

THE MISSION OF CRIPPS

Joseph McLeod, '42

The whole east was in a panic over the ravaging Japanese, and the vast subcontinent of India was threatened with invasion. In the desperate crisis the British government sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India to unite the various political factions in the defense of the country and to preserve this valuable portion of the Empire.

For years Cripps had advocated self-government for India, and now many looked to him as the man who could enlist the spirit and support of her teeming millions against the Japanese. Seldom had a more difficult problem in statesmanship confronted any man, but Cripps promised to settle the three hundred year old question in less than a month. For three weeks he laboured and sweated in his little white bungalow in the sultry, languid metropolis of New Delhi. He interviewed, argued and pleaded with the leaders of the various races, religions, and castes, and exerted every effort to persuade them that their best policy lay in cooperation with Britain. At first it looked as though his offer of Dominion status for India after the war would be accepted by the leaders, but three centuries of British imperialism had sown a spirit of distrust in India's people that no amount of argument could displace. They feared the British promises would not be kept, and although by no means agreeing among themselves, they demanded their own management of the country's defense and complete independence immediately.

Thus the great Indian problem proved too much for Sir Stafford. The trouble of British-Indian relations was too old and deep-seated to be uprooted in a month. If India had accepted his offers, Cripps would have been assured an immortal place in history. He would have been the most popular man in England after Churchill and a most probable successor to him. But the mission failed, and, as the disappointed, discouraged envoy returned to Europe, the Japanese bombers roared over Mandalay, and the little yellow invaders approached ever nearer to India.