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"GREAT IS TRUTH AND IT SHALL PREVAIL"

ALTERNATE SATURDAYS

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SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS

LITERARY VALUES, INSPIRATIONS, FORMS, STYLES, TECHNIQUES

(May I have some general rule about writing prose—besides the emphasis you have always laid on rhythm?)

"Avoid over-writing; let all your sentences be the vehicle of something worth saying and say it with a vivid precision neither defective nor excessive. Don't let either thought or speech trail or drag or circumvolute. Don't let the language be more abundant than the sense. Don't indulge in mere clever ingenuities without a living truth behind them."

(14-6-35)

(How would you look at too violent condensations in literature?)

"Too violent condensations of language or too compressed thoughts always create a sense either of obscurity or, if not that, then of effort and artifice, even if a powerful and inspired artifice. Yet very great poets and writers have used them, so great a poet as Aeschylus or so great a prose stylist as Tacitus. Then there are the famous 'knots' in the Mahabharata. I think one can say that these condensations are justified when they say something with more power and depth and full, if sometimes recondite, significance than an easier speech would give, but to make it a constant element of the language (without a constant justification of that kind) would turn it into a mannerism or artifice."

(The English reader has digested Carlyle and swallowed Meredith and is not quite unwilling to reJOYCE in even more startling strangenesses of expression at the present day. Will his stomach really turn at the novelty of that phrase which you wouldn't approve: "the voice of a devouring eye"? "The voice of an eye" sounds rather idiotic, but if the adjective "devouring" is added the phrase seems to become effective. "Devouring eye" is then a synecdoche—isolating and emphasising Shakespeare's most remarkable quality, his eager multitudinous sight, and the oral epithet provides a connection with the idea of a voice, thus preventing the catachresis from being too startling. If Milton could give us "blind mouths" and Wordsworth

Thou eye among the blind,

That, deaf and silent, readst the eternal deep,

is there very much to object to in this visioned voice?)

"Can't accept all that. A voice of a devouring eye is even more re-joycingly mad than a voice of an eye pure and simple. If the English language is to go to the dogs, let it go, but the Joyce cut by the way of Bedlam does not recommend itself to me.

"The poetical examples have nothing to do with the matter. Poetry is permitted to be insane—the poet and the madman go together: though even there there are limits. Meredith and Carlyle are tortuous or extravagant in their style only—though they can be perfectly sane when they want. In poetry anything can pass—for instance, my 'voice of a tilted nose':

O voice of a tilted nose,

Speak but speak not in prose!

Nose like a blushing rose,

O Joyce of a tilted nose!

That is high poetry, but put it in prose and it sounds insane." (5-5-35)

(I am afraid that poem of mine is quite a hash, what with those expressions that you find difficult to stomach).

"'Young heart', 'thrilled companionship', 'warm hour', 'lip to lip', 'passionate unease' are here poorly sensuous clichés—they or any one or two of them might have been carried off in a more moved and inspired style, gathering colour from their surroundings or even a new and rich life; but

here they stand out in a fashionable dressed-up insufficiency. This secret of fusing all in such a white heat or colour heat of sincerity of inspiration that even the common or often-used phrases and ideas catch fire and burn brilliantly with the rest is one of the secrets of the true poetic afflatus. But if you stop short of that inspiration and begin to write efficient poetry, then you must be careful of your P's and Q's." (19-3-32)

(Yes, the line "... so grief-hearted, strangely lone" is pretty poor. How would you exactly hit off the "quality" of its failure?)

"The line strikes at once the romantically sentimental note of more than a hundred years ago which is dead and laughed out of court nowadays. Especially in writing anything about vital love, avoid like the plague anything that descends into the sentimental or, worse, the namby-pamby."

(30-5-32)

(Here is a poem which seems to me an expression of the lower vital (to use our yogic classification) lashed to imaginative fury. Any real possibilities along this line?)

"An expression of the lower vital lashed to imaginative fury is likely to produce not poetry but simply 'sound and fury',—'tearing a passion to tatters' and in its full furiousness may even rise to rant and fustian. Erotic poetry more than any other needs the restraint of beauty and form and measure, otherwise it risks being no longer poetic but merely pathologic."

(14-6-32)

(In the poem I have submitted, the phrase "carnal prize" was indeed ugly and it must be thrown overboard. I suppose what the inspiration really meant in this poem is, as you put it, that I am not turning coldly to a cold Emptiness but with the same undiminished fire of longing to a greater imperishable Beauty than the earthly which my senses knew. But there was an additional nuance that arose in my mind in response to the inspiration—namely, that the joy and beauty found in "mutable" things was due to the magnificent revealing flame of youth and desire. Without that flame, even earth's beauty and the beauty of the body would have proved drear and comfortless. And it was because I had the same zest and emotive ardour when turning towards the Infinite as when turning towards things carnal that what I sought for could never be for me barren and cold and that I got, instead, a revelation of "undying rapturous Loveliness." It is this idea in particular that seems to have suggested the title I proposed: *The Sovereign Secret*—the secret being that to find in spiritual life something more pleasurable than even in that of the senses, one must turn towards the Unknown with a heart of intense love and not with "sage calm.")

"If I am to take some expressions in your letter at their face-value you seem to put forward—at least as poet—three notions about spiritual seeking which are somewhat extraordinary.

1. It is the same love which is addressed towards a 'carnal prize' and towards the Divine. I should imagine that one who approached the Divine with a 'carnal' or an untransformed vital love would embrace something of the vital world but certainly get nowhere near the Divine.

2. The Divine in itself is something cold and empty and dark—only human love gives it some warmth and attraction. I always thought that the Divine was the supreme ineffable Ananda of which human love and delight is only a clouded and fallen ray—most often hardly even that—compared with the empyrean of ethereal fire. How can the luminous eternal Ananda be something cold and dark, I should like to know.

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3. Or perhaps you only mean that the Divine Infinite which the calm sages seek is by the very fact of their calm and wisdom something cold, dark, empty, gloomy. Has it not occurred to you that if they really sought for something cold, dark and gloomy as the supreme good, they would not be sages but asses? The sages sought after the Divine as the supreme Existence, Consciousness and Bliss, the Light beyond lights, by which all this shineth, the Joy beyond all other joys. Even the seekers of the Absolute Indefinable find in it the peace that passeth all understanding and that is nothing cold, dark or gloomy. The Nihilistic Buddhists? But they did not believe in the Divine or in Eternity, only in Non-existence and what they sought was not the supreme good, but self-extinction and the end of suffering—an intelligible aim, but something quite different from the stress towards the Eternal." (15-7-31)

(Some time back I was wondering whether a second such outburst of quintessential romantic poetry as Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* was not possible. I wrote the first draft of some lines, but I am afraid they come nowhere near that gem.)

"I do not know why this fancy has seized on you to follow in the trace of others. No good work is likely to come out of such a second-hand motive. Let me add that this poem of Coleridge is a masterpiece, not because it is the quintessence of romantic poetry, but because it is a genuine supraphysical experience caught and rendered in a rare hour of exaltation with an absolute accuracy of vision and authenticity of rhythm. Further, romantic poetry could be genuine in the early nineteenth century, but the attempt to walk back into it in the year 1931 is not likely to be a success, it can only result in an artificial literary exercise. You have a genuine vein of poetic inspiration somewhere above your intellect which comes through sometimes when the said intellect can be induced to be quiet and the lower vital does not meddle. If I were you, I should try to find that always and make the access to it free and the transcriptions from it pure (for then your writing becomes marvellously good); that would be a truer line of progress than these exercises." (21-8-31)

(In Shelley's *Skylark* my heart does not easily melt towards one simile—

*Like a high-born maiden
In a palace-tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower.*

Sometimes I am inclined even to feel this is an atrocity. Then I wonder whether the sentimental stuff shouldn't be cut out and replaced by something deeper although in Shelley's style as much as possible—something like:

*Like a child who wanders
In an ancient wood
Where the strange glow squanders
All its secret mood
Upon her lilting soul lost in that solitude.)*

"The attempt to rewrite Shelley better than Shelley himself is a rash and hopeless endeavour. Your proposed stanza is twentieth century mysticism quite out of place in the *Skylark* and has not the simple felicity and magic and music of Shelley's verse. I fail to see why the high-born maiden is an atrocity—it expresses the romantic attitude towards love which was sentimental and emotional, trying to lift it out of the coarseness of life into a mental-vital idealism which was an attempt to resuscitate the attitude of chivalry and the troubadours. Romantic and unreal, if you like, but not atrocious." (8-11-34)

(It was Keats's ambition to write "a few fine plays" and some critics believe that he had the capacity to fulfil it. What is your impression? Do you think any of the Romantic poets had it?)

"I don't believe Keats had any dramatic genius in him. None of these poets had. Shelley's *Cenci* is a remarkable feat of dramatic construction and poetic imagination but it has no organic life like the work of the Elizabethans or the Greeks or like such dramas as the *Cid* or Racine's tragedies." (7-2-35)

(The Arnoldian terms "noble," "elevation," "grandeur"—are they really ruled out for Chapman's translation of Homer or for the ballad metre at its best?)

"Noble" has a special meaning, also 'elevation' is used in a certain sense by Arnold. In that sense these words do not seem to me to be applicable either to Chapman or to the ballad metre. Strong, forceful, energetic, impressive they may be—but nobility is a rarer, calmer, more self-mastered, highly harmonious thing than these are. Also, nobility and grandeur are not quite the same thing." (2-2-35)

(In that early poem of Harin's which you appreciated, there is no indication that the God spoken of is not the sole Divinity. There is no distinction hinted that the true and essential Godhead is not referred to but only a construction out of universal appearances. For the time being, there is no God but a jealous God—all Godhead is seen as a lonely jealousy directed

against human love and happiness. Isn't a human relation idealised here with a ludicrous thought-effect which is a flaw in the poem?)

"If Harin had indicated that the God spoken of was not the sole Divinity he would have spoiled the poem. For the purposes of the poem he has to be spoken of as the sole Divinity. Why must we take the poem as an exercise in philosophy? A poem is a poem, not a doctrine. It expresses something in the poet's mind or his feeling. If it agrees with the total truth or the highest truth of the universe, so much the better, but we cannot demand that of every poet and every poem. My appreciation was given from the purely aesthetic standpoint. Even if a poet were to extol a false doctrine such as a malevolent God creating a painful universe, still if it were a fine poem I would enjoy and praise it—although it would be there too an appearance of the universe but not spoiled by putting it forward as a doctrine." (1-2-35)

(Does the theory I have expounded and illustrated in that article on the poetic "daimon" hold water? As part of literature it may be perfectly legitimate, but is there any chance of its being true?)

"What is exactly your theory? There is one thing—influences—everybody undergoes influences, absorbs them or rejects, makes them disappear in one's own developed style or else keeps them as constituent strands. There is another thing—Lines of Force. In the universe there are many lines of Force on which various personalities or various achievements and formations spring up—e.g. the line Pericles-Caesar-Napoleon or the line Alexander-Jenghis-Tamerlane-Napoleon—meeting together there—so it may be too in poetry, lines of poetic force prolonging themselves from one poet to another, meeting and diverging. Yours seems to be a third—a Daimon or individual Spirit of Poetry migrating from one individual to another, several perhaps meeting together in one poet who gives them all a full expression. Is that it? If so, it is an interesting idea and arguable." (17-2-35)

(What precisely is meant when we say that poems exist already on higher planes and have only to be transmitted here by the human consciousness? If the parts of a poem hail from quite different planes, where exactly does the whole exist? Are there poetic fragments floating about, which cohere only in the mind of the man who catches them? And have these fragments a form already of language or do they become expressed by us alone? Are all the innumerable languages of earth spoken in the higher planes or do the latter possess merely modes or states of consciousness?)

