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"GREAT IS TRUTH AND IT SHALL PREVAIL"

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CONTENTS

SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS: The Mother	1	THE PRESENCE IS HERE (Poem) by "Alastor"	5
PORTRAIT OF SAVITRI: From Sri Aurobindo's "Savitri": Book I, Canto 2	2	SRI AUROBINDO CAME TO ME by Dilip Kumar Roy	6
THE PASSING OF AN AVATAR by Franklin Merrel-Wolff	3	Chapter X: Avowedly Personal	6
GIVER OF SPIRITUAL VALUES TO TWO WORLDS By Baron Erik Palmstierna	3	THE HARLEQUIN OF SAGACITY by K. D. Sethna	11
THE INVISIBLE WHOLE AND THE PERSONAL WORKER	3	BOOKS IN THE BALANCE	
by A. L. Crampton Chalk	3	"MUCH RICHES IN A LITTLE ROOM" (Review by William Hookens of	
I DECLINE TO ACCEPT THE END OF MAN by William Faulkner	4	Dr. Amiya Chakravarty's MODERN TENDENCIES IN ENGLISH	12
SRI AUROBINDO, THE LEADER OF THE EVOLUTION	4	LITERATURE)	
Part II of "The World Crisis and India" by "Synergist"	5		

SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS

THE MOTHER

The Mother's Presence

(You have told us that the Mother is aware of everything. Does she know all our insignificant thoughts always or only when she concentrates?)

"I have said: 'Always behave as if the Mother were looking at you, for she is indeed present.' This does not mean that in her physical mind she is thinking of you always and seeing your thoughts. There is no need of that, since she is everywhere and acts everywhere out of her universal knowledge." (12-8-33)

(In what sense is Mother everywhere? Does Mother know all happenings in the physical plane?)

"Including what Lloyd George had for breakfast today or what Roosevelt said to his wife about the servants? Why should the Mother 'know' in the human way all happenings in the physical plane? Her business in her embodiment is to know the workings of the universal forces and use them for her works; for the rest she knows what she needs to know, sometimes with her inner self, sometimes with her physical mind. All knowledge is available in her universal self, but she brings forward only what is needed to be brought forward so that the working is done." (13-8-33)

The Mother's Grace

(Why does Mother in her universal action act according to the law of things, but in her embodied physical by constant Grace?)

"It is the work of the Cosmic power to maintain the cosmos and the law of the cosmos. The greater transformation comes from the Transcendent above the universal and it is that transcendent Grace which the embodiment of the Mother is there to bring to action." (13-8-33)

(What is the law of the working of the Mother's Grace?)

"The more one develops the psychic, the more is it possible for the Grace to act." (13-8-33)

(Can it be believed that the Mother's Grace is acting even when the difficulties do not disappear?)

"In that case everybody might say that all my difficulties must disappear at once, I must attain to perfection immediately and without difficulties, otherwise it proves that the Mother's Grace is not with me." (20-7-33)

(Is it not that the more we individually open to the Mother's Light and Force, the more her power is established in the universal?)

"It is the transforming power that is established—the universal power is always there." (13-8-33)

(Is not Grace a miracle also?)

"No. There is really no such thing as miracle." (13-8-33)

(What would you say about the utility of the physical approach to the Mother?)

"There is the utility of the physical approach to the Mother—the approach of the embodied mind and vital to her embodied Power. In her universal action the Mother acts according to the law of things—in her embodied physical action is the opportunity of a constant Grace—it is for that that the embodiment takes place." (12-8-33)

The Mother's True Being

1. Do you not refer to the Mother—our Mother—in your book *The Mother*?

2. Is she not the "Individual" Divine Mother who has embodied "the

power of these two vaster ways of existence"—Transcendent and Universal?

3. Has she not descended here amongst us into Darkness and Falsehood and Error and Death in her deep and great love for us?)

"Yes." (17-8-33)

(There are many who hold the view that she was human but now embodies the Divine Mother. Her *Prayers and Meditations*, they hold, explain this view. But, to my mental conception, to my psychic feeling, she is the Divine Mother who has consented to put on her the cloak of obscurity and suffering and ignorance so that she can effectively lead us—human beings—to Knowledge and Bliss and the supreme Lord. I also conceive that her Prayers are meant to show us—the aspiring psychic—how to pray to the Divine. Am I right?)

"Yes. The Divine puts on an appearance of humanity, assumes the outward human nature in order to tread the path and show it to human beings, but does not cease to be the Divine. It is a manifestation that takes place, a manifestation of a growing Divine consciousness, not human turning into divine. The Mother was inwardly above the human even in childhood. So the view held by 'many' is erroneous." (17-8-38)

(Am I right in thinking that she as an Individual embodies all the Divine Powers and brings down the Grace more and more to the physical plane and that her embodiment is a chance for the entire physical to change and be transformed?)

"Yes. Her embodiment is a chance for the earth-consciousness to receive the Supramental into it and to undergo first the transformation necessary for that to be possible. Afterwards there will be a further transformation by the Supramental, but the whole consciousness will not be supramentalised—there will be first a new race representing the Supermind, as man represents the mind." (13-8-33)

The Mother's Action

(Sometimes the Mother does not smile at us. Does this mean displeasure on her part?)

"It is a mistake to think that the Mother's not smiling means either displeasure or disapproval of something wrong in the sadhak. It is very often merely a sign of absorption or of inner concentration. On this occasion the Mother was putting a question to your soul." (31-7-33)

(Can Mother see to the details of organisation?)

"It is quite impossible for the Mother to see to every detail of the organisation of the Ashram in person, even as it is she has no time free at all. It is understood that you can have things done, but it is with those who have charge that you must insist on the execution of any arrangement." (20-7-33)

(On what basis did Mother's action proceed in the case recently submitted to her?)

"Mother acted on her inner perception about the whole affair; she does not act only on the outer facts but on what she feels or sees lying behind them." (29-8-35)

(X's letter to me about her hip-joint pain was sent to Mother by me not on the same day but on the next. Yet it seems from X's latest that her pain disappeared soon after that letter had reached me. Was there an automatic effect of the letter, even before Mother was told of the letter's contents?)

"Y spoke to the Mother about X's pain on the same day—so it is not necessary to suppose an automatic effect of the letter itself. But such an

Sri Aurobindo's Letters —Continued from page 1

automatic effect does often take place either immediately after writing or when the letter enters the Mother's atmosphere."

(How does Mother's protection of the sadhaks from certain forces of death, disease, etc., work?)

"The Mother has made an arrangement with a view to all the occult forces and the best possible conditions for the protection of the sadhaks from certain forces of death, disease etc. It cannot work perfectly because the sadhaks themselves have not the right attitude towards food and kindred vital physical things. But still there is a protection. If, however, the sadhaks go outside her formation, it must be on their own responsibility. But this arrangement is for the Ashram and not for those who are outside."

(Is Mother testing us always?)

"The idea of tests is not a healthy one and ought not to be pushed too far. Tests are applied not by the Divine but by the forces of the lower planes—mental, vital and physical—and allowed by the Divine because that is a part of the soul's training and helps it to know itself, its power and the limitations it has to outgrow. The Mother is not testing you at every moment but rather helping you at every moment to rise beyond the necessity of tests and difficulties which belong to the inferior consciousness. To be always conscious of that help will be your best safeguard against all attacks whether of adverse powers or of your own lower nature". (23-2-31)

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo

(Is it possible that the Mother cannot help me but you can?)

"You consider that the Mother can be of no help to you.....If you cannot profit by her help, you would find still less profit in mine. But in any case I have no intention of altering the arrangement I have made for all the disciples without exception that they should receive the light and force from her and not directly from me and be guided by her in their spiritual progress. I have made the arrangement not for any temporary purpose but because it is the one way—provided always the disciple is open and

receives—that is true and effective (considering what she is and her power)."

"The Mother's consciousness is the Divine Consciousness and the Light that comes from it is the Light of the Divine Truth.

One who receives and accepts and lives in the Mother's Light will begin to see the truth on all the planes, the mental, the vital, the physical. He will reject all that is undivine—the undivine is the falsehood, the ignorance, the error of the dark forces; the undivine is all that is obscure and unwilling to accept the divine Truth and its Light and Force of the Mother.

That is why I am always telling you to keep yourself in contact with the Mother and Her Light and Force, because it is only so that you can come out of the confusion and obscurity and receive the Truth that comes from above.

When we speak of the Mother's Light or my Light in a special sense, we are speaking of a special occult action—we are speaking of certain Lights which come from the Supermind. In this action, the Mother's is the White Light that purifies, illumines, brings down the whole essence and power of the Truth and makes the transformation possible. But in fact all Light that comes from above, from the highest divine Truth is the Mother's.

There is no difference between the Mother's path and mine, we have and always had the same path, the path that leads to the Supramental change and the Divine realisation; not only at the end, but from the beginning they have been the same.

The attempt to set up a division and opposition putting the Mother on one side and myself on another and opposite or quite different side, has always been a trick of the forces of Falsehood when they want to prevent a sadhaka from reaching the Truth.

Know that the Mother's Light and Force are the Light and Force of the Truth; remain always in contact with the Mother's Light and Force, then only can you grow into the divine Truth." (10-9-1931)

Portrait of Savitri

From Sri Aurobindo's "Savitri"—Book I, Canto 2

Around her were the austere sky-pointing hills,
And the green murmurous broad deep-thoughted woods
Muttered incessantly their muffled spell.
A dense magnificent coloured self-wrapped life
Draped in the leaves' vivid emerald monotone
And set with chequered sunbeams and blithe flowers
Immured her destiny's secluded scene.
There had she grown to the stature of her spirit:
The genius of titanic silences
Steeping her soul in its wide loneliness
Had shown to her her self's bare reality
And mated her with her environment.
Its solitude greatened her human hours
With a background of the eternal and unique.
A force of spare direct necessity
Reduced the heavy framework of man's days
And his overburdening mass of outward needs.
To a first thin strip of simple animal wants,
And the mighty wideness of the primitive earth
And the brooding multitude of patient trees
And the musing sapphire leisure of the sky
And the solemn weight of the slowly passing months
Had left in her deep room for thought and God.
There was her drama's radiant prologue lived.
A spot for the eternal's tread on earth
Set in the cloistral yearning of the woods
And watched by the aspiration of the peaks
Appeared through an aureate opening in Time
Where stillness listening felt the unspoken word
And the hours forgot to pass towards grief and change.
Here with the suddenness divine advents have,
Repeating the marvel of the first descent,
Changing to rapture the dull earthly round,
Love came to her hiding the shadow, Death.
Well might he find in her his perfect shrine.
Since first the earth-being's heavenward growth began,
Through all the long ordeal of the race,
Never a rarer creature bore his shaft,
That burning test of the godhead in our parts,
A lightning from the heights on our abyss.
All in her pointed to a nobler kind.
Near to earth's wideness, intimate with heaven,
Exalted and swift her young large-visioned spirit
Voyaging through worlds of splendour and of calm
Overflew the ways of Thought to unborn things.
Ardent was her self-poised un stumbling will;

Her mind, a sea of white sincerity,
Passionate in flow, had not one turbid wave.
As in a mystic and dynamic dance
A priestess of immaculate ecstasies
Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault
Moves in some prophet cavern of the gods,
A heart of silence in the hands of joy
Inhabited with rich creative beats
A body like a parable of dawn
That seemed a niche for veiled divinity
Or golden temple door to things beyond.
Immortal rhythms swayed in her time-born steps;
Her look, her smile awoke celestial sense
Even in earth-stuff, and their intense delight
Poured a supernal beauty on men's lives.
A wide-self-giving was her native act;
A magnanimity as of sea or sky
Enveloped with its greatness all that came
And gave a sense as of a greatened world:
Her kindly care was a sweet temperate sun,
Her high passion a blue heaven's equipoise.
As might a soul fly like a hunted bird,
Escaping with tired wings from a world of storms,
And a quiet reach like a remembered breast,
In a haven of safety and splendid soft repose
One could drink life back in streams of honey-fire,
Recover the lost habit of happiness,
Feel her bright nature's glorious ambiance,
And preen joy in her warmth and colour's rule.
A deep of compassion, a hushed sanctuary,
Her inward help unbarred a gate in heaven;
Love in her was wider than the universe,
The whole world could take refuge in her single heart.
The great unsatisfied godhead here could dwell:
Vacant of the dwarf self's imprisoned air
Her mood could harbour his sublimer breath
Spiritual that can make all things divine.
For even her gulfs were secrecies of light.
At once she was the stillness and the word,
A continent of self-diffusing peace,
An ocean of untrembling virgin fire:
The strength, the silence of the gods were hers.
In her he found a vastness like his own,
His high warm subtle ether he refound
And moved in her as in his natural home.
In her he met his own eternity.

