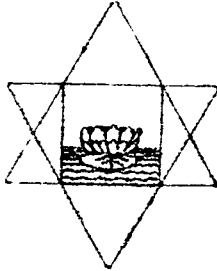


MOTHER INDIA

NOVEMBER 1952

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

I believe the descent of this Truth opening the way to a development of divine consciousness here to be the final sense of the earth evolution.

SRI AUROBINDO

*A new Light shall break upon the earth,
a new world shall be born: the things that
were promised shall be fulfilled.*

Sri Aurobindo

*Translated from the Moiner's
"Prayers and Meditations."*

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

Managing Editor
K. R. PODDAR

Editor:
K. D. SETHNA

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“A PATHWAY TOWARDS IMMORTALITY”

K. D. Sethna

November 24, 1926, was the day on which Sri Aurobindo went into seclusion for concentrated Yogic work towards the creation of a new humanity. In the forefront he put, as *guru* and guide to his disciples, one whom he regarded as the spiritual Mother of the greater world that was to be. On this day, when the Mother's genius of spiritual organization took up the group of souls dedicated to the Aurobindonian ideal, the Ashram was conceived and set growing to be the nucleus-light of the divine Consciousness into which mankind was intended to be reborn. In the years that followed, this day was one of those few on which Sri Aurobindo, seated side by side with the Mother, used to give *darshan* to the hundreds who gathered in Pondicherry to pay them homage.

But since 1950 the Mother alone has been visible on this day as on others like it. For, Sri Aurobindo who had retired for twenty-four years from common outer contact with the world chose to retire still further and, on December 5, 1950, withdrew from even his body. It will be two years next month since that momentous event and those five days of magnificent mystery when he lay in state, with not a sign of decomposition, and men and women in their thousands filed past that picture of imperial repose which was yet to the deep-seeing soul the dynamo of a divine energy let loose on the earth. Also, to the deep-seeing soul, on every *darshan* day after the great withdrawal the Mother has never sat alone. Sri Aurobindo, conscious and alive though not in the corporeal sheath, has been there, unmistakably felt in the double intensity of spiritual light that the Mother's bodily presence has manifested in Sri Aurobindo's physical absence. It is as if the wonderful work that was his could be, after a certain point of progress, best done by packing the whole force of it into one form instead of two. Two can indeed be glorious company for revealing what the Upanishads have called “the Light by whose shining all this shineth”, but sometimes a solitude of one can be a more potent focus for setting aflame what the Vedas have termed “the darkness which is enwrapped within darkness”.

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To get a glimmering of what happened on November 24 in 1926 and what lies behind the Mother's apparent solitariness on the same day now and what Sri Aurobindo brought about on December 5 two years ago, we must understand this Vedic phrase. While the Rishis saw an absolute and perfect Spirit that is all and more than all, a transcendent and a universal Godhead, at once personal and impersonal, while they saw also within all a divine dweller ever evolving forms higher and higher, they did not fail to see that this evolution is often a most paradoxical story because the transcendent and universal and immanent Godhead has worked out the dynamics of our cosmos from a first foundation of gigantic unconsciousness, a vast welter of blind brute energy. Hidden in the energy are all omniscience and omnipotence, but the secret divinity is formidably locked and breaks out by a most difficult process. Hence the rise of life and mind in a context of enormous randomness and devious waste, as though it were an emergence through layer on obstructive layer, through labyrinth on misleading labyrinth of gloom.

Yes, the Rishis recognised the immense obscurity at the roots of life and mind. They recognised too the necessity not only of ascending to the domains of knowledge and bliss beyond earth but also of disclosing in its full splendour the Sun, as they put it, lost in the Cave of Night. To bring about that disclosure, the cave-walls must be demolished. But how were the ancient barriers to be broken down? The question seems to have met with no positive answer. Hence the later Indian masters of Yoga read, in that irreducible opposition which introduced some ever-resistant element of the undivine into all our parts of nature, an enigmatic *maya* which, being unconquerable, has to be evaded by a world-exceeding absorption of the inner being into an infinity that has no form, an eternity that has no movement. Even the less intransigent masters felt that ultimately the world was the field of a play, *Lila*, without a *denouement* a play which could be inwardly ecstatic to a God-lover but never completely resolvable in its outward terms to God's freedom and light and beatitude and immortality.