"A poem may preexist in the timeless as all creation preexists there or else in some plane where the past, present and future exist together. But it is not necessary to presuppose anything of the kind to explain the phenomena of inspiration. All is here a matter of formation or creation. By the contact with the source of inspiration the creative Power at one level or another and the human instrument, receptacle or channel get into contact. That is the essential point, all the rest depends upon the individual case. If the substance, rhythm, form, words come down all together ready-formed from the plane of poetic creation, that is the perfect type of inspiration; it may give its own spontaneous gift or it may give something which corresponds to the idea or the aspiration of the poet, but in either case the human being is only a channel or receptacle, although he feels the joy of the creation and the joy of the *avesh*, *enthousiasmos*, elation of the inrush and the passage. On the other hand it may be that the creative source sends down the substance or stuff, the force and the idea, but the language, rhythm etc. are found somewhere in the instrument; he has to find the human transcription of something that is there in diviner essence above; then there is an illumination or excitement, a conscious labour of creation swift or slow, hampered or facile. Something of the language may be supplied by the mind or vital, something may break through from somewhere behind the veil, from whatever source gets into touch with the transcribing mind in the liberating or stimulating excitement or uplifting of the consciousness. Or a line or lines may come through from some plane and the poet excited to creation may build around them constructing his material or getting it from any source he can tap. There are many possibilities of this nature. There is also the possibility of an inspiration not from above, but from somewhere within on the ordinary levels, some inner mind, emotional, vital etc. which the mind practised in poetical technique works out according to its habitual faculty. Here again in a different way similar phenomena, similar variations may arise.

"As for the language, the tongue in which the poem comes or the whole lines from above, that offers no real difficulty. It all depends on the contact between the creative Power and the instrument or channel, the Power will naturally choose the language of the instrument or channel, that to which it is accustomed and can therefore readily hear and receive. The Power itself is not limited and can use any language, but although it is possible for things to come through in a language unknown or ill-known—I have seen several instances of the former—it is not a usual case, since the *sanskaras* of the mind, its habits of action and conception would normally obstruct any such unprepared receptiveness; only a strong mediumistic faculty might be unaffected by this difficulty. These things, however, are obviously exceptional, abnormal or supernormal phenomena.

"If the parts of a poem come from different planes, it is because one

READINGS FROM SRI AUROBINDO

A BROADCAST TALK, A.I.R. (CALCUTTA), DECEMBER 3: 6-30 TO 6-45 P.M.

By ASIT KUMAR GUPTA

In giving listeners a few excerpts from the vast literature which Sri Aurobindo has created, a word of caution is perhaps necessary. It is obviously impossible to do anything like justice to the tremendous range and catholicity of Sri Aurobindo's gospel of life by reading out a few selections—howsoever representative—from his writings, specially in the brief course of 15 minutes. All that I shall attempt to do is to try and transmit something of the magical beauty of Sri Aurobindo's language. For the rest, the passages will speak for themselves—they require no comment from me and I need only add that the general theme running through these selections—a theme which recurs with numerous modulations in Sri Aurobindo's works—is the Destiny of Man.

THE LIFE DIVINE

First, a passage from *The Life Divine*. Evolution is a master-concept in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and in the very first chapter of his philosophical *magnum opus*, Sri Aurobindo states his view-point with compelling authority. He says:

"We speak of the evolution of Life in Matter, the evolution of Mind in Matter; but evolution is a word which merely states the phenomenon without explaining it. For there seems to be no reason why Life should evolve out of material elements or Mind out of living form, unless we accept the Vedantic solution that Life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life because in essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Consciousness. And then there seems to be little objection to a farther step in the series and the admission that mental consciousness may itself be only a form and a veil of higher states which are beyond Mind. In that case, the unconquerable impulse of man towards God, Light, Bliss, Freedom, Immortality presents itself in its right place in the chain as simply the imperative impulse by which Nature is seeking to evolve beyond Mind, and appears to be as natural, true and just as the impulse towards Life which has planted in forms of Matter or the impulse towards Mind which she has planted in certain forms of Life. As there, so here, the impulse exists more or less obscurely in her different vessels with an ever-ascending series in the power of its will-to-be; as there, so here, it is gradually evolving and bound fully to evolve the necessary organs and faculties. As the impulse towards Mind ranges from the more sensitive reactions of Life in the metal and the plant up to its full organisation in man, so in man himself there is the same ascending series, the preparatory, if nothing more, of a higher and divine life. The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the god. Or shall we not say, rather, to manifest God? For if evolution is the progressive manifestation by Nature of that which slept or worked in her, involved, it is also the overt realisation of that which she secretly is. We cannot, then, bid her pause at a given stage of her evolution, nor have we the right to

condemn with the religionist as perverse and presumptuous or with the rationalist as a disease or hallucination any intention she may evince or effort she may make to go beyond. If it be true that Spirit is involved in Matter and apparent Nature is secret God, then the manifestation of the divine in himself and the realisation of God within and without are the highest and most legitimate aim possible to man upon earth."

THE SYNTHESIS OF YOGA

Listeners will perhaps have noted the words "with whose conscious co-operation" which Sri Aurobindo has used in indicating the decisive step by which Nature seeks to evolve beyond man. This conscious co-operation of man with the secret will of Nature, the Great Mother, involves a discipline, a sadhana, a mighty process of Yoga which Sri Aurobindo has described with incomparable mastery in his great work *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Here is a magnificent passage from the first chapter of this book.

"One who is the Lord or Ishwara of the Yogic philosophies, the Guide in the conscious being (*caitya guru* or *antaryamin*), the Absolute of the thinker, the Unknowable of the Agnostic, the universal Force of the materialist, the supreme Soul and the supreme Shakti, the One who is differently named and imaged by the religions, is the Master of our Yoga.

"To see, know, become and fulfil this One in our inner selves and in all our outer nature, was always the secret goal and becomes now the conscious purpose of our embodied existence. To be conscious of him in all parts of our being and equally in all that the dividing mind sees as outside our being, is the consummation of the individual consciousness. To be possessed by him and possess him in ourselves and in all things is the term of all empire and mastery. To enjoy him in all experience of passivity and activity, of peace and of power, of unity and of difference is the happiness which the jiva, the individual soul manifested in the world, is obscurely seeking. This is the entire definition of the aim of integral Yoga; it is the rendering in personal experience of the truth which universal Nature has hidden in herself and which she travails to discover. It is the conversion of the human soul into the divine soul and of natural life into divine living."

THE HUMAN CYCLE

Sri Aurobindo's vision embraces not merely the line of development of the individual man towards the Divine Perfection which is his destiny but, in a series of profound articles under the title *The Psychology of Social Development* which appeared month by month in the philosophical monthly *Arya*, Sri Aurobindo has traced for us the lines of development which society must follow in the upward curve of the human cycle. These articles have been reprinted in a book entitled *The Human Cycle* and our next passage is from the 21st chapter of this book:

"The true and full spiritual aim in society will regard man not as a mind, a life and a body, but as a soul incarnated for a divine fulfilment upon earth, not only in heavens beyond, which after all it need not have left if it

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starts from some high plane but the connecting consciousness cannot receive uninterruptedly from there and as soon as it flickers or wavers it comes down to a lower, perhaps without noticing it, or the lower comes in to supply the continuation of the flow or on the contrary the consciousness starts from a lower plane and is lifted in the *avesh* perhaps occasionally, perhaps more continuously higher for a time or else the higher force attracted by the creative will breaks through or touches or catches up the less excited inspiration towards or into itself. I am speaking here especially of the overhead planes where this is quite natural; for the Overmind, for instance, is the ultimate source of intuition, illumination or heightened power of the planes immediately below it. It can lift them up into its own greater intensity or give out of its intensity to them or touch or combine their powers together with something of its own greater power—or they can receive or draw something from it or from each other. On the lower planes beginning from the mental downwards there can also be such variations, but the working is not the same, for the different powers here stand more on a footing of equality whether they stand apart from each other, each working in its own right or cooperate." (29-4-37)

(The other day, in the course of a talk with Pavitra, I happened to mention Hugo's *Les Misérables* as a great book. "Faugh!" he said, "what a shallow thing!" As we were speaking of the masterpieces of art, I concluded that he was definitely against including this book in that category. I have the impression that you used to regard it as one of the world's great novels. Am I mistaken?)

"It is not one of the masterpieces of 'art', but I regard it as the work of a powerful genius and certainly one of the great novels. It is certainly not philosophically or psychologically deep, but it is exceedingly vivid and powerful." (25-4-37)

(With regard to *Les Misérables* I did not mean art in quotation marks but in the general sense. Shakespeare has his "artistic" defects, nor is he

philosophically or psychologically deep, but all that doesn't prevent his plays from being considered masterpieces of literature. What I want to know is whether *Les Misérables* could be counted among the world's great novel-creations and whether that "Faugh!" on the ground of the book's being not philosophically or psychologically deep, is a legitimate criticism).

"People have different tastes—some regard Hugo as a childish writer, a rhetorician without depth—others regard him as a great poet and novelist. One has to give one's own judgment and leave others to hold theirs." (26-4-37)

(Well, I am not going to bludgeon Pavitra with your pronouncement that *Les Misérables* is one of the world great novels, an exceedingly vivid and powerful creation. But the point raised by his own view is worth discussing. In criticising novels, should one depreciate a work because its ideas are not very deep? Is *Vanity Fair* deep? Is *David Copperfield* deep? Is *Cousine Bette* or *Père Goriot* deep? And what about *Tom Jones*? The question I am putting you is a general one and meant to help my own judgment and not to prolong any controversy).

"That is again a matter of opinion. There is the position that plot and character-presentation are sufficient and for the rest a large or great theme—one of the well-recognised human situations or a picture of life largely dealt with—and no more is necessary. Most famous English novels of the past are like that. There is another position that subtle psychology, deep and true presentation (not merely imaginative or idealistic) of the profounder problems or secrets of life and nature are needed. Hugo's characters and situations are thought by many to be melodramatic or superficial and untrue. His novels, like his dramas, are 'romantic' and the present trend is against the romantic treatment of life as superficial, childishly overcoloured and false. The disparagement of what was formerly considered great is common on that ground. 'Faugh!' expresses the feeling." (27-4-37)

READINGS FROM SRI AUROBINDO—Continued from page 1

had no divine business here in the world of physical, vital and mental nature. It will therefore regard the life, mind and body neither as ends in themselves, sufficient for their own satisfaction, nor as mortal members full of disease which have only to be dropped off for the rescued spirit to flee away into its own pure regions, but as first instruments of the soul, the yet imperfect instruments of an unseized diviner purpose.