THE PASSING OF AN AVATAR

By FRANKLIN MERREL-WOLFF

June 5 marked the completion of six months since Sri Aurobindo's departure. Here is a commemorative article from "New Age Interpreter", Los Angeles, California. We are happy to reproduce this fine tribute which shows that Sri Aurobindo's light is marching on, touching the mind and soul of the West no less than the East.

"Whensoever there is the fading of the Dharma and the uprising of unrighteousness, then I loose myself forth into birth.

*"For the deliverance of the good, for the destruction of the evil-doers, for the enthroning of the Right, I am born from age to age".**

That the times in which we live bear the mark of the "fading of the Dharma" and the "uprising of unrighteousness" in an exceptional measure has long been evident to many of us, who have, therefore, been alerted for the Avatars Descent in one or more embodiments. For those who are spiritually awake the signs of such Descent, in more than one embodiment, currently or within the recent past, have not been lacking, so that, indeed, a time of exceptional darkness has also been the occasion for the manifestation of rare inner Light. Among these embodiments Sri Aurobindo stands out as one of the most luminous figures of all historic time. It is but fitting, therefore, that we should direct at least some portion of our thoughts and regard towards this man who in an uncommon degree manifested the Divine Nature and Wisdom.

Sri Aurobindo was born in 1872 and passed from physical embodiment on the fifth of last December. Rarely have we known lives so packed with accomplishment as were the seventy-nine years of this man. His formal education began in England at the age of seven and was completed at Cambridge. His life-work began in the secretariat of the Gaekwar of Baroda and soon extended to the teaching of English and administrative work in Baroda College. It was not long before his interests were drawn into the field of Indian politics and in the years just preceding 1910 he became the leader of the independence movement. In fact he originated the technique of non-cooperation which was later continued so effectively by Mahatma Gandhi. Like other such leaders he experienced arrest and waited a year in jail for the trial which ultimately cleared him from the accusations brought against him.

This year was the turning point in his life, for, while on one side he faced the harshnesses of incarceration, yet it was during this night of physical life that there began for him the Illuminations and Realisations which opened the way for his primary life-work. So, when at last acquitted, he left forever the political and professional fields, retired to Pondicherry, the French territory in India, and there spent the remaining forty years of his life in a rare productive retirement.

For the biographer, able to trace only the tangible events in a human life, the final forty years might well seem poor in the material offered; but for him who has metaphysical Vision, these were the great years which reveal One with a stature comparable with that of a Krishna, a Buddha or a Christ. These years saw the manifestation of greatness in two senses. First, there was a vast literary production, in both the mediums of prose and poetry, which is available to the scholar and which may be in some measure evaluated by the latter. The second and greater part of his labor lay in those unseen dimensions which only the few can ever truly evaluate. Along with this double labor, and really incidental thereto, an Ashram was established, open to both sexes, and dedicated to the dual objective of individual Realization and the Spiritualization of the world in a sense that is not restricted to the human portion of that world.

Leaving this all too brief sketch of an extraordinarily full life-work, we must turn to an evaluation of the more tangible production of his last forty years. Sri Aurobindo became a Yogi and a Rishi or, as the Buddhists would say, an Enlightened One. He was not merely a mystic but a master of mystical and Gnostic Consciousness with a comprehensiveness that does not seem to have been surpassed within historic times. His literary work was dedicated, almost exclusively, to the revelation of Gnostic Consciousness, in so far as that may be, and to the encouragement and guidance of effort upon the part of all who may respond, to the end that they too may know the Gnostic Realization. But he implemented this work with a most unusual scholarly equipment, in both Oriental and Occidental material. While this equipment is strongest in the Vedic and Yogic philosophical, and general

literary, linguistic and historic sense, yet there is not lacking a considerable understanding of Western science, save only that phase of science of which mathematics is an essential part. Along with all this, Sri Aurobindo was thoroughly trained in, and a master of, the English language in both the forms of prose and poetic literary production, and thus for the first time in the history of Indian Gnostic contributions† we have original production in the language of the reader of English, and in terms adapted to the needs of the modern mind; all of which results in a product of far more value than the translations of ancient Sutras composed for a mentality which is strange and often incomprehensible to us.

While it is true that Sri Aurobindo often speaks in pejorative terms of the mind and the reason, particularly in later writings, yet his formulations, even in his poetry, are always highly rational and, therefore, intelligible. The reader does not have to labor with the unintelligibilities which are so often the curse of mystical production, as in the case of Jacob Boehme. Perhaps, despite himself, Sri Aurobindo found it to be impossible to cease being reasonable, and the reader may well be thankful for this.‡ The writer would class him with Shankara as being one of the two clearest and most rational of mystical philosophers. And, further, Sri Aurobindo rarely, if ever, imposes intellectual violence upon the reader, since he avoids categorical assertion and denial in the highest degree possible, though the authority of Direct Realization is such that the categorical form cannot be completely avoided. He suggests possibilities or difficulties for the reasonable consideration of the reader and in his philosophic writings and letters ever seeks to lead the understanding by argument, rather than to compel it by authoritarian pronouncement. The result is that the thoughtful reader is often convinced away from his previous predilections and, when not convinced, yet feels that Sri Aurobindo permits and respects his differing view. Of all the merits of this great man, this is not the least.

Lack of space prevents saying more than a word concerning the substance of Sri Aurobindo's Yogic philosophy, but we would fail in the sketch of this man's life and thought if we did not say something. In the main, he continues in the current established by the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita and, in so far, is in accord with the established Indian tradition. But he derives from, or superimposes upon, that current an interpretation which, in certain important respects, diverges radically from views that have been predominant in India, particularly the views of Shankara and the Mayavadins. He teaches a philosophy of universal Realism as opposed to the Mayavadin universal Illusionism. Hence, for Sri Aurobindo, the attainment of Nirvana, while a preeminently valuable achievement, is but the beginning of a process which returns to the evolution, whereas, for Shankara and the Mayavadins, the evolution is simply irrelevant and Nirvana a culmination. For Sri Aurobindo, world process and development remain significant even for the Divine Life.

The Crown of Sri Aurobindo lies in this that through him the Divine has been drawn down into the mundane field for its spiritualization in a degree and sense that has rarely, if ever, been realized heretofore, and thus He is truly an Avatar.

Hail to Thee, Thou Man-God!

"Small is his work, even if he succeeds, who labours for his own salvation or the salvation of a few; infinitely great is his, even if he fail or succeed only partially or for a season, who lives only to bring about peace of soul, joy, purity and perfection among all mankind".

† EDITOR'S NOTE: "Spiritual", instead of "Gnostic", would be more accurate. For, though what Sri Aurobindo terms "Gnostic" can be termed "Spiritual", all that is Spiritual is not necessarily Gnostic. By Gnosis Sri Aurobindo means a special status and power of the Spirit, which he also calls Supermind or Truth-Consciousness and which in its full and integrally dynamic world-transformative Light is outstandingly the realisation of Sri Aurobindo.

‡ EDITOR'S NOTE: Sri Aurobindo speaks pejoratively of the mind and reason in the role of discoverers or arbiters of ultimate truths. He acknowledges their pragmatic usefulness in certain spheres and accepts them as instruments which, if made sufficiently clear and plastic, can serve effectively to explain something of the spiritually realised knowledge.

†† Sri Aurobindo.

* "The Message of the Gita", ch. IV, verses 7 and 8, as translated by Sri Aurobindo.

GIVER OF SPIRITUAL VALUES TO TWO WORLDS

By Baron Erik Palmstierna

(From "Forum", published by the World Congress of Faiths)

Here in the West we are beginning to recognise Sri Aurobindo as one of the outstanding personalities India has given to the world and we saw in him a philosopher, poet and inspired visionary who was eminently fitted to serve as a bridge-builder across and above the frontiers between east and west. He stood at the height of western thought and was at the same time a mystic of rare quality who gave spiritual values to two worlds. In a materialistic age, the bright beam of wisdom which shone through him pointed a way we have to follow.

THE INVISIBLE WHOLE AND THE PERSONAL WORKER

By A. L. CRAMPTON CHALK

"The knowledge on which the doer of works in Yoga has to found all his action and development has for the keystone of its structure a more and more concrete perception of unity, the living sense of an all-pervading oneness; he moves in the increasing consciousness of all existence as an indivisible whole.*

The dominant motif of the grand symphony of Sri Aurobindo's teaching is its insistence upon the Wholeness of life. It is the Integral Yoga and its purpose is to make whole or integrate the life as it exists at present in differentiated expressions in consciousness. Boundaries and divisions of consciousness have to be broken down and the Divine flood allowed to penetrate and flow everywhere. It is in contrast with other yogas that achieve their purpose of uniting the fragmentary individual spark of consciousness to the whole by isolating and augmenting the local powers until they form a unit strong enough to leap from ordinary into super-consciousness. It is the broad, general, and flexible quality of Aurobindonian teaching that should, and no doubt will, establish it as the foundation of spiritual philosophy in the ensuing decades; this and, of course, the incomparable lucidity of its exposition.

Of all practical aids that of "the concrete perception of unity, the living sense of an all-pervading oneness" is the most pregnant with significance at this time; the formula is a veritable litmus-paper test of the presence or otherwise of the acid of separative deviation from the grand purpose of Nature. The enemies and opponents of the doctrine of unity are those whose efforts tend towards the isolation or segregation of peoples, sympathies, and of interests one from another; those who insist on the once-and-for-all domination of some particular notion, or local and personal interest, or view of life, as against all others.

But while it is easy to see the error in someone else's selfish insistence that his particular way of life or point of view should prevail over others, it is not so easy to see one's own duty—or limits of duty—in sustaining one's own position. The clue to the solution of this dilemma in action is obviously to act and fight always for the principle of the Indivisible Whole, and not to find oneself siding with a power that is fighting or working for the division or disruption of the whole.

An adequate conception of the all-pervading oneness is subtle and not easy, for it implies the right to a place within the whole scheme of things of all the differing, even warring, segments of life at their present levels of development and manifestation. As the light of consciousness drops deeper into matter so does separation become more and more a principle of conditions; equally this is true of the consciousness that informs a particular ray called a personality. The more intense the personal obsession, i.e., the more rooted in matter, the more separated its outlook; inversely, the less the ego-centricity the wider and truer the conception of life. Paranoia is the extremity of one limit, and the ananda of conscious union with the Divine Whole the other.

All this seems to add up to the practical need to live and let live in a very high, wide, and comprehensive sense. Whenever, for instance, a Communist seeks to enslave or wage war on a friendly neighbour—in any sphere of action—one should help to stop him; even, if necessary to pre-

vent him killing his neighbour, stop him by the force of war. Equally, wherever his neighbour wages war on a friendly Communist, stop him too, with lethal force if necessary. (The fact that non-Communists have not, so far, shown any particular desire to wage war on Communists does not invalidate this example—it actually adds point to it.)

It is within the canon of this doctrine of the indivisible Whole that each part must stick up for itself as well as for its neighbour. Weak concession to other points of view is no part of the technique of preserving peace—it actually encourages aggression. Sincere surrender of an outworn viewpoint is another matter entirely and is a sign of progressive enlightenment if it proceeds from strength of mind and perception and not moral weakness.