Sri Aurobindo harks back to the Vedic endeavour. Not only the Godhead above, around and within, but also the Godhead below is the object of his Yoga. Unless the Godhead below is compassed and set free completely in the forms of evolution, there can be no overcoming of those resistant elements that have made mysticism a magnificent failure, the grandest human achievement that yet could not bring heaven to earth. Of course nothing else than mysticism can hope to build a perfect life fulfilling man to the innermost and

the outermost. However, mysticism must open its eyes to the darkness enwrapped within darkness and find some means of irradiating it.

If the old spirituality fell short, it was because the means remained undiscovered. Sri Aurobindo's teaching is that there must be in the infinite Divine the power that put forth the formula of a huge involution as the starting-point of an endless evolution and that in this power must reside the key to the irradiation of the Vedic darkness so that the Godhead may stand manifest in the very atoms of matter, secure in them as in its own home since matter would release in its own terms the Supreme Spirit crypted within it. This power he calls Supermind, Truth-Consciousness, Gnosis. To make the Supermind descend into earth-life, to carry it down into the Cave of Night and, by making the "Sun on the head of the Timeless" join the Sun immured below the feet of Time, render possible a perfect existence here and now, an existence no longer open to invasion from the nether glooms nor liable to slip down into their abyss—this is the epic of the Aurobindonian Yoga. Its uniqueness lies, on the one hand, in the full realisation of the hitherto unexplored and undynamised Supermind where the Truth is wide-awake and, on the other, in the full fathoming of the hitherto evaded and untransformed "inconsistence" of matter where the Truth is deep-asleep. This uniqueness leads us to look upon Sri Aurobindo as, in the most literal sense, the Scientist of the Spirit—one who in the light of the highest spiritual Knowledge grapples with the plane of Matter, the basic sphere of Science, and asserts that, until the heart of matter's mystery is spiritually entered and possessed, the Life Divine can never become for embodied souls an assured reality, an established and consolidated evolution. For evolution means not just the emergence of the higher from the lower: it means also the transformation of the lower by the higher, the integration of it into a richer value. To evolve is to climb to the top of the scale and then turn back to the bottom in order to master it with the peak's puissance.

But the significance of mastery must be properly grasped. There is the old word *siddhi* doing duty for it in spiritual parlance. It is not sufficient, as ordinarily interpreted. For, it suggests a gripping and shaping of recalcitrant substance—the substance itself regarded as alien to the force that grips and shapes. Such *siddhi* can never have permanence inherent in it nor can it reach down to very essence. Whatever it does is by way of sustained miracle and constitutes a splendid superimposition. It is not something natural, intrinsic, inevitable. The latter is possible only if the gripped and the shaped is not essentially different from the gripper and the shaper, but is the same

being in a phenomenal form put out of the original Perfection for a particular process of self-loss and self-finding. The utter concealment, the absolute involution, comes as the last step of a graded devolution from the Supermind and serves as the first step of a graded evolution due to an expressive push upward from below by the hidden powers and an evocative pressure downward upon them and a progressive entry into them by the same powers—life, mind, Supermind—which have their planes above. What Sri Aurobindo, therefore, means by mastery of the black nadir of existence by the golden zenith is nothing superimposed by a miraculous seizure—it is the Supreme coming into His own and fulfilling in evolutionary Time a figure of the perfect that He is in His Truth-Consciousness, His plane of creative archetypes which joins the eternal to the temporal. That is why Sri Aurobindo has said that the supramental manifestation is in the very logic of earthly things and is the final sense of the developing terrestrial nature. As such it will be intrinsically sustained, permanent—matter itself crystallising as Spirit.