"It will believe in their destiny and help them to believe in themselves but for that very reason in their highest and not only in their lowest or lower possibilities. Their destiny will be, in its view, to spiritualise themselves so as to grow into visible members of the spirit, lucid means of its manifestation, themselves spiritual, illumined, more and more conscious and perfect. For, accepting the truth of man's soul as a thing entirely divine in its essence, it will accept also the possibility of his whole being becoming divine in spite of Nature's first patent contradictions of this possibility, her darkened denials of this ultimate certitude, and even with these as a necessary earthly starting-point.

"And as it will regard man the individual, it will regard too the collectivity as a soul-form of the Infinite, a collective soul myriadly embodied upon earth for a divine fulfilment in its manifold relations and its multitudinous activities. Therefore it will hold sacred all the different parts of man's life which correspond to the parts of his being, all his physical, vital, dynamic, emotional, aesthetic, ethical, intellectual, psychic evolution, and see in them instruments for a growth towards a diviner living. It will regard every human society, nation, people or other organic aggregate from the same standpoint, subsouls, as it were, means of a complex manifestation and self-fulfilment of the Spirit, the divine Reality, the conscious Infinite in man upon earth. The possible godhead of man because he is inwardly of one being with God will be its one solitary creed and dogma.

"But it will not seek to enforce even this one uplifting dogma by an external compulsion upon the lower members of man's natural being; for that is *nigraha*, a repressive contraction of the nature which may lead to an apparent suppression of the evil, but not to a real and healthy growth of the good; it will rather hold up this creed and ideal as a light and inspiration to all his members to grow into the godhead from within themselves, to become freely divine."

SAVITRI

There is one point here that it would be well to remember. The divine consummation which Sri Aurobindo envisages for humanity will not be brought about as a matter of course through the ordinary processes of evolution; nor can it be achieved by the unaided efforts of man—however strenuous and determined these may be. Nature can take the next leap forward and man be born into the integral perfection visioned by Sri Aurobindo only if the Divine intervenes on his behalf and sets the seal of His sanction on man's efforts. The mysteries of this Divine Intervention,

unfathomable to the human understanding, have been gloriously revealed by Sri Aurobindo in what is perhaps his supreme work—the epic *Savitri*—and our last selection this evening will be from the fourth canto, called *The Secret Knowledge*, of the first Book of *Savitri*:

"Above the illusion of the hopes that pass,
Behind the appearance and the overt act,
Behind the clock-work chance and vague surmise,
Amid the wrestle of force, the trampling feet,
Across the triumph, fighting and despair,
They watch the Bliss for which earth's heart has cried,
On the long road which cannot see its end
Winding undetected through the sceptic days
And to meet it guide the unheedful moving world.
Thus will the masked Transcendent mount his throne,
When darkness deepens strangling the earth's breast
And man's corporeal mind is the only lamp,
As a thief's in the night shall be the covert tread
Of one who steps unseen into his house.
A voice ill-heard shall speak, the soul obey,
A power into mind's inner chamber steal,
A charm and sweetness open life's closed doors
And beauty conquer the resisting world,
The truth-light capture Nature by surprise,
A stealth of God compel the heart to bliss
And earth grow unexpectedly divine.
In Matter shall be lit the spirit's glow,
In body and body kindled the sacred birth;
Night shall awake to the anthem of the stars,
The days become a happy pilgrim march,
Our will a force of the Eternal's power,
And thought the rays of a spiritual sun.
A few shall see what none yet understands;
God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep;
For man shall not know the coming till its hour
And belief shall be not till the work is done."

In concluding these readings from Sri Aurobindo, it is inevitable that the mind should turn to almost exactly a year ago when the sudden news of his passing away broke in on a stunned world. The blow was unexpected and severe and yet the significance of Sri Aurobindo's actions have never been apparent to the superficial gaze and if he has now withdrawn himself from our physical sight we may be sure that he has his own reasons for having taken that decisive step. To be acquainted with the writings of Sri Aurobindo is to know that the tremendous work for which he came can never fail and that he continues to preside over human destiny.

Arboretum—Three Poems by Terence Heywood

To A Cedar In A Sussex Park

What of thy dignified arms (now swallow-encircled),
Cedar majestic
What of thine arms that extend with their hands all open,
Immovable, ever-receptive?
Even as gold light settles
First on their levelness,
Now in departing she glows there, loathing to leave it.
Likewise Winter the Sullen
Out of a leadenness
Shakes in a wizardly fashion his feathery flakelets
Over thine arms till laden.
What of their vast receptivity? Is it an hindrance
To generous rendering?
How—when the rendered's rerendered, and rendered more beautiful?

Where Winter Holds His Levée

The willow has become a chandelier:
Its branches dipt in flood-water are knobbed
With glassy pendants moulded by the stream.
Quivering, they flash; the whole rococo show—
From powdered hollies pranked in finest lace
To shrubs superbly jewelled around tables
Of intricate ice-marquetry, cut-glass,
Filigreed trinkets and ubiquitous mirrors—
Glitters; and through the rich white-marbled passage
A breeze suddenly (jangling the chandelier)
Passes: you watch each tree with snowy wig
Curtsey or bow, and wait for something big.

Sequoia

"Da steig ein Baum. O reine Übersteigung!"

R. M. RILKE

Not greenheart, tough, self-impregnated, nor
root-elbowed banyan is my means or model,
but the millennial redwood, oldest thing
alive,—that can survive colds, burns, bruises.
Though shaky on her dates, not out-of-date,
she ticks off sunspot-cycles in her notebook.
Unclipt, uncallipered, she shadow-boxes
the bothersome ages, shoots a massive shaft
at heaven. (Thoughts! ride roughshod till eyes see
the ambivalent vortex of the tree.)

Houses are made from her; she is a house
self-building and self-built. Unbudgeable
she stands on freehold land and yet pays rent
to scrounging epochs. Out of her are taken
boards, planks, laths, scantlings sizeable for a hamlet:—
she goes on living, grips the parent rock,
and shrugs her shoulders casually at ice-
ages. (Swift, thoughts, ride roughshod till eyes see
the axle at the square root of the Tree!)
On chlorophyll the vital corner-stone
vision is set by leverage of love,
till form leaps in the frictionless ether, where
the rarer gases are no longer rare.

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE AND WORLD-PROBLEMS

TWO LETTERS TO A SEEKER

By K. D. SETHNA

I

I believe you have sincerity of search. It seems to me that what you have to do is to let this sincerity take as much effect as possible by bringing up the true Godward strain in you which at present appears to be a little mixed up with the ethico-social urge. Not that the two need be at loggerheads; but the former should subsume the latter and not *vice versa*.

I come now to the specific points you have raised. A person who is frustrated and unhappy can make others happy by doing his best to keep his frustration and unhappiness in the background and by being good and considerate and helpful. It can also be that if one is loved by somebody, one automatically gives happiness of a kind, even though one is frustrated and unhappy. But frustration and unhappiness are serious impediments and they can often distort one's attitude and spoil one's conduct. What is required is some sort of "sublimation" if one's desire to serve people and make them happy is to prove fruitful. And there can be no greater sublimation than the turning of one's frustrated and unhappy self towards the Divine and away from the feverish attachments to ordinary things which has brought about that unfulfilled and miserable state of mind. When such a turning is done, that state of mind is not a drag but an occasion for the calling down of a supreme light and bliss. Filled with this light and bliss one is the natural radiating centre of a constant happiness which does not even need to speak or do things but invades and envelops other people's consciousness, so that the very presence is sufficient to make broken spirits whole. And this radiated happiness does not merely make people comfortable in their own little holes of all-too-human imperfection: it lifts them up, kindles in them a sense of the ideal and the perfect, draws out the secret soul of them and helps them to find in themselves the strength and the peace which no circumstance can defeat or destroy. Authentic and truly evolutive happiness, therefore, can only be given by those who have caught something of the Divine's delight and fullness.

What you call "self-knowledge" and consider "the beginning of wisdom" is precisely the awakening of one's real soul whose spontaneous movement is always to be in communion with the Divine and be charged with the Divine's Truth, Rightness, Beatitude and Wideness. The more this movement develops, the more self-knowledge comes and wisdom grows. The development has, normally, to depend on two powers. One is the direct power of the soul itself—the intense aspiration, the passionate devotion, the unconditional surrender to the Divine. The other is an indirect power—the clearing of the way for the soul by the mind's will towards an inner detachment from things and persons, a large equanimity and disinterestedness, a freedom from anger and rancour, a tranquil strength, a calm generosity, an untroubled accomplishment of all work, a remembrance of the Divine Presence everywhere and a quiet yet concentrated offering of all one's work into Its hands. I may add that some time may be reserved for what is called meditation—the getting alone, the cutting off of contacts, the turning inward, the stilling of thought, the one-pointed flowing of the consciousness towards the Supreme.

Your question about the prevalence of so much suffering in the world would require a long philosophical discussion for a complete answer. But, for practical purposes, it is enough to know that we ordinarily live in a consciousness which is not in union with the perfect Being of God but is limited and divided: suffering is the badge of all limited and divided living. And, as long as this limitation and division lasts, it is not possible also for people to abstain from hurting one another or bring to one another understanding and love. I don't mean that people cannot be or are not good at all. But there is always an uncertainty in their intentions and actions: whatever effort they may make, there is an easy slipping back into selfishness and cruelty. Conflict is the second badge of a living that is limited and divided. To get rid of the two baleful badges we have to change our poise of consciousness. Such a change cannot be compassed by merely will-power attempting to follow certain mind-made rules of ethics. The ethical endeavour has considerable value, but it cannot eradicate the evil from the roots. Our present mental-vital-physical status lacks the light and the force by which alone suffering and conflict can be avoided. We have to explore our deeper ranges of being, bring into the forefront the inner self, the true soul, call down into the mind and the life-energy and the body the Divine Consciousness by a direct process of Yoga. By Yoga I don't imply a sitting in a fixed posture or breath-exercises or any special ascetic regime. Yoga is simply the leap of the consciousness towards the Eternal, the Infinite, the Divine in order to achieve a union with that Perfection, a union both in rest and activity. When one has this union one knows and becomes the single Spirit that is all things and more than all things in the universe. And don't you see that if the same supreme Self is experienced to be in all beings the very ground of conflict disappears and a wonderful harmony takes its place?

As for social work, I think there can be no real social work unless one proceeds from the living sense of the single supreme Self in all beings. Then alone one's action will be pure and powerful. Mind you, I say "real social work". Short of this there are various degrees of social service of a good kind; but always the limited and divided consciousness that is man

will bring in its greeds and egoistic motives and competitions and lust for fame and for position. The authentic idealist in you will always be disappointed, for ordinary social work is a very mixed affair and even at its best it does not escape the taint, however subtle and refined, of the limited and divided ego. Well, I suppose you have to accept certain conditions. But if you are in the field of social work, what you have to do is to work there in the spirit of a Yogi and inwardly dedicate all your work to God by a constant remembrance and offering. For, whether you do one kind of work or another, you as a Yogi serve not any persons or institutions or merely human causes but only the Divine and have to manifest His will and His light and His joy. Also, there should be no attachment to one kind of work in preference to another. You may certainly choose what you are inclined towards or what you think you are best fitted for; but you should have the capacity to give it up without uneasiness and disturbance if ever the call comes to do so. And I can assure you that if you live in constant touch with your true soul you will have such a fund of causeless and unconditional happiness within you that no changing of work or any other vicissitude can upset you or make you feel that you have lost something.