Sticking up for one's principles does not necessarily involve aggressive action, though it does imply a clear and even militant attitude in dealing with conditions that are natural to and impinge on one's circumstances. One's thoughts and attitude, within one's dharma and way of life, must be uncompromising for the individual whole. "Every standpoint, every man-made rule of action which ignores the indivisible totality of the cosmic movement, whatever its utility in external practice, is to the eye of spiritual Truth an imperfect view and a law of the ignorance."†

It is of the essence of the yoga that it should be "difficult for us in our outward parts and active nature to square accounts between this universal standpoint and the claims of our personal opinion, our personal will, our personal emotion and desire."** While he is differentiating himself from the general mass of consciousness it is normal and well that man should develop and cherish his individuality; but when he turns the evolutionary corner for his return journey home to the Eternal his ego-consciousness must go. Western feeling, profoundly influenced by Christianity, does not take kindly to the necessity for surrendering the ego-consciousness to the cosmic, and beyond to the transcendent spirit. The central doctrine of the Christian atonement appears to be based on the idea of permanent personality; but to the mystical perception of the Indivisible Whole this teaching seems perforce to be a temporary one, a sort of resting stage towards the final conception of the Wholeness of God. It is true that the Father's house has many mansions, but within the Father's heart is one spirit of the Eternal which is indivisible and Whole, possessing and possessed of all forms of consciousness. In this heart all must be surrendered.

Within the Indivisible Whole what is to be the attitude of the personal worker? He is to hold himself a specialist for a task specifically assigned to him, a task with both an outward impact on circumstances about him and an inner impact on his own soul; these two aspects he will feel to be two poles of the same current of fate for him. The compass point for his perpetual guidance is to be the idea of the Indivisible Whole, and all his efforts are to be devised and implemented with his spiritual eyes on that star. For him there will be "a constant drive towards an ever increasing and more adequate and more harmonious self-development nearer to the secret truth of things".†† In time, no doubt, he will have that freedom of the Spirit and access to supreme Truth which will render his service perfect.

* "The Synthesis of Yoga," p. 171.

† Idem, p. 172.

** Idem.

†† Idem, p. 124.

I DECLINE TO ACCEPT THE END OF MAN

By WILLIAM FAULKNER

This is the Speech delivered in Stockholm on the occasion of the Award to William Faulkner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, December 10, 1950.

I feel that this award was not made to me as a man but to my work—a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit, not for glory and least of all for profit, but to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before. So this award is only mine in trust. It will not be difficult to find a dedication for the money part of it commensurate with the purpose and significance of its origin. But I would like to do the same with the acclaim too, by using this moment as a pinnacle from which I might be listened to by the young men and women already dedicated to the same anguish and travail, among whom is already that one who will some day stand here where I am standing.

Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: when will I be blown up? Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat.

He must learn them again. He must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed—love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacri-

fice. Until he does so he labors under a curse. He writes not of love but of lust, of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value, of victories without hope and worst of all without pity or compassion. His griefs grieve on no universal bones, leaving no scars. He writes not of the heart but of the glands.

Until he relearns these things he will write as though he stood among and watched the end of man. I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure; that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.

(From "Saturday Review of Literature")

SRI AUROBINDO, THE LEADER OF THE EVOLUTION

PART II OF "THE WORLD CRISIS AND INDIA"

By "Synergist"

SECTION III: THE NEW WORLD-VIEW

(i) THE SPIRITUAL METAPHYSIC

(ii) KNOWLEDGE OF THE DIVINE REALITY

THE SUPERMIND

Our enquiry into the nature of the Higher Knowledge has led us to the spiritual-mental ranges of the Higher Mind, the Illumined Mind, the Intuitive Mind, and the Overmind; the characteristic mode of cognition on each of these levels has been described at length in the previous essays, but so far, a detailed exposition of the Supramental cognition has not been given, except when comparing it to the Overmind or when relating it to "Self-realisation." This has been done because it would not have been correct to bracket the Supermind with other levels as it belongs to a plane which is not only beyond the mental, but even beyond the spiritual-mental; therefore, in a philosophical schema it is necessary to consider it as a separate category. The Supermind is supra-cosmic—its ontological station is in *Parardha*, the higher hemisphere containing the triple world of Satchidananda (Existence: Consciousness-Force: Bliss), and not in *Aparardha*, the lower hemisphere of Mind: Life: Matter; yet it is not extra-cosmic, it is not severed from the cosmos, for it is by its creative and formative action that all manifestation becomes possible—in this sense it connects the lower and the higher hemispheres. Out of its depths the One Divine Reality, through the instrumentation of the Supermind, which is its gnostic light and creative dynamis, develops the triune principle of Sat: Chit: Ananda; out of the one indivisible unity it brings out and establishes a Trinity, but in doing so it only differentiates, it does not divide, so that the unity is constantly maintained. Sri Aurobindo clarifies the relation of Supermind to Satchidananda in the following lines: "The supreme supra-cosmic Satchidananda is above all. Supermind may be described as its power of self-awareness and world-awareness, the world being known as within itself and not outside. So to live consciously in the supreme Satchidananda one must pass through the Supermind. If one is in the supra-cosmic apart from the manifestation, there is no place for problems or solutions. If one lives in the transcendence and the cosmic view at the same time, that can only be by the Supramental consciousness in the supreme Satchidananda consciousness..." And in his *Life Divine* he writes: "We have to regard therefore this all-containing, all-originating, all-consummating Supermind as the nature of the Divine Being, not indeed in its absolute self-existence, but in its action as the Lord and Creator of its own worlds. This is the truth of that which we call God."

This Epistemological Section will not be complete without a description of the Supramental cognition, which is the highest mode of knowledge-apprehension—the highest, because it is the Divine Truth-consciousness itself, God-consciousness self-aware in all its integrality, totality and unity, that consciousness by which the Divine Being knows His essence as well as His entire manifestation. The Supermind is self-aware and aware of all that is by its own inherent light and governs this Universe of myriad worlds by its own self-force; it is the Supreme Divine Intelligence and Will, the Highest Law, that presides over and secretly controls the workings

of the cosmic manifestation—secretly, because overtly it does not;* as we shall see later in the Ontology Section, the Supermind has not directly created this Universe, but through its immediately delegatory power, the Overmind. However, even though the Supermind does not directly control the cosmic process, it stands veiled behind it and supports it.

Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind the "Real Idea" of the universe, because it is according to its Truth-Idea and Truth-Law that all manifestation proceeds. It contains the archetypes of the ectypal earthly realities, the perfect forms and patterns in the likeness of which the imperfect earthly creations are gradually evolving. It bears within itself the seed-truths of terrestrial things; it brings out, from the "Transcendent Divine", truths of existence and puts them forth into cosmic creation. The "Ideas" of Plato can be said to be the reflections of these archetypes on the spiritual-mind plane; though not a mystic in the strict sense like Pythagoras, Plato's mind was nevertheless receptive to a certain extent to spiritual inspiration—in the calm ether of his mind many truths of the Spirit were reflected; that is why he was able to intuit the existence of archetypal realities. Jung, on the contrary, posits his archetypes on an infra-rational plane, not on a supra-rational one like Plato; therefore they have for him a different connotation and a more earth-bound significance—in his system of Psychology they become perennial symbols and patterns in the Racial Unconscious that influence and condition the religious, philosophic, aesthetic, and psycho-social life of men.

Coming to the question of knowledge-apprehension on the level of the Supermind, it can be stated that the Supramental consciousness has a dual aspect—it is a consciousness of inherent self-knowledge as well as, through identification of Self and its manifestation, of intimate world-knowledge. It is, says Sri Aurobindo, fundamentally a "Truth-consciousness, a direct and inherent awareness of the truth of being and the truth of things; it is a power of the Infinite knowing and working out its finites, a power of the Universal knowing and working out its oneness and detail, its cosmicity and its individualities; self-possessed of Truth, it would not have to seek for the Truth or suffer from the liability to miss it as does the mind of the Ignorance." The consciousness of the evolved gnostic being would be "a consciousness of universal identity and a consequent or rather inherent Truth-knowledge, Truth-sight, Truth-feeling, Truth-will, Truth-sense and Truth-dynamis of action implicit in his identity with the One or spontaneously arising from his identity with the All. His life would be a movement in the steps of a spiritual liberty and largeness replacing the law of the mental idea and the law of vital and physical need and desire and the compulsion of a surrounding life; his life and action would be bound by nothing else than the Divine Wisdom and Will acting on him and in him according to its Truth-consciousness".

* Establishing the Supermind as an overtly operative power, instead of it remaining a "hooded Gnosis" in terrestrial creation, is the work Sri Aurobindo has been doing for the last forty years.

The Presence is Here

When sweet enchantment wraps the hush of day,
And moon-glow fills his heart,
He hears a whisper amidst the trees:
"See Me in all that is."

But in moments darkened by sorrow's gloom,
In loneliness of heart and mind,
An eremite, he cries out loud:
"O where art Thou? I am blind."

He shouts across the Cosmic Void,
To Him who dwells beyond the stars,
To reawaken in dumb earth
His own Descent in human garb.

He waits and waits through many moons,
But dawns not still the longed-for day,
He lingers outside the sacred place
To see but an imagined face.

Perchance the Lord of Heaven heard the voice
And said: "Let faith be justified",
For the Grace that moves 'midst human things
Blessed with Her smile his soul-yearnings.

Then warmth and glow filled the blank air
And clasped the being rendered mute,
And gold-light hovered in mind-space—
He knew: The Presence is here.

"ALASTOR"

CHAPTER X
AVOWEDLY PERSONAL

SRI AUROBINDO

By DILIP K

In Chapter VIII the closing stress was on Sri Aurobindo's vision of earth as the final venue of heroic souls who are sent to carry through a great experiment because this earth has been chosen as "the forge where the Arch-mason shapes His works." This experiment has a twofold aim: first the aspiration of the animality of man after Divinity and secondly the invocation of the answering Divinity in order to transform the seemingly ineradicable animality which has been the despair of idealists. That is why Sri Aurobindo speaks so emphatically of the Descent of the Divine Power into our dismal humanity, a descent ever increasing with realization of the Ascent and missioned to promote a new manifestation in the "earth-consciousness."

But to invoke the Divine power for the bitter lot of earth and man is one thing: to apply the power to alleviate the "misery" of man is quite another. How hard this task is in practice is difficult for such as we to realise because, among other things, we have little knowledge of occult powers and even less clue to their right utilisation when such powers are given us, as they occasionally are, before we have acquired some insight into the mysterious springs of human nature and action. Sri Aurobindo gave me a pregnant hint of this deep difficulty in 1924, when he said that he had come to realise through his Yogic knowledge that "to help humanity out it was not enough for an individual, however great, to achieve an ultimate solution individually" because "even when the Light is ready to descend it cannot come to stay till the lower plane is also ready to bear the pressure of the Descent... consequently the utmost you can do, here and now, is to communicate only partially the light of your realisation in proportion as people are receptive."*

But what I had understood him to mean then proved very different from what, little by little, I came to realize afterwards. Often enough a saying of Sri Ramakrishna recurred to me as my ideas changed under the pressure of what was borne home to me through my seemingly endless struggles. Sri Ramakrishna once said: "What I had conceived about *sadhana* corresponded little with my subsequent experience of it." No one, I am afraid, can possibly grasp the complex implications of this simple statement. I will not, however, venture to enlarge on these because, for one thing, I do not feel myself competent and, for another, this is not a treatise on Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. What I have undertaken is to pay my homage to my Master's great personality through my own reactions and clashes. So I will, to be on the safe side, confine myself to his personality as it impressed me from day to day.