However, the luminous crystallisation cannot take place without unprecedented labour on the part of those whose mission it is to turn the potentiality of it into actuality. The promise that the potential would be the actual as a result of his Yoga is the significance of November 24, 1926, when the towering ascent that Sri Aurobindo had accomplished was matched by the crossing of a critical point of descent. This day was the culmination of year on long year of travel along uncharted ways of the inner life—travel far beyond the goals of Nirvana, Moksha, Cosmic Consciousness, Krishna-realisation, union with the World-Creatrix which were reached before he withdrew from the political field of British India to Pondicherry in 1909. It is known as the Day of Victory because it marked a decisive turn pregnant with the divinisation of material existence. But between the casting of the seed and the advent of flower and fruit there must again be a mighty passage through the unknown. And here the unknown was the penetration more and more of the Vedic darkness with the supramental Gnosis. All the old Yogas move out of the gloom of mortal ignorance into the Immortal's light. The Aurobindonian discipline alone wants the illumined soul not to pause there but to adventure into a gloom of which mortal ignorance is only an attenuated form—the abyss from which evolving life and mind have sprung and which must be conquered if life and mind are to be completely divinised, for, unless matter is also divinised, the embodied deity will always have feet that are fragile. The promise of Victory could grow a realised Triumph

only by Sri Aurobindo's becoming at the same time a Pilgrim of Day and a Pilgrim of Night.

The pilgrimage through occult regions of consciousness totally involved within matter is the stupendous sacrifice Sri Aurobindo was giving for decade on decade from the time the Victory had been promised, bearing—as a line of *Savitri* phrases it—"the fierce inner wounds that are slow to heal" Nothing save Divine Love in the supreme degree could support him in such a journey—Divine Love that throws itself out infinitely to lead the evolving world, sparing itself no struggle however dangerous, no self-immolation however exorbitant. A body that housed the illimitable puissance of the Supermind and could grow permeated with the Light beyond this universe of death took upon itself not the mere task of an extraordinary individual transformation but the giant labour of being representative of all bodily life and hence accepting a universal responsibility so that the hope of an entire transformed mankind may result from its achievement. In a Yoga thus representative and responsible the greatest apparent advantages, the most striking personal benefits, can be thrown away in a dire strategy of losing the immediate all to gain the ultimate all for the race. Understanding this, we have to view the events that occurred in the first week of December in 1951—the attack by a fearful malady, uraemia, symbolic of the "inconscience" of the depths surging to drown the heights, the acceptance of it in spite of the Supermind's inherent ability to ward off all disease, the day-to-day aggravation on the one hand and on the other the response of the descending Supermind to the sacrifice being given by a leader of the evolution for the whole earth's sake, the deadly suffusion of the leader's body with the uprising poison and yet the lack of the least trace of discolouration and decay for over 111 hours in tropical climate, the spectacle at once of death and of its transcendence, as though to proclaim in a convincing parable that through the aspect of defeat a triumph was being worked out in the future that lay with Sri Aurobindo behind the visible scene and, here before us, with his companion in the creation of a super-humanity: the Mother.

We await the flaming up of that future from the tenebrous fuel offered to the imperishable Splendour by the strategic sacrifice of Sri Aurobindo. What marvels the flaming will lay bare none can fully gauge. But, if the words of one who incarnated the Truth-Consciousness can be believed, the flaming is certain, and the Mother's eyes are a mirror of the things to be. They bear ever brighter witness to the prophetic close of that poignantly profound sonnet written by the Master of the Supermind's everlasting Day:

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*I made an assignation with the Night;
In the abyss was fixed our rendezvous:
In my breast carrying God's deathless light
I came her dark and dangerous heart to woo.
I left the glory of the illumined Mind
And the calm rapture of the divinised soul
And travelled through a vastness dim and blind
To the grey shore where her ignorant waters roll.
I walk by the chill wave through the dull slime
And still that weary journeying knows no end;
Lost is the lustrous godhead beyond Time,
There comes no voice of the celestial Friend,
And yet I know my footprints' track shall be
A pathway towards Immortality.*

MY CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Nirodbaran

PREFACE

The history of this correspondence dates back to the early thirties, 1933 to be exact, when I made the Ashram my permanent home. In 1930 I came here for my first "Darshan" and stayed for a month. Before leaving I wrote a letter to Sri Aurobindo about my future course of life, and intimated to him my disposition towards rather Karma-yoga than a life of meditation, I also asked him how it could at all be compatible with life in the world, and in what way my being could be prepared for Yoga if at a later date I wanted to enter into it. He wrote a fairly long reply, which was rather unusual for him to do to an outsider, as friends in the Ashram observed; they congratulated me on my good luck. Sri Aurobindo explained to me in this letter how the outer life can be a field of yoga and how work done as a part of Karmayoga and with the right attitude can be a very good training for the completely yogic life. But little of his advice was put into practice: the flicker of light kindled in the Ashram was enveloped by the darkness of the world around.

