ and then play a Bach fugue on it, lecture on Goethe or St. Paul, interpret Indian thought, preach a sermon or sail a boat. This story will be told in his own words in seven BBC programmes to be heard from 2YC, starting on Wednesday, May 15, at 8.15 p.m. They will also be broadcast soon in the 2YA Women's Session, and will start in the 1YZ Women's Session on May 24, and from 4YC early in June.

Although he has survived two world wars and spent half his life on the Equator, in a climate where no white man is supposed to stay for more than two years at a time, Albert Schweitzer was once a sickly infant. In a way he was a man of two worlds from the start for, the son of an Evangelical pastor and teacher, he was born on the frontier, in Alsace, only four years after it had passed from France to Germany after the Franco-Prussian War. The leading virtue in this part-French, part-German homeland was tolerance. As Waldemar Augustiny points out in his recently published authorised biography of Schweitzer,* even the churches had to minister to two denominations—"Catholic and Protestant, priests and ministers, stood before the same altar."

The threads that run through Schweitzer's life can be found even in his childhood: his curiosity about the Bible, which led him to theology; his love of arguing and asking questions, which led him to philosophy; his pity for suffering—in animals as well as humans—which led him to medicine; his passion for music and especially the organ, which made him one of the great Bach authorities and interpreters; and his sense of humour which kept him human and reminded him of his shortcomings. As early as three or four years old he must have developed a remarkable self-critical faculty. Augustiny tells the story of a bee-sting at that age, when the child went on crying longer than was necessary, and he quotes Schweitzer's recollection: "My conscience told me to stop now. But so that I would still be of interest, I went on yelling loudly and received a lot more comforting than I had need of. But I felt myself a little rascal and I was unhappy about it the whole day long. How often has this experience warned me, if the temptation came to me as a grown man, not to exaggerate

the importance of anything that happened to me."

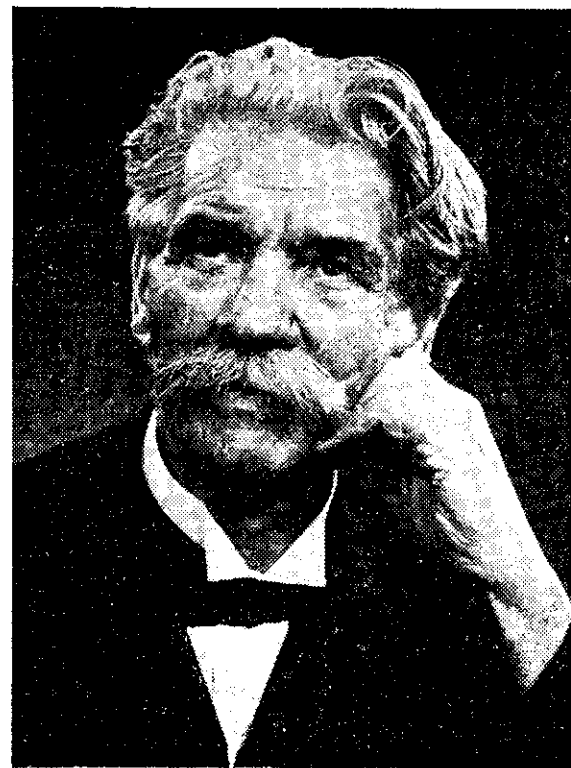
Dr Schweitzer himself believes that his childhood was quite normal. His biographer sees implicit in it the man fulfilled. Certainly he must have decided early that the great problem was "how to get through life without expending one's humanity." "What we usually mean by 'maturity' in mankind is a resigned reasonableness," he has written. "Each one follows in the wake of another until, unit by unit, he surrenders those thoughts and perceptions which were dear to him in youth. . . So as better to get through life's storms and stresses, he has lightened ship. He throws out a cargo he once thought precious. But it was meat and drink that he really threw overboard. Now he rides more lightly, true, but as a shameful being."

This insight and another which he had in his early twenties go far towards explaining the sort of future Schweitzer was to make for himself. The circumstances of his life had been all he could have asked for, yet there remained the question: why is there so much suffering in the world? "It seemed," writes his biographer, "that it became an obligation on the part of those shielded from suffering to seek to reduce the miseries of others not so fortunate." Could it be that there was something corrupt in the belief that a man should build his life around the development of his special talents? Schweitzer, at any rate, decided as he lay in bed that Whitsun morning that he would consider himself justified in living till he was 30 for science and art so that he could devote himself from that time forward to the direct service of humanity.

His decision made, Albert Schweitzer carried it out in the most practical

fashion when the time came. At 30 he chose a future as a doctor in tropical Africa, and putting his years as a preacher, artist and scholar behind him began his new studies. They were hard years with much time given to lectures and recitals to earn money for studies and living costs, and to work as an author of books on theology and music. And even when he was ready to go his offer to serve under the Paris Missionary Society was not readily accepted because some of his religious beliefs were not orthodox. He had to promise not to preach—though later the missionaries in the field freed him from this promise.

The year before he went to Africa, Schweitzer had married. His wife had taken courses in nursing and had helped with the purchases and packing of all necessities for their hospital. They had little with them when they arrived in Lambaréné, for the case with medicaments had not yet come, but (says his biographer) "the doctor had not gone to sleep for the first time in his new home before he heard the roar of the tom-tom drums on the other side of the water prairie. . . The white fetish-man (witch-doctor) who could make them all healthy had come. In the morning the first patients had



DR SCHWEITZER—by Karsh, of Ottawa

assembled. On the next day there were still more; then whole flotillas of canoes were headed for the Mission. . ."

That was the beginning of the years Dr Schweitzer has spent in Africa—years that have been made harder by two world wars. Interned in the First World War, as a German national in French territory, he began on his second day as a prisoner in his own home to write his *Philosophy of Civilisation*, in which his principle of "Reverence for Life" was stated. He has written: "Truly ethical is the man who listens to the voice that tells him that he must help all that lives, and who seeks to avoid in any way injuring that which lives. . . He never asks whether, or how greatly, it is capable of sensibilities. Life for him, as such, is holy. He tears no leaf from a tree; he breaks no flower-stem; he takes care that he does not tread on insects." When the Second World War seemed imminent, Schweitzer, with six terms of service in Equatorial Africa behind him, forfeited his leave and began a seventh term which was to last 10 years and cover a period when war came to Lambaréné.

Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Divinity, Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Music, Dr Albert Schweitzer has in recent years been honoured by several countries—Belgium, France and Britain among them. When the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to him in 1953 he was compelled to ask that the visit to Oslo to receive it should be deferred. "He was completely occupied in building a village for lepers," writes Waldemar Augustiny. ". . . When he had begun the building, he did not know where the money was coming from to complete the work. Now the Nobel prize money enabled him to buy the tin for roofing. . . So he kept on living, working, with an anxious heart, for all that, serene. So he stands in our age as a watchman, now much older, wearier, but not bowed down and haunted by worries but filled with hope, hope that the spirit will overcome thoughtlessness, and humanity prevail over inhumanity."



IN THE LEPROSY HOSPITAL at Lambaréné—a study from Erica Anderson's book, "The World of Albert Schweitzer"

*THE ROAD TO LAMBARÉNE, by Waldemar Augustiny, translated by William J. Blake; Frederick Muller (through Oswald Sealey), N.Z. price 15/-.