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"GREAT IS TRUTH AND IT SHALL PREVAIL"

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# CHAMPIONS OF PEACE

On every hand we have people styling themselves champions of peace. With so many champions at large we should expect our poor earth to get some real taste of the one thing she most hungers for in her heart of hearts. But the trouble is that the word "peace" means as many things as there are champions of it. People are at war about even the connotation of the word "peace"!

We have in India quite a number who look with disfavour on the strained relations between Soviet Russia and the Atlantic nations and beatifically utter the formula "Asian sentiment" as if that were the master-key to all the deadlocks at which the Atlantic nations and Soviet Russia have arrived. They tell us: "Asia can easily be—not necessarily through any official agreements but through sympathetic solidarity—the third bloc in the world by which a trmendous will to peace can be set in action and the dangerous tensions between the two other blocs counteracted if not relieved. Asia is the home of moral values and spiritual truths: if the two great historical repositories of these values and truths—China and India—can come together by the elective affinities of Asian sentiment, a step towards the millennium will definitely be taken. No doubt, the intellectual drive behind these two countries is not at present identical, the ideologies do not sweetly chime in unison; but all that is on the surface. Asian sentiment naturally unifies them on the deeper levels and pushes them towards world peace."

Unfortunately for the gospellers of Asian sentiment, the facts on what they call the surface are too significant to be blinked. How can we believe that there is such a sentiment which can bind together in good-neighbourliness and in a will to peace our own country and that of Mao who made no bones about taking the side of North Korea whom even India could not help condemning as aggressor, Mao who allowed his own soldiers to teem into the Korean peninsula in defiance of all international canons and not just with the aim of defending the hydroelectric installations on the Yalu River or even of driving the U.N. Forces south of the 38th Parallel but with the express avowed purpose of pushing into the sea an army whose right to help South Korea had been accepted by India herself, Mao who attacked peaceful innocuous Tibet in violation of promises to India and with a slap in India's face when Nehru dared to demur to that unjustifiable military action? The core of the matter is that contemporary China's behaviour is the direct expression of the new temper developed in several parts of Asia as a result of the doctrine of Communist totalitarianism and expansionism. The real mind of India and the psychology of those who are in power in China today are poles asunder. There is nothing Asian about Chinese Communism any more than there is about the Indian Communist Party which is recognised by our Government as being bent on the subversion of all democratic principles and institutions as well as of all patriotic feeling and truth-sense. The talk, therefore, of peace through a bloc of Asian sentiment is based on a delusion. Another concept must be created for resolving international tangles.

In Europe a group of politicians are patting themselves on their backs for what they claim to be success in at least localising war if not altogether stopping it and establishing peace. They point to Korea and say: "World War III would have burst out from here. At a critical moment we intervened. When President Truman seemed poised for an attack on Manchuria in order to stem the vast horde of Chinese soldiery pouring across the Yalu River, we strongly urged reconsideration and stayed his avenging hand. Without us Mao and Truman would have been openly at each other's throats and then Stalin would have cut in because of his treaty with Mao and soon Western Europe would have had to grapple with Stalin because of the Atlantic Pact. We have saved the earth from a terrible holocaust."

Calm observation of the Korean scene does not at all bear out the claim. We must remember that though China has actually plunged into the fray she has not officially committed herself: her armies go by the name of "volunteers". Why has the subterfuge been adopted? It can evidently deceive nobody. The sole reason seems to be that China is afraid to be fully involved in wholesale war with the U.S.A. and that therefore a gateway of escape is left open by which she can withdraw from Korea without unbearable loss of face. If Truman's threat had remained unchecked the most likely consequence would have been the pulling back by Mao of the Chinese "volunteers". Yes, the decision not to speak any more of attacking Manchuria was extremely ill-conceived and let to the grievous difficulties in which the U.N. Forces got involved and from which they are only now getting extricated, thanks to General Mac-Arthur's military genius. The prospects of peace would have been immeasurably enhanced in consequence of Truman's readiness to take drastic action against the very heart of the enemy. Those who changed his frame of mind came really next door to appeasement and are very far indeed from having induced the White Dove to wing earthwards from its perch in the heaven of the Ideal.

Mention of the White Dove brings us to a substantial group of people of many countries who have attached their signatures to a document sponsored largely by the Communists and called the Stockholm Peace Appeal and carrying as its emblem the picture of a milky bird drawn by the famous artist Picasso. We may remark here that this bird is said to be a dove, but Picasso was careless in choosing for his model what ornithologists term the trumpeter pigeon, a bird characterised among other things by its specially raucous cry! Have we in this symbol, as Dennis Healey suggests, a subconscious disclosure of motives sought to be camouflaged by the conscious mind of the artist?

The answer to this question is important. Perhaps it has been best given by a booklet published in our country: *The Communist 'Peace Appeal'* by Philip Spratt.*

Mr. Spratt speaks with some authority, for he was himself a practising Communist and only after an inside study of Communism both at work and in theory he broke with it and took up the cause of resisting its activity. His booklet is a masterly survey of what he considers an attempt on a mighty scale by Russia to throw dust in the eyes of the world. He has no difficulty in proving that the whole history of Russia's behaviour after the war and even during its prosecution reveals an extremely intolerant and aggressive mentality rooted in basic principles of Communism and determined to employ every available means of getting its job done. Russia has maintained a military organisation on a war-footing while all the other countries progressively disarmed until quite recently when it was sheer lunacy to believe in the sincerity of Stalin's pretensions to peace. Country after country in Eastern Europe has been annexed and made a servile satellite. And it is pro-Russia countries like North Korea and China that have committed blatant aggression. To confuse opinion there run side by side with this shamelessness a posing by Communists as champions of peace and an attempt by them to persuade the free world to put away all thought of fighting. Their objective is a perversion of the free world's mind and a subversion of its morale *vis-à-vis* Soviet power.

Mr. Spratt brings a lucid pointed style to his work. There are no vehement phrases, a quiet steady relentless exposure goes on from page to page—with fact on fact speaking forth the truth. The main idea of the Peace Appeal is to make the West, especially America, appear in the role of war-monger. But American policy in the East is easily demonstrated by Mr. Spratt to be the opposite of imperialism or of seeking for bases against Russia. America wanted in China a Communist-Kuomintang coalition. She washed her hands of Chiang Kai-shek at a critical juncture. Foolish actions, no doubt, but hardly anti-Russian. Her resolve to neutralise Formosa or to aid Viet Nam is only a recent change of her policy of keeping away from interference in the East—a change forced by the sheer circumstance of Communist aggressive-

* Publishers: Democratic Research Service. Sole Distributors: The New Book Co. Ltd. (Bombay). Price Re. 1.

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ness. The main idea, therefore, of the Peace Appeal is fallacious. And the general bogus nature of the Appeal is cleverly spotlighted again and again by Mr. Spratt. For instance, the representative of Yugoslavia was expelled from the World Peace Committee just because his country refused to submit to Russia. "Why the World Peace Committee," asks Mr. Spratt dryly, "should faithfully take the Russian side in the quarrel is not apparent, more especially as the threat to peace here has come from Russia, not from Yugoslavia." The Stockholm Peace Appeal which is the whole movement in quintessential form is shown to be often signed in a most peculiar way. "In some of the countries, children must have signed in considerable numbers. Thus Poland, with a population of 24,500,000 contributed no fewer than 18,500,000 signatures, and Czechoslovakia, with a population of 12,500,000, found 9,500,000 to sign. In East Germany the babies in their cradles must have signed: total population, 18,500,000, signatures, 17,046,000."

Finally, it is not easy to understand why the atom bomb is singled out for condemnation. War as such is not condemned in the Stockholm Appeal. No weapon is condemned except the atom bomb. This is indeed an eye-opener and it is no wonder that with such an attitude the Communists everywhere are able to talk peace while making war. Two other facts also are here to be remembered. "At Potsdam," says Mr. Spratt, "Stalin was for the first time informed of the atom bomb. He said to Truman that he was glad to hear of it and hoped it would be used. Two bombs were used a few weeks later against Japan." This proves that Stalin has no objection to atomic warfare in his own interests. The second fact is that the atom bomb happens to be the only weapon that stands between Russia and world conquest; for America has immense superiority in it. This sufficiently explains Russia's present objection to it.

India has unfortunately given a fair amount of reception to Moscow's hoax. The Gandhism of many in our country has been exploited by the Red sympathisers in our midst. Mr. Spratt's 46 pages will leave not the slightest doubt in the mind of any intelligent Indian that if he puts his signature to the Appeal he will be betraying both his own country and the cause of civilisation at large.

Anyone aware of the general trend of the Soviet mind as laid bare by Mr. Spratt will scarcely be taken in by the comments made lately on international affairs by the lord of the Kremlin in the columns of *Pravda*. Stalin has declared that Russia scrupulously demilitarised herself after the war. As proof he cites the many industrial and constructive developments in the country and the lowering of the prices of consumer goods: his point is that these achievements would have been impossible if the military machine had been a prime concern. But by the same token any charge that America has concentrated on military preparedness should sound hollow. For in no country as in the U.S.A. have such achievements been so extensive, and the increasing rate of prosperity there cannot be compared to anything in the Soviet bloc. Besides, Stalin has conveniently overlooked what he himself and several of his spokesmen (for example, Marshal V. Sokolovsky in *Pravda*, May 9, 1949) said in the past—namely, that without a total advance in economic life the quick conversion of Russia's economy to war-conditions cannot be accomplished and that one of the chief purposes of such an advance is preparedness for war and that, therefore, Russia should aim at a side-by-side progress of the total economy and the military machine. Apropos Stalin's attempt in *Pravda* at *suggestio falsi* we may deal with another point which, rather surprisingly, he has left unexploited. Whitewashers of the Soviet Union draw attention at times to what they claim to be the low percentage of its military expenditure. "America", they tell us, "spends much more on military as compared to direct nation-building activities than Russia." Even supposing the statistics released by the Soviet Union about itself to be true (the Iron Curtain precludes, of course, genuine verification), we must realise that not only out of the Federal Funds which are here in question does America carry on her nation-building: State funds and private foundations provide huge additional amounts. Again, in Russia with her State-control or State-regulation of all nation-building, all expenditure is put in the account of the national income. Hence, as a sound student of statistics has lately remarked, the merely relative share of defence expenditure could very well be smaller than in the U. S. A. where heavy industries, banking, communications, insurance and foreign trade are private concerns. No peaceful intentions can be read in the low percentage, if any. But, all this apart, can the staggering figures quoted some months ago by Mr. Shinwell of Russia's titanic military preparedness be challenged? Strangely enough, the lie is given to Stalin's statement by one of his own high officials who has committed the huge *gaffe* of proclaiming, soon after the *Pravda*-comments, that Russia has no fear of the West since she has a fully equipped army outnumbering all that the West can muster!

Even if the cat were not thus out of the bag we should have guessed its existence by noting the lines along which the Soviet mind worked after the last war. The *Soviet Literary Gazette* displayed them clearly in what it said in 1946: "We do not intend to abandon the war theme. We must write of war so that the generation of young people that comes after us can love arms." Or take the testimony of the journal of the All-Union Political and Scientific Society in the U.S.S.R. in 1950: "The foreign policy of the U.S.S.R. is based on the growing strength of our armed forces. We must be prepared to wage war." Then there are the curious words of the Hungarian Minister of Defence last year: "A certain pacifism has made itself felt within the ranks of our Party of late. Slogans like 'we want no more wars' are very significant of this pacifism. We have to overcome this feeling of pacifism in order to fight it down in the masses." In a context of complete absence of free speech, all these utterances have to be regarded as official. Set against these manifestations of the inner working of the Soviet mind, Stalin's show of progressive disarmament as well as the Stockholm Peace Appeal betrays its true colour.