However, when I returned in 1933 and decided to stay on, I found that correspondence with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo was a regular feature of that period of our yoga. Piles and piles of note-books and letters used to be written, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo poring over them all night month after month, answering all sorts of questions, sublime and ridiculous, put by the sadhaks and sadhikas. This went on for eight years. On some the writing was obligatory, for others voluntary, but nobody wanted to allow such an opportunity to pass by, and all the old disciples of that period treasure that correspondence which has now become a hundred times more precious and endearing. I too began to write, but the answers received were for a year or so quite formal and matter of fact. It never occurred to me even in my wildest dreams that this relationship would soon take an intimate personal form. Yet it did, and in a surprisingly sudden manner. I was at that time working in one of the departments,—not the medical; even though a doctor, I had a strong distaste for the medical profession. One day, when my note-book came back from Sri Aurobindo, I began to read what he had written, when to my utter bewilderment I came across the sentence, "Well, sir, do you understand now?" I was so taken aback that I could not believe my eyes. "Is this a joke or a slip of the pen?" I said to myself, for I did not remember his having addressed anybody as "Sir!" Neither could I ask him about this strange phenomenon. But he did not keep

me long in doubt, for, from that day the whole correspondence changed its character and bore to me the *rasa* of Heaven's delight which Sri Aurobindo's pen alone could deliver and his many-faceted personality alone could create, for he was to me the very incarnation of *raso vai sah.**

From now on life became a song. Every morning I would wait in suspense for the arrival of the "divine post", as we used to call it. As soon as it arrived, I would fall upon it with avid hunger. How great was the thrill when I saw pages filled with a fine close handwriting though written at a tremendous speed! "Oh, how much he has written!" was the first outburst. And the contents used to be indeed a feast for the gods, though I must say it was for him a god's labour to answer so many letters and note-books in one single night. Sometimes, when least expected, the answers would be very generous in length, and when most expected, very meagre; but they always had on me an enlivening effect. The lightning flash of humour, the brilliant passage at arms, the arguments exposing to ridicule the utter hollowness of my unripe reasoning were things beyond my usual mortal fare. Burdened with delight, I used to run to Dilip Roy to share the sumptuous feast. How we would roar with laughter and enjoy all the thrashings given me for my wooden-headed logic! Dilip used to remark, "In your correspondence Sri Aurobindo has revealed himself in a totally new aspect. . . How lucky we are to have such a Guru!" Friends wondered how I dared to take such an extraordinary liberty with Sri Aurobindo; to some it even appeared sacrilegious. They asked, "Don't you tremble with fear when you face him during 'Darshan'?" Fear? Where was the question of fear when his face, his eyes would say *ma bhairh*,† his lips parted in a sweet smile and his whole body bending in love and sweetness to bless the head lying at his feet?

So we went on, Guru and disciple, with our daily literary duels, the Guru encouraging and allowing himself to be attacked on all fronts but ultimately throwing the puny adversary down with a benign laughter. But the disciple would shake off the dust, get prepared for another tussle and "though vanquished, would argue still." Readers may be sometimes struck by the silly questions asked, but the temptation to draw him out was so irresistible that we did not much weigh the wisdom of our queries. He gave us this exceptional privilege and we employed all our skill and art to dispossess him of his vast wealth of knowledge. As I have said, sometimes he was rather miserly, at

* "He is verily the Delight"

† "Have no fear"

other times he was abundantly lavish, reminding me of Sri Krishna in AE's poem:

*A miser with a heart grown cold;
And yet He is the Prodigal, the Spendthrift of the Heavenly Gold.*

The total result has been a long and invaluable series of letters on various subjects which will shine forever like jewelled letters on the breast-plate of Time.