Now your last query. Of course it is possible to do Sri Aurobindo's Yoga even outside his Asram. But at some time or other it is always advisable to go for a stay, short or long, in the Asram in order to have the Mother's direct contact and get into the luminous atmosphere of the life there. However, a genuine contact with the Mother is quite possible while staying in Bombay. And the best way of doing Yoga is to have this contact. Think of her and feel her to be your Guru. Inwardly open your heart to her. Keep remembering her always and dedicate your actions to her. Aspire to have her guiding word within yourself. And now and again write to her, freely and frankly, as if you were her child both in soul and body. Fellow-aspirants can give you whatever advice they may be capable of and their advice can be of help. But the Mother alone can be your Guru and in important, crucial matters her advice and guidance are essential.

II

You have asked: How is one to know that one's search for the Divine is a true quest? I am not sure what exactly you mean. Are you doubting that to search for the Divine is a quest worth making and not merely a pursuit of a will-o'-the-wisp? Or are you wondering whether what you are searching for is the Divine or is something else? I think it is the latter sense you have in mind. If so, my reply in brief is: "Whenever one feels that the things of ordinary life do not satisfy one and that even the best of fortunes commonly imaginable will not answer the need in one's heart, one has known the call and the touch of the Divine. Whether the call and the touch are a temporary phenomenon—an incident in an interval between two phases of ordinary human life—or a permanent event remoulding one's whole being and shaping one's whole future: this depends on the intensity of the inner flame. The intensity may not always show on the surface in its full drive, but a certain inner certitude is its sign for the outer self. When you say, 'I definitely know that I am searching for something, but what I do not know,' you seem to me to give a hint of the certitude I speak of. But you must try to get some sort of silence in the being so that matters may become quite clear and the call and the touch of the Divine may reveal themselves in an unmistakable shape. Don't doubt your destiny, but ask it inwardly to show its true light."

Your next question is about the exceeding care needed about one's company and environment when one is wanting the Divine. The injunction you quote does not mean that you should seclude yourself from common contacts, but it would be wise to refrain at present from the contact of those who are opposed to your quest for the Divine or are very gross in their nature. A lot of influences come to us on the level of the subconscious: we may hardly know what has happened and yet a host of things can take place because all of us are constantly interchanging currents on the sub-mental level where there are not sharp demarcations of individuals but a general amorphous mass flowing through all and passing from one to another. In spite of our best aloofness in mind and heart the interchange can take place: that is why we have to be somewhat careful about our contacts. Of course the invasion can come even from afar, but it is less likely and not so strong, provided one is on vigil within and turned towards the Divine.

Yours query about humanity and Yoga brings again the theme of "social work." I should say that humanity is certainly meant to receive the boon of Yoga but our principal and central aim is not merely service of humanity. As soon as you make that service your chief concern you will be attacked by all sorts of doubts about doing Yoga: you will feel that instead of doing Yoga you must absorb yourself in social work, give money to charities etc. etc. You will not want to spare any moment for direct communion with God—and quite naturally because that would take away the attention you should give every moment to humanity. But if, while accepting humanity as God's creation and therefore meant to receive His

Continued on page 8

It has been said that the greatness of a man is the greatness of his greatest moments. To make its meaning clear one might safely add "moments of vision". This qualifying clause is necessary for the simple reason that pragmatic man is, indeed, a little too apt to judge others in terms of their concrete achievements in appraisable action. But although it is true that what one achieves in the field of Karma cannot be ignored in the evaluation of a man's total personality, yet it would be equally true to say that one could hardly assess the most precious elements in the flowering of a great personality by focussing one's attention on mere ponderables. Browning once made a profound observation:

*All I could never be,
All men ignored in me—*

This was I worth alone in the eye of God.

Sri Aurobindo expressed the same truth when he wrote: "To me the ultimate value of a man is not to be measured by what he says, nor even by what he does, but by what he becomes." Aldous Huxley emphasized this very point when he wrote that real knowledge is a function not of the intellect but of the growth of the total personality. I have quoted these dicta with but one purpose: to help us, moderns, to obviate a grievous error we constantly perpetrate in our rational appraisal of things of the spirit: namely, the error of concentrating exclusively on what the mind can measure and assay when it sets out to adjudicate in the realm of the deepest, that is, the mystic truth. This error creeps in because, when the gaze is rivetted on what can be clearly seen with the mortal eye, it misses, necessarily, what authorises the seen phenomena: the ordaining Finger of the Unseen.

Sri Aurobindo never missed this because he had acquired the third eye, the *Shivanetra*, in the very initial stages of his *sadhana*. Hence he was accorded, to start with, the Vision which led him to claim the Boon. This Vision made him seek what only the authentic Avatar can dare to crave: the Boon of

*The magic flowing waters of deep love
Along the mystic roads of Space and Time
To the experience which all Nature hides.*

This mighty Vision, to which we have been fortunately invited, he has not, however, opened to us at one bold sweep. He takes us in hand, as it were, to lead us, step by step, along the way he has himself trod in his mystic discoveries expressed through his mantric messages. He had indeed hinted at these discoveries in his great prose but it was in the epic *Savitri* that he first gave us the full Vision which opens, layer by layer, in his thrilling poem till we arrive at the rapturous summit-view which came to Aswapathy, that "colonist from immortality" and "treasurer of super-human dreams". I say "layer by layer", as Sri Aurobindo, while expressing through Aswapathy some of his deepest experiences, has described in *Savitri* how the inspiration came to him initially:

*Oft Inspiration with her lightning feet,
A sudden messenger from the all-seeing tops,
Traversed the soundless corridors of his mind
Bringing the rhythmic sense of hidden things.*

And what happened then?—

*A music spoke transcending mortal speech,
A joy of light, a joy of sudden sight,
A rapture of the thrilled undying Word...
A repetition of God's first delight.*

And then

*The inspiring goddess entered a mortal's breast,
All was made wide above, all lit below.*

And lastly,

One soul's ambition lifted up the race.

Such was Aswapathy, a poetic double of Sri Aurobindo, the great har-binger of a New Light to be manifested only through this great "aspirant to supernal Timelessness."

I must, however, pause here to qualify the statement about the "poetic double". In *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo's message as well as aspiration is voiced not through Aswapathy alone but also through Narad, the Prophet, and Savitri the final invoker of the New Gleam. I have given the priority to Aswapathy inasmuch as it was he who first appealed directly to the Divine, the World-Mother, to manifest her compassion on our famished earth:

*O radiant fountain of the world's delight
World-free and unattainable above,
O Bliss who ever dwellest deep hid within
While men seek thee outside and never find,
Mystery and Muse with hieratic tongue,
Incarnate the white passion of thy force,
Mission to earth some living form of thee...
Pack with the eternal might one human hour
And with one gesture change all future time.
Let a great word be spoken from the heights
And one great act unlock the doors of Fate.*

But the Promise was to be redeemed only through Savitri, the "daughter of Infinity" and "priestess of immaculate ecstasies" whose "mind, a sea of white sincerity, had not one turbid wave," who came equipped with "a heart of silence in the hands of joy" and

*A body like a parable of dawn
That seemed a niche for veiled divinity
Or golden temple door to things beyond.*

SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION

By DILIP KU

This is the lecture delivered at the G...
under the aegis of .

But this mighty world-redeemer was recognised as such not even by her own father Aswapathy or her mother, the Queen, but by Narad, "the heavenly sage from Paradise" who "passed from the immortals' happy path to a world of toil and quest and grief and hope," who

*Sang the name of Vishnu and the birth
And joy and passion of the mystic world
And how the stars were made and life began...
And darkness yearning towards the eternal Light
And Love that broods within the dim abyss
And waits the answer of the human heart,
And death that climbs to immortality.*

It is difficult to describe the architectonics of *Savitri* in the span of a brief lecture. For *Savitri* is an epic with multitudinous notes and voices, alien and angelic, woven into a symphony of human destiny which is imposed by the law of Karma with its tardy evolution and, withal, redeemed by a supreme *tapasya* of challenging courage which refused to accept even the dread yoke of Yama, the Lord of Death. So this humble lecture must be looked upon not as an elaborate exegesis but only as an invitation to those aspiring hearts which feel that there is an answering Heaven waiting the ardent call of the Earth and yet cannot, in their seeming helplessness, even dare to hope against hope because of the hopeless conditions of "earth-nature" to any change for the better. That is why, if my audience will tolerate a little divagation, Shaw described in his 92nd year the profession of the "world-betterer" as doomed beyond all retrieving.

Those to whom the world-betterer's father in Shaw's *Buoyant Billions* genuflected as "practical men" will no doubt undersign the son's despair with alacrity. But in spite of the tragic state of this God-deriding world preferring the suicide of cynicism to redemption offered by the vision of faith, the world still breeds visionaries and mystics, seers and saints, prophets and avatars. That is why to the heart of Despond still comes the Voice from the heights of the Impossible-made-possible which guarantees that:

*If human will could be made one with God's
Man might be all-knowing and omnipotent.*

For, although it is true that

... now he walks in Nature's doubtful ray,

yet, there is a possibility, a divine potentiality lying latent in this very poor specimen which can help him transcend his seeming impotence, doubting and stumbling, till

... can the mind of man receive God's light,

and

The force of man can be driven by God's Force.

Not that there are not reasons a-plenty which can and do make even the angels weep, in the spectacle of rampant sentient suffering born of man's pitiful attachment to his congenital blindness, the root of all his misery, pain and deep-seated frustration. But this, however damning in itself, cannot invalidate what the Seer has seen from his more evolved consciousness (and more trustworthy because it is more evolved):

*This world was not built with random bricks of chance,
A blind God is not destiny's architect;
A conscious power has drawn the plan of life,
There is a meaning in each curve and line.*

But the world we know and see hardly encourages us to have any helpful faith in world-betterers, mystic, scientific or humanitarian. Sri Aurobindo is, indeed, in agreement with the sceptics here though not for their reasons. What he seems to hint at is:

*A prayer, a master act, a king idea
Can link man's strength to a transcendent Force,
Then miracle is made the common rule...
A lonely thought becomes omnipotent.*

In other words, he wants to bring the miraculous to bear on our inertia and supine mediocrity. And this he wants, nay, claims because he has seen what he has seen:

*I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers
Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life
Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth...
Out of the paths of the morning star they came
Into the little room of mortal life.
I saw them cross the twilight of an age,
The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
The great creators with wide brows of calm,
The massive barrier-breakers of the world...
The labourers in the quarries of the gods,
The architects of immortality.*

ON AND THE BOON

NAR ROY

at the Hotel, Bombay, on 11-12-1951
Justice Bhagwati.