Where, then, are we to turn for a genuine championship of peace? It cannot be doubted that many peace-makers whether in India or in Britiain are sincere. Yet at the best there is an element of weakness or self-interest in their attitude. For, India cannot help being concerned at the sight of a militarised neighbour of such proportions as China, while Britain knows that a crisis even worse than the one through which she passed after Dunkirk would be in store for her in World War III. Their passion for peace—free though it may be from delusion or illusion—is still liable to be not quite pure. The purest form of it can be studied best in those Americans whose leader today is Truman. Truman is free from any sense of immediate menace: geographically, America is in no position of weakness and, technologically, she can easily match Russia. The American desire for peace, therefore, is in the majority of cases likely to be shot with authentic idealism, a sign of a new world-mind in the making. Not that the Americans come with halos: they are all-too-human and the good in them is intertwined with the bad as much as in other peoples. But a true vein of disinterestedness must be acknowledged in their wish to live and let live. All the brighter does this vein shine because it is untainted by any isolationism. The U.S.A. is giving with a generous hand the finest flower of her manhood to the Korean war which is 8,000 miles away from her own people. The U.S.A. is prepared to shed her own blood in full measure in Western Europe. The U.S.A. is standing guarantee for the security of a state like Yugoslavia which is precariously lodged in the very bosom of the Stalinist empire. If by any chance war breaks out, she will not shirk the bitterest brunt of it. This proves that peace to her is something indivisible. It is, of course, possible to find fault with her in certain details of international policy—for instance, her attitude to the Kashmir tangle is less than satisfactory; but it is not possible to question that by and large she is the purest no less than the strongest power for peace in the world today. Only sheer blindness to true idealism can lead one to picture her, as Stalin has tried to do in his *Pravda*-comments, in the shape of a war-mongering capitalist or imperialist; and only a grossly materialistic view of human nature can fail to understand, as Stalin has failed, the high ethics of the drive behind the G.I.'s in Korea and can declare, as he does, that these fighting men have no heart in them because they are not fighting for their own skins or for immediate benefits to their country.

We in India who are often inclined to bring a philosophical mind to most issues must consider it especially incumbent on us to appreciate the inner spirit of every gesture and every move on the world-stage. We must not adopt the easy course of pleading, "Much can be said on either side." Doubtless, there are no absolute blacks and whites; but greyness itself has a myriad shades ranging from near-white to near-black. And there are times in history when to refrain from pronouncing judgment is a grievous folly because at these times a very clear scission takes place in the common human factor and on one side stand those who for all their imperfection leave the road open for a manifold passage towards the perfect and on the other are ranged those who want evolutionary humanity to be forcibly caught and engrooved in some rigid formula of individual and collective life.

Yes, we must pronounce judgment—not otherwise can we serve the cause of peace. Peace has to be pursued in the right manner. On the plane of ordinary life it must be peace with honour and peace with a chance for the survival of moral values and spiritual truths. But we cannot fully pursue such peace by remaining only on the plane of ordinary life. For, if moral values and spiritual truths are to come into their own, they must be supported by us with a consciousness in vital touch with the hidden realm where they have their highest origin and form—the realm where the human and the divine meet and coalesce, the realm to which the human has to ascend and from which the divine has to descend. All attempts at unity and harmony in the world are doomed either to failure or to partial success until the light and the force are from the heights of being. The idealism that is a strong strand in the American passion for peace is very necessary, but it is not enough: it must be charged with an illumination from beyond the mere mind and made a channel for the expression of the Supreme Reality towards which the Seer and Saint and Rishi and Avatar have beckoned us throughout India's history. Unless we aspire after this Reality in which the one unifying Godhead is to be found together with an infinite multiplicity of modes of manifestation, we cannot either be Indians to the core or work most effectively for peace. The completest champions of peace are, therefore, they for whom, in some degree or other, an actual experience is held in these words from one of the most luminous books of our time: "There is a Power which no government can command, a Happiness which no earthly success can give, a Light which no wisdom can possess, a Knowledge which no philosophy, no science can acquire, a Beatitude of which no satisfaction of desire can give the enjoyment, a thirst for Love which no human relation can quench, a Peace which can be found nowhere, not even in death. It is the Power, the Happiness, the Light, the Knowledge, the Beatitude, the Love and the Peace which come to us from the Divine Grace."*

* "Prayers and Meditations of the Mother" (p. 293).

# ENGLISH POETRY FROM INDIA

## BY FRANCIS WATSON

**This is the thought-provoking talk recently put on the air by the British Broadcasting Corporation in its "Third Programme" and published in "The Listener". Francis Watson has had long association with India and is well-known as a usually perceptive commentator on her culture.**

I have sometimes wondered whether any single event in the long and extraordinary history of the British in India was so weighted with consequence as the decision of 1835 to introduce English education in the English language. It had incalculable political consequences. It had economic and social consequences. And naturally it had literary consequences. It is with a special section of these literary consequences that I want to try to deal here.

### Indignity or Liberation ?

First, let me explain that I shall be using the name 'India' in its former sense, because I am thinking chiefly of work produced before the establishment of the independent Domininion Governments of India and Pakistan. Secondly, I do not intend to comment or speculate upon present or future policies in those dominions affecting language or education. And, thirdly, I am well aware that my subject is in some respects controversial. Yeats once exclaimed that the introduction of English for the higher education of Indians was Britain's greatest wrong, 'making a stately people clownish, putting indignity into their very souls'. I do not suppose that Yeats' well-known interest in the east would have taken him very far if he had had to master Sanskrit, or Bengali, in order to pursue it. And perhaps it is our own sense of obligation that makes us in certain moods agree with him—a guilty feeling that the proficiency of Indians in our own language has made things too easy for us. But 'clownish'? Surely that is much too sweeping. Kipling's Harish Chandra Mukerjee may be clownish. The English anguage may have come to be regarded as a symbol of foreign control. But it was first accepted as a liberating force, and it is still possible to argue that it had that function.

The next thing to notice is that, whatever the indignation vicariously felt by the generous-minded Yeats, English as a *literary* language was, in fact, increasing in vigour during the decade preceding the withdrawal of British power. In November 1945, when the Indian centre of the P.E.N. Club held its big conference at Jaipur, I was at first a little surprised by the prominence of English among the sixteen modern Indian literatures that were reviewed—including those like Sindhi and Urdu which are now particular to Pakistan. Perhaps the contemporary author in India had to make some effort to write in English, but it was clear that he had also to make an effort not to do so. It was through English that he penetrated to the literature of other parts of the world—and even sometimes to the literature of other parts of India. Above all—and this makes the use of English in an Indian renaissance less surprising—English immensely widens the writer's potential audience and his potential market. But the important thing was really that at this 1945 conference, almost on the eve of partition and independence, English was treated as one of sixteen languages in which Indian literature was written—and let me add that there was and is no doubt about the vitality of many of the other languages. English was not thought of so much as the unpatriotic hobby of expensively educated Indians: or at least that view was defeated by the conception of a special sort of literature, a literature which could be called Indo-English. The name is a trifle uncouth, but it is better than some others that have been suggested, and it has stuck.

The outburst that I quoted a moment ago was wrung from Yeats by the submission to him, through a sympathetic party, of some English verses by a young Indian. But Yeats did not always return Indian offerings with a cry of regret. He said, for instance:

> I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway-trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger should see how much it moved me.

That is from Yeats' preface to the *Gitanjali* of Rabindranath Tagore, published in 1912 and crowned the following year by the Nobel Prize for Literature. The key-word, of course, is that word 'translation'. Tagore wrote no verse directly in English, except a few early poems which have no special interest. His immense fame outside India was founded on his own English versions of his Bengali originals, and on the further translations from that English into scores of other languages—notably into German. Strictly speaking, therefore, you might say that Tagore should not be included in a talk on Indian poets who have written in English. Yeats obviously made a distinction—he said as much—between those who write creatively in their mother-tongue and those who think in one language and write in another, which he judged to be the Indian difficulty. That sounds simple, but it is not. Thousands of Indians would declare that they have thought in English. There are many degrees in their self-adaptation to the language; and to decide in each case the point at which mental translation begins, if it does begin, is a task which I leave very happily to expert psychologists

In any case, Tagore is difficult to exclude. To a whole generation between the wars, the world over, he was the east speaking to the west. He embarked upon that role, I believe, with genuine reluctance, even if he was more than once carried away by the rapture of his reception. 'One day', he remarked pensively, 'I shall have to fight my way out of my own reputation'. I do not think he ever quite did this, though he certainly tried. Any portrait of him—and there are hundreds—will tell us that he could not escape from the stage once he had set foot upon it: that impressive figure, nobly browed, with the highly-bred Aryan features and the prophetic beard. It is not easy to approach his poetry—his English renderings—simply, though a certain kind of simplicity is one of its characteristics. It is not easy to forget the physical presence of the man, the stories about him, the storms where he so often seemed to find himself at the centre. The Nobel Prize itself was something of a shock—an unknown Hindu with a name that nobody pronounced with confidence, carrying off the prize against the candidature of Thomas Hardy and Anatole France. Moreover, by his conquest of the west Tagore took on an additional and powerful significance in his own country, where he would in any case have been venerated. It was not, perhaps, a significance which was particularly good for the direct appreciation of poetry. It was a bardic significance, and politically bardic at that.

### Value of Tagore's Poems

On the other hand, I believe that we ourselves may miss something that is valuable in accessible Indian poetry on account of our reaction to Tagore and to his enormous vogue. Tagore stands there at the gate. To turn away from him, as many do, is to refuse to enter at all. To feel that these brief and sometimes tenuous prose-poems reflect little of the intricately wrought Bengali songs in which tonal and metrical pattern are wedded to Tagore's own music in its own mode—to feel this is to erect a mental barrier between us and Indian poetry in whatever tongue. Yeats recognised this, but declared that the *Gitanjali* poems, 'display in their *thought* a world I have dreamed of all my life long'. And Tagore himself confessed to Will Rothenstein: 'I had no doubt that it was not the language but the earnest feeling expressed in a simple manner which touched their hearts'.

We are on dangerous ground here: the ground, not of poetry itself, but of that 'message from the east' which a persistent convention demands. A great deal of the Indian poetry written in English is mystical, or devotional, or metaphysical. So is a great deal of our own native poetry, especially from the period when we had not yet lost a religious attitude to life, which India largely retains. In their own languages—or perhaps I should say in their other languages—Indian poets are not by any means limited by a serious religious attitude. Their themes and their forms are as various as our own. If the more solemn vein predominates in the Indian verse which finds its way into English anthologies—'Matthew Arnold in a *sari*', as Gordon Bottomley once unkindly said—it is partly because of a certain self-consciousness which only the best poets can surmount: I mean self-consciousness on both sides, in the English reader who either desires or fears a 'message from the east', and in the Indian who feels an inner or an outer pressure to deliver it. That is only part of the story. We have also to remember the way in which English has at various times been taught in India. From the beginning of that enterprise, 'uplift' was written all over it. Through the English language and English literature, India was offered the liberalising message of the west. She accepted it from Shelley as well as from John Stuart Mill. And when the time came, as it were, to send a reply, it tended to be couched in slightly old-fashioned, slightly hackneyed, slightly over-studied English.

The early stages, say from the eighteen-thirties to the eighteen-seventies, were ardent enough, but are now largely forgotten except by the composers of theses. Some of the verse of this period, largely from Bengalis, is astonishingly competent. Most of it seems as lifeless today as any other imitation of Byron, Moore and Scott. There is one figure, that of a young girl from a well-known literary family, who made a startling impact upon the English public. Toru Dutt died in 1891 at the age of only twenty-one, having published a novel in French, a novel in English,a large number of original poems and nearly two hundred translations into English verse from French poets. Edmund Gosse warmly praised these translations and H. A. L. Fisher welcomed the prodigious young woman into 'the great fellowship of English poets'. Yeats, later on, in the letter that I have already quoted, declared that Toru Dutt's poetry had no merit, though her published letters were exquisite. In India it is her *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* that are remembered; and her successors among the poets of the Bengal Revival took up the idea of expressing India's traditional glories in English. Romesh Chunder Dutt's versions of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have found their way into Everyman's Library;

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but they are in the metre of 'Locksley Hall', and to me almost unreadable. This rendering in English of a specifically Indian contribution may be said to reach its culmination with Tagore. And it is customary, on the way thither, to pay a graceful tribute to another woman poet, the late Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, who ended her remarkable life as Governor of a Province under the independent Indian Government. I am sure I am not alone in feeling about Sarojini Naidu rather as Yeats felt about Toru Dutt.