This correspondence phase stopped after some years, but for a few of us the privilege continued. For myself, the necessity of mental reasoning was over and a fresh channel opened up, again in an unexpected manner. I started writing poetry in English, and Sri Aurobindo began to help me with his inspiration, his comments, instructions on rhythm, metre, etc., in one word, all the intricacies of poetic composition. This is an episode which is no less remarkable in its import as well as its appeal, though limited to the literary connoisseur. The correspondence, however, came to an abrupt end in 1938, when owing to an accident he injured his leg, and I came face to face with the *raso vai sah*. For me nothing on this earth can surpass the *rasa* and the beauty that we enjoyed all these years except the personal contact with him to which the accident opened the way. How an indirect contact through letters could be made so close, vivid and tangible is an art whose magic Sri Aurobindo alone seems to know. A phrase like "hold on! hold on!" when the sadhak is in a mood of despair, or "move on, move on," when he is curious to know whether he is moving at all, or a simple exclamation mark in the margin are things that can be immensely enjoyed if only the context is known. Besides, his way of dealing with different sadhaks according to their psychological make-up, discussing the same subject from different levels of consciousness appropriate to the stature of each, reveals a profound mastery of the art of penmanship. The charm of the correspondence will be half lost without knowing the person to whom it was addressed. It is generally admitted that the power of his pen has been equalled by very few either here or in Europe, and he has been acknowledged as a master of the English language by literary men. If Sri Krishna has bewitched the hearts of men by his flute, Sri Aurobindo has captured their hearts and minds by the magic of his pen.

What, however, remains to me a deep mystery and shall ever remain so, is his treating me like a close and intimate comrade when I had nothing in me to deserve such a privilege. My repeated questioning on that score failed to elicit any reply. His only answer was. "Find it out for yourself." At one time in a semi-humorous vein he

wrote to me, "I have been trying to intellectualise you, but all seems to be in vain." This could hardly have been the reason,—but is there any use speculating on things of divine dispensation? "God's *lila* cannot be understood," the saints have declared.

This in short is the story of our correspondence. As it lies before me a host of memories spring up from the submerged history of the past and colour my inner horizon with their rainbow hues. Many things have happened since then, many convulsions have shaken the earth casting their sombre shadows upon it, but receding when his power has intervened; one great dream of his life, the independence of India, has already been realised; the others are in process of being realised. Our own life has passed through many upheavals, but through all this flux and reflux things have advanced very far indeed in our inner world. Few there are who know even a little of the Herculean labour the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have unitedly and separately put forth, pursuing subtle, swift or slow methods according to the exigencies of time, now taking up one method, discarding it only to take up another, opening fresh viaducts, closing or blocking old ones, even risking their own lives to work for their divine goal. This unprecedented symbolic history has to be written in the future, that will be our epic,—as *Savitri* is Sri Aurobindo's,—in which our great mass of correspondence with him will find its proper place.

I cannot but dwell, at least for a while, in a reminiscent vein on that glorious past as I look again at this correspondence. Most men live in their past, we here live in our future, but the past contributes to the high consummation of that future and such a past recorded through the correspondence is like a brilliant page of one's ever-present life. The picture of the past floats again before my eyes: I look at his chamber from the corner of my room and imagine that he must now be busy at our letters. Then passing through the corridors of dream, I wake up to wait at the threshold of the morning hours for the divine post. There it comes carrying the heavenly breath and bearing the Spirit-touch. I pore on it and seem for a moment to touch the very hands that have struck those harmonious chords.

Moments pass and I still taste the "strange-ecstasied fruit". The aroma of His unbodied Presence recreates the "Darshan" before my vision—calm and serene, golden and majestic, eyes reflecting the Unfathomed, smile and gravity on the lips in succession as known and unknown pass by. Are these the hands that have culled from the vineyard of his luminous mind the luscious fruits of knowledge and filled

our mortal jars with its sparkling wine? Those the eyes that have passed sleepless nights over our daily tales of mixed hues, our babbles and stupid reasonings? Is this the mouth that has uttered through the eloquent pen volumes of speech just to assure one single person of his spiritual destiny, to promise all help and succour in the battle-field of Yoga?