And it is not his own private vision alone on which he bases his mighty hope. For did not the World-Mother assure him:

*A radiant purpose still conceals its face,
A mighty blindness stumbles hoping on,
Feeding its strength on gifts of luminous Chance.
Because the human instrument has failed,
The Godhead frustrate sleeps within its seed,
A spirit entangled in the forms it made.
His failure is not failure whom God leads.*

Which is not to say, however, that his vision amounts in the end to that of a mere ecstatic. For Sri Aurobindo believes in the Unseen not because he is blind to the grim reality that pens the human heart beating its bleeding wings against the cage of Destiny, but because he has seen what the worldlings have not sighted. And what he has seen he has thought fit to bring into a radiant relief against the wan background of life, as beheld by the common eye—the grim spectacle of Destiny mourned by the Queen in the Book of Fate, Canto 1:

*For nothing have we learned, but still repeat
Our stark misuse of self and others' selves
And fallen from his ethereal element
Love darkens to the spirit of nether Gods.*

The hard stark reality is depressing enough in all conscience. For who will dare deny that not only do our "days" prove "links of a disastrous chain", so that "old cruelties come back unrecognised", but is not man, at bottom, a mere feckless creature?—

*An ill-armed warrior facing dreadful odds,
An imperfect worker given a baffling task,
An ignorant judge of problems ignorance made,
Its heavenward flights reach closed and keyless gates,
Its glorious outbursts peter out in mire.*

Sri Aurobindo has been at great pains to delineate the sorry plight of fate-ridden humanity from two distinct standpoints. The passage just quoted is uttered by the Queen, Savitri's mother, who is disconsolate because her daughter, a prize girl, is set on linking her life to that of a pauper, Satyavan, who is, besides, doomed to die in twelve months. But he views the world's tragedy from a deeper standpoint as well, namely, from that of Aswapathy, the great aspirant, whose "soul of flame" cannot consent to

*...rest content with mortal days
And the dull measure of terrestrial things,*

because he has

*...seen behind the cosmic mask
The glory and the beauty of thy face!*

and therefore refuses to acquiesce fatalistically in the tardy pace of human evolution. His indomitable soul has to cry out for the great Fulfilment to come here and now and so he sighs:

Hard is the doom to which thou bindst thy sons!

And he goes on to ask somewhat impatiently because his love has emboldened him to be intolerant:

*How long shall our spirits battle with the Night
And bear defeat and the brute yoke of Death,
We who are vessels of a deathless Force
And builders of the godhead of the race?*

And then begins an astonishing challenge:

*Or if it is thy work I do below,
Amid the error and waste of human life,
In the vague light of man's half-conscious mind,
Why breaks not in some distant gleam of thee?*

The "gleam" is, indeed, distant, for—as he goes on in a mounting crescendo:

*Ever the centuries and millenniums pass.
Where in the greyness is thy coming's ray?
Where is the thunder of thy victory's wings?
Only we hear the feet of passing gods....
All we have done is ever still to do,
All breaks and all renews and is the same,
Huge revolutions of life's fruitless gyre,
The new-born ages perish like the old.*

Of course he cannot possibly belong to the ilk of Shavian world-betterers who have not glimpsed anything beyond what trickles to the sight of the purblind rationalist; for has he not seen the Face of the Destiny-maker and heard his Voice which impels him to attest:

I know that thy creation cannot fail

and so knows, to a certainty, that

*This strange irrational product of the mire,
This compromise between the beast and God,
Is not the crown of thy miraculous world,*

as also that

*... there shall inform the inconscient cells,
At one with Nature and at height with Heaven,
A spirit vast as the containing sky
And swept with ecstasy from the invisible founts,
A God come down and greater by the fall.*

Yes, Sri Aurobindo must come to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear as a somewhat refreshing paradox among the mystics. For he is at once an ancient and a modern, a conformist and a dissident—in one word, a realist and a "dreamer of superhuman dreams" which are dreams and yet signals, flashed from the Beyond, of what is pre-ordained: the apocalypse which will transform this "tardy limp of the hours" and the ineradicable slowness of manifestation which has been the despair even of the most authentic world-betterers, the despair which does, in effect, prompt them to wail:

*Too little the strength that now with us is born,
Too faint the light that steals through Nature's lids,
Too scant the joy with which she buys our pain....
A foiled immortal soul in perishing limbs,
Baffled and beaten back we labour still.*

Ever waiting and labouring, alas, in vain,

*... that from us may rise
A larger-seeing man with nobler heart,
A golden vessel of the incarnate Truth,
The executor of the divine attempt
Equipped to wear the earthly body of God,
Communicant and prophet and lover and king.*

A mere ecstatic can have no possible truck with such thoughts. He will simply brush aside the grim reality as an illusion and seek his solace in the extra-cosmic lap of the Hereafter. But Sri Aurobindo's vision is vast and keen. He is not thankful for small mercies. So he can at best accept but never welcome pain which is to him merely a temporary device needed in the transitional stage when the human chafes at his humanity and yet wants to transcend it and be divinised.

But the pain is a hard reality whatever the Illusionist may say. Of all the ancient doctrines of the other-worldly ecstatic the doctrine of maya appeals to Sri Aurobindo the least. To him this earth is not a phantom stage where meaningless plays of "blood and sweat and tears" are produced to no purpose save that of making men groan in agony under the dread yoke of Destiny. So he has to accept pain and suffering but only to discover this secret purpose working as an invisible leaven in the heart of pain:

*Pain is the hammer of the gods to break
A dead resistance in the mortal's heart...
Pain is the hand of Nature sculpturing men
To greatness: an inspired labour chisels
With heavenly cruelty an unwilling mould.*

And that is why

*The great who came to save the suffering world
And rescue out of Time's shadow and the Law
Must pass beneath the yoke of grief and pain.*

Is it any wonder then that the world-redeemer in all climes and ages should have passed through what he did?—

*Gethsemane and Calvary are his lot,
He carries the cross on which man's soul is nailed.
His escort is the curses of the crowd.*

But still God is and cannot be mocked, destined by his own ordaining to triumph through His very defeats, to be crowned through His crucifixion.

*He who has found his identity with God
Pays with the body's death his soul's vast light.
His knowledge immortal triumphs by his death.
Hewn, quartered on the scaffold as he falls
His crucified voice proclaims: "I, I am God."
"Yes, all is God," peals back Heaven's deathless call.
The seed of Godhead sleeps in mortal hearts,
The flower of Godhead grows on the world-tree:
All shall discover God in self and things,
But when God's messenger comes to help the world
And lead the soul of earth to higher things,
He too must carry the yoke he came to unloose:
He too must bear the pang that he would heal.
Exempt and unafflicted by earth's fate
How shall he cure the ills he never felt?*

But though this may be accepted as a consolation, one cannot contemplate such a state of affairs with equanimity. No. Suffering, in Sri Aurobindo's vision, is not a boon, even though pain may be transmuted up to a point and in the measure that it is so utilised it may be made use of as a skyward step in life's uphill pilgrimage, but when all is said, pain is by no means a consummation devoutly to be wished, least of all death before its hour. For man, according to Sri Aurobindo, has not been sent here to go on suffering pointlessly and sobbing endlessly, any more than the God-hostile forces can be tolerated by God-lovers. But alas, one cannot remedy the canker before experiencing the scourge. That is why even the sons of God have to accept pain and vicarious atonement for all as a cross, submitting to the Divine and, if need be, consenting even to the supreme sacrifice

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SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION AND THE BOON—Continued from page 7

demand of the world-redeemers in every age: the martyrhood of death. Sri Aurobindo's outlook on this supreme tragedy is inspiring both in its nobility and profundity:

*Hard is the world redeemer's heavy task,
The world itself becomes his adversary,
His enemies are the beings he came to save.
Those he would save are his antagonists.*

For the simple reason that

*This world is in love with its own ignorance,
Its darkness turns away from the saviour's light,
It gives the cross in payment for the crown.
His work is a trickle of splendour in a long night;
He sees the long march of Time, the little won;
A few are saved, the rest strive on and fail.*

How these "few" are going to gain ground, how the gain is going to be consolidated—with the sons of God fighting every inch of their climb—till the trickle of light shall swell to a veritable downpour are only hinted at in *Savitri* somewhat reticently, as in the last great couplet of the Gita:

*Sarvadharmā parityajya mamekam śhrānam brajā:
Aham twam sarvapapebhyo mokṣaiṣhyami mā śhucā.*

("Abandon all the accepted codes of conduct and take final refuge in Me alone and I will absolve thy sins: have no misgivings.")

I will not therefore expatiate on what is beyond our ken, because on matters such as these only those who have reached the Goal can speak. We can, indeed, as Guru Nanak has stressed again and again, say that what the Messiah proclaims we believe to be true, but we cannot presume to attest something as true till we have realised or seen it as true. So I would not venture to rush in where the greatest among us have chosen deliberately to be silent so far, to wit, presume to indicate when the last laurels of Immortality are going to be won, nay, not even dare to speculate what Immortality truly means. Those who would have more light on this deep enigma had better be referred to Sri Aurobindo's own messages, born throbbing and radiant out of his own vision derived from a life-time of superhuman *sadhana*, and notably to his mantric prophecy in *Savitri* in the soul-stirring *Book of Everlasting Day*. For there he has thrillingly described how *Savitri* wrests the Boon of boons from the Lord of Destiny by forcing the hand of Death and thus conquering Destiny: Satyavan had to

die to be subsequently reclaimed—but after what incredible ordeals!

But then why talk even of ordeals since, however hard may be the World-redeemer's task, he—as a Divine Representative on earth—is sent to uplead us, earthlings, to Divinity by daring what none but a Divine Deputy, an avatar, can dare. We—the rest, who are born not to lead but to follow the Finger of Light—can play our role best through a real seeking, humble but sincere, remembering with gratitude that in this world of cruelty and calamity still under the sway of the Despot, Darkness, great Liberators are still empowered, as Heralds of an ever-deepening Light and as miracle Minstrels, to sing, in the heart of din, of Harmony and transmit to us, feeble mortals, the supreme Pledge of "the One of the colour of the Sun, stationed beyond the Darkness," who supports all true aspiration. For it is He Himself who has chosen to make our Messiah convey to us His promise of the inevitable Fulfilment, the Boon which accrued to him from his Vision in a vibrant Prophecy that cannot fail:

*A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal's world...
The superman shall reign as king of life,
Make earth almost the mate and peer of heaven
And lead towards God and truth man's ignorant heart
And lift towards godhead his mortality.
A power released from circumscribing bounds,
Its heights pushed up beyond death's hungry reach,
Life's tops shall flame with the Immortal's thoughts,
Light shall invade the darkness of its base.
Then in the process of evolving Time
All shall be drawn into a single plan,
A divine harmony shall be earth's law,
Beauty and Joy remould her way to live:
Even the body shall remember God,
Nature shall draw back from mortality.
And Spirit's fires shall guide the earth's blind force;
Knowledge shall bring into the aspirant Thought
A high proximity to Truth and God.
The supermind shall claim the world for Light
And thrill with love of God the enamoured heart
And place Light's crown on Nature's lifted head
And found Light's reign on her unshaking base.*

So Says The Mind...

There is no higher norm,
No heaven, no soul—
And only matter has form,
Therefore no goal!
So says the mind—life is but Nature's trance—
Then who built Nature's vast extravagance?
From the glistening jewels of dew
On a spider's web,
To the stars in a midnight blue
That flow and ebb—
The flood of moments when each little thing
Has a secret purpose and a joyous ring.

But man on mind is wrecked,
His only god
The Pride of Intellect:
Where saints have trod,
A mere illusion or a phantom gleam
Lit in imagination's house of dream;
Yet there are moments sweet
Which kindle the hours,
Where love and heaven meet—
Himalayan towers
Where Truth longs for a home and strives to be
The Light to guide our human destiny.