The famous brothers Ghose are contemporary with Mrs. Naidu: Aurobindo Ghose, once a revolutionary, for the last forty years a recluse, a yogi, the sage of Pondicherry; and his elder brother, Manmohan Ghose, who died early in 1924 at the age of fifty-five, nearly blind, after years of illness and worry and private sorrow. Both brothers had all their early and higher education in England; both were classical scholars. Aurobindo at Cambridge, Manmohan at Oxford. With Manmohan Ghose we can at any rate forget all the reservations, the questions of thinking in one language and writing in another, the doubtful dichotomy of east and west. Oscar Wilde, Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dowson were among his companions, and Wilde remarked that he gave a welcome distinction to Christchurch. I do not know that I would call his poetry ninetyish, though some of it is mannered. It is entirely English, sophisticated, yet deeply suffused with the intimate love of nature, of the countryside, the English countryside, *his* countryside for eighteen formative years. He went back to India, but he had made up his mind to return to England, when he died. Many of his poems remain unpublished in the Calcutta University Library. Those that have appeared, notably in the selection made by his schoolfellow, Laurence Binyon, seem to me too good to be forgotten.

### Praise from Yeats

Aurobindo Ghose, like his brother, shows a distinguished technical mastery: he was deeply interested in prosody. He is the one Indian poet whom Yeats singles out as writing creatively in English (although it was Manmohan for whom Yeats found a corner in the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse).* Aurobindo the poet has been over-shadowed by Aurobindo the seer, the yogi, the transcendental philosopher—if indeed you can separate him into these two characters, which I doubt. The craftsmanship which he developed before he retired to the Pondicherry *ashram* has since been used as the most perfect instrument he could find for the communication of spiritual discovery: but unless you are prepared to respond to that discovery in some degree you will hardly enjoy the poetry. It is a message all right, but from a point so elevated that the sundering Suez Canal is invisible. It is the kind of message which most theories of poetry sanction, and which for Aurobindo it is the poet's highest function to deliver.

The rise and fulfilment of Indian nationalism, as I have said, has not noticeably weakened the impulse to write English poetry. But it produced personal conflicts, especially after Gandhi took the movement to the villages and wrapped it in austerity. There was the dilemma of the young Indian with intimate English friends, an English education, memories of the best of England, yet drawn by patriotism towards another camp. And there was the dilemma of the son or daughter of wealthy parents, westernised, cosmopolitan, prepared no doubt to do some 'slumming' in the big cities, but shrinking from the village-programme with its rude denial of aesthetics and its brave abandonment of comfort. Anybody who had Indian friends knew of these conflicts and hesitations, deepening with the new issues of world warfare. How often I heard T. S. Eliot quoted in those personal crises:

*Between the idea*
*And the reality*
*Between the motion*
*And the act*
*Falls the Shadow . . .*

Eliot, with his religious sense, his appreciation of Hindu metaphysics, his delicate surgery of middle-class despair, was meat and drink to the Indian intellectuals between the wars. He had imitators as well as readers. Bharati Sarabhai, Oxford-educated daughter of a family well known in Congress affairs, was not exactly an imitator. But Eliot and other English poets certainly stimulated her struggle to eliminate the threadbare conventions, to escape the florid and artificial orientalism which barred any attempt to penetrate to the quick of her own nation in its most sensitive phase. She had had an experience at one of the great pilgrim gatherings at the source of the Ganges; and an idea connecting her experience with the contemporary Indian struggle. Her poetic drama, 'The Well of the People,' is quite short, but it took shape slowly, before and during the war. When it was published in 1943 it made an immediate impression not only in India but also in England, where Edmund Blunden said that he felt Bharati Sarabhai 'ought to establish a new expectation about Indian poetry in English.'

That was a manuscript that got into print, between covers, and made its mark. But much good contemporary verse in India remains in manuscript, or gets obscurely printed, or badly printed, or in the wrong company, or with patronising prefaces and followed by meaninglessly extravagant reviews. To mention names—even admired names like Shahid Suhrawady, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Humayun Kabir, Baldoon Dhingra—does not dispose of the matter in a country where standards in this sort of literature are not well established nor well supported by publishing. I believe that there is often a hesitation, a fastidiousness, which not only prevents good poetry in English from being published in India, but also prevents better poetry from being written, because of the absence of these critical standards. Heaven knows the way of a poet in England these days is not easy. It must be worse to feel oneself in company with English poets and yet find no worthwhile channel of public communication or professional competition. The existing anthologies are enthusiastic rather than selective, and there are not many of them. I cannot help wishing sometimes that Mr. Eliot would apply himself to this task for Indo-English poetry. After all, he put the Anglo-Indian Kipling through a critical sieve.

What ,then, do we expect from this Indian poetry written in English? Mastery of the language we can take for granted, in the past at all events, and in the future probably. The Sadler Commission on Calcutta Universersity observed in 1919:

> We do not mean that the English of the Indian would necessarily be indistinguishable from that of the English-born citizen. But it would be by special qualities and characteristics that it would be distinguished, not by incongruities and faults.

And that notion of a special sort of English seems to be in the mind of the novelist Raja Rao, who says:

> We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression, therefore, has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American.

That is what one might logically expect. But frankly I fail to find signs of this national variant of English. At any rate I do not find it in the poetry, which seems to succeed and fail in form and texture, as English verse succeeds and fails. Professor Srinivasa Iyangar, who has studied the subject for Bombay University, speaks of the best of Indo-English poetry as effecting 'a marriage of Indian processes of poetic experience with English formulae of verse expression'. That may be nearer the mark. What I feel sure we should avoid is the attitude expressed in Dr. Johnson's celebrated remark about the acrobatic dog: 'We are astonished not that he does it well, but that he does it at all.' For that sort of astonishment the bulk and variety of Indian literary achievement in the English language offers us no warrant.

## *Taprobanè*

### *(Suggested by a phrase from Milton)*

The "utmost Indian isle,
Taprobanè",
Where the soul is ringed by the coolness
Of a sleeping sea—

There the mute sages go,
Washing away
All touch of colour and climbing
The nameless gray
Of hills that give no answer
Across the foam
To the cry of wanderer ages
For an ultimate home.

But, reaching those still peaks
At austerity's end,
They bring from the face of the granite
The smile of a friend!

*K. D. SETHNA.*

# IN THE MOTHER'S LIGHT

## THE MIND

### By RISHABHCHAND

What is the proper place and function of the mind in spiritual life? Is it a help or a hindrance? Can spiritual illumination come by mere intellectual development? How should one deal with the mind in order to make it aid and subserve one's spiritual end?

The mind is the pride, power and highest possession of man until he rises into the skies of the Spirit. It is by his developed mind that he can achieve a certain amount of control over his unruly desires and passions, train his body to be a docile beast of burden and, perceiving a higher goal than mere sense-gratification, create a centre of gravity above to counteract the constant pull of that which is below him. It is his mind that can give him a sense of inner freedom, purity and peace, absolutely independent of outer conditions and circumstances and, though his life and its normal working run counter to this new sense and perception, he can enlighten and modify them by his mind and, sooner or later, succeed in persuading them to seek and surrender to the Light. The mind can purify itself by renouncing its obsession with material objects, detaching itself from selfish vital interests and restraining its own discursive and desultory habits of thought and random vagrancy. Though not a possessor of knowledge, the mind is a seeker of it and can greatly help man's progress towards the Truth by the sustained intensity of its dispassionate seeking. "'This intellectual faculty which makes man vain and leads him into error, is the very faculty which can also, once enlightened and purified, lead him farther, higher than the universal Nature, to the direct and conscious communion with the Lord of us all, He who is beyond all manifestation. This dividing intelligence, which enables him to separate himself from me (the Divine), enables him also to scale the heights to be climbed, without his advance being enchained and retarded by the totality of the universe, which in its immensity and complexity cannot achieve so prompt an ascent.'"[1] A clear light in the intelligence is a great asset in spiritual life. A wide sweep of perception, a penetrating discernment, a calm and balanced judgment and a constant uplook are the best mental safeguard against the insidious attacks of the lower nature.

But the mind does not always act for the harmonious development of the individual and his progress towards freedom and mastery. A creation and tool of the lower nature, it panders to the gratification of the ego and becomes a bar to the individual's spiritual advançement. If it seeks knowledge, it is only because the ego takes a delight in intellectual knowledge even as the vital ego takes a delight in vital power and the physical ego in material possession and comfort. But the knowledge it usually seeks is intellectually informative and not spiritually illuminative —flashy scraps and segments, culled from various sources, which it can proudly store and display at will. The egoistic drive is always for self-gratification, whether it is on the physical level or the vital or the mental, and so long as this drive is not detected and stopped, the soul cannot come forward and assume the reins of the nature. "The reason was the helper, the reason is the bar."

Let us first pass in brief and rapid review the characteristic traits of the human mind, before we proceed to consider how we ought to deal with it in spiritual life. The mind is an instrument of analysis and synthesis. It cuts up things from the whole and deals with them as if they were separate integers. It takes an obvious parcel of a whole and dissects it in order to study its structure and function, and then puts together the constituents to arrive at an aggregate or what it believes to be an independent whole. All its operations move on the basis of division, differentiation and distinction. It can deal successfully with finite objects or a conglomeration of finite objects, but it can never conceive or perceive the infinite. If it tries to do that, it finds itself at sea, and has to content itself with mere symbols and images and figures of speech.

It is then evident that the mind is constitutionally incapable of apprehending the infinite, and has, therefore, to be transcended, if a flight to the infinite is the primary object of our spiritual life. But a flight may be an irrevocable one, entailing, as it has done up to now, an increasing renunciaiton of life in the world and culminating in the final disappearance of the soul in the immobile infinite. That is an eventuality which the Mother does not envisage in her teachings, for it arbitrarily cuts up the unity of existence into two, Light and Life, and ignoring God's purpose in the world, lures the soul away from the field of its divine perfection and creative self-expression in Nature. "Even he who might have arrived at perfect contemplation in silence and solitude, could only have done so by extracting himself from the body, by making an abstraction of himself; and thus the substance of which the body is constituted would remain as impure, as imperfect as before, since he would have abandoned it to itself; by a misguided mysticism, by the attraction of supraphysical splendours, by the egoistic desire of being united with Thee for his personal satisfaction, he would have turned his back upon the reason of his earthly existence, he would have refused cowardlike to accomplish his mission to redeem and purify Matter. To know that a part of our being is perfectly pure, to commune with that purity, to be identified with it, can be useful only if we subsequently utilise this knowledge for hastening the earthly transfiguration, for accomplishing Thy sublime work."[2] If we take a flight to the Infinite, it is not to merge in It, but to be united with It, and return to the world with Its force and benediction in order to conquer and transform our material life for Its self-revelation. We cannot, therefore, afford to coerce the mind into a complete inaction and impose upon it a progressive atrophy in order to transcend it. The mind has its essential, indispensable function in the economy of our triple nature and must be developed to its highest perfection, so that with all its faculties, quickened, widened and illumined, it may serve the soul in its work of divine manifestation.

What is the essential and indispensable function of the mind in the hierarchy of the instrumental nature of man? The mind is "an instrument of formation, organisation and action. And it is in these functions that it attains its full value and real utility."[3] "It is not an instrument of knowledge—it is incapable of finding knowledge—but it must be moved by knowledge. Knowledge belongs to a region much higher than that of the human mind, even beyond the region of pure ideas."[4] The mind forms thoughts, that is to say, partial and, in most cases, dwarfed and distorted representations of Truth, and transmits them to the vital *(prana)* which infuses them with its own energy and passes them on to the physical being for materialisation in life. If we follow the ascetic way, we shall reduce the mind to a blank and let its faculties starve and languish or be paralysed by a long disuse; but in a dynamic spirituality they have to be fully awakened, trained and developed to their utmost perfection. Instead of forming thoughts from its dim perception of the remote shadowy aspects of Truth, the mind can receive, in silence and in a growing light, the messages, intimations and revelations of Truth and employ its organised faculties to give them the right forms for life-effectuation.