Many other vivid associations renew the contact of the soul with the veiled summit-source. Who can exhaust these iridescent memories, who can extinguish their flames? Worship and prayer, work and an intense desire for the fulfilment of his mission,—the things with which he has inspired our souls, and the path that he has hewn through the virgin forest of our life, are a tale whose beginning only is disclosed, but whose end waits to be revealed by the future development of events. Above all, how much of his inner consciousness he has transfused into our blood through the medium of this correspondence, no one will be able to gauge; indeed, very few will be able even to appraise correctly. Only those who have been the recipients of that rejuvenating energy of the Divine Consciousness will understand its action, slowly, in the gradual process of self-unfolding. Our heart repeats the marvel of his name and awaits his arrival through the very pathway that he has built with so much labour of love and compassion.

SRI AUROBINDO'S FORCE

My letter to Sri Aurobindo:—

“Yesterday X and I had a discussion about the action of your Force. Try as I would, I could not convince him of its reality. Let me put before you the discussion in dialogue form as it actually took place.

X: I just can't believe that D. was cured by Sri Aurobindo's Force, unless I hear to this effect from Sri Aurobindo himself.

Myself: But the facts and figures are there; they show quite clearly that something utterly miraculous happened,—an abdominal abscess being cured without any material intervention, —symptoms subsiding, the temperature coming down from 103 degrees to 102, and then dropping to 99. As a doctor I am in a position to judge these things.

X: Maybe all this happened, but how do you know it was Sri Aurobindo's Force that brought about this sudden change? Be logical.

Myself: I am being logical. Everybody knows here that Sri Aurobindo's Force is constantly acting on us with a tremendous

power. Almost all of us have felt it and experienced it some time or other. D. was brought here under the Mother's instructions even though his condition was precarious; now, as he is also a sadhak like us, he will naturally be subjected to Sri Aurobindo's Force, so it seems quite obvious to me that he has been cured by this Force just as others have been. What other blessed force could have acted upon him, and if some force did act, why not the Force under which we are living and which is all the time animating us?

X: If that is so, what about the instances where the Divine Force has failed, and why does it succeed in some cases and not in others?"

Sri Aurobindo made the following marginal comment on this first part of my letter:

"The mistake is to think that it must be either a miraculous force or else none. There is no miraculous force and I do not deal in miracles. The word Divine here is out of place, if it is taken as an always omnipotently acting Power. Yogic Force is then better; it simply means a higher consciousness using its power, a spiritual and supraphysical force acting on the physical world directly. One has to train the instrument to be a channel of this force, it works also according to a certain law and under certain conditions. The Divine does not work arbitrarily or as a thaumaturge, He acts upon the world along the lines that have been fixed by the nature and purpose of the world we live in—by an increasing action of the thing that has to manifest, not by a sudden chance or disregard of all the conditions of the work to be done. If it were not so, there would be no need of yoga or time or human action or instruments or of a Master and disciples or of a Descent or anything else. It could simply be a matter for the *tathastu* and nothing more. But that would be irrational if you like and worse than irrational—'childish'. This does no mean that interventions, things apparently miraculous, do not happen—they do. But all cannot be like that."

My letter continued:

"Myself: I don't see how you can deny the reality of this Force. Were you able to write with such vigour before you came here?

X: I could work so much that people used to get surprised. Was that also Sri Aurobindo's force? And what about world figures like Y and Z, and the giants who sway men—is that the Divine Force?

* "Let it be so"

The discussion went on in this vein. Kindly throw some light on the spiritual consciousness.”

Sri Aurobindo's Comment:

“What is Sri Aurobindo's force? It is not a personal property of this body or mind. It is a higher Force used by me or acting through me. Of course it is a Divine Force, for there is only one force acting in the world, but it acts according to the nature of the instrument. Yogic Force is different from others because it is a special power of the spiritual consciousness.