NORMAN DOWSETT

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE AND WORLD-PROBLEMS—Continued from page 5

boon, you realise that the basic need in the world is more and more of God's direct presence, His superhuman consciousness and power and bliss, and that God is greater than humanity and is therefore our primary concern, then Yoga will be a spontaneous movement and the channelling of its influence to humanity will also be an automatic action and you will be helping to remove the world's evil and suffering from the very foundation. Work in the midst of humanity and ostensibly for humanity need not always cease, but during the work the Yogic consciousness will go on and the work itself will be really done as an offering to the Divine and not either for oneself or for humanity which is after all a repetition of oneself on a huge scale.

Your final question is the shortest but actually a tremendous "stumper." All the books written by all the sages won't be a sufficient answer to it. And yet, I suppose, a few general words could hold the heart of the matter. Let me first repeat your question: "Why do we come into this world and whither are we going?" I'll begin with the words: "this world." What is the nature of this world? It seems to start in brute matter without consciousness. It develops the quiverings of life. It attains the level of mind. It keeps straining beyond the mental. It is a world of evolution in which the initial stage is an apparent negation of the Divine. The open affirmation of the Divine is therefore its evolutionary aim. But such affirmation cannot stop with the soul's inner realisation of God. The outer nature must also become Godlike—and this becoming

Godlike is not tantamount only to the outer nature obeying the soul and receiving something of its light. Mind, Life Force, Matter are themselves the Divine concealed, and the soul is just the centre and guide of a world which is not ultimately a contradiction of its divine spark but a veiled perfection which it has to clear of encumbrances and help to unveil. A divine Mind, a divine Life Force, even a divine Matter have to be realised and established. Then alone the aim of evolution will be fulfilled. The complete and integral divinisation of our whole being is the "why" of our coming into this world. If that is so, there is no "whither" in an essential sense. Here and here only must we attain perfection. Of course, the soul passes out of earth at death, moves through subtle worlds and then waits in its own deep world until the time comes to shape forth a new embodiment of mind and vitality—this happens again and again till a large range of experience has been collected by the soul in its own depths and the hour strikes for it to turn the whole being into divine values and terms. The Yogic call is a sign that the hour has struck or is very near. Another "whither" is the higher and inner worlds which have to be explored and possessed by the Yogi: he goes into the profundities of being and scales the peaks above the mind, but after experiencing and realising them he must strive to bring their wonders into the outer being. So my answer to the query—"Whither are we going?"—is: "We are going everywhere but in order to come back to Mother Earth and transform her and fulfil the purpose for which we came."

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIA

By SISIRKUMAR MITRA

Continued from previous issue

Races, Languages, Religions (Continued)

The diversity of racial elements in the population of this vast country, the natural geographical regions promoting the growth of small but free units of collective life, and the necessity of easier media of expression than classical ones, have been among the most formative factors in the development of local dialects and languages of India, in whose current and existing forms can be traced influences of several foreign languages too. The Census Report of 1931 makes the bold statement that India has more than two hundred languages; but this is far from the truth. No doubt we have here all the four great families of human speech, but their derivatives, forming the written languages of India, would not number more than a dozen. It is the spoken dialects, allied mostly to the written ones, that make a comparatively large number but never more than what they are elsewhere, proportionately to their population. Besides, many of the points that distinguish these dialects are slight variations in the forms of verbs and in intonation. Diversity in language exists in many countries, more markedly, in the United States, Soviet Union, Germany, Switzerland and Great Britain where English is spoken in about forty dialects. That it should exist in a huge country like India is only natural; and it is, by no means, inconsistent with the growth of a nation in India or with India's political progress.

In the vast area of India there are about a dozen languages and these are closely allied to one another. They fall under two groups—the Indo-Aryan languages of the North and the Dravidian languages of the South. The Indo-Aryan ones—Hindi, Urdu, Sindhi, Gujarati, Marathi, Bengali, Assamese, Oriya—derive from Sanskrit and anyone who knows one of them finds it easy to learn another. The Dravidian languages are different, but each of them contains fifty per cent or more words of pure Sanskrit or of Sanskrit origin. Their four broad groups are Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. Telugu is the language of the northern part of the Madras province; Tamil that of the eastern coast from Madras to the end of the Indian Peninsula. It is the richest of the Dravidian languages and the oldest of all modern Indian languages. Its literature is of an extraordinary quality and richness and goes back to the early centuries of the Christian era. There is a view that Tamil and Sanskrit have a common origin. Kannada is spoken in the southwestern part of India. It is also an old language possessing a considerable literature of its own. Malayalam, probably a branch of old Tamil, is the language of the south-western coast. Brahui, the language of Central Baluchistan, is regarded as the northernmost of the Dravidian languages.

The languages of the North also have each its own literature. In the history of their development can be traced various influences acting and reacting on one another. It is a subject of absorbing interest—this comparative study of the growth of the Indian languages, both of the South and the North. In the North Hindi in slight variations is more widely spoken than any other major language of India and it is understood by an even wider number. Bengali is another language which, mainly because of the international recognition of Tagore's unique poetry, has been acclaimed as one of the progressive languages of the world. Its rapid rise to its present richness, grace, flexibility and vigour, is indeed a literary phenomenon of the first magnitude. No wonder that every country in Europe should have some nationals learning this language and the Swedish Academy Library has the largest Bengali section outside Bengal.

Though not a spoken language now, Sanskrit, the mother of most of the languages of India, is equally popular as a cultural language both in the North and in the South. It is indeed the very fount and foundation of Indian culture. Sanskrit literature enshrines in its vast range practically the whole story of India's magnificent past and is, therefore, an authentic source of her history along with Pali—the first popular form of Sanskrit—in which most of the early Buddhist texts and inscriptions were written. Eminent Indians who plead for a correct appraisal of the culture and civilisation of India adduce convincing evidences about the incomparable greatness of Sanskrit language, and urge upon their countrymen to give more importance to its study not only because it is the repository of the world's highest knowledge and finest literature but also because it is the most perfect language characterised by ancient sages as *Devabhāṣā* (the language of the gods), better still, as the medium of God's own words—the Vedas or the Revealed Scriptures. The cultivation of the language, by itself, has an exalting influence on the mind and heart—a blessing of a rare value. W. C. Taylor says that Sanskrit is a language of unrivalled richness and variety. It is the parent of all those dialects that Europe has finally called classical. W. Bopp holds that Sanskrit was at one time the only language of the civilised world. Fredrich Schlegel declares that it is the greatest language of the world, the most wonderful and perfect; justly is it called *Sanskrita*, that is to say, perfect and finished. To Sir William Jones Sanskrit is of a wonderful structure, more perfect than Greek, more copious than Latin, more exquisitely refined than either. Says Sri Aurobindo: "Sanskrit,

as has been universally recognised by those competent to form a judgement, is one of the most magnificent, the most perfect and wonderfully sufficient literary instruments developed by the human mind, at once majestic and sweet and flexible, strong and clearly-formed and full and vibrant and subtle, and its quality and character would be of itself a sufficient evidence of the character and quality of the race whose mind it expressed and the culture of which it was the reflecting medium." Many prominent thinkers of India today believe that without a knowledge of Sanskrit nothing of India's past achievements can be understood in their deeper and therefore truer implications, and that a revival of this language may strengthen the cultural unity of India and help bring about a new resurgence.

Now a word about English. This remarkable language, already international, has rendered signal service to the cause of India's unity, her nationalism and her independence, and occupies, in her everyday-life, a place of importance, perhaps no whit less great than what Sanskrit or Pali did each in its own day. Vivekananda made it the vehicle of his luminous thoughts and world-shaking ideas charged with Indian spirituality. Rabindranath and Radhakrishnan owe to it their international fame, the one as, 'the inspired singer of the New Dawn,' and the other as a brilliant exponent of Indian philosophy. Abstruse ideas of Indian thought, occult and esoteric symbology of the Vedas and other Indian scriptures, too difficult for explanation or translation into a foreign tongue, have found wonderfully exact translation and revealing exposition in English at the hands of Sri Aurobindo who has also enriched the language by his own matchless contributions in prose and poetry, embodying his supreme experiences in the way of the Spirit. If English is the greatest gift of England to India, India's greatest gift to English, and through it, to the world is Sri Aurobindo's masterpiece, *The Life Divine* and his sublime epic *Savitri*, through which he has sent forth his divine message to humanity.

Yet another phenomenon of diversity in Indian life is its religious aspect. It is significant that India represents all the major religions of the world. The many sects of Hinduism which is the religion of nearly two-thirds of India's population do not divide their followers into such rival camps or hostile groups as have disfigured the history of other religions. Every Hindu, whatever his sect, believes in the Veda as the supreme source of all Indian religious and spiritual ideas. It is this faith that unites them into a confraternity which has always proved to be a powerful cohesive force in the social life of the country. The Hindu worships many gods but he regards them not as separate entities but as aspects of the One, any one of which is seized by him as the deity of his heart because that suits his temperament and capacity or answers to his soul's need. This unlimited freedom of worship that Hinduism allows to its adherents is a striking proof of its breadth of outlook, universality and tolerance. Hinduism does not impose any fixed set of rules or dogmas on its follows. It not only permits but encourages every individual to follow his own line of spiritual development, respecting at the same time the right of others to follow theirs. It is this cosmopolitan outlook of Hinduism that accounts for the various sects, schools and communities that have grown up within its broad sphere.

Hinduism is not a mere religious system. It embraces the whole life of man, because religion, for the Hindus, is a way of life by following which one can grow towards a greater life, a perfection of wholeness composed of the perfection of every part of his being. Hinduism, therefore, embodies along with its cults and rites, mythologies and philosophies, the customs, laws and institutions which form the fabric of family, social and collective life. But in its present form, encrusted with various excrescences, the core and pith of it, ever so deep, has gone deeper down, beyond an easy reach of the common run. No wonder they should be far from its highest ideals. Nevertheless, the key to the highest spiritual destiny of man is there.

Islam claims the next largest number of followers. It has also sects two of which are more popular than others. The fundamental teachings of Islam are not foreign, but are found too in Hinduism, like those of any other religion. Ideas of Indian Vedānta in Sufism, the highest spiritual thought and mystic experience of Islam, supply a common platform for Indianism and Islam. Impartial history will testify to the fact that relations in the past between Hindus and Muslims in India did show unmistakable signs of mutual understanding and toleration and that there were regions, as in Bengal, where a fellowship of these two faiths was developing as a result of this understanding. This is how religions and cultures can thrive side by side. There are also the Buddhists, the founder of whose faith is one of the ten Avatars—Incarnations of God—of Hinduism. Over a million people follow Jainism which was preached by Mahavira, a contemporary of the Buddha. It is noteworthy that the Jains have all their religious rites and ceremonies performed by Hindu priests. The Cross of the Christ is held up by a section of Indians who adopted Christianity when European missionaries started preaching it, long before Europe had

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIA—Continued from page 9

any political footing in India. The Indian Christians are as much a part of the total religious life of the country as the Muslims or the adherents of any other faith. It may be mentioned that the Hindus regard the Christ as an incarnation of God. A great Swami of the Ramakrishna Order has clearly defined this attitude of the Hindus towards Christianity. The Sikhs of the Punjab still show their exemplary devotion to the *Adi Granth*, 'the First Sacred Book,' their Bible, which they worship in place of their Master who founded their faith in the fifteenth century. Then there are a hundred thousand Parsis, the descendants of the Persians, the first batch of whom left their country in the eighth century and came over and settled in India, refusing to be converted to Islam which the Muslim conquerors of Persia were then forcibly imposing on them. They are fire-worshippers in accordance with the ancient Aryan tradition and have much in their cult that resembles Vedic ideas which in a remote past were commonly shared by the Iranians, the early fathers of the present Persians, and the Aryans of India.