But in spiritual life, though we instinctively feel the necessity of imposing a purificatory discipline on the vital *(prana)* and the body, we usually neglect the mind and, except during meditation or short spells of concentration, let it roam and browse just as it pleases, and do not think that it too needs a scrupulous discipline of restraint and renunciation, if it is to be transformed and if our consciousness is to transcend it. No transcendence is possible without renunciation. If we cling to the normal delights of the mind and its habitual interests, we shall never feel the necessity of climbing to the higher realms of Light and discovering the Truth and its native delight. It is by the renunciation of our absorption in the gross pleasures and pre-occupations of the body that we have risen into the tumult and thrill of life's stimulating adventure and again, by a renunciation of the exclusive goad of desires and the blinding storm of passions, into the partial poise and quiet of the thinking mind. But since we find even this poise precarious and this quiet besieged and obscured by the waves of the vital and disintegrating inertia of the body, we have to renounce the mind's customary, mechanical movements and its separative tendency, and aspire to ascend to the higher reaches of our consciousness, where alone, away from the dividing and limiting operation of the mind, we shall realise the unity of universal existence and the truth of both our essential and phenomenal being. But the pleasures of reasoning and speculation have so enthralled us that we think we know everything by means of them, and even if, as in spiritual life, we feel the need of silencing or at least quieting the mind, we cannot easily arrive at a total renunciation of its habitual, hampering activities. Especially, in this age of exaggerated intellectuality, we are apt to confuse spirituality with mental accomplishments and let the power of our pen or the eloquence of our tongue do duty for spiritual experience. It is not unoften that the initial fervour of our heart for spiritual progress is overlaid with a plethora of intellectual activity which revels in the analysis, synthesis, criticism and exposition of spiritual truths of which our mind knows little or nothing by realisation, but everything by imagination, inference and reasoning, or, at second hand, from books; and many a promising spiritual career is wrecked by this overmastering passion to know and understand and expound, rather than to be and become, which should be the prime objective of spiritual life.

There is a story told of St. Jerome which finely illustrates our point. It is said that, having renounced all other pleasures, he found that he could not renounce the pleasure of reading, and so had to carry his library to the desert, where he repaired for the purpose of penance and purification. "One day, during a fever, he dreamed that, at the Last Judgment, Christ asked him who he was, and he replied that he was a Christian. The

1 "Prayers and Meditations of the Mother."

2 "Prayers and Meditations of the Mother".
3 and 4 "The Science of Living" by the Mother.

# THE MIND—*Continued from previous page*

answer came: 'Thou liest, thou art a follower of Cicero and not of Christ.' Thereupon he was ordered to be scourged. At length Jerome in his dream cried out: 'Lord, if ever again I possess worldly books, or if ever again I read such, I have denied Thee.' This, he adds, 'was no sleep or idle dream'."[5] Here is obviously an extreme case of ascetic self-denial, but it has, all the same, an unmistakable lesson for those who engross themselves in unremitting mental activities either in the deluded hope of being thereby able to follow the spiritual path better or simply because they cannot overcome the force of habit. One of the reasons why we have so few original and creative thinkers in modern times is this inveterate habit of constant and promiscuous reading and thinking, which keep the surface layers of the mind in a chronic fever of activity and prevent the deeper layers, the deeper faculties from opening and developing. It is not without justice that Whitman characterises the modern mind as "dazed and darkened by reading". A sort of mental indigestion is a prevailing malady of the modern intelligentsia and accounts not only for the catalepsy of its intuitive powers—intuitive thought, intuitive imagination, intuitive perception—but also for its inaptitude and disinclination for the spiritual life, and the fungus growth of doubt and disbelief choking its mind. Every part of human nature has, unquestionably, a right to autonomy, but it must be an autonomy respecting and conforming to the organic unity of the whole, and not exclusive and subversive of it. Besides, as we have already said, in the scale of life's values, the higher must always be given a greater emphasis of attention and an ampler scope of development than the lower, for, it is on the perfection of the higher that depend the perfection and secure fulfilment of the lower; it is, indeed, the higher and the highest that explain and justify the lower and the lowest in the scale of life's values. No part of our nature has to be neglected or repressed, but each must be developed to its highest perfection and integrated with all around the central truth and substance of our composite being. If the autonomy of a part, even of a dominant part, degenerates into autocracy, oppressing and obstructing the growth and legitimate self-expression of the others, then it is a serious menace to the harmony of the whole. It is from such a tyranny of excessive intellectuality that humanity is suffering today. All its science, politics, economics, sociology—in fact, all its intellectual labour is threatening it more and more with a complete disruption of the balance of its life and the harmony of its being. An exclusive emphasis on the material values of existence and their glorification in philosophy, arts and science seems to be the sole pre-occupation of the mind of modern humanity. If it turns, as in a few exceptional individuals, to the ethical values, it gives them a utilitarian bent; if it turns, as in a still fewer exceptional individuals, to spirituality, it reduces it to a code of ethics, trimmed and tabulated by the mechanising intellect, and exults in its summary negation of all that exists beyond its very limited ken. Its vaunted rationalism is a wilful exclusion of true knowledge, and it is no wonder that it is paying rather heavily for it. Its brilliant, unspiritual, egoistic, sense-enmeshed, matter-enslaved intellect is leading its life from problems to predicaments and from predicaments to perils. It is a blind chase—after what?

What should we do with the mind in order to make it help our spiritual evolution and become a supple and docile instrument of the Divine, which it is meant to be? The Mother says, "The mind has got to be made silent and attentive in order to receive knowledge from above and manifest it."[6] For developing the capacity to receive, it has to purify itself of all its preferences, preconceptions and prejudices, its fixed ideas and rigid principles, its narrow outlook and arrogant dogmatism, its categoric affirmations and negations, and turn in intent and aspiring silence to the Light which broods over it with an infinite motherly solicitude to illumine it. For developing the capacity to manifest knowledge, it has to widen itself by renouncing its attachment to its habitual thoughts and ideas and develop all its faculties to their utmost potentialities of perfection. When the Light descends, the mind, surrendered to it, will be not only lit up with knowledge, but transformed in all its operations,—its thought, reason, imagination, perception, memory,—all changed in their basic stuff and substance. It will become an inspired instrument of a developing concord and harmony, instead of being, as it is now, a confused creator of division and discord. A quiet and aspiring mind is the nursery of intuition.

Let us conclude by quoting at some length from *Words of the Mother*, in which the Mother points out some of the normal defects and limitations of the human mind. "The whole mental world in which you live is limited, even though you may not know or feel its limitations, and something must come and break down this building in which your mind has shut itself and liberate it. For instance, you have some fixed rules, ideas or principles to which you attribute an absolute importance; most often it is an adherence to certain moral principles or precepts, such as the commandment 'Honour thy father and mother...' or 'Thou shalt not kill', and the rest. Each man has some fad or one preferred shibboleth or another, each thinks that he is free from this or that prejudice from which others suffer, and is willing to regard such notions as quite false; but he imagines that his is not like them, it is for him the truth, the real truth. An attachment to a rule of the mind is an indication of a blindness still hiding somewhere. Take, for example, the very universal superstition, prevalent all over the world, that asceticism and spirituality are one and the same thing. If you describe someone as a spiritual man or a spiritual woman, people at once think of one who does not eat or sits all day without moving, one who lives in a hut in great poverty, one who has given away all he had and keeps nothing for himself. This is the picture that immediately arises in the minds of ninety-nine people out of a hundred when you speak of a spiritual man; the one proof of spirituality for them is poverty and abstinence from everything that is pleasant or comfortable. This is a mental construction which must be thrown down if you are to be free to see and follow the spiritual truth. For you come to the spiritual life with a sincere aspiration and you want to meet the Divine and realise the Divine in your consciousness and in your life; and then what happens is that you arrive in a place which is not at all a hut and meet a Divine One who is living a comfortable life, eating freely, surrounded by beautiful and luxurious things, not distributing what he has to the poor, but accepting and enjoying all that people give him. At once with your fixed mental rule you are bewildered and cry, 'Why, what is this? I thought I was to meet a spiritual man.' This false conception has to be broken down and disappear. Once it is gone, you find something that is much higher than your narrow ascetic rule, a complete openness that leaves the being free. If you are to get something, you accept it, and if you are to give up the very same thing, you, with an equal willingness, leave it. Things come and you take them up; things go and you let them pass, with the same smile of equanimity in the taking or the leaving.

"Or, again, you have adopted as your golden rule, 'Thou shalt not kill', and have a horror for cruelty and slaughter. Do not be surprised if you are immediately put in the presence of killing, not only once but repeatedly, until you understand that your ideal is no more than a mental principle and that a seeker of the spiritual truth should not be bound and attached to a mental rule. And when once you are free from it, you will find perhaps that all these scenes which troubled you—and were indeed sent in order to trouble you and shake you out of your mental building—have, singularly enough, ceased altogether to happen in your presence."[7]

It will have been clear from the above consideration that, in spiritual life, the best discipline for the mind is its rejection of all egoistic interests and habits of thought and reasoning, and a growing surrender, in serenity and silence, to the divine Light. None of its essential functions have to be suppressed, but all have to be offered and polarised to the Infinite. "When we have passed beyond knowings, then we shall have knowledge."[8] "Transform reason into ordered intuition; let all thyself be light. This is thy goal."[9] A regular practice of a constant and loving concentration on the Divine and an unfailing reference of all mental movements to His Light is the surest means of making the mind "receive and manifest knowledge."

[5] "History of Western Philosophy" by Bertrand Russell.
[6] "The Science of Living" by the Mother.
[7] "Words of the Mother."
[8] and [9] "Thoughts and Glimpses" by Sri Aurobindo.

## *Thy Presence*

The utmost sadness of the hours
When Thou art gone from me,
And when no more thy Presence flowers
Upon the mystic Tree.

Though winds pass by and golden rains
And birds and butterflies,
Within the sapless roots and veins
All sweetness, all life dies.

The worlds revolve in blank-grey skies,
And sun-stars whirl away,
And day and night the seed-heart cries
Within its jail of clay.

O Love, thy grace and beauty shower
Upon the dark, dry Tree;
Restore thy Presence and thy Power,
Blossom once more in me.

*TEHMI*

# SRI AUROBINDO CAME TO ME

## By DILIP KUMAR ROY

### CHAPTER V:

### THE ASHRAM: THE TRIALS

*(Continued)*

He was always like that—had never any weakness for lording it over the weak whom he actually invited to "discuss things" familiarly with him. And he did it so unostentatiously that we often forgot how weak we were when we presumed to argue with him almost as though he had as much to learn from us, garrulous dwarfs, as we from him, the reticent giant! I well remember how I used to dash off just what came to me—on the most diverse topics imaginable—only to receive comments the next morning, little realising that it cost him what he valued even more than his health and well-being, namely time, *his* time! But as it is little use being wise after the event, I shall give a few typical instances to bring into relief the greatness of his condescension against the background of our thoughtless levity.

No, I must use the *mot juste,* for the word condescension will not do when what floats before my mind is his compassion, for nothing less could possibly make us stake our all for one who, to all outward seeming, lived remote—almost in a far cloudland of unreality so far as we were concerned—and yet could inspire us with a deep sense of progressive fulfilment. I recall an Urdu ghazal which I once translated and often sang to describe this:

*Thou wok'st my heart to thy memory*
*And mad'st my world parched ... pale as sand:*
*How shall I sing thy diamond gifts*
*Or limn thy Bounty's wonderland?*
*My prayer was given before I prayed:*
*A pregnant sky—thy love of thine:*
*The past became a scroll on waves*
*Beneath thy newlit summit-sign.*
*From me, who had no claim for meed,*
*Never would thy Grace one boon withhold:*
*Who but thy self could answer earth*
*With squanderings of thy heavenly gold?*

To those who did not know him, all this may seem somewhat of an overstatement since it was not given to us to come in contact with him in a give-and-take of what we call friendship. But those who came to know him could only wonder how he moved people thus to their depths—he who (to exploit a Bengali idiom) was known as a "denizen of the deeps"; whom none had seen affected by even the most terrible of shocks, the fearless revolutionary, who meditated calmly in a prison-cell when the hangman's rope was in the offing; who, a week before he passed away, smiled affectionately when an attendant, a disciple went out to call in a doctor.