“There was an obvious intervention in the case he speaks of—but the agent or process could only be determined if one knew all the circumstances. Such interventions are frequent; e.g. my uncle's daughter was at her last gasp, the doctors had gone away telling him that there was no more to be done. He simply sat down to pray—as soon as he had finished, the death symptoms were suspended and the girl recovered without further treatment (it was a case of typhoid fever). Several cases of that kind have come within my personal observation.

“I have marginalised on the Force—to write more completely would need more time than I have tonight. Of course, if it depends on a few cases of illness, it would be a thing of no certitude or importance. If the ‘Force’ were a mere freak or miracle, it would be equally trivial and unimportant, even if well-attested. It is only of importance if it is part of the consciousness and the life used at all times, not only for illness but for whatever one has to do. It manifests in various ways—as a strength of the consciousness evenly supporting the life and action, as a power put forth for this or that object of the outward life, as a special Force from above drawn down to raise and increase the scope of the consciousness and its height and transform not by a miraculous but by a serious, steady organised action following certain definite lines. Its effectiveness as well as its action is determined first by its own height and intensity or that of the plane from which it comes (it may be from any plane ranging from the Higher Mind upward to the Overmind), partly by the condition of the objects or the field in which it acts, partly by the movement which it has to effect, general or particular. It is neither a magician's wand nor a child's bauble, but something one has to observe, understand, develop, master before one can use it aright or else—for few can use it except in a limited manner—be its instrument. This is only a preface” (6-2-35)

Myself: "Your letter has given us quite a new and interesting point to think about. Our idea was that the Divine is always omnipotent, independent of all conditions and not limited by the particular plane from which He may act. But you give so many clauses under which the Force can operate successfully! K. then seems to be right when he says that if one has not got a particular possibility in him the Divine cannot make him develop in that direction. Pushing this a little farther, I would say that one must have a talent or capacity as a nucleus in him for the spiritual development he is going to have later. One *must* have it, the Divine cannot make anything out of *Shunyam*.

Sri Aurobindo's marginal comment: "What is Shunyam? It is out of the Silence that all things originated. All is contained in what you call Shunyam."

Myself (continuing): "But I may be wrong. It again seems possible that the Divine can do these things—even change an atom into a mountain. If He does not He has reasons of His own for not doing it. But then how is it that you spent so much Force on Z but to no avail? Is it that you did not use the supramental Force, which alone can work irresistibly without the necessity of adapting itself to existing conditions?"

Sri Aurobindo's comment. "Certainly. Supramental Force was not the force used in that case, it was mental-spiritual. In such cases the object of the Force has always the right to say No. I put the force on him because he said he wanted to change, but his vital refused as it had the right to do. If nothing in him had asked for the change, I would not have tried it, but simply put another force on him for another purpose . . ."

Myself: "There may be conditions and qualifications for the success of the Divine Force, but is it not also true that the Divine can rise above all conditions and act, and get a thing done if He wants to? You make a distinction between the Yogic Force and the Divine Force; but is not the former an outcome of the latter?"

Sri Aurobindo's marginal comment: "Of course, but all force is the Divine Force. It is only the egoism of the individual which takes it as his own. He uses it, but it is not his own."

Myself: "By the way, X did not question the reality of your Force for his poetry or other literary activities, but he said he could not admit that all his activities were through and through permeated by your Force, because he used to work with great vigour and energy even before he came here. Does this imply that if one had great energy previously, it would operate in the same way when one took to the spiritual life, and the conditions change?"

Sri Aurobindo's comment: ". . . Of course not—all the activities cannot be that. It is only in the Yogic realisation that one feels all one's activities to be from the one source—something from above or the Yogashakti or the Guru Shakti or the Cosmic Force or whatever it may be (all names for the same thing in different formations) driving the whole consciousness and being. What is one's own energy after all? You mean Nature's energy in you? It may in new conditions remain extant in some things, develop in others, fail or change in others. One can't make a rule."

I put a P.S.: "After the 'preface', is any chapter likely to follow, or is it going to be like so many other prefaces—nothing coming after them?"

This letter brought forth a very interesting reply, making him speak about his own sadhana:

"Perhaps in some weeks or some months or some centuries the chapter may follow! But I used the word preface to characterise the nature of what I had written, not in a prophetic sense.