As I lived in his Ashram and, much to my shame, tussled with him in my pathetic ignorance which made me rush in again and again where much greater beings than I feared to tread, I felt a great load, increasing on my consciousness, as it were. To think that I knew so little—less than nothing at all—in spite of the beautiful opinion I had formed of my beautiful knowledge of men and things and truth in general! But he did all he could to make the burden of my self-pity bearable because he was what he was, and not because I was anything near what he wanted me to be. And what was it after all that he had wanted of me? A very simple thing: to grow in trust and come to have a working faith in his superior wisdom, his verifiable power of helping me in my helplessness and his unfailing indulgence for one who had failed him at every turn. I do not say this in mere (so-called) humility. For as the days passed I came to realise, progressively, how much I had been found wanting when weighed in the balance. For did I not, even after accepting his radiant lead, desire him (sometimes unwittingly, at others perversely!) to lead me in the way I thought proper? In other words, did I not presume, time and time again, to give him a lead, as it were, as to how I should be led and to offer guidance about how I was to be guided? I am not trying to be clever. I want only to steer clear of platitudes and focus the limited light of my vision on his personality that I may bring out the only thing I can: his greatness as I saw it from close quarters and perhaps appraise it better by failing to plumb it. For day after heart-shattering day I saw how I was petering out even though the more restive I grew the more patiently he gave me a long rope. He did this not to force the balm of his wisdom on my unruly ego but to show me the way to my own higher nature which the thunder-storms of my boisterous self-will blurred so effectively from my "rational eyes", as I put it self-appreciatively. Month after weary month I challenged him to prove his thesis which I knew in my heart of hearts to be true and yet, curiously, I insisted on flinging a deeper defiance every time he leaned down to accord me a kinder hand-clasp. I aimed at him my crude gibes but he came down unperturbed to my level and met me with his superior repartees. I doubted him but he blessed me in return. I resisted him but he only lullabied to sleep the Old Adam in me. I challenged him to 'prove' his axioms—a thing I had not dared even when I was learning such an elementary thing as Euclidian geometry—and yet he came out invariably with his patient arguments substantiating the validity of his reasonings from different angles. Those who, in their strong ignorance, castigate the dogmatism of spiritual teachers may appear very sweetly undogmatic to the uninformed, but those who have even once come into contact with an authentic Guru can only testify to his overwhelming tolerance.

But what I wish to stress here is not simply his tolerance and patience, nor even his matchless capacity for understanding the rebel's point of view but a gift, amounting to genius, of appraising in imaginative sympathy the latter's position as an antagonist and then coming down to his level of

intelligence and receptivity. To give an instance in point.

I had come to the Ashram with a strong mental formation in favour of asceticism. So even though I loved *karma*—being, by nature, ineradicably *rajasic*—I wanted to debouch into inaction of the *sattvic* type, to shine as a living example of inaction, *bhakti* and wisdom. I was told by a *guru-bhai* that the Mother favoured a dynamic spirituality and *karma* as against static wisdom. This made me at once glad and sad. Glad because I was by nature energetic; sad because I feared that *karma* would tether me irrevocably to the world and therefore, *a fortiori*, to my present state of no-experience as against transcendent God-realisation. Yet why must he go on browbeating Nirod, the charming pessimist, with his Aurobindonian gospel of incessant *karma* to the exclusion of *jnana* and inveigh against those who, like Dilip, loved the traditional thoroughfare of *bhakti* which at least led somewhere? Did not even the great Sri Ramakrishna warn the spiritual aspirant against being caught in the toils of *karma* when he gave the simile of the wife carrying a child and saying that the nearer she draws to her confinement the lighter is made the load of her work till, when the child is born, she has only to live for the child to the exclusion of everything else?

As I waxed eloquent over the bliss of inaction I often enough went too far: my impulse landed me in an anti-climax and I looked like a disciple who wanted to give points to his Guru. No wonder my brief glow of questioning and challenging left me only a legacy of sadness if not an aftermath of depression. Could it be right to take such liberties with one's Guru (and what a Guru!) because he tolerated them? And was it seemly to assume such a tone of banter if not irreverence, treating him as though he were something like an honourable colleague in the Parliament of Words—a fellow-member in opposition whom one could address with polite reverence only to show up the more effectively his deficiency in acumen? So I apologised in a postscript: wouldn't he pardon my unpardonable temerity? For if he got displeased where would I be? And then wasn't I at least an energetic worker in practice though an opponent of works in idealistic theory—etc?

To that he wrote, indulgent as ever (1934):

"I do not understand why you should assume that I am displeased with the *karma* question. I castigated or fustigated Nirod not from displeasure nor even 'more in sorrow than in anger', but for fun and also from a high sense of duty: for that erring mortal was bold enough to generalise from his very limited experience and impose it as a definite law in yoga, discrediting in the process my own immortal philosophy! What then could I do but to jump on him in a spirit of genial massacre?"

Nirod used to come almost daily in those days as we two happened to be birds of the same shade of pessimistic feather. Thus while roosting together, we two drowned many a time our world disapproval in our morning jeremiad over the tea. So we chuckled at this point, albeit, alas, a little too prematurely!

"I am afraid," Sri Aurobindo went on to add, "your letter too does very much the same thing. For in spite of your disclaimer, you practically come to the conclusion that all my nonsense about integral Yoga and *karma* being as much a way to realisation as *jnana* and *bhakti* is either a gleaming chimera or practicable only by Avatars or else a sheer laborious superfluity—since one can jump straight into the Divine through the open door of *bhakti* or sweep majestically into him by the easy road of meditation, so why this scramble through the jungle of *karma* by which nobody reached anywhere? The old Yogas are true, are they not? Then why a new-fangled and more difficult one with this unheard-of talk about Supramental and God knows what else? There can be no answer to that; for I can only answer by a repetition of the statement of my own knowledge and experience. That is what I have done in my today's answer to Nirod and perhaps that amounts only to a perverse obstinacy in riding my gleaming and dazzling chimera and forcing my nuisance of a superfluity on a world weary of itself and anxious to get an easy short cut to the Divine. Unfortunately, I do not believe in short cuts—at any rate none ever led me where I wanted to go. However, let it rest there.

"I have never disputed the truth of the old Yogas—I have myself had the experience of Vaishnava *bhakti* or of *nirvana*, I recognise their truth in their own field and for their own purpose—the truth of their experience so far as it goes—though I am in no way bound to accept the truth of the mental philosophies founded on the experience. I similarly find that my yoga is true in its own field—a larger field, as I think—and for its own purpose. The purpose of the old is to get away from life to the Divine—so obviously, let us drop *karma*. The purpose of the new is to reach the Divine and bring fullness of what is gained into life—for that, yoga by works is indispensable. It seems to me that there is no mystery about that or anything to perplex anybody—it is rational and inevitable. Only you say that the thing is impossible; but that is what is said about everything before it is done.

"I may point out, however that *karmayoga* existed even before the Gita. Your idea that the only justification in the Gita for works is that it is an unavoidable nuisance, so better make the best use of it, is rather summary and crude. If that were all, the Gita would be the production of an imbecile and I would hardly have been justified in writing two volumes

* Among the Great (American edition) P. 219-20.

CAME TO ME

JMAR ROY

on it or the world in reading it as one of the greatest scriptures, especially for its treatment of the place of works in spiritual endeavour. There is surely more in it than that. Anyhow, whether works can lead to realisation—or rather, your flat and sweeping denial of the possibility—contradicts the experience of those who have achieved this supposed impossibility. You say that work lowers the consciousness, brings you out of the inner into the outer,—yes, if you consent to externalise yourself in it instead of doing works from within; but that is just what one has to learn *not* to do. For that matter, thought and feeling also can externalise one in the same way; but it is a question of linking thought, feeling and act firmly to the inner consciousness by living there and making the rest an instrument. Difficult? Even *bhakti* is not easy and *nirvana*, for most men, is more difficult than that.

"You again try to floor me with Ramakrishna. But something puzzles me, as Shankara's stupendous activity of karma puzzles me in the apostle of inaction!—you see you are not the only puzzled person in the world. Ramakrishna also the gave image of the jar which ceased gurgling when it was full. Well, but Ramakrishna spent the last few years of his life in talking about the Divine and receiving disciples—was that not action, not work? Did Ramakrishna become a half-full jar after being a full one or was he never full? Did he get far away from God and so begin work? Or had he reached a condition in which he was bound neither to *rajasic* work and mental prattling nor to inactivity and silence, but could do, from the divine realisation, the divine works and speak, from the inner consciousness, of the divine world? If the last, then perhaps, in spite of the dictum, his example at least is rather in *my* favour.

"I do not know why you drag in humanitarianism, Subhas's activism, philanthropical *seva* etc. None of these are part of my Yoga or in harmony with my works, so they don't touch me. I never thought that the Congress politics or feeding the poor or writing beautiful poems would lead straight to *Vaikuntha* or the Absolute. If it were so, Romesh Dutt on one side and Baudelaire on the other would be the first to attain the Highest and welcome us there. It is not the form of the work itself or mere activity but the consciousness and Godward will behind it that are the essence of karma-yoga; the work is only the necessary instrumentation for the union with the Master of works, the transit to the pure will and power of Light from the will and power of the Ignorance.

"Finally why suppose that I am against meditation or *bhakti*? I have not the slightest objection to your taking either or both as the means of approach to the Divine. Only I saw no reason why anyone should fall foul of works and deny the truth of those who, as the Gita says, reached through works perfect realisation and oneness of nature with the Divine—*sam-siddhim sadharmyam* (as did Janaka and others)—simply because he himself cannot find or has not found their deeper secret; hence my defence of works."

His indulgence emboldened me. But paradoxical though it may sound, I myself loved *karma* for its own sake, and yet often found my mind championing quietism when he emphasised activism, knowing all the time that *his* brand of activism was very different from ours, that is, the accepted variety. Thus, in the present instance, just when I felt his greatness most, I was conscious of a division in me, and then and there I penned a long letter to him attempting in my inept way to rail at his theory about *karma*. I wrote that I was delighted that he had lifted the ban on *bhakti*; that I was indeed thankful for small mercies; that he confounded us beautifully with his paradoxes—wasn't that why he wrote about his being "puzzled"? and so on. I asked him if it were really possible to refer all our works to the Divine. I reminded him once more that though I had tried to "remember" Krishna while I worked, I found that I failed utterly in the attempt for more than a few minutes at a time because I got quickly absorbed in whatever I undertook. So I had come in the end to ask myself if "offering one's works" could prove a practical proposition. In short *bhakti* and *jnana*, I contended, meant business whereas *karma* left one high and dry in no man's land because the moment it became interesting it took entire possession of the mind and therefore could not be offered to the Divine. As I wrote on, the Old Adam in me got out of hand, as it often did in such critical times, and I waxed eloquent over my realistic pessimism: true, I was turning out some fine poetry with an astonishing facility and composing lovely tunes which seemed to drop on me from above like manna; but, I argued in my wrong mood, wasn't it somewhat irrelevant to the seeking which had made me leave everything and come here? In other words, I asserted, although such things of beauty might be joys for ever, yet the stark fact remained that no artistic joy, however longlived, could win one a passport to the last paradise of salvation. To put it more succinctly, through works none had so far arrived, while through *bhakti* and *jnana* at least a brilliant galaxy had achieved salvation. So why on earth must one stick to the mantra: *yat karomi Jaganmatastadeva tava pujanam* (whatever I do, O World-Mother, is an oblation to thee!)? Lastly, I asked him whether his new-fangled Integral Yoga could really succeed with anyone who was not congenitally a Hercules? "*Nayamatma valahinena labhyah*" said the Upanishad. But, if "none but the strong deserved the fair Soul's favours", what hope was there for the likes of us who could not claim the strength of a Ramakrishna, a Ramana Maharshi or a Vivekananda? Thus I went on

blowing my bubble of sorrow, inveigled by its phantom iridescence.

But this time he did not choose to meet my banter with banter and wrote back in high if not stern seriousness:

"I must again point out that I have never put any ban on *bhakti*, so there is no meaning in your saying that I have lifted a ban which never existed. Also I am not conscious of having banned meditation either at any time—so the satirical praise of my mercifulness is out of place. I imagine I have stressed both *bhakti* and knowledge in my yoga as well as works, even if I have not given to any of them exclusive importance like Shankara or Chaitanya. Also I think I have not imposed my own choice unduly upon anyone in the matter of *Sadhana*. Those who wanted to go wholesale for meditation, I have left to do without any interference, though not without any help I could give. I have latterly sometimes discourteously counselled entire retirement, but that was because I did not want a repetition of the cases of N. and others who, in spite of my warnings, went in for it and came to grief. I have written what I thought when people asked me; but if they have no use for my ideas about things, why do they ask me?