This diversity in the religious life of India is not without its bearing on the future of religion in this country. The essential truth of every cult is one and the same and as this is realised by the followers of different religions, there will grow with that the basis of the new religion of the future, the Religion of the Spirit, through which man will realise his divine destiny.

Levers of Progress and Unity

An epitome of the world, India presents a colourful picture of a Kaleidoscopic kind—physical, racial, linguistic and religious. The place and importance of each of these aspects of Indian life as also their meaning and purpose, become defined, not in what each as an isolated phenomenon is, but in the whole that India is. This integral significance of India's diversity takes the depth and extension of its proper connotation from the very fact of the many-sidedness of her life and culture, because it is that which is the very basis of her greatness and glory, her richness and strength. Even her geography and the natural divisions of the country, at least as they existed in the past, have had their particular contribution to make in the growth and evolution of India as a whole.

Separated by mountain and ocean, India had long centuries of peace and security during which she occupied herself with cultural pursuits of various kinds and built up a distinct type of civilisation, a culture which was the natural flowering of her soul, her schools of art, her social and religious institutions which have served as the foundation of all later developments of the race. In very early times, the North and the South, separated by Vindhya, evolved each its own type of culture; and a synthesis of the two, the latter assimilating the ideas of the former in which its own got interfused, forms the fabric of what for more than three thousand years flourished as the civilisation of India.

Then there are the smaller territorial units in these two larger divisions, which are created by nature—by rivers, hills and forests—in such a way that each of them developed its own political and social existence, its own distinctive ways of life, its own customs, manners and traditions, and above all, its own way of expressing its creative soul. The great ideals of India to which every such unit owed its willing allegiance used always to influence and guide these regional endeavours so that their fruits invariably became part of the cultural achievements of the whole country. A distinctiveness would be there, perhaps, in every such local note, but that was only to increase the richness and fullness of the symphony, not to mar the total effect of its music. This is what makes up the grandeur and profundity of Indian culture. Some of these units specialised in art and architecture, some in literature, some in statecraft, and some again in military science, and there were a number of others which excelled in more than one of them: but all showed, in whatever they did, their innate tendency to regard the spiritual motive in them as the one governing principle of every expression of their creative soul.

It is this attitude of Indians which gives meaning and purpose to the efforts they made in the past and make even today to realise those highest ideals of the race in which alone, they know, lies their and their country's true progress and advancement. In this long and almost unbroken history of their cultural striving Indians have shown that it is not always true that civilisation thrives only in certain favourable climatic zones. India is not hampered by belonging to any particular zone. She had been in her past one of the most progressive countries of the world. And this she was able to be as much on the snowy heights of Kashmir and Nepal

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as on the dry plateau of the Dekkan or in the sweaty river valleys of the North. The reason was that in all her higher pursuits she was impelled by the irresistible urge of her soul, the urge to discover and preserve the Truth—the Truth that preserves the world. No outer impediment could stop the adventure of the soul into the boundless heavens of the Spirit. That is why Indian culture is so deeply rooted in and sustained by the inward bent of the racial mind.

The peoples of these natural units of India owed much of their progress to the comparative smallness of their regions and to the freedom they were always allowed to follow their own line of development,—a freedom which was largely Nature's gift to them. From their natural setting they derived much of their character, habit and trend of culture. These, again, in their turn, had to their credit the marvellous creations of the Heroic Age, when the foundation was laid for India's vast and unique civilisation. What is most striking in these local expressions is that they almost immediately assimilated themselves to the general trend of the country's culture, making it richer and more durable. This cultural unity of India was at work long before the rise of Buddhism. A proper history has yet to be written of the contribution of these smaller units to the larger stream of Indian civilisation. In the smallness and intensity of these socio-political centres of ancient Indian life lay the primary source of their strength. Indeed, their vitality was amazing.

History has amply shown that smaller and more compact collectivities tend naturally towards a solidarity, and that this solidarity brings about a vigour in the currents of their life. This vigour is propagated to every part of the organism and helps it to grow and expand, and, in God's own time, bear flower and fruit. Large states and empires have everywhere lacked this intensity of life and, because of the very hugeness of their size, seem also to lack the full fullness of energy which is the characteristic of the small compact states. These are too large to have their vitality equally active in every part of their big body. Besides, cultural endeavours find better scope in smaller units where individual talent receives more facile recognition. Our intention in this digression into the region of political science is to show that such empires as that of the Mauryas in India and the Romans in Europe cannot claim even a very small fraction of the wonderful cultural achievements of the Greek city-states, the city-states of medieval Italy and the small states and republics of ancient India which had flourished in pre-Buddha times and continued almost to the last days of Hindu rule in India. Some of them grew in natural regions, in the river-valleys of the Sindhu-Ganga plain, in the hilly areas of western India, in central Indian forest uplands, and also in the naturally advantageous parts of the South. To these and to other smaller states of the hoary past may roughly be traced the origin of the present-day peoples or 'sub-nations' of India, if they may be so called, the Gujaratis, the Marathis, the Punjabis, the Rajputs, the Bengalis, the Oriyas, the Tamilians and the Andhras. Each of these evolved out of one or more of the early smaller states, many of which were mothered by the natural regions that they inhabited in those days. And we know how remarkable was the role every one of them played in building up the glory that is India. Of course, for the bigger empires, one can always say that they constitute an important step in the growth of the human race towards ultimate unity.

With the march of time in which various changes took place in the political life of the country necessitating readjustments of its inside territorial frontiers, these smaller units could not all of them retain their natural geographical boundaries. Bigger states and kingdoms and, later, empires arose, and with them grew strong tendencies towards larger and larger organisations whose need began to be felt when the country was faced with the threat of aggressions from without and when many of the smaller states became so much wedded to their individuality and local patriotism that they forgot the political interests of the country as a whole and, owing to mutual rivalries, were unable to unite against any foreign invasion, which however did not affect the common cultural life India enjoyed through her history. Yet from very early times the idea of an all-India empire had been there, and had also taken some form, of which undoubted evidences are available. It may, however, be remembered that behind these endeavours there was no imperialistic motive in the modern sense of the term. The need for the country's political unity was certainly one of the reasons, but this unity was needed not only for its own sake but also for the sake of strengthening the cultural unity of the race, the bedrock of its life and progress. That is why India's history throughout has been marked by a constant effort to unite all her diverse units into a single political whole under a central authority so that India might be politically as well as culturally one.

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SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT—Continued from opposite page

the component nations freedom to follow their own ideals and tendencies—to allow them to enjoy a healthy freedom. It is quite possible that it would take some time to induce the nations to give up the pursuit of their own propensities. But in the era to come the principle of political non-interference is likely to be much less stressed than now. Things have happened, of late, which seem to indicate that the interests of humanity

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at large have guided the conduct of nations. Sri Aurobindo has cited some examples—the action of America in Cuba and the Philippines, the action of the Powers in Spain during the civil war, etc. We may add the international intervention in Korea. Sri Aurobindo says, "This idea of the common interest of the race in the internal affairs of a nation is bound to increase as the life of humanity becomes more unified."

SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

By C. C. DUTT

Continued from previous issue

In the next three chapters, Sri Aurobindo has dealt *seriatim* with the need of military unification, economic unity and administrative unity. We shall go over the three points briefly. In the course of national centralisation, "military necessity has played at the beginning the largest overt part." The necessity was twofold—first, against attack from without—second, against internal disruptions and disorders. In the growth of a World-State, too, military necessity has begun, however vaguely it be, to play the same important part. A certain loose unity has appeared in the affairs of the world. No nation can stand alone today. Each feels already, subtly or directly, its "separate life overshadowed by the life of the whole." The possibility of a great war has become a source of anxiety to the entire fabric of man's life, after the dire suffering of the last four decades. The necessity of preventing a major clash is exercising the mind of man generally. It is felt that a means should be devised whereby the evil can, at least, be minimised. Hence the establishment, first of the League and now of the U.N.O. We have referred already to the League and now of the U.N.O. We have referred already to the former's failure to do real good and the difficulties facing the latter. The main difficulty is not in being able to decide equitably but in enforcing the decision. How is a major power going to be forced, if it is recalcitrant? As things are, it is difficult to leave the fate of the world to be decided by an assembly which has not yet established its supreme authority. Certain democratic nations are at the back of the U.N.O. today. But democracy in itself is no guarantee against war. In any case, the existence of strong concentrated military power would be for a long time the primary condition of a country's safety. One does not see as yet any likelihood of the nations of the world consenting to their own disarmament. Yet such a disarmament would be essential to a permanent State of peace. "National armies," says Sri Aurobindo, "must become like the old baronial armies a memory of past and dead ages."

With regard to military unification, the position is thus clear. National armies must disappear; this disappearance would mark definitely the creation of a World-State. "Diffused force . . . is the servant of discord and struggle; concentrated, it becomes the guarantee of organisation and the bond of order." Military necessity, pressure of war, the need for preventing war—all this will in the long run drive mankind towards some sort of world-union. But there is another necessity—the commercial, the industrial, the economic—which is very strong in the modern mind. Modern, because in the present stage of man's development economic interests occupy the preeminent position in his thoughts and gives the whole turn to his social life. In former days, the economic man (the Vaishya, merchant) occupied only a third place in the community. The two first places went to the thinker and the warrior (the Brahmin and the Kshatriya) who constituted the political portion of a society. In those days, the political consciousness and the political motive were all-important and the exponents of these occupied a dominant position. Everything is changed today. With the decline of the two upper classes, the commercial and industrial Vaishyas and Sudras have risen to the top and there is a conflict between them. The stamp of commercialism is on everything today. "Even in the outlook on knowledge, thought, science, art, poetry and religion the economic conception of life overrides all others," says Sri Aurobindo. The economic man looks upon all these things from a narrow decorative and utilitarian point of view. His attitude is much the same as that of the philistine of the nineteenth century, described by Sri Aurobindo in his *Human Cycle*. We have touched upon it in an earlier portion of this review. Politics and government of the State are passing into the hands of the bourgeois capitalist and are slowly opening a channel for economic socialism. "Free thought and culture remain on the surface of this great increasing mass of commercialism and influence and modify it, but are themselves more and more influenced, penetrated, coloured, subjugated by the economic, commercial and industrial view of human life." There is no prospect of a turn in a new direction in the near future, and the present trend is affecting international relations profoundly.