"Where did you go, Nirod?" he asked when the other returned.

"To fetch the doctor," he answered apologetically.

"Doctor? What for? Have you lost your head!"

Yes, such was he: moving through life but as a "squanderer of the heavenly gold," never asking anything from anybody in any shape or form.

Once when an offer came from Sir Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan that he would introduce him to the West if he wrote a philosophical article for the Westerners he declined.

"Look here!" he wrote back to me, "Do these people expect me to turn myself again into a machine for producing articles? The times of the *Bande Mataram* and *Arya* are over, thank God! I have now only the Ashram correspondence and that is 'overwhelming' enough in all conscience without starting philosophy for standard books and the rest of it.

"And Philosophy! Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never, was a philosopher—although I have written philosophy, which is another story altogether. I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry—I was a poet and a politician not a philosopher! How I managed to do it and why? First, because Richard proposed to me co-operate in a philosophical review—and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his head to anything, I could not very well refuse: and then he had to go to war and left me in the lurch with sixty-four pages a month of philosophy all to write by my lonely self! Secondly, because I had only to write down in the terms of intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there, automatically. But that is not being a philosopher!

"I don't know how to excuse myself to Radhakrishnan—for I can't say all that to him. Perhaps you can find a formula for me? Perhaps: 'so occupied, not a moment for any other, can't undertake because he might not be able to carry out his promise.' What do you say?"

I wrote what I could to Sir Sarvapalli but he importuned. So I once again wrote to Gurudev imploring him that he comply. In the end I even tried to coax him:

"Your name is not yet known to the West and Sir Radhakrishnan will give you wide publicity, fancy that! Besides, he is right... etc."

But he was adamant.

"As to Radhakrishnan, I do not care whether he is right or wrong in his eagerness to get the contribution from me. But the first fact is that it is quite impossible for me to write philosophy to order. If something comes to me of itself, I can write, if I have time. But I have no time. I have some thought of writing to Adhar Das pointing out that he was mistaken in his criticism of my ideas about consciousness and intuition and developing briefly what were my real views about these things. But I have never been able to do it. I might as well think of putting the moon under my arm, Hanuman-like—although in his case it was the sun—and going for a walk. The moon is not available and the walk is not possible. It would be the same if I promised anything to Radhakrishnan—it would not be done, and that would be much worse than a refusal.

"And the second fact is that I do not care a button about having my name in any blessed place. I was never ardent about fame even in my political days; I preferred to remain behind the curtain, push people without their knowing it and get things done. It was the confounded British Government that spoiled my game by prosecuting me and forcing me to be publicly known as a 'leader'. Then again I don't believe in advertisement except for books, etc. and in propaganda except for politics and patent medicines. But for serious work it is poison. It means either a stunt or a boom, and stunts and booms exhaust the thing they carry on their crest and leave it lifeless and broken high and dry on the shores of nowhere—or it means a movement. A movement in the case of a work like mine means the founding of a school or a sect or some other damned nonsense. It means that hundreds or thousands of useless people join in and corrupt the work or reduce it to a pompous farce from which the Truth that was coming down recedes into secrecy and silence. It is what has happened to the 'religions' and is the reason of their failure. If I tolerated a little writing about myself, it is only to have a sufficient counter-weight in that amorphous chaos, the public mind, to balance the hostility that is always aroused by the presence of a new dynamic Truth in this world of ignorance. But the utility ends there and too much advertisement would defeat the object. I am perfectly 'rational', I assure you, in my methods and I do not proceed merely on any personal dislike of fame. If and so far as publicity serves the Truth, I am quite ready to tolerate it; but I do not find publicity for its own sake desirable."

And yet he went on writing reams and reams of letters to such as we—for hours on end for years and years!

Yes, to reason he was baffling, even though he claimed that he was "perfectly rational." But I find it difficult to take him at his word because I have not yet been able to find a clue to the mystery of his strange personality which not only drew us to him but made us cleave to his all-but-invisible self in spite of the hypnotic pull of multitudinous life outside. But to give one more instance of how subtly he led us on to "discuss" things with him and in what a carefree way!

"O Guru," I wrote, "I enclose a fine poem of Nishikanta's entitled *The Yarning West.* Incidentally, I was telling him yesterday about Europe's frantic drive for the charnel-house in a fit of 'rationalised lunacy' as Russell puts it in his latest book, *In Praise of Idleness.* There he laments the imminent devastation of the coming War with the consequent holocaust of the finest ideals cherished by a handful of dreamers. Let me quote to you a few passages from his book which I wish my activist friend X would ponder a little.

"After castigating 'compulsory military service, boy-scouts, the dissemination of political passion by the press,' etc. Russell girds at the blind restlessness of pugnacious activism thus:

'We are all more aware of our fell-citizens than we used to be, more anxious, if we are virtuous, to do them good, and in any case to make them do us good. We do not like to think of any one lazily enjoying life, however refined may be the quality of his enjoyment. We feel that everybody ought to be doing something to help on the great cause—whatever it may be—the more so as so many bad men are working against it and ought to be stopped. We have not the leisure of mind, therefore, to acquire any knowledge except such as will help us fight for whatever it may happen to be that we think important.'

"O Guru, what, I wonder, will be the rejoinder of the activist in X to this sarcasm of Russell directed against his darling activism which, thanks to its blindness wedded to greedy self-aggrandisement, is today crushing out our delicate soul-aspirations towards all that is noble and beautiful in life?..."

"But, Dilip," he wrote back promptly, "you forget that X is a politician and the rationality of politicians has, perforce, to move within limits: if they were to allow themselves to be as clear-minded as Russell, their occupation would be gone! It is not everybody who can be as cynical as a Birkenhead or as philosophical as a C. R. Das and go on with political *reason* or political make-believe in spite of knowing what it all came to from *arrivisme* in the one and patriotism in the other case."

"But no, Guru," I protested, "I have not forgotten it any more than I have forgotten the blazing fact that any show of busy enthusiasm is applauded in this gullible age as the worthiest exploitation of our vitality which makes puppets of us all, mostly with the pathetic delusion that we

# SRI AUROBINDO CAME TO ME

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are serving humanity! What I was driving at was X's falling for activism for its own sake, to undertake a mountain of labour to produce a mouse, believing, alas, (to quote your own remark on him) that 'by human intellect and energy making an always new rush everything can be put right.' I wish my friend would try to develop a little more correct vision if only to be delivered from this sad delusion that by blind energy and rudimentary logic one could salve the shipwreck of civilization. The big guns of the West have tried that game for centuries and the result has been, oh, why not hear Russell once more?—

'When the indemnities were imposed, the allies regarded themselves as consumers: they considered that it would be pleasant to have the Germans work for them as temporary slaves, and to be able themselves to consume, without labour, what the Germans had produced. Then after the treaty of Versailles had been concluded, they suddenly remembered that they were also producers, and the influx of German goods which they had been demanding would ruin their industries. They were so puzzled that they started scratching their heads, but that did no good, even when they all did it together and called it an International Conference. The plain fact is that the governing classes of the world are too ignorant and stupid to think through such a problem and too conceited to ask advice of those who might help them'.

"O Guru, how I wish X would not attach much value to Reason's inordinate pretentions which often make people as blind to stark reality as this! *Qu'en dites-vous?*"

"You are right, Dilip," he wrote back again. "Only you again seem to forget that human reason is a very convenient and accommodating instrument and works only in circles set for it by interest, partiality and prejudice. The politicians reason wrongly or insincerely and have power to enforce the results of their reasoning so as to make a mess of the world's affairs: the intellectuals reason and show what their mind shows them, which is far from being always the truth, for it is generally decided by intellectual preference and the mind's inborn or education-inculcated angle of vision,—but even if they see the Truth, they have no power to enforce it. So between blind power and seeing impotence the world moves, achieving destiny through mental muddle."

I sent up in reply, Russell's fling at national planning: "When a nation, instead of an individual, is seized by lunacy, it is thought to be displaying remarkable industrial wisdom!" he commented:

"Seized by lunacy? But this implies that the nation is ordinarily led by reason. Is it so? Or even common sense? Masses of men act upon their vital push, not according to reason: individuals too do the same. If they call it reason, it is as a lawyer to plead the vital's cause."

I quote in full his letters on Russell for another reason which I may as well state here.

During the first few years of my Ashram life I simply did not know what to do with my Russellian scepticism in the face of Gurudev's deep disapproval of such obstinate recalcitrance to spiritual experience. But this landed me in another dilemma: on the one hand I could not discard Russell whose intellectual clarity and integrity of character I profoundly admired: on the other, even when I could not fully understand Gurudev's deeper wisdom and wider vision, I could not help but warm up to his exhortations. Unfortunately, however, the see-saw did not cease; for even when there was not a vestige of doubt in my mind as to who should be followed, theoretically, it so happened that despite Gurudev's unanswerable arguments I found myself unable to accept, once for all, that Russell had been discredited as a guide to wisdom in general. This dualism of mine in its turn, was sharply criticised by Krishnaprem to whom, alas, I turned, foolishly, for sympathy. For on this issue he evinced a heart of adamant and indicted me from distant Almora:

"Why do you keep harping on Russell? I quite agree he is a fine man in many ways and a fine thinker of his own sort but why do you keep hoping that your Gurudev or someone else will answer his sceptical arguments? If you accept Russell's premisses you will be forced into his conclusions but then why accept his premisses? He is no muddle-headed thinker whose conclusions are at fault with his premisses. Quite the reverse. If you set foot on an escalator you will be automatically carried to the top of it; so why set foot on it at all when you see it is going in the wrong direction?"

But there, precisely, lay the greatness of Gurudev. *He* never minded if any of us wanted to experiment with an escalator "going in the wrong direction." For he had never believed in hard and fast taboos. (Years later, he told me once in conversation that the one thing he had never cared to become was a dictator.) His tolerance and charity would have been incredible had it not been a fact of almost everyday experience. In the Ashram he tolerated some fire-eaters even when they were found out to be disloyal and treacherous. He gave a long rope even to insolent rebels who from calling him names and misrepresenting his catholic views told deliberate lies—just to do him down. Even such calumniators and traitors he not only declined to expel from the Ashram but actually forgave again and again till I had to ask him which he loved more: to encourage the faithless or discourage the faithful?

As I look back in retrospect, somewhat sadly, I realise how often I myself have misunderstood him in the past. Perhaps I had to—his patience, charity and tolerance having been a little too incredible even for human credulity. For I did, often enough, feel impatient of his superhuman patience when some others took advantage of it without scruple. At such times I conveniently forgot how much I myself had profited by his patient acceptance of the burden of my obstinate ego and assertive self-importance. How often, indeed, did I rebel, yet not once did he scold me—not even when I doubted his love and wisdom in my rebellious moods! Time and again, when I wrote to him that I had decided to throw up the sponge, he came to me with the balm of his affection, understanding and infinite tolerance not only forgiving the insolence of my repeated ultimatums but assuring me again and again:

"You need not imagine that we shall ever lose patience or give you up—that will never happen. Our patience, you will find, is tireless because it is based upon unbounded sympathy and love. Human love may give up, but divine love is stable and does not falter. We know that the aspiration of your psychic being is sincere. It is because the sincere aspiration is there that we have no right to disbelieve in your *adhikara** for the Yoga.

"These difficulties do not last for ever—they exhaust themselves and disappear. But to reject them when they come is the quickest way to get rid of them for ever."

Neverthelss I could not, for the life of me, reject out of hand the hostile suggestions that got the better of me in my wrong moods. What was stranger still was that the more he leaned down to help me see the light of the Divine Will, the less I cared to forswear the darkness of my self-will, insomuch that I sometimes wondered whether our graceless perversity did not wax in inverse proportion to the descent of the beneficent grace offering to absolve our deep delinquencies. I wonder, however, whether the import of such paradoxes can ever be truly grasped by those who have never been all but swept off their feet by what Gurudev termed "the adverse forces". His arguments and tender anxiety, however, are likely to be appreciated by all who know anything about human solicitude. So, by way of illustration, I shall refer here to two out of the numerous crises I had to undergo.