"My remarks about being puzzled were, by the way, mere Socratic irony. Of course I am not in the least puzzled by the case either of Shankara or of Ramakrishna.

"The difficulty you feel or any *sadhaka* feels about *sadhana* is not really a question of meditation versus *bhakti* versus works, it is a difficulty of the attitude to be taken, the approach or whatever you call it. Yours seems to be characterised on one side by a tremendous effort in the mind, on the other a gloomy certitude in the vital which seems to watch and mutter under the breath if not aloud: 'Yes, yes, go ahead, my fine fellow, but—it will come to nothing,' and then at the end of meditation: 'What did I tell you, hasn't it come to nothing?' A vital so ready to despair that even after a 'glorious' flood of poetry it uses the occasion to preach the gospel of defeatism! I have passed through most of the difficulties of the *sadhaka*, but I cannot recollect to have looked on delight of poetical creation or concentration in it as something undivine and a cause for despair. This seems to me excessive. Even Shankaracharya would not agree with you here.

"If you can't remember the Divine all the time you are writing, it does not greatly matter. To remember and dedicate at the beginning and give thanks at the end ought to be enough. Or, at the most, to remember too when there is a pause. Your method seems to me rather painful and difficult, you seem to be trying to remember and work with the same part of your mind. I don't know if that is possible. When people remember all the time during work (it can be done) it is usually with the back of their minds or else there is created gradually a double consciousness—one in front that works, one within that witnesses and remembers. But this is only a comment—I am not asking you to try that. For usually it does not come so much by trying as by a very simple constant aspiration and will of consecration—which does bring results, even if in some it takes a long time about it. That is a great secret of *sadhana*—to know how to get things done by the Power behind or above instead of doing all by the mind's effort. Let me hasten to say, however, that I am not dogmatising—I don't mean to say that the mind's effort is unnecessary or has no result—only if it tries to do all by itself, that becomes a laborious effort for all except the spiritual athletes. Nor do I mean that the other method is the longed-for short cut; the result may, as I have said, take a long time. Patience and firm resolution are necessary in every method of *sadhana*.

"Strength is all right for the strong—but the aspiration and Grace answering to it are not altogether myths. Again, you see, I am muddling the human mind—like Krishna of the Gita—by supporting contrary things at the same time—can't help it—it is my nature.

"But I am unable to explain further today—so I break off these divagations. I am rather too overburdened with 'work' these days to have much time for the expression of 'knowledge'. This is simply a random answer."

The general reader, I feel, is likely to appraise the value of letters such as these in terms either of their weightiness of matter or profundity of wisdom. But to us, his disciples, every such communication was valued even more as a token of his Grace than for its other merits, as also because of the light it carried from the fount of his luminous personality which we had grown to cherish. To me, personally, his letters radiating affection imparted something even more convincing—possibly because only such personal letters could convey to my sceptic mind the help of seerhood that hovered round him, through a receptive emotion which nothing short of an intimate contact with his soul of compassion could arouse. Besides, had he not written to me once: "I am certainly not helping you only with letters, but doing it whenever I get some time for concentration and I notice that when I can do it with sufficient energy and at some length there is a response." Outsiders may not seize the import of this, but as I saw the effect of his concentration on and for me day after day, I had to believe in its concrete efficacy. Could it be otherwise when, time and again, I experienced my glooms melting away like mists before sunrise and strength returning to me through his exhortations dripping every time the deep tenderness of his solicitude? On one occasion my gloom evaporated in a moment—it was almost like a let-there-be-light-and-there-was-light miracle. I was at the time in an utter mental prostration and wrote that I could well understand his inability to help me out of the abyss of my despond since he could not possibly spare time for one so opaque to his force. To that he wrote: "Want of time does not come in the way as there is no day on which I do not devote *some* time to thinking of you and concentrating for you. The difficulty lies in the removal of the obstruction in the physical mind—what you feel as the impasse. But it will go if you per-

SRI AUROBINDO CAME TO ME—Continued from previous page

severe. What seemed to be denied and impossible for years (bringing about a state of helpless stagnation and hopelessness and disbelief in even the goodwill and power of the Divine, the spiritual Force and the Guru) suddenly happens after all—when those who never had any experience for years get the opening. The difficulty is great and the darkness of the material consciousness obstinate, but still if one knows how to persist or even to wait, the Light comes....”

And then he went on to add reassuringly:

“It is not true that you have never received force from us. You have received it to any extent; it can only be said that you were not conscious of it, but that happens with many. Certainly none of the *sadhakas* receives or uses all the Force that the Mother sends, but that is a general fact and not peculiar to you. I hope you will not carry out your idea of going suddenly away... Whatever else you may doubt, you should not doubt that our love and affection will always be with you. But I still hope that you will be able to overcome this despair and develop the great force of intense will that is sure to come.”

And he wrote in a postscript in reply to my sigh over his preoccupation with the Empyrean: “No, it is not with the Empyrean that I am busy: I wish I was! It is rather with the opposite end of things: it is in the Abyss that I have to plunge to build a bridge between the two.”

What exactly he meant by building a bridge and what was the nature of the resistance he was confronted with at every turn we shall probably never know, but we can surely infer from his beautiful if somewhat sad poem, *A God's Labour* that he had known all along it was unlikely to be an easy achievement of Yogic engineering:

*I had hoped to build a rainbow bridge
Marrying the soil to the sky
And sow in this dancing planet midge
The moods of infinity.
But too bright were our heavens, too far away,
Too frail our ethereal stuff,
Too splendid and sudden our light could not stay;
The roots were not deep enough.*

How could the roots be deep enough when we, instead of tending the saplings, would throw so lightly away the seeds of faith and aspiration he would plant again and again in us? To give but one instance, one of his disciples on whom he had simply lavished his love declined to change and deserted. A year later this disciple wrote to me flaunting not only an ephemeral success of a trivial undertaking of his but rationalising it into a deep(?) philosophy:

“Life is a mirror, Dilip,” he lucubrated complacently, “and being a mirror, it must return smile for smile and frown for frown.” I forwarded it to Gurudev and received his comment the next morning:

“As for his ‘philosophy’ it is phrases and nothing else: what he means is, I suppose, that when one is successful one can be jolly—which is not philosophy but commonplace, only he turns it upside down to make it look wise. Or perhaps he means that if you smile at Mussolini and Hitler they will spare you castor-oil or cudgel: but even that is not sure, they may want to know what the smile means first—flattery or satire.”

But smile or no smile, he added, one must stave off defeatism and eschew the expensive luxury of despondency!

“Don’t allow the assailant (Insidious Mr. Doubt) to become a companion, don’t give him the open door and fireside seat. Above all, don’t drive away the incoming Divine with that dispiriting wet blanket of sadness and despair! Or, to put it more soberly, accept once for all that this thing has to be done, that it is the only thing left for yourself on the earth. Outside are earthquakes and Hitlers and a collapsing civilization and, generally speaking, the ass and the flood.* All the more reason to tend towards the one thing to be done, the thing you have been sent to do, and for getting it done. It is difficult and the way long and the encouragement given meagre? What then? Why should you expect so great a thing to be easy or that there must be either a swift success or none? The difficulties have to be faced, and the more cheerfully they are faced, the sooner they will be overcome. The one thing to do is to keep the *mantra* of success, the determination of victory, the fixed resolve: ‘Have it I must and have it I will’. Impossible? There is no such thing as impossibility: there are difficulties and things of *longue haleine*, but no impossibilities. What one is determined fixedly to do, will get done—now or later it becomes possible. Drive out the dark despair and go bravely on with your poetry, your novels and your yoga. As the darkness disappears, the inner doors too will open.”

Tagore once said of the poetry of my father, Dwijendra Lal Roy, that he passed from the serious to the light moods with an astonishing ease of transit. The same might be said of Sri Aurobindo’s letters though not of his other writings which are more concerned with an illumined clarity than with the chiaroscuro of wit and humour. We had come to the Ashram drawn by this magnetic light with which his messages were instinct. But it *was*, more often than not, a dazzle rather than an effulgence to our novice eyes. So when, in the thirties, he started writing his letters somewhat freely, naturally we all acclaimed them as much for the relief as for the rapture his light moods occasioned in our somewhat over-impressed breasts still resonant with the tribute of a quondam Prime Minister of England:

“I called on one whose name is on every lip as a wild extremist across whose path the shadow of the hangman falls... He talked of things which trouble the soul of man; he wandered aimlessly into the dim regions of aspiration where the mind finds a soothing resting-place. He was far more a mystic than a politician. He saw India seated on a temple throne... Man has to fulfil God, he has written, and that is only possible by fulfilling himself, this again being possible only through nationality... The *Matripuja*—the worship of the Mother—has become a political rite... He returns to his Gods and to the faith of his country for there is no India without its faith and no faith without India.”*

We felt a sense of relief because when we dwell on tributes such as these the awe they generate militate against the sense of kinship we need and strive to feel with the Guru but in vain: he is too great for such as we, is he not?—we ask ourselves almost with a pang. But *laus Deo*—when such a living orb of superhumanity comes down to us with letters limpid with love and a human understanding which we can understand, then comes the thrill because the incredible thing seems to have come to pass: even such a giant can then, on occasions, dwarf himself so that we may *feel* his humanity! I can almost recapture the thrill which his first letters gave us and the mystic thanksgiving that rose from our hearts like vapour from a calm lake at sundown, wistful and yet iridescent with romance. For such a great revolutionary, who matured later into an even greater Yogi of invulnerable gravity, to have retained unimpaired a human zest for laughter and humour and repartees! About his humour we gathered titbits only through anecdotes and cautious gossip when I learned, to my immense relief, that though in society he withdrew generally into the shell of his deep, congenital reserve, with his intimates of the inner circle he had always loved to indulge in banter and laughter and quips of every description. An old friend of his once gave me a sample of his pre-yogic humour. “The Prince of Baroda was going to be married,” he said, “In those days monogamy was not particularly insisted on. Sri Aurobindo was then Vice-Principal of the Gaekwar’s College. When the distinguished guests had assembled for the wedding dinner, the royal bridegroom came up to him dignified and shy. The grave Vice-Principal, revered by all, shook hands with ‘the cynosure of neighbouring eyes’ and wished him ‘Many many happy returns of the day!’”

As I have said, in the Ashram they often told me how refreshingly he used to spar with his adherents of old. I used to envy them the privilege they had enjoyed till, in the course of time, he began to write freely to me. I must quote here in full the first letter he wrote shedding the solace of his humour on my badly hurt head. This happened in 1932.

“You struck your head against the upper sill of the door our engineer Chandulal fixed in your room?” he wrote. “A pity, no doubt. But remember that Chandulal’s dealings with the door *qua* door were scientifically impeccable: the only thing he forgot was that people—of various sizes—should pass through it. If you regard the door from the Russellian objective point of view as an external thing in which you must take pleasure for its own sake, then this will be brought home to you and you will see that it was quite all right. It is only when you bring in irrelevant *subjective* considerations like people’s demands on a door and the pain of a stunned head, that objections can be made. However, in spite of philosophy, the Mother will speak to Chandulal in the morning and get him to do what has (practically, not philosophically) to be done. May I suggest, however, if it is any consolation to you, that our Lilliputian engineer perhaps measured things by his own head, forgetting that there were in the Ashram higher heads and broader shoulders?... As for the Divine rapture, a knock on the head or foot or elsewhere can be received with the physical *ananda* of pain or pain and *ananda* or pure physical *ananda*—for I have often, quite involuntarily, made the experiment myself and passed with honours. It began, by the way, as far back as in Alipore Jail when I got bitten in my cell by some very red and ferocious-looking warrior ants and found to my surprise that pain and pleasure are conventions of our senses. But I do not expect that unusual reaction from others. And I suppose there are limits, e.g. the case of the picketers in Madras or Dr. Noel Paton.” (They were beaten by the police as a result of which there were many fractured skulls.) “In any case *their* way of having rapture is better off the list and that dwarfish doorway was not a happy contrivance.”