How is this disease going to be cured? Sri Aurobindo says, "The end of commercialism can only come about either by some unexpected development of commercialism itself or through a reawakening of spirituality in the race," and he remarks that there are signs that seem to point in this direction. These signs are a revival of the religious spirit and an idealistic trend in man's secular thought. They are still too slight and superficial to raise any definite hope in our minds. The propelling impulsion is still towards industrialism and its many variations. The substitution of Labour for capital as the dominant factor in the society is not likely to usher in Utopia. In the meantime, the democrat, the imperialist, the socialist, the communist—all seem to be drifting towards military efficiency and military organisation to the detriment of everything else. In the past, commercialism has served, at times, to tend towards the unity of nations. But the tendency was only superficial. While peace

was necessary for the normal activities of trade and manufacture, there was so much of rivalry and utter selfishness in the various nation-units that commercial dealings were bound ultimately to bring about war. For a time these feelings would find expression in the erection of tariff walls, the race for fields of exploitation, the struggle to capture markets, but sooner or later they are bound to lead to acts of political hostility. Sri Aurobindo shows how the Franco-Prussian war was the last war on political grounds and how since then political motive has been merely a cover for the commercial. Anyhow, one thing is clear, prohibition tariffs, blockades, etc. can be terrible weapons in the hands of one nation against another, and as long as there is freedom to use these weapons, mere military precautions will not prevent war. Sri Aurobindo says, "Since industry and trade are now five-sixths of social life and the economic principle the governing principle of society, a World-State which did not control human life in its chief principle and largest activity would exist only in name." The League of Nations, at one stage, did take up the question of international trade relations but its activities were only platonic and advisory. Still it is something that the need of an economic understanding was already felt and indicated.

Military and economic unification without administrative unity can lead us nowhere. Any central authority that is established will go on assuming greater powers or fall to pieces. Our immediate objective is a well-knit World-State with the nations for its provinces. A central body devoting itself at first to the limitation of armaments and settlement of economic disputes would steadily develop into an international legislature and a standing executive. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "It would tend increasingly to stretch its hand to all or most matters that could be viewed as having an international effect and importance. Before long it would invade and occupy even those fields in which the nations are now jealous of their own rights and powers. And eventually it would permeate the whole system of the national life and subject it to international control" for the co-ordination of human life in all its activities. The obstacle to such extreme development is the strong group-egoism of the nations. But if the ideal of human unity goes on gaining strength, the nations and States would have to subordinate their interests to the larger interests of humanity,—as the classes and tribes and cities in the past gave up their authority to the nation. The international idea, the idea of a single undivided race, has to develop before nationalism disappears as an active force. But we must never forget that nationalism is a very powerful sentiment, much stronger than the older clan feelings. Still there are certain forces, favourable to internationalism, at work even now, which may push forward the ideal of human unity unexpectedly. The World-State would probably form in the same manner that the Nation-State did in the past. "There will be a centralisation of all control, military and police, administrative, judicial, economic, legislative, social and cultural in the one international authority. The spirit of the centralisation will be a strong unitarian idea . . . there will be an effort at co-ordination such as we now see in a well-organised modern state, the complete idea of a thorough-going state socialism." In a new footnote, Sri Aurobindo tells us that this State socialism is being realised rapidly in three of the greatest nations of late.

We have seen already that all military power must vest in a common authority in a World-State, and that it would then mean no more an armed international police force. Similarly the final decision of all economic questions must in the end rest in the hands of the central government. At present, there is, on the one hand, a feeling of mutual dependence in matters of commerce—on the other, feelings of national egoism and jealousy. Between the two, things are adjusted somehow and go on in a haphazard fashion, till war overtakes us and things are in the melting pot again. An efficient central authority would be compelled, more and more to intervene and put an end to the present anomalous position. It will set in action the common will of mankind through the State government. Not only would an administrative unity be essential, but a greater centralisation and uniformity must come about than what we have known in the nation-states. International crime and international disorder are both likely to increase under future conditions. A more stringent system, a closer supervision, must replace the present crude and imperfect methods, if we are to prevent crime. The bleeding ground of the bacillus of crime must receive our constant attention. Crime must be dealt within its inception, at its roots. Education and moral training must be organised, eugenic and scientific methods must be studied and developed, the gaol system and judicial method must be revised. All this has to be done by standardising the new methods by a common legislative and centralised control.

In the working out of such a programme uniformity and centralisation would seem to be inevitable. But it might also be desirable to leave to

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BOOKS in the BALANCE

VENTURE WITH IDEAS by KENNETH WALKER

(Jonathan Cape, London.)

We are grateful to Mr. Kenneth Walker for giving us his personal impressions of the well-known Russian philosopher P. D. Ouspensky, who died in 1946. His new book gives us a simple account of the impact of new vistas of a wider knowledge on the author, who on his own admission "received an orthodox scientific education and was in no way a searcher for esoteric truth." It is yet another testimony of the turn from the barren scepticism prevalent in the West, to a beginning of appreciative belief in the ancient and eternal truths more familiar to eastern thought. From the description here given of Ouspensky's work in London (from 1923 to 1939), both in lecturing and later in the attempt to found a group-colony for the practical application of the methods of self-advancement in communal life, there is no doubt that he had exerted quite a significant influence in orienting men's thoughts in the direction of a higher Knowledge and towards a higher Consciousness,—though it was yet an intellectual approach to these higher spiritual truths. This account confirms one's earlier impression from a perusal of Ouspensky's own writings that he had been a valuable guide in helping to bridge the gap between the current scientific and materialistic outlook of the West and the Eastern metaphysical thought,—though of course he was primarily a logician endowed with a respect for the supernatural. He was, like Bertrand Russell, a trained mathematician and philosopher but unlike the latter he was strongly attracted to the practical side of mysticism and occultism. It was therefore with a characteristic precision of mind that he approached this wide net of esoteric thought. Out of the diverse elements therein he constructed a system which has been presented as the new "model" of the universe. It is only to be expected that many of the original truths (which seem to be mostly of Buddhistic origin or akin), were either incompletely presented or pushed into new shape to fit the model. However, we are thankful that Ouspensky deliberately left a free opening for the necessary individual development, since he rightly saw that the progressive evolution of man could only come through a widening and elevation of Consciousness from the individual awakening. Perhaps this idea of a higher Consciousness to which man can and must attain is one of the most important aspects of his work.

Ouspensky was a great advocate of the esoteric type of teaching, which is familiar in the East as the ancient oral methods of transmitting wisdom from Master to disciple. He was also aware of the fact that knowledge in itself was not sufficient unless it could be translated through individual action into a means of advancing one's self-development, and as far as possible that of others also. He also realised the need for centralising the individual consciousness around the true self, which should mean, of course, the co-ordinating and integrating action of the soul-personality. But unfortunately what this true "self" is he did not make clear,—a deficiency, all too frequent in modern western thought. It is a regrettable fact that he did not realise, or perhaps ignored, the essential truth of the innermost centre of the individual, where the inner soul or psychic being is focussed. For it is this latter which constitutes the real nucleus around which the integrated personality can be built, and which alone can span both the higher and the lower hemispheres of man. It is clear that Ouspensky brings the seeker to the very edge of the great Beyond but leaves him there with the bare injunction to find his own bearings.

However, we must concede, that as far as it goes, Ouspensky's is a clear-cut system of thought, which provides the intellectual mind with at least some starting-point to grasp in the quest for the higher Truths. This is more than can be said of Gurdjieff's teaching, from which Ouspensky is reputed to have acquired his own system. Gurdjieff is dealt with in the latter part of the book, and it is certain that he was more of a magician versed in occult knowledge than a possessor of the higher Truths. Unfortunately Mr. Kenneth Walker lays too much stress on trying to make out a case that Ouspensky was a true disciple of Gurdjieff, and

this hardly fits the facts. Ouspensky makes it clear in his own writings that although Gurdjieff was a powerful influence in imparting some of the mysteries of the old occult knowledge to his seeking mind, he soon broke away completely from the latter's teaching and built his own structure of thought independently. In tracing Gurdjieff's career, as it is given here, we can see how radically he differed from Ouspensky. As a young man he lived near the Turkish border of Russia, where he joined a brotherhood of seekers who had agreed to wander over Central Asia in search of the secret occult knowledge that lay behind the rites and practices of the dervishes, lamas and holy men. In this way Gurdjieff travelled through Persia into Tibet, and probably found the key in some form of tantric Buddhism to the occult mysteries he was seeking. He returned to Russia and began to organise an institute for the development of man. It was there in Moscow (in 1915) that Ouspensky came into contact with him. By 1922 they had separated for good,—Ouspensky to set up his own teaching in London and Gurdjieff to establish his school in Paris. Gurdjieff had been attracted to the ritual and religious dances of Asia (probably influenced chiefly by the mystery dances and plays he had seen in and around Tibet), and he sought to combine this symbolical movement with the traditional ballet idea as he had known it in Russia. At his school in Paris he taught some system of dance which, as far as one can gather, seemed to have incorporated these ideas. But his teachings, apart from being some form of link with eastern culture, do not seem to have helped greatly in the way of spiritual advancement. We only have to look at the writings of the two men, Ouspensky and Gurdjieff, to mark the intellectual contribution of the one as against the mixed allegorical and occult meanderings of the other.

We have to note that the occult knowledge in itself (as we can see from extreme tantric elements in India's past) cannot help man integrally to ascend to a wider sphere of consciousness, since the occult zones refer only to the subliminal layers in man and cosmos, and do not reach the superconscious. Immersed in the subliminal, one cannot see from above the occult working, and without this necessary detachment and clear vision which the higher Knowledge gives, there can be no true knowing and hence no mastery. (Here in India we can see how the ancient Vedanta, with its upward vision, had been able to keep the real spiritual development alive in spite of the almost overwhelming rise of Tantra in her medieval phase.) But apart from the occult knowledge itself, a further question that strikes one in surveying Ouspensky's teaching is how far the old principles of maintaining esoteric sects and schools can be held in the modern world, in face of the increasing need to spread the higher truths themselves over a wider field. Occult knowledge must necessarily be secret whenever it cannot widen beyond its own enclosed confines, through the penetration of an illumined knowledge giving the true spiritual realisation. In that sense it must always remain restricted whenever it is merely sectarian. It is only when there is a luminous opening from the higher Light above that we begin to see the subliminal working in its true perspective. One can say that the esoteric schools have served their purpose in the past in preserving as much of the eternal truths as could be maintained within the limits of each school or sect. But with the opening of the higher Knowledge to the discriminative mind universally, such as Sri Aurobindo has achieved, the position has changed. Esotericism and sectarianism are both no longer necessary for, nor desired by, the modern outlook.

The present tendency of the world must be towards the unity of mankind as the basis of world transformation, and this necessity transcends both sect and group. The opening of the world to the higher Knowledge is in fact the one sure means by which the recognition of a higher Consciousness can become an actuality to man.

NATHANIEL PEARSON.

A Call

I spread my wings wide in the infinite sky,
My flight courses beyond the blue of an endless abyss;
The glory of a new sun I sing hovering high,
I dwell upon the notes of the supernal bliss.

I soar entranced to the sky in my soul's delight,
The dream of dreams turns into a shape of heavenly glamour:
The white mountain-top calls to its enormous height,
A fireflute reveals cadences of a divine fervour.

The silver air now upbuoys me and bids me to stream,
The reddened horizons mark the fateful time
When the tarrying night must go or burn and gleam.
Athwart the silence comes a call of the Peak sublime.

ROBI GUPTA