The first serious "attack", if I may so put it, developed in March, 1930. I had been feeling listless after my first flush of joy and optimism till, suddenly, I made a *faux pas* which brought matters to a head. I felt—or rather imagined, to be more precise—that Mother had grown indifferent to me. I told myself that what I had all along dreaded must have come to pass: that she had been disappointed in me and finally convinced that I would never make good. And it so happened that Gandhiji's famous Dandi march had just been announced in the papers: they would break the law by making salt and go to prison. In my despair I wrote to Gurudev that I had decided to leave at once, and court prison, giving up such a futile undertaking as Yoga, the more as I could not bring myself to believe in his doctrine of the "hostile forces.": I knew of course that it was nothing short of a mad impulse but I yielded to it none the less. I challenged him to prove his thesis and mocked at the idea of invisible phantom forces, such as he posited, swaying sensible (?) men like us. This time, I imagine, Gurudev wrote without a smile of irony.

"Dilip," he pleaded, "it is certainly the force hostile to Yoga and the divine realisation upon earth that is acting upon you at the present moment. It is the force (*one* force and not many) which is here in the Ashram and has been going about from one to another. With some as with B, V and P, it has succeeded; others have cast it away from them and have been able to liberate the light of their soul, open in that light to the nearness and the constant presence of the Mother, feel her working in them and move forward in a constant spiritual progress. Some are still struggling, but in spite of the bitterness of the struggle have been able to keep faithful to the divine call that brought them here.

"That it is the same hostile force would be shown, even if its presence were not for us visible and palpable, by the fact that the suggestions it makes to the minds of the victims are always the same. Its one master sign is always this impulse to get away from the Ashram, away from myself and the Mother, out of this atmosphere, and *at once*. For the force does not want to give time for reflection, for resistance, for the saving Power to be felt and act. Its other signs are doubt; tamasic depression; an exaggerated sense of impurity and unfitness; the idea that the Mother is remote, does not care for one, is not giving what she ought to give, is not divine, with other similar suggestions accompanied by an inability to feel her presence or her help; a feeling that the Yoga is not possible or is not going to be done in this life; the desire to go away and do something in the ordinary world—the thing itself suggested varying according to the personal mind. If it were not this one invariable hostile force acting, there would not be this exact similarity in all the cases. In each case it is the same obscurities thrown on the intelligence, the same subconscious movements of the vital brought to the surface, the same irrational impulses pushing to the same action: departure, renunciation of the soul truth, refusal of the Divine Love and the Divine call.

"It is the vital crisis, the test, the ordeal for you as for others—a test and ordeal which we would willingly spare those who are with us but which they call on themselves by persistence in some wrong line of movement or some falsification of the inner attitude. If you reject entirely the falsehood that this force casts upon the *sadhaka*, if you remain faithful to the Light that called you here, you conquer and, even if serious difficulties still remain, the final victory is sure and the divine triumph of the soul over Ignorance and the darkness . . .

* Title, native right to a vocation, suitability.

# SRI AUROBINDO CAME TO ME

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"I do not wish to disguise from you the difficulty of this great and tremendous change or the possibility that you may have a long and hard work before you; but are you really unwilling to face it and take your share in the great work? Will you reject the greatness of this endeavour to follow a mad irrational impulse towards some more exciting work of the hour or the moment for which you have no true call in any part of your nature?

"There is no true reason for despondency, in nothing that has passed in you or which you have written do I find any good ground for it. The difficulties you experience are nothing to those that others have felt and yet conquered them, others who were not stronger than you . . .

"All that is needed is for your psychic being to come forward and open to the direct and real constant inner contact of myself and the Mother. Hitherto your soul expressed itself through the mind and its ideals and admirations through the vital and its higher joys and aspirations; but that is not sufficient to conquer the physical difficulty and enlighten and transform Matter. It is your soul in itself, your psychic being that must come in front, awake entirely and make the fundamental change. The psychic being will not need the support of the intellectual ideas or outer signs and helps. It is that alone that can give you in the direct feeling of the Divine the constant nearness, the inner support and aid. You will not then feel the Mother remote or have any further doubt about the realisation; for the mind thinks and the vital craves, but the soul feels and knows the Divine."

I can still recapture the thrill the last sentence gave me and I came back to normal.

Then came another attack which was more serious—a couple of years later. The cause of it was of course my egoism and self-will, but in my ignorance, I attributed it to Sri Aurobindo's apathy to our sufferings.

"Why must you insist on staying thus in deep *purdah,*" I asked him rebelliously, "when we should be dying to hear just a word of reassurance direct from your lips? To succeed in any Yoga of Guruvada, the Guru must be loved, must he not? But how can one love a being who has become so remote as to taper off into all but a rumour? In silence I have prayed to you to grant me an interview, if you had really been omniscient as many here stoutly claim, you would have heard my anguished prayer since I came to you not because of any frustration (I threw away my career in the full flush of an all-round success) but because of my need for the Divine. And yet you rest in repose sequestered in your ivory-tower of God-knows-what consciousness and look calmly on while we sink in this relentless slough of despond!

"But although I am determined to end such a sterile relationship which can be of little use to you and a source of pointless suffering to me, I cannot bring myself to depart unless you consent to dismiss me with your blessings. For strange as it may sound to you, I cannot do without your blessing even when I decline to go on with your impossible Yoga."

To that came a rejoinder which he alone could write in reply to such blatant impudence!

"It is quite impossible for me to dismiss you or consent to your going away like this from us. If the idea of this kind of separation is possible to you, for us it is inconceivable that our close relation should end like this. I had thought that the love and affection the Mother and I bear you had been made evident by us. But if you say that you cannot accept it with the limitations on its outward manifestation that not our choice but inexorable necessity imposes on us for a time, I do not know how to convince you. I could not believe that you find it in your heart to go or take such a step when it came to the point. As it is, I can only appeal to you not to allow yourself to be swept away by this attack, to remain faithful even in suffering to your soul that brought you here and to believe in our love that can never waver . . ."

I could not "disbelieve" in spite of my "determination".

I wrote a little while ago that I could never feel sure about distinguishing between the human and divine movement of an impulse, say love or patience. What I meant was that I could not lay my finger on any clear line of demarcation. For when I come to think back to those early years of my stay in the Ashram, the memory of his inexhaustable tolerance returns to me with a strange emphasis on something beyond the reach of us humans. I do not know how to explain this but I cannot persuade myself that I feel this so powerfully now because he is no more, or because I have allowed myself to be carried away by my sentimentality. In other words, I feel today, more strongly than ever, that somehow I have been enabled suddenly, to read between the lines of so many of his letters which once I interpreted so differently. Thus what I said to him once in jest recurs to me today with a new ring of poignancy.

"You have told us, Guru," so I wrote, "that every *sadhaka* here represents a type and serves a Divine purpose in not only getting something from you but evoking something in you on the rebound. I had often wondered what purpose was served by *my* irruption here till the answer flashed, apocalyptically: I was sent here by the Divine to test your patience in a way none else possibly could: to bring out that is, the difference between the human patience and the divine.

"But," I went on to add, "you have at least one advantage which we, your testers, cannot claim: your divinity. No wonder you can be so patient with us since it is after all we who suffer, not you. That is why, I suppose, you look so sublime when we see your face, *au-dessus de la mêlée,* and therefore unperturbed, buttressed probably by the Supramental! Inevitably, equipped as you are with a temperament such as yours—so aloof from what Russell loves to call 'the hard world of facts'!

To that he promptly replied:

"But what strange ideas again! that I was born with a supramental temperament and that I know nothing of hard realities! Good God! My whole life has been a struggle with hard realities—from hardships, starvation in England and constant dangers and fierce difficulties to the far greater difficulties constantly cropping up here in Pondicherry, external and internal. My life has been a battle: the fact that I wage it now from a room upstairs and by spiritual means as well as others that are external makes no difference to its character. But of course as we have not been shouting these things, it is natural, I suppose, for others to think that I am living in an august, glamorous, lotus-eating dreamland where no hard facts of life or nature present themselves. But what an illusion all the same!"

"But is it altogether an illusion, Guru? I pursued unconsoled. "You have said yourself in one of your famous messages which we, humans, have been exhorted to believe. It assures us: 'The Divine gives Himself to those who give themselves without reserve in all their parts to the Divine. For them the calm, the light, the power, the bliss, the freedom, the wideness, the heights of knowledge, the seas of *ananda!*'

"You do take one's breath away, Guru! But my lament today is set in another key. It is that you wanted us to take it all not as mere rhetorical fireworks but as a concrete fact of indubitable experience, then it must follow, as the night the day, that none would be able after this to take seriously your trials and tribulations, far less presume to feel any compassion for you. How could one—after all this inexhaustible capital to your past, present or future? And then, since you are in constant communication with this obliging Divine of yours what have you really to long, suffer or sigh for? An Avatar like you (or even a mighty *Vibhuti)** has only to apprise Him, your Omnipotent Commissariat, and He will give you with both (or shall I say, with endless) hands all you need? For you and He being one He cannot possibly refuse you what you ask any more than the hand can the mouth when the coveted food is handy".

His reply came: "Your descriptions of Avatars and prophets are magnificent in colour. I wish it were sober fact that the Divine refuses us nothing—if He would start doing that, it would be glorious and I should not at all insist on constant beatitude. But from his representatives, Vibhutis, and Avatars, he rather exacts a good deal and expects them to overcome rather difficult conditions. No doubt they do not call for compassion, but, well, surely you can permit them an occasional divine right to a grumble?"

"Well Guru," I wrote back in a more conciliatory tone this time, "you can grumble on if it helps you overcome whatever difficulties you have to. But at all events do realise, for mercy's sake, that *we* cannot, if we grumble away in full chorus and for all our worth, overcome even such a difficulty as your smilelessness not to mention any others. And now on top of it all you foist this heavy Divine of yours on the fragile altars of *our* hearts, an Idol whose weight makes even you grumble. What hope is there then for the likes of us?"

To that he replied: "The Divine may be difficult, but His difficulties can be overcome if one keeps at Him. Even my smilelessness was overcome, which Nevinson had remarked with horror more than twenty years before—'the most dangerous man in India', Aurobindo Ghosh 'who never smiles'. He ought to have added: 'but who always jokes'—but he did not know that as I was very solemn with him, or perhaps I had not developed sufficiently on that side then. Anyhow since you have overcome *that*—my smilelessness—you are bound to overcome all the other difficulties also."

(Henri W. Nevinson, the well-known author, came to India in 1907 as a correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* and his book entitled *The New Spirit in India* published in 1908 made a deep impression not only on Indians but on the British bureaucracy as well, because he was not only gifted with vision but commanded a rare power of expression which could sway people. He sought out most men who were prominent in the then public life of our country and was most impressed by Sri Aurobindo's personality. Here is what he saw and felt in Sri Aurobindo even then:

"In an age of supernatural religion Aurobindo would have become what the irreligious mean by a fanatic. He was possessed by that concentrated vision, the limited and absorbing devotion. Like a horse in blinkers he ran straight, regardless of everything except the narrow bit of road in front. But at the end of that road he saw a vision more inspiring and spiritual than any fanatic saw who rushed on death with Paradise in sight. Nationalism to him was surrounded by a mist of glory, the halo that medieval saints beheld gleaming around the head of martyrs. Grave with intensity, careless of fate or opinion, and one of the most silent men I have known, he was of the stuff that dreamers are made of, but dreamers who will act their dreams, indifferent to the means. 'Nationalism', he said,

* "An Avatar, roughly speaking, is one who is conscious of the presence and power of the Divine born in him or descended into him and governing from within his will and life and action: he feels identified inwardly with this divine power and presence.

"A Vibhuti is supposed to embody some power of the Divine and is enabled by it to act with great force in the world, but that is all that is necessary to make him a Vibhuti: the power may be very great but the consciousness is not that of an inborn or indwelling Divinity." (From an explanatory letter he wrote to me in 1950).