Then came, in 1934, his comment on the parable I had retailed to him of the ass and the flood:

“Once upon a time, Guru, there was a foolish ass who lived in the neighbourhood of a wise Yogi. One day a sudden flood burst the banks of a river near by and flooded the countryside. The wise Yogi, being wise, ran up till he reached the safe top of a hill at the foot of which he used to meditate day and night in a cave. But the ass—being foolish, not to say unmeditative—was swept away by the rushing tides. ‘Alas!’ he brayed, ‘the world is being drowned!’ ‘Don’t be an ass,’ reprimanded the wise Yogi in scorn from up the hill-top. ‘It’s only *you* who are being drowned—not this great big world.’ ‘But sir,’ argued the idiot, ‘if I myself am drowned how can I know that the world will survive?’ And the Yogi was struck dumb and wondered, for the first time, which was the deeper wisdom: the human or the asinine! And I too have started wondering, Guru!” I added, on my own. “So I appeal to you to adjudicate: tell me whose is the more pitiable plight: the Yogi’s or the ass’s? And incident-

* Reference is to a parable which is to follow presently.

* Quoted from J. Ramsay Macdonald’s “The Awakening in India,” first published in London in 1910.

SRI AUROBINDO CAME TO ME —Continued from opposite page

ally, tell me also if my mind is going off the handle because I find the foolish ass's argument nearly as valid as the wise Yogi's?"

To that he replied: "Your wise but not otherwise ass has put a question that cannot be answered in two lines. Let me say, however, in defence of the much-maligned ass that he is a very clever and practical animal and the malignant imputation of stupidity to him shows only human stupidity at its worst. It is because the ass does not do what man wants him to do even under blows, that he is taxed with stupidity.

"But really, the ass behaves like that first because he has a sense of humour and likes to provoke the two-legged beast into irrational antics; and secondly, because he finds that what man wants of him is quite a ridiculous and bothersome nuisance which ought not to be demanded of any self-respecting donkey. Also note that the ass is a philosopher. When he hee-haws, it is out of a supreme contempt for the world in general and for the human imbecile in particular. I have no doubt that in the asinine language *man* has the same significance as *ass* in ours. These deep and original considerations are, however, by the way—merely meant to hint to you that your balancing between a wise man and the wise ass is not so alarming a symptom after all."

Once a rather funny thing happened in 1933. We used in those days to have a musical programme in the Ashram, about once in two months. As I was singing a song on Krishna on one such occasion with Mother sitting before me in *samadhi*, I was conscious of a commotion behind me where the others were sitting. A senior *sadhaka* of considerable girth, Purushottam—so I was told subsequently—got up on a sudden to dance when Ambu, a rather thin though strong youth, leapt up to restrain the other's indomitable ecstasy, as a result of which there was, necessarily, a tussle. So the musical soiree was partially spoiled. This saddened me and I asked Sri Aurobindo if I had been responsible in any way, or if I had stimulated a *bhakti* unfelt by my heart. To that he replied:

"There was no misdirection of your appeal to Krishna; if there was anybody responsible it was Anilkumar with his *tabla* (Indian drum). But there was nothing wrong and no *possession* in the evil sense of the word—nothing hostile. The beat-beat of the *tabla*—more than anything else—created a vibration which was caught hold of by some rhythmic material energy and that in turn was caught hold of by Purushottam's body which considered itself under a compulsion to *execute* the rhythm by a dance. There is the whole (occult) science and genesis of the affair. Purushottam thought he was inspired and in a trance; Ambu thought Purushottam was going to break his own head and other people's legs; a number of others thought Purushottam was going cracked or already cracked; some thought Purushottam was killing Ambu which Ambu contemptuously rejects, saying he was able to hold Purushottam all alone, and out of these conflicting mental judgements—if they can be called so—arose the whole row. A greater quietude in people's minds would have allowed the incident to be 'liquidated' in a less uproarious fashion—but the Mother was absorbed in the music and could only intervene later on when Champaklal consulted her. That is all."

And sometimes, though rarely, we had pure fun as well—just unqualified laughter and mirth. To give an instance or two:

I had a friend whom we called Bindu. He wrote to Gurudev (1934) a long letter besieging him with a number of world-shaking questions to which the reply came in due course:

"Bindu,

Good heavens! But what! But when! But which! You expect me to give you 'clear and concise' notes on all that, fixing the 'nature and salient features' of each blessed thing? It will take me several Sundays wholly devoted to grappling with this tremendous task! And how the deuce am I to tell you in a 'clear and concise way' what consciousness is or mind or life is? Do you think these confounded entities are themselves clear and concise or have any 'salient features'? They are 'salient' only in the Latin sense of jumping about all the time and becoming something different each moment. As for 'consciousness' you might as well ask me to define the *world*. Of course I could do it by replying—'a damned mess,' and that would be very satisfactory to me as well as 'clear and concise' but it would hardly serve the purpose."

Bindu had, however, a peculiar humour wedded to a native gift for insistence which he developed like a master craftsman till it looked almost indistinguishable from genius. I can give it no other name because in those days Gurudev or Mother never allowed outsiders to cook for them. But his sheer importunate genius prevailed and he was allowed to cook what we call *prasad* (food offered to the Gods). This he sent up duly to Gurudev who ate of it but not much, whereupon Bindu penned him a disconsolate letter a copy of which I still possess.

"Gurudev," he wrote, "Nalina brought me back the dishes. I was stunned to find that you had hardly touched them. I am deeply pained, sorely disappointed, utterly dejected and mortally wounded, and cannot imagine why you are so unsympathetic to me."

Gurudev wrote back a sweet letter of solace:

"Bindu!

Don't be absurd! Our sympathy towards you is profound and perfect, but it cannot be measured by our sympathy towards your eatables. We, usually, just taste the *prasad* people send to us; sometimes we take more but never when it is very sweet or very extraordinary. Of your vermicelli pudding we could well speak in the language of the passionate address of the lover to his beloved: 'O sweet! O too too sweet!' (which

doesn't mean, though, that it was not well done). And the stew was extraordinary, albeit of another world—so much so that if I tasted the first forkful with anxiety, the second was with awe, after which I ventured no farther into these unknown countries. By the way, I took much more of the vermicelli than I usually do of these concentrated puddings. So you are wrong in thinking that I did not touch your *prasad*."

* * *

Bindu came triumphantly to me flourishing the letter as a lethal weapon.

"You may write to him reams and reams of letters and poems and what not," he chortled, "but you dare not *cook* for him."

"Don't be silly!" I returned. "Any duffer can."

"I defy you to prove it, scoffer!" he retaliated.

I had to accept the challenge, to save my face. But here too came a snag, for the stipulation was that I must peel, boil, fry—in a word, do all that has to be done *single-handed*.

So when I had playfully accepted the gauntlet flung by him, I felt scared: how could one who had never even boiled an egg in his life manipulate into being an eatable dish over the stove? Joking was all right, but I could hardly send up to Gurudev and Mother a horrible concoction as a *prasad*! Suddenly I had a brain-wave: I appealed piteously to an experienced lady, Amiya, to come to my rescue and thus prove my saviour. I asked her to direct me, verbally, without moving a finger. And lo, it worked! The incredible miracle was achieved! A vegetable *entrée* of potatoes, peas, and tomatoes was got ready by myself, *single-handed*, in less than an hour and a half! As I sent it up to Gurudev I wrote in my explanatory letter all about its genesis and evolution and then went on to add, casually, that though it was literally "cooked all by myself," I had availed myself of a few "whispering directions" by Amiya.

His heartening letter came duly, the next morning.

"Your cooking is remarkable and wonderful," he wrote. "If you had not disclosed the secret about Amiya's 'whispers' I would have been inclined to claim it as a *yogic miracle*! Even with the 'whispers' it is an astonishing first success. *Ashcharyavat pashyati kashchidenam** as the Gita says! My palate and stomach as well as my pen has done full justice to the event."

* * *

"Guru," I wrote once, "Lady Indignant told me today that she had reported of late to you that she was being forced by me and Saurin to accept our invitations to tea. A word in self-defence. We never suspected that she had disliked our—shall I say?—'chivalry.' In fact when we invited her she complied after a few no's which we had, naturally, interpreted as yes because when she came to tea, she, with her face wreathed in smiles, did not at all toy with the tea, far less with the cakes! 'Caprice!' I philosophised ruefully, 'thy name is woman!' But henceforth—now that the iron has entered my soul—she comes to tea to us at her own peril, what?"

He wrote back applauding: "Well, that is all right. If Lady Indignant is a devotee of the Great Chaf Devi she will fly and throw herself on the altar without need of urging: if not, she will sit in tealess meditation, invitation-free. As for chivalry, however, it is more than a century ago that Burke lamented: 'The days of chivalry are gone!' And in the year of grace, 1932, with feminism triumphant everywhere—except in France and Bokhara—how do you propose to keep the cult going any longer?"

* * *

Sometimes—just for fun—we wrote to him telegraphically even though it bordered upon irreverence if not blasphemy. Here is a sample.

"O Guru," I dashed off, "I send you a Bengali poem of mine entitled 'Akuti' which I translated last night into English. Can you revise it? Is it good? Mediocre? Worthless? Frank opinion, please! But what about Raihana's letter? Won't return? You keep mum. What's up? Bridge-building? Supramental? Wool-gathering?"

His repartee came, as echo to the song:

"I shall see if I can get a few minutes for revising your English translation. But you seem to have progressed greatly in your English verse—(How so quickly? Yogic Force? Internal combustion? The subliminal self?) Raihana's letter and drawing which have unaccountably turned up again with me. (Poltergeist? Your inadvertence? Mine?)"

* * *

"O Guru," I wrote, "I could not meditate of late, thanks to mountains of proofs. But soon I will start like Pahari Baba. So beware!"

He answered it promptly the next day:

"After mountains of proof the mountain of meditation, with you, the BABA, on top? All right: I am ready to face it!"

* * *

"O Guru," I wrote, "three solid pieces of jolly news: first, a Muslim writer named Abul Fazl comes to congratulate me because in my recent controversy with Tagore, he opines the latter had very much the worst of it. Then comes a savant who praises my Bengali novel, *Dola*. Last, though not least, turns up a Zamindar who implores me to draft for him an address for a local doctor who has been honoured by a Rajah. Do you smile on it or frown?"

He wrote back: 'I sympathise. Three cheers for Abul Fazl and the savant. But I don't feel enthusiastic about the doctor even though honoured by a Rajah! What are things coming to! (Please don't tell this to

* Quoted from the Gita, it means 'some look upon it as amazing.'

† *Cha* in Bengali means tea.

SRI AUROBINDO CAME TO ME—Continued from previous page

Nirod). Perhaps, however, it may be on the principle: 'Honour the doctor that thy life may be long in the land'? But then to call in an eminent littérateur like you is after all appropriate. You can furnish them with a long address on the romance of medicine beginning with Dhanwantari, Charaka and Galen and ending with Nirod Taluqdar or Dr. Ramchandra."

When his correspondence in our Ashram increased to unconscionable proportions and he had to deal with them all by himself night after night from 9 P.M. till 5 A.M. the next morning, Mother intervened and decided that henceforth *only a few* were to be allowed to write to him, by *special* permission. But as the number of the privileged ones mounted day by day, I wrote one day to him (1935):

"To how many have you given a special permission to write to you daily? Nirod confided to me—it's 121. Bindu says—impossible, it is only 97—out of the present total 150."

The reply came:

"The number openly accepted is two by tacit understanding, two by express notice and two by self-given permission. If it had been 97 or 121 I would have translated myself to the Gobi desert or the Lake Manasa in the style of Sri Bijoy Krishna Goswami."

"O Guru," I wrote once, "Lady Demure insists on being deeply shocked whenever somebody is caught lying, forgetting that she lies herself—as often as not. But then we all do lie, Guru! So why are we so profoundly shocked when others repeat our favourite pastime? Please elucidate."

"Lies?" he wrote back. "Well, a Punjabi student at Cambridge once took our breath away by the frankness and comprehensive profundity of his affirmation: 'Liars! But we are all liars!' It appeared that he had intended to say 'lawyers', but his pronunciation gave his remark a deep force of philosophic observation and generalisation which he had not intended! But it seems to me the last word on human nature. Only the lying is sometimes intentional, sometimes vaguely half-intentional, sometimes quite unintentional, momentary and unconscious. So there you are!"

"O Guru," I confided, "Mr. Cocksure told me yesterday for nearly half-an-hour that he feels a wonderful power astir in him day and night leading him to a wonderful self-surrender! I am impressed. Aren't you?"

On this he commented:

"When he speaks of the power in him and his self-surrender—well, one can only wish that if and when people are so *wonderful*, they might as well be a trifle less eloquent about their wonderfulness. One never knows to what this excessive self-appreciation will lead and the past examples do not encourage."

"O Guru," I communicated, "Mr. Effusive, who is an admirer of yours has just sent me a Bengali poem which he implores me to sing to you 'without fail'. But I wonder how you would react to it if I complied, for he has in effect sounded the death-knell of Rishihood, calling you virtually the last of the Romans. I will translate into English only the opening couplet so that Mother may also know, just to be forewarned:

'Glozy to thee, O wistful India's last and lingering seer!

O let me expire with thee, my Lord, who never more shalt appear.'

One hardly knows whether one should laugh or whether weeping is here *de rigueur*? What do you say? And he wants your blessings too, remember."

"Dilip," Gurudev admonished, "you don't understand! What he means is that my *shishyagan* (disciples) will all become supermen; ergo, there can be no possible chance of any such small thing as a Rishi (seer) appearing again—I am positively the last of that crowd. All the same, you may send him my blessings—he deserves it richly for giving us such a gorgeous prospect."

"O Guru," I wrote after reading two autobiographies which set me thinking once again, "in Yoga prayers have, I understand, a very important function to fulfil even when they are of the petitionary brand. In his reminiscences entitled *Vale* Dean Inge says, with true humility, that although the pearl of great price is only for those few who stake their all for the All-in-all, yet no sincere prayer is unheard. But then, I ask myself, why is there so much preventible misery when *les misérables* keep praying—at any rate a large proportion of them do. I have seen myself so many praying and praying till they are blue in the face but nothing happens! Dean Inge may assert that *his* prayers have been heard often enough, but what about our Jawaharlal who writes, equally categorically, that he has often enough been just thirsty for a little peace but to no purpose? No wonder his scepticism is reinforced about a Divine Ordainer and he goes on fuming against the religious. To the seer mystic his indictments may seem crude and superficial, but can one say that he really is as childish as he seems since he does not, alas, want to dive deeper and so remains where he is, admiring Gandhiji (I believe, sincerely?) and yet poohpoohing his profoundest impulse—towards mysticism! Or is it because he simply hankered for peace—but never prayed?"

"As for prayer," he wrote back, "no hard and fast rule can be laid down. Some prayers are answered, all are not. The eldest daughter of my maternal uncle, Sri Krishna Kumar Mitra (the editor of *Sanjivani*—

not by any means a romantic, occult, supra-physical or even an imaginative person) was abandoned by the doctors after using every resource, all medicines stopped as useless. The father said: 'There is only God now, let us pray.' He did and from that moment the girl began to recover, the typhoid fever and all symptoms fled, death also. I know of any number of cases like that. Well? You may ask why should not then all prayers be answered? But why should they? It is not a machinery: put a prayer in the slot and get your asking. Besides, considering all the contradictory things mankind is praying for at the same moment, God would be in a rather awkward hole if he had to grant all of them; it wouldn't do. As for Jawaharlal, he has perhaps something in his temperament that might answer to the supraphysical, but by his intellect he has so put it down that it is not likely to act in any overt manner."

"O Guru," I appealed. "Lady Indignant is again down on us, males! She says man is such a foul seducer and poor woman (poor? a modern woman? good Lord!) such a guileless, simple and trustful tendril! I retaliated in banter and reminded her what Tagore had sighed over in the 'twenties: 'We are a much maligned sex, Dilip! The fair one would have it that we pursue and harry her. But between you and me, do you think that the most leonine of lions could dare approach a woman if she really frowned upon his advances?! So adjudicate, Guru: who tempts first—man or woman? Or shall we say *à la* Sir Roger de Coverley: 'Much can be said on both sides?'"

"Dilip," he answered, "it is six of one and half-a-dozen of the other. To throw it all on woman is Adamism. To ignore the man's part is feminism. Both are in error. Yes, Sir Roger is right."

"O Guru," wailed the man of sorrows in me. "So be it. Since I have been hanging too long in mid-air and must land somewhere somehow, anyhow—therefore I propose—subject to your approval—a drastic prescription for my long-suffering unconvalescing self.

"Number one. I will give up tea: I love it.

"Number two. I will do without cheese: I like it.

"Number three. I will bid adieu to tasty dishes and start periodic fasts.

"Number four. Will forswear hair-oil and shave my head. (I was not baldish in those days).

"Number five. I will sleep on only one sole blanket, pillowless. But note: I tried this before already and remember that although you have kept me in reasonable comfort, I came ready to brave any austerity.

"Number six. I will sleep without the mosquito-curtain which, I fear, will be the most difficult of all feats because I have never been able to treat the crooning of the mosquito as a lullaby.

"Only believe me when I say that although I move this resolution in a language that may sound unparliamentary, my heart is really heavy and tearful, since I can see no shorter cut to salvation. So, in the circumstances, will you and the Mother ratify my resolution, please?"

My letter was dated September 14, 1935.

He wrote back precipitately: "I stand aghast as I stare at the detailed proposals made by you! Fastings? I don't believe in them, though I have done them myself. You would really eat like an ogre afterwards. Shaved head? Great heavens! Have you realised the consequences? I pass over the aesthetic shock to myself at *darshan* on the 24th November from which I might never recover—but the row that would rise from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas! You would be famous in a new way which would cast all your previous glories into the shade. And just when you are turning away from fame and all the things of the ego! No: too dangerous by half. Sleep without the mosquito-net? That would mean no sleep, which is as bad as no food. Not only your eyes would become weak, but yourself also—and, to boot, gloomy, grey and gruesome—more gruesome than the Supramental of your worst apprehensions! NO and NO again. As for the rest, I placed some of them before the Mother and she eyed them without favour.

"After all, real asceticism is hardly possible except in a hut or in the Himalayas. The heart of asceticism, besides, is having no desires or attachments, being *indifferent*, able to do without things, satisfied with whatever comes. If you 'asceticise' outwardly, it becomes a rule of life and you keep up because it is a rule, for the principle of the thing or for the *kudos* of it—as a point of honour. But I have noticed about ascetics by rule that when you remove the curb they become just like others—barring a few exceptions, of course—which proves that the transformation was not real. A more subtle method used by some is to give up for a time, then try the object of desire again and so go on till you have thoroughly tested yourself; e.g. you give up your potatoes and eat only the Asram food for a time—if the call comes for the potatoes or from them, then you are not cured: if no call comes, still you cannot be sure till you have tried potatoes again, and seen whether the desire, attachment or sense of need revives. If it does not and the potatoes fall away from you of themselves, then there is some hope that the thing is done.

"However, all this will make you think that I am hardly fit to be a Guru in the path of asceticism and you will probably be right. You see, I have a strong penchant for the inner working and am persuaded that if you give the psychic a chance it will rid you of the impediments you chafe at

Continued on page 11

THE HARLEQUIN OF SAGACITY

BY K. D. SETHNA

July 14 was the sixteenth anniversary of G. K. Chesterton's death. The following essay, written in its author's undergraduate days while G. K. C. was alive, was first published by him at that time in book-form with three other essays on noted men of letters. Years after, it appeared separately in the monthly magazine, "The Journalist", with a changed beginning to suit the changed circumstances.

Some men are so abundantly and impressively individual that to the world their death seems the most minor incident of their life. No lover of literature feels that G. K. Chesterton is dead: his overflowing uniqueness drowns the fact of dust returning to dust. Still he stands in all his eccentric ecstasy—the champion paradoxer. Still through his little *pince-nez* he looks at the cosmos, considers its giant situations, contemplates its dancing trifles, and says that what appears gigantic is microscopic and what appears trifling is momentous. And we are made to sit up and take notice because this is no puckish perversity but confirmed conviction. Chesterton voices his startling inversions because he thinks our perspective to be habitually inverted. We magnify the small and minimise the great, the resultant reaction being the perfectly sane man who tells us the opposite and gets cheered as a genius or jeered at as a lunatic. Chesterton can never be taken for a nitwit, doing his job as he does with unmatched geniality and masterly finesse. Besides, he blandly keeps asking why he should ever be deemed "barmy on the crumpet". Is he really a paradoxer? "There are no paradoxes in my books," he says, "I only insist on the obvious—I only declare that the truisms are true." Well, the only thing obvious is that he is quite incorrigible and that we do not wish him changed one jot!

Who would change a master-explorer of happiness? Chesterton is the King of Romanticists. Whatever is disillusioning ought to be eliminated, lest the world should become humdrum and lead us to believe that life is unpromising, whereas it is just our way of living which is at fault. He does not relish the Zolaesque element in fiction. He is a faithful devotee of the fairy tale, the adventure story and the mystery yarn: they make him jump—in spite of his Johnsonian bulk! We know what exists, but we require the non-existent, which is Romance. Yet Romance is non-existent because we fail to discern its actuality, not because it is a phantom of the imagination. In short, Romance is reality, only we do not realise it. Look at the ocean charging the coast where the rocks are like battlements and the roaring waters like armies of invasion. The sun rises every day: but is it not ample food for a riotous fancy that it should disappear in the West and pop up again from the East? We go out into the street with its deafening traffic and million unknown people; but what indescribable fun it would be to speculate on the aims and ideals and destiny of every pedestrian, and imagine ourselves in a sort of elfland where griffins and goliaths in the form of taxis and tramcars attack us, and where it depends on our own skill and adroitness whether we are run over or whether we land triumphantly on a convenient foot-path! Chesterton is ever on the look-out for this inner meaning of things and advises us all to find it, for the meaning is not apparent but hidden; and it would not have been hidden were it not meant for us to search it out. Indeed, we cannot discover anything unless it has been undiscovered!

The romantic temperament is the sure sign of the optimist. Chesterton is uproariously optimistic, usually seeing the bright side; and if he gropes

for the dark one, it is either for the purpose of showing that it is not so dark as we suppose or in order to throw on it the dazzling light of humorous criticism and drive it out of sight. Why should we grumble and look glum? Why did Carlyle do so? He was a dyspeptic invalid throughout his life and his stomach had a bilious effect on his head. That is what is the matter with most of us: we are dyspeptic, we do not digest what is given us, we cannot change the impressions life in its multiplicity gives us into a nutritious philosophy; we turn them into senseless pessimism or idiotic indifference. Thomas Hardy has it that Nature is callous. Very well; then we should smile and lark all the more, joy becoming a positive obligation. Hilarity is never so vital a thing as when the world around is morose.

The easiest way to achieve a hilarious temperament is, according to Chesterton, to have a hopeful faith as the staff of life. Let us believe in God, for we shall be happier with a merciful father than as benighted orphans. Let us believe in a future life, for we shall cease to mourn for the loved and lost and try to smile, if only to conceal our sorrow. Let us believe in freewill, for fate makes us slaves and a state of freedom is decidedly more enjoyable; furthermore, as we really feel free we must not sophistically argue ourselves into slavery. Heresies are daring, adventurous and desirable; so let us adopt Orthodoxy as our religion, for it is nowadays a thundering heresy against "the Established Church of Doubt". We grow old not because we are nearing the grave but because we are approaching the gate of Paradise: only children can enter it and old age is second childhood! Anatomists deny the spirit because it has not met their dissecting knife; but the spirit is intangible on account of being an immaterial principle rather than on account of being an unsubstantial nonentity. We have drifted into the earth from a more perfect world beyond; and that is why we yearn for perfection and feel homesick in this our home. And since we are the children of God though we might be the sons of Man, we should laugh and joke and slap one another on the back. The Pagan says: "Let us drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." The Christian cries out: "Let us drink and be merry, for lo! we live for ever."