# SRI AUROBINDO CAME TO ME

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in a brief address delivered in Bombay, early in 1908—'Nationalism is a religion that comes from God".)

Sometimes, we felt, we had gone too far, as here, for instance. His coming down to spar with such as we might redound to *his* glory, our remorse reprimanded, but what about the foil of our levity? I wrote to him once in such a penitent mood about a famous canon who had said to his brother: "Brother, you and I are exceptions to the laws of Nature. You have risen by your gravity and I have sunk by my levity."

"I hope, Guru", I wrote in conclusion, "that my epistolary frivolity will not disqualify me altogether as ineligible if and when you apply for a passport for me to the Sleepless Sentinel of the Kingdom of Heaven?" To that he wrote back: "Your 'epistolary frivolity' was all right. There is laughter in the Kingdom of Heaven though there may be no marriage there."

And he could give his absolving "laughter" because he could understand, just as he could understand because he could love, which had made him write to me a few months earlier:

"It is only the divine love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of darkness towards the Divine. The Galileo-like *Je-m'en-fiche-ism** would not carry me one step: it would certainly not be divine. It is quite another thing that enables me to walk unweeping towards the goal".

But strange as it may sound to many who are willing to take him as an embodiment of the Divine, that is, something beyond the ambit of human comprehension, the very assumption that he was divine, even when we could not define 'divinity' (except in that we could not claim him as one of us) made us fret and fume to the top of our bent. And from his watch-tower of summit-vision he must have seen that clearly for has he not written apropos that mortality finds the unmitigated Divine so hard to bear that it is actually impelled to reject its boons of immortality?—

*Earth's grain that needs the sap of pleasure and tears*
*Rejected the undying rapture's boon—*

which he probably regarded as one of the salient symptoms of earth's resistance to any divine descent, or rather mortality's innate antipathy to Immortality as a result of which

*It murmurs at its sorrowless happiness.....*
*Inflicting on the heights the abysm's law*
*It sullies with its mire heaven's messengers*
*And meets the sons of God with death and pain.*

And it was not a mere regret he expressed but a deep tragedy for these "sons of God" that it had to be, down the ages,

*The cross their payment for the crown they gave.*

In the Ashram most of us gave ample proof of being to some extent responsible for this grievous state of things insomuch that it weighed on our minds all the time, and yet we saw no way out, naturally, being not only sceptical about the possibility of the divinization of the human elements in us, but actually opposed to it in practice, if not in theory, a fact which probably made him sigh in *Savitri*:

*A dark concealed hostility is lodged*
*In the human depths, in the hidden heart of time*
*That claims the right to change and mar God's work.*
*This all must conquer who would bring down God's peace.*
*This hidden foe lodged in the human breast*
*Man must overcome or miss his higher fate.*
*This is the inner war without escape.*
*Hard is the world-redeemer's heavy task;*
*The world itself becomes his adversary,*
*His enemies are the beings he came to save.*
*The world is in love with its own ignorance.*

Yes, he had indeed his work cut out and he knew it. Years ago he wrote to me that he had been "dredging, dredging, dredging, the mire of the subconscious", and he hinted at the same resistance in a letter to Nirod: "It (the supramental Light) was coming down before November, 1934, but afterwards all the mud arose and it stopped. But there are red crimson lights. One is Supramental Divine Love, the other Supramental Physical Force." Somewhat at sea, I asked him what was his drift. He sent me only four lines of an unpublished poem* by way of explanation which I quoted subsequently in my *Among the Great:*

*He who would bring the heavens here*
*Must descend himself into clay*
*And the burden of earthly nature bear*
*And tread the dolorous way.*

But to revert to the human. For I do not want to convey the impression that although we were often enough conscious of our deep limitations we were always unhappy on that account or that Gurudev and the Mother wanted us to go on our way brooding profitlessly about our shortcomings and *lacunae*. Did he not once write to me semi-humourously that he had all along wanted to follow the easier—that is, the sunlit path because he himself was "constitutionally lazy"—which made him, unheroically "prefer the easiest and the most automatic method possible!" I doubted whether this could really be "easy" for aspirants such as we! Anyhow I persevered in reminding him of his dark hints in the past that his Integral Yoga bristled with difficulties. Had he not also written in an oft-quoted letter of his: "I call no one in the world, nor am I here to convert anybody", etc.? In the end I wrote: "Such being your published views, why do you object to the path of *vairagya*† which I propose to take especially when I feel deeply discouraged by all sorts of adverse suggestions?"

To this he replied, once again, with his characteristic understanding solititude:

"It is evident that something in you, continuing the unfinished curve of a past life, is pushing you on the path of *vairagya*—in spite of our preference for a less painful one—something that is determined to be drastic with the outer nature so as to make itself free to fulfil its secret aspiration. But do not listen to these suggestions of the voice that says: 'You shall not succeed and it is no use trying'. That is the thing that need never be said in the Way of the Spirit, however difficult it may seem at the moment to be. Keep through all the aspiration which you express so beautifully in your poems; for it is certainly there and comes out from the depths, and if it is the cause of suffering—as great aspirations are, in the world and nature where there is so much to oppose them—it is also the promise and surety of emergence and victory in the future".

To which I replied that it was not that I was born a hero but that I wondered whether there really was an easier way, what he called "the sunlit path" in this world of dominant shadows.

He answered in the affirmative and wrote:

"The sunlit path can only be followed if the psychic is constantly or usually in front or if one has a natural spirit of faith and surrender or a face habitually turned towards the sun or psychic predisposition (e.g. faith in one's destiny) or acquired the psychic turn. That does not mean that the 'sunlit man' has no difficulties; he may have many, but he regards them cheerfully as 'all in the day's work'; but if he gets a bad beating, he is capable of saying: 'Well, that was a queer go, but the Divine is evidently in a queer mood and if that is his way of doing things, it must be the right one; I am surely a queerer fellow myself and that, I suppose, was the only means of putting me right'. But everybody can't be of that turn, and surrender which would put everything right is, as you say, difficult to achieve completely. That is why we do not insist on total surrender at once, but are satisfied with a little to begin with the rest to grow as it can".

But do what we would, we simply could not keep our faces "turned towards the sun", feeling sometimes too deeply discouraged by the darkness that deepened before us as we marched on. But although it was true that the more we tried to follow the easier sunlit path, the more we found it difficult to cleave to the right attitude, yet it would be *untrue* to say that the struggle brought us nothing but pain: it taught us invaluable lessons; unmasked little by little the tricks of the ego; gave us joy whenever we fought its suggestions down and often enough got our self-will to bow progressively to the Guru's will or our pride to chase the false preconcieved notions so that the true notions might have some niches to settle in like white doves of purity. There was also the joy of receiving Gurudeva's letters, making a joint effort to obey him and the Mother and last, though by no means the least, basking in the beneficent rays of her approving eyes. And then, as the days passed, we grew more and more conscious of the supreme importance of her gracious self, the self of sweetness, beauty and unfailing compassion. Also the more we came to appreciate this, the more our hearts went out to her till in intermittent, if somewhat rare, moments of bliss we simply walked on air, when our hearts sang gratefully to her:

*In lotus-groves thy spirit roves,*
*Where shall I find a seat for thee?*
*To Thy feet's tread, feet dawn-rose red,*
*Opening my heart Thy throne shall be.*
*All things unlovely hurt thy soul,*
*I would become a stainless whole,*
*O World's delight! All-beauty's might!*
*Unmoving house Thy Grace in me.*
*An arid heart Thou can'st not bear,*
*It is Thy will love's bonds to wear,*
*Then by Thy sweetness' magic completeness*
*Make me Thy love's eternal sea**

Yes, but may I still defend myself, or rather plead a little for the unrepentant human in each of us?

It would be true to say that the divinity in her did sometimes impel even rationalist sceptics like myself to write ecstatic poems on her heart-warming grace, but it would be equally true to say that the same divinity sometimes induced just the opposite moods of denial and revolt which urged us strongly to depart in hot haste and depart often enough for ever. At such crises, and here is my point, it was only her reassuring human ways which could win us back to allegiance. That is why I have often felt—I say this somewhat diffidently though—that in certain moments we do feel inexplicably moved by the utter "humanness" of the remote Divine, possibly because we have not yet learned how to feel truly at home in the

Continued opposite

* I do not care.
* Published later in his poem "A God's Labour."

† Earth-averseness.
* A translation by Sri Aurobindo of a Bengali song written by Anilbaran, one of his disciples.

# THE BIRTHDAY OF THE MOTHER—FEBRUARY 21

## THE FIRST "DARSHAN" AFTER THE PASSING OF SRI AUROBINDO

**By NORMAN DOWSETT**

Of the four "Darshans" celebrated at Sri Aurobindo's Ashram at Pondicherry, the Mother's Birthday has always been one of the smaller with regard to outside visitors. This time was no exception to that rule, but for those who were fortunate enough to be here it was indeed a memorable day. There was a distinctive atmosphere of "sweet intimacy" which grew more intense with the day. At 7-00 a.m. the sadhaks and visitors began to queue in the courtyard preparatory to entering the room that had been the sacred abode of the Master, the full splendour of whose spiritual life has yet to be understood by the world at large.

An ineffable Calm and Silence filled the Ashram courtyard, cool and shaded by the overhanging trees, yet a shaft of bright sunlight found its way through the leaves to the glorious bank of flowers on Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi tomb like a burst of morning glory.

Soon the waiting queue of devotees moved towards the meditation hall and up the stairs to Sri Aurobindo's room where three magnificent life-size photographs of the Master are arranged behind his bed which is now covered by a huge tiger skin. Here the Presence can be felt by the least sensitive as a Power and Sweetness, a Holiness, to fill the heart of all who pass this way. The queue moved silently on to the next room where the Mother received each with a radiant compassion, giving her blessing together with a new photograph of Sri Aurobindo, one which she has named Beatitude.

At six fifteen in the evening the Mother distributed a silver and gold insignia of her symbol to the members of the *J.S.A.S.A. (Jeunesse Sportive de l'Ashram de Sri Aurobindo)* after which there was a march past, the Mother taking the salute as the Ashram band (which has only recently been started) preceded the various groups. This was followed by the children's choir and then the band playing their latest piece. Then after concentration the Mother distributed cakes and the evening came to a close.

Up till the present the Mother has always contrived to remain in the background, but now that Sri Aurobindo's mighty work has taken a decisive and irrevocable step in transforming the earth nature, it is necessary to say something of this unique Individual who has always been the co-worker of the Master.

On this her birthday—February 21—the earth received into its bosom the female child that was destined to become the manifestation and embodiment of the Divine Shakti. The Power, Creatrix, the Master's companion, who, sacrificing the heavens for a mortal birth, came that she might ensure the fulfilment of his Supreme Endeavour: the Supramentalisation of the earth nature. She who was destined, in this earth drama of evolution, to play the role of Prakriti to his Purusha, Radha to his Krishna and Savitri to his Satyavan. She who is the Mediator between his Light and the human consciousness; bringing his Force to the disciple who, in the early stages of the Sadhana at least, could not bear Its Light or Power. And as the seeker enters more and more into the divine awareness, it is she who protects him on the path, she who leads him to the feet of the Master; her Wisdom and Sweetness that guide him in his actions, her Charm and Ananda that call him ever on towards the Light.

Her ways and movements are as sunlight playing upon rippling waters, her moods impossible for the mind of man to follow, yet she has chosen to approach us on this earth as a mortal, and bound herself to the laws of ignorance. In the words of the Master in his *Savitri:*

*Consenting to the slow deliberate Power*
*Which tolerates the world's error and its grief,*
*Consenting to the cosmic long delay,*
*Timelessly waiting through the patient years*
*Her coming they had asked for earth and men;*
*This was the fiery point that called her now.*
*Extinction could not quench that lonely fire;*
*Its seeing filled the blank of mind and will;*
*Thought dead, its changeless force abode and grew.*

If our beloved Master had to make, through a supreme gesture, the last sacrifice for humanity—yet it was to leave with her the divine assurance that his sacrifice would not be in vain. If it had to be that only he could pay the price for the ignorant suffering and weakness of humanity, then he made sure that she would remain, a physical contact to bear the rest of the world's burden for us on earth, leaving him free to work from a different orientation. For she is that other part of himself that can attend in detail to the earthly difficulties that still obstruct the full passage of the divine Light; and it is she who by her own Light and Power will melt away these difficulties from the earth consciousness.

In the contemplation of our Lord we cannot help but see her in him, as also he in her. Their separation is perhaps only to be perceived in the division of God's labour—if he is the supporting Power behind, she is the dynamic working out of that power on the various planes of consciousness; down to the physical plane, where as the Individual she embodies these powers in her terrestrial existence. His power is her power, his light her light. If there is any difference at all it is perhaps in the manner of distribution—the detailed apportioning out to those who are ready to receive is one of her especial functions—which she does with an exactitude beyond mortal understanding. Her Love and Compassion, her Power and Grace are always there for those who seek the Divine; yet with the same exactitude with which she administers the divine Power she expects complete sincerity and surrender from those who aspire for the Power to help them.

Our Master has said in that never-to-be-forgotten book, *The Mother*:

"The One whom we adore as the Mother is the divine Conscious Force that dominates all existence..... that upholds us and the universe. Transcendent, the original supreme Shakti, she stands above the worlds and links the creation to the ever unmanifest mystery of the Supreme. Universal, the cosmic Mahashakti, she creates all these beings and contains and enters, supports and conducts all these million processes and forces. Individual, she embodies the power of these two vaster ways of her existence, makes them living and near to us and mediates between the human personality and the divine Nature."

It is the Birthday of this Individuality of the Mother that we honour today—May the whole world, through us who have been fortunate enough to have come near her, offer up to the Divine our infinite gratitude; for as He says it is only through her that

*A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous hour,*
*A branch of heaven transplant to human soil;*
*Nature shall overleap her mortal step;*
*Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will.*[1]

To the Mothre we can offer all we have, give to her all our love, devote our lives to her service, surrender all the parts of our being to the Truth for which she stands; yet it is only through the words of our Master that we can know:

"The Mother's power and not any human endeavour and tapasya can alone rend the lid and tear the covering and shape the vessel and bring down into this world of obscurity and falsehood and death and suffering Truth and Light and Life divine and the immortal's Ananda."[2]

It was to India she came, the land of the Master, the only land where a rich flowering of the Spirit is possible, where there still survives—after all the centuries of change and upheavals, after the tremendous upsurge of pragmatism and science—the toleration of all moods of religious thought; to India, who in spite of herself and the present appearance of things, will be the first to realise the Golden Dawn which is her future destiny, for Sri Aurobindo has categorically declared:

"The Supramental is a truth and its advent is in the very nature of things inevitable."

1. "Savitri": Bk. III Canto IV. 2. "The Mother".

# SRI AUROBINDO CAME TO ME

—*Continued from opposite page*

unqualified divinity of the Divine Mother—at any rate not in the way we can in her declared humanity. I take it that this was what Gurudev meant when he wrote about the disguised World-Mother manifesting in the human frame of Savirti accepting humanity's "sorrow, struggle, fall" because she wanted

*To live with grief, to comfort death on her road....*
*The mortal's lot became the Immortal's share....*
*Accepting life's obscure terrestrial robe,*
*Hiding herself even from those she loved,*
*The Godhead greater by a human fate.*

To give one instance, even at the risk of ending this chapter perhaps on a note of anticlimax:

The day I arrived in Pondicherry I was in a mood of indescribable exaltation: had I not burnt my boats, ready for anything, out to brave no matter what, eager to suffer privations, welcoming even the total dearth of creature comforts? I had only one blanket for my bedding—not even a pillow: in my heroic mood I had got used to sleeping without one.

I had just spread my one and only rug on the floor of my room when a *sadhaka* came in and without a word fixed a pulley on the ceiling and then passed a wire over, to be attached to a bulb he held in his hand.

In my curiosity, I asked him what it was all about. "Mother has asked me to fix a moveable bulb"; he answered, and went on: "She said: 'Dilip is fond of reading and will probably find such an arrangement convenient'."

I was strangely moved. I had just arrived in an Ashram I hardly knew anything about and I knew about her even less. But here she was not only thinking of me in the midst of her multifarious responsibilities, but actually and actively ministering to my needs just like a human mother, solicitous even about my creature comforts, when I had come in such a heroic mood ready for any tussle with the grim Lord of my destiny!

In my heedlessness I may forget many a manifestation of the divine glory in her, but the memory of this utterly human mother in her will remain undimmed.

REGD. NO. B. 5525



# KURUKSHETRA UP TO DATE

## BY A. L. CRAMPTON CHALK

The cyclic nature of human events, within the cosmic mechanism of unfolding evolution, is perhaps the most incontrovertible principle of our progression in consciousness. Situations that faced our fathers, grandfathers, and most remote ancestors face us today with only the external circumstances changed to suit later material developments, but with the inner soul and meaning unchanged. The inner passions, powers, aspirations and spiritual strivings are the same but only the externalities of the circumstances change to puzzle us. It might almost seem that human psychology does not change, but only varies in the means it uses from time to time to express itself. The spiritual philosopher believes, of course, that human nature, i.e., its psychology, does change but so slowly and imperceptibly as not to be readily discernible from generation to generation.

For instance, Dhritarashtra today can be seen seated as firmly in his kingdom as ever he was on the eve of the battle of Kurukshetra. The reader can use his own guess as to his postal address. In his *Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita,* Sri Krishna Prem says (p. xxv): "Dhritarashtra.... represents the empirical ego, the lower and transient personality which, blinded by egoism and foolish infatuation, wields a nominal sway over the kingdom of the body which it has unjustly seized..." In our reading of the glyph, the translation of the Dhritarashtra symbol from the individual to the national or racial level means that it represents the blind materialism of intellectual infatuation which has unjustly seized—or is attempting to—the whole of the civilised world.

If this is so, what possible value can there be to the political tags and slogans which are flung about these days like intellectual confetti, and with about as much striking force so far as impact on the real problem that faces humanity is concerned. To say that a man is a Communist says precisely nothing; to say that he believes he should try to enslave his fellow-men to his own power and ideas and ways of life means everything. A man who says he is a Democrat tells you nothing until he says whether or not he believes in the essential freedom of choice of every human being to live his own life in his own way, saving only the equal rights of his neighbours to do the same thing. This childish game of "calling names", so beloved of politicians, is one of the weapons of Beelzebub, the father of lies, who notoriously himself uses many names to confuse his dupes. How supremely silly a victim would appear who did not run away from a man advancing upon him with a dagger, merely because the ruffian continued to assure the bewildered innocent that his intentions were entirely peaceable! Running away is, of course, only possible to individuals who have somewhere to run; the intended victim may be more fortunate and have weapons which he can seize for his defence.

The free and democratic world will remain free and democratic only if it can see through the maze of wordy spells which is being wound about it by its inevitable and natural enemies. It must make up its mind what it wants to live—or die—for and be sure that these precious things are not just words empty of meaning; words there must be, since we are so constituted, but they can be things of power and not veils for meanings.

Sincerity is the touchstone of power in the meaning of words, as it is in human beings. If the devil quotes Holy Writ for his own purposes it is not difficult for a sincere man to spot the deception—so long as he will keep his mind and soul unencumbered from spells cast by mere words. Under the doctrine of "Communism" the world has seen vile and bloody mischief done to human beings in many parts of the world; no floods of rhetoric or other manifestations of words will alter this. Under the banner of "Democracy" many evils have been promulgated and wrongs done. But it does not take more than a modicum of intelligence to see that the Communism of the high exponents of this system is dedicated to the empirical ego, the lower and transient personality and everything that is comprised by the practice and adoption of materialism and the utter banishment of the spirit of human life. Indeed, it does not take any intelligence at all, since the framers of academic Communism have stated, and always reiterate, that the above is exactly so.

Surely the simple realisation of this incontrovertible fact should help a lot of people to make up their minds about the significance of things to come, their duty, and their destiny? Dhritarashtra, the arch materialist, tried to keep his unruly sons in check, but these forces sprung from his own loins were not to be balked of the enjoyment of their passions; they would have violence at all costs. If there is a moral it does not need much pointing, only it is good to reflect how the Battle of Kurukshetra went in the outcome.

Finally, it is well to remember the injunction to Arjuna, the striving and sincere soul who was overcome by pity for himself and the situation which confronted him and his humanity. Krishna exhorted him in the flaming verse in which the Gita sums up the whole militant duty of mankind—"Throwing every deed on Me, and with your mind fixed upon the Self, resolve to fight! Thus, freed from hope, devoid of egoism, and without anxiety."

# BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

## FROM PSYCHOLOGY TO RELIGION

### WILLIAM JAMES by MARGARET KNIGHT (Pelican Books, 1sh. 6d.)

William James stands at the parting of ways between the old psychology and the new scientific psychology. Psychology was formerly defined as the science of the mind. Considered as an entity, "the mind" is to an empirical science such as modern western psychology a metaphysical concept which it chooses to regard as being of no direct use to its own purpose. The Structuralists, however, could define an individual mind as the sum total of a man's conscious experiences. The secondary Functionalists accepted this definition, adding that the role in life of consciousness must be considered. It was left to the primary Functionalists to define mind as the sum total of mental functions, though they admitted the difficulty of drawing a sharp distinction between these and the other functions of the organism. William James was the precursor of functional psychology, with a conviction that consciousness was not a mere frill or epiphenomenon but rather a genuine causal factor in life and biological survival. Every sensation or feeling, besides its mere existence, has a function as referring to some kind of an object, knowing it and also choosing or rejecting it. Moreover, "every possible feeling produces a movement", or sometimes an inhibition of movement. Conscious processes are thus tied in with the environment on both sensory and motor sides.

William James was born in New York in 1842. His father was a Swedenborgian mystic, whose mysticism did no damage to his wit and humour; and the son was not lacking in any of the three. He was sent with his brother Henry to private schools in France, where they fell in with the work of Charcot and the other pathologists and took, both of them, a turn to psychology; one of them, to repeat an old phrase, proceeded to write fiction as psychology, while the other wrote psychology like fiction. The greatest work of William James was almost his first—*The Principles of Psychology,* a fascinating mixture of "anatomy, philosophy and analysis"; for in James, to quote Will Durant, "psychology still drips from the foetal membrane of its mother, metaphysics." Yet the book remains the most instructive and easily the most absorbing summary of its subject.

It is, however, in his analysis and description of Religious Experience that William James stands almost alone. The new psychology started by Freud and his associates is too prone to dismiss religious experience as an "illusion", a pure fiction created by the repudiated impulses of mankind with a view to find a kind of fairy land for free unobstructed movements. But for William James the facts of religious experience are facts among other facts of human experience and, in the capacity of yielding knowledge by interpretation, one fact is as good as another. The total-Reality which enters our awareness and appears on interpretation as an empirical fact, has other ways of invading our consciousness and offers further opportunities of interpretation. The revealed and mystic literature of mankind bears ample testimony to the fact that religious experience has been too enduring and dominant to be rejected as mere illusion. The influence of the celebrated work of William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* has been very great; and to it is largely due the fact that psychology, which until very recently was commonly regarded with hostile suspicion by the leaders of religious thought, as well as by the rank and file, seems now in a fair way to become the chosen handmaid of theology and even its principal support. For, since the publication of this book, there has sprung up what may almost be called a new branch of literature in the shape of several journals and a stream of articles and books devoted to the psychology of religious experience and written for the most part by theologians.

The volume under review is a lucid and connected account of James's psychological teaching, compiled from the *Principles,* the *Briefer Course,* the *Varieties of Religious Experience* and selections from his other books, linked together by a running commentary and evaluated in a biographical and critical introductory essay. Mrs. Knight's introduction is both informative and interesting and accurately appraises James's position as psychologist and philosopher. Incidentally this is the first of a new series of Psychological Pelicans. The idea of this series is to present the great psychologists in accordance with the principle: *Let the man speak for himself.*

WILLIAM HOOKENS.

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