This fervent hope, this deep-set faith made Chesterton as jolly in life as he is in literature. In fact, the literature he created is the translation of which his life was the original. He was the most ardent friend of children. There was only one thing he liked more than an intellectual game of give-and-take and that was the children's game of hide-and-seek. You might expect him to be poring over Thomas Aquinas and explaining the cosmology of that saint to an unrepentant infidel, whereas you would find him reading the verses of Edward Lear about the Dong with the luminous nose to a boy of seven. He would derive greater happiness from discoursing with a gushing schoolgirl than with an austere schoolmaster. Both would be equally handicapped against so expert a dialectician, but the schoolmaster would assert when he could not argue, dogmatise when he could not retort, and send our hero into a rage, while the schoolgirl would look up with won-

Continued on page 12

SRI AUROBINDO CAME TO ME —Continued from opposite page

without all this sternness and trouble."

"O Guru," I replied, "I thank you sincerely for refusing assent to my doom. And yet, paradoxically, I feel a definite disappointment too along with the relief. For I had a lurking suspicion that your Supramental wisdom might be wanting to impose asceticism on me since I have, willy-nilly, to practise your Supramental Yoga and no other; so I decided, after a mighty wrench, to ban everything my mind loved or even approved of. But now, you yourself are turning down my proposal to conquer attachments which are holding me up. I repeat that I am still 'game' if you reconsider your veto to give me another trial."

To that he replied next morning:

"But how in the earthly did you get this strange idea that we were pressing asceticism on you? When? How? Where? I only admitted it as a possibility after repeated assertions from you that you wanted to do this formidable thing, and it was with great heart-searchings and terrible apprehensive visions of an ascetic Dilip with wild weird eyes and a loin-cloth, eating groundnuts and nails and sleeping on iron spikes in the presence of a dumbfounded Lord Shiva! I never prescribed the thing to you at all: it was *you* who were clamouring for it, so I gave in and tried to make the best of it, hoping that you would think better of it. As for the Mother, the first time she heard of it she knocked it off with the most emphatic 'Nonsense!' possible. In fact what you proposed was even more formidable than my vision—a shaven-headed and mosquito-bitten Dilip in loin-cloth and the rest (not that you actually proposed the last but it is the logical outcome of the devastating shave!). Conquest of attachment is quite a different matter—one has to learn to take one's tea and potatoes without weeping for them or even missing them if they are not there. But

we have repeatedly said that you could go on with them and need not follow the way taken by others. As to seclusion I have written my distrust of retirement several times: it is only a few people who can do it and profit, but they are not a rule for others. . . . If I am living in my room it is not out of passion for solitude. . . . So you need not be anxious: solitude is not demanded of you, for an ascetic dryness or isolated loneliness cannot be your destiny since it is not consonant with your *swabhava* (nature) which is made for joy, largeness, expansion, a comprehensive movement of the life-force. So your subtle interpretation of our intentions or wishes was a bad misfit. However, all is well that ends well and in spite of your suggestion of being 'game' I will consider the danger as over. *Laus Deo!*"

* * *

The Maharaja of Dewas who was then a refugee in Pondicherry once invited me to dinner. Gurudev wrote:

"I hope your dinner did not turn out like my first taste of Maharatta cookery—when for some reason my dinner was *non est* and somebody went to my neighbour, a Mahratta Professor, for food. I took one mouthful and only one. O God! Sudden fire in the mouth could not have been more cataclysmic! Enough to bring down the whole of London in one agonised sweep of flame!"

To be continued

Correction

In *Mother India* of June 2, on page 9 (column 2) read
Beauty and charm of a face?
after the line;

Hearts once alive.

BOOKS in the BALANCE

"Much Riches in a Little Room"

MODERN TENDENCIES IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

By Dr. AMIYA CHAKRAVARTY

(Published by the Book Exchange, 217, Cornwallis Street, Calcutta.

Pp. X plus 73. Price: Rs. 2.)

Much has been written in recent years on Modern Literature but few have covered so wide a range in so small a compass as Dr. Amiya Chakravarty in his latest book. Here there is no laying down of the law. The crystal-clear understanding of individual poets as against a background enables the writer (formerly Professor of English in Calcutta University and now occupying a Chair in English Literature in the New World) to give the novice as well as the advanced student of English Literature the main tendencies as they affect and are affected by the people and the prevailing "isms".

The *Introduction* gives a bird's-eye view of English Literature today and accounts for the idiosyncrasies that are part of modern writers, particularly of poets who, in their quest for the novel, dabble in "bleak reality" as they call it or get back to a past that is legendary. Through poeticising the unpoetic and by refining the medium the

poets often reveal a harmony that exists between themselves and the subjects they deal with, and show the unity of truth in the "diverse riches of humanity." The chapter *Yeats and the Moderns* shows the Irish poet and mystic in a frame of mind that separates him from all others of his age, and he is a lonely figure in the realm of poetry—the Grand Old Man of Letters—another Blake and Thompson, looking to the ether for inspiration and passionate music. *Enter Mr. T. S. Eliot* brings us to what was once the "dreamland atmosphere of Symbolism suddenly become heavy with shadows," when a beautiful life of dreams and shadows, so loved by Yeats, had come to nought in a world of "The Waste Land", "Murders in Cathedrals" and "Sad Electra Calling."

In Poetry there have been rapid changes and developments, and two chapters in the book are devoted to them. The poet utilised the line or rhythm scheme in a way

that pleased but more often distracted by untuned, subtoned, detoned words. The poets were for throwing overboard the tradition of verse—and the Sonnet, so loved by the poets, particularly the nineteenth century poets, was given a rest and a variegated conglomeration of verse structure was the fashion, with Free Verse thrown in as a rich bait. The pendulum swings once again and the rhythmic variations become more virile and are in consonance with an age of far-reaching changes; and stresses (with a change in the meaning of words), rhythmic breaks (as used by Shakespeare) and the "sprung rhythm" (as used by Hopkins) bring in the era of modernist verse and extend the domain of poetry over "palm and pine".

Each of the three major poets of today, Spender, Lewis and Auden, receive considerable attention at the hands of Dr. Chakravarty and the main tendencies are so well brought out that the broad outlines can be

filled in from time to time by up-to-the-minute reading of the works of these poets. In *Stephen Spender* we are made aware of the poet's early phase, of his interest in a mythological past and the difficulty he gave his readers by bringing to his poems the inscrutability of life. In *C. D. Lewis*, the Past and Present are depicted in a series of "black and white antitheses"; and the poet's belief in Action, immediate and startling, makes him a singer of the Promised Land, with self-fulfilment or "private dawn" as a reward for all who strive and do. In *W. H. Auden* we see the poet-reformer and his diagnosis of the world that inclines him to conclude that the world's "plague" can be cured if individuals have an iron will. His *Orators* is a psychological analysis of the times and captures his readers by his wholeheartedness, the admixture of poetry and prose and a happy turn of expression.

WILLIAM HOOKENS.

THE HARLEQUIN OF SAGACITY

Continued from page 11

dering eyes and pretty gaping mouth and take to everything her big friend gave her, because she liked fairy tales and Chesterton's theories looked astonishingly like them. But generally with children he was like a child, drawing cartoons for them, singing nonsense with them or showing his dexterous jugglery to them. "Well," said the aunt to the little boy who had been to tea with Chesterton; "well, Frank, I suppose you have had a very instructive afternoon?" "I don't know what that means," said Frank; "but oh, you should see Mr. Chesterton catch buns with his mouth!" History does not show a more pleasing picture of a man of genius.

Chesterton was a kicker of convention wherever he saw it—from bun-eating to citizenship. Insist on rigid rules of behaviour and he would break them all, one after another. Make it a crime punishable by death not to lift your hat to a lady friend and he would cut dead all the belles he knew, to be saved the humiliation of acquiescing in this tyranny. Pass a Bill in Parliament that no man should stand on his head in public view, and we would find Chesterton balanced on the dome of St. Paul's with his legs cutting wild semaphores in the sky. Declare that literary criticism should be sober and classical and he would instantly contrast the poetry of Tennyson with that of Browning by delightfully describing how we could be kicked downstairs in their respective styles. Throw volumes of paralysing pedantry at his head, teaching him the art of verse, and he would fling back at you divine doggerels and lurid limericks to shock you out of your senses. Play the puritan against play-houses and taverns and you would get from him a spirited defence of the drama and a ringing lyric on a glass of ale. Be original, he says; do not strike the beaten track; do not be a timid camp-follower afraid of the van. "Good taste" is the last and vilest of superstitions because it is neither tasteful nor good. Know yourself much but be yourself more. Few there are whose life is not mimicry, whose conduct is not imitation. Biologically the apes are our ancestors, socially we are apes ourselves. We do what our neighbours do, we copy them to the last button, we ape them to a hair—without shame, without revulsion, without humour. But though a bit of imitation may be excusable, servile adherence to a type is a mortal sin. To be a quotation from society in many respects is inevitable, but to be a pocket-edition of it is to be not worth the print.

It is queer that in spite of his being most himself the British public picked him out as the most typical Englishman among them. Their choice involved preposterous self-flattery, for if there was anybody less like the dull and frigid Englishman the law of being inflicts upon us as a rule, it was G.K.C. But he was selected because he represented the abiding love of the Englishman for his foggy little isle floating in the North Sea. Chesterton loves England but to him it is always Little England. He could

never turn a Kipling, however much Kipling might jibe at the stay-at-homes and praise the march of Tommy Atkins to the ends of the earth across the deep which the Lord has "made dry" for him. Though he shares Kipling's admiration for England it is not for the same reason. He admires it for what it has not done, for the evils it has not occasioned, the temptations it has not yielded to in the course of its imperial expansion. Kipling would admire it for what it has done, for the Boer War, the Denshaw Affair, the Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre. Kipling advocates the two-edged sword: Chesterton takes it from his hand and puts it between Kipling and himself. He holds the idea of the Empire in abomination. Let England be a tiny country—to be tiny is to be romantic. No fight is worth one's strength unless it is against heavy odds, no victory one's exultation unless against big battalions, no defeat one's honour unless at the hand of overwhelming multitudes. For the great battle, the great contest, the great grapple the hero must sling his shield. Not for trade and territory was the earth given and the first sword forged at the first anvil and the fields spread for banners to sweep over and cavalries to gallop across. Chesterton's is ever the country of which the capital is London and never the country of which the capital is England!

As in his patriotism, he can be serious and polemical at times. When some anarchist declares education to be unnecessary for children he cannot keep his temper and vents it in a satiric essay. When some socialist wants to abolish private property and make everybody a servant of the State, he shouts out that this is only Capitalism *in excelsis*, the substitution of the many by the one, the multitude of capitalists by the greatest capitalist—the Socialist State! When some Eugenist puts forth a proposal for the scientific breeding of the human animal he sees in it a conspiracy of the governing class for a more thorough exploitation of the labourers. The poor classes are now physically exhausted and cannot overwork in the factories; so the aristocracy turns to Eugenics to restore its victims to health and equip them for more strenuous drudgery. Chesterton stands up for the common people. His religion is a kind of democracy, and democracy is to him almost a religion; for, in his eyes, both proclaim the doctrine that all men are equal—democracy because they have the same earthly birth, and religion because they have the same heavenly parentage.

Seriousness, however, is confined merely to his ultimate aims: the means he employs are always funny. And the writer who chooses humour as his method is either laughed at or laughed with; his greatness hangs on whether he excites our ridicule or arouses our interest. G.K.C. does the latter; for if he just penned a dizzy paradox we might be inclined to laugh at him, but we cannot help laughing with him in appreciation when he ingeniously proves its extreme plausibility!