"There are two things—Yoga Force in its original totality which is that of the Divine spiritual force, always potentially all-powerful, and Yoga Force doing its work under the conditions of the evolutionary world here.

"It is not a question of 'can' or 'cannot' at all. All is possible, but all is not licit—except by a recognisable process; the Divine Power itself imposes on its action limits, processes, obstacles, vicissitudes. It is possible that an ass may be changed into an elephant, but it is not done, at least physically, because of the lack of a process. Psychologically such changes do take place. I have myself in my time changed cowards into heroes and that can be done even without Yoga shakti, merely by an inner force. How can you say what is latent in man or what is incurably absent? I have developed many things, often even without any will or effort to do so, by Yoga which were not in my original nature. I may even say that I have transformed my whole nature and it is in many respects the opposite of what I began with. There can be no question about the power to change, to develop, to awaken faculties that were not there before; this power exists already, but it can be raised to an acme by being lifted to the spiritual plane.

"The rest is for the indefinable future. One day I shall certainly try to explain methodically and by examples what the spiritual force is, how it has worked on the earth-plane, how it acts and under what conditions—conditions not rigidly fixed, but plastic and mutable."

To be continued

THE SAMADHI OF SRI AUROBINDO

'Not on the surface' was there much 'to see'—
 Yet even our feeble hide-bound gaze could glean
His flame's exploits in realms of destiny
 That lifted veil on veil across the unseen.

Depth after depth, peak over peak, he dared—
 Slow-gathering man's coveted felicities,
Till sword-like out, above, the spirit flared,
 The sheath was lowered in the dark abyss—

Not as mere common dust returned to dust,
 But a divinised vehicle, Light-soaked golden seed
Whose dire potency would tear Matter's crust,
 And quicken Earth-stuff for its heaven's need.

Thrice blessed be the spot the body chose
 For the phoenix-crown of its Promethean role
The rest is here no silence, no repose—
 But a calm-faced, deep-driv'n whirl about the goal

Earth's settled dross is stirred by the charging Light,
 And the flux is churned to throw up from its thrall
The substance which will stand mortality's might,
 Whose plastic glow will answer Spirit's call.

A hush of expectancy now fills the air—
 Men come and kneel and lay their flowers and pray,
An aching sweetness, an animation rare
 Throbs—instinct with a Presence come to stay.

All's bathed in luminous peace and sanctity—
 A vibrant, tense, ethereal atmosphere—
A radiant faith is big with prophecy
 That the glorious hour of the golden Dawn is near

Beneath the fragrant, floral vesture gleams
 The sublime form of a god about to wake—
A brooding image of the one, it seems,
 Behind the scene, who bides his time to make

His new advent in our familiar shrine
 As a superman—the first to blaze the trail
Of a race of men terrestrially divine;—
 A marvel comes—we feel, we sense, we hail!

NARESH BAHADU

PAGES FROM A JOURNAL
THE EARLY CONVERSATIONS OF
SRI AUROBINDO

Compiled from the Notes of Anilbaran Roy

INTRODUCTION

Before Sri Aurobindo went into seclusion in order to carry on a yogic-spiritual action by which he could prepare conditions in earth-life suitable for establishing the Supermind, he used to have long conversations with his disciples. Exact verbatim reports of these were not taken down, but some of the disciples used to keep notes. Anilbaran Roy was in the habit of writing down after the conversations were over most of the things that had been discussed.

It is true that Sri Aurobindo later changed his views on some matters to a certain extent, not so much in their fundamental truth as in their application to life amidst the fast-changing conditions of the world, also, as his mastery over the world forces increased he was led to alter some of his views with regard to the working of the Higher Power in the earth-consciousness. Nevertheless, the fundamental truths he had previously expressed he did not reject but incorporated them in a larger and more complex unity.

At some places the notes taken down may not capture the correct tone of Sri Aurobindo's exposition and bring out the precise shade of meaning, or again they may fail to catch the right turn of phrase and the immaculateness of the expression, making the philosophical formulation suffer stylistically to some extent, but on the whole the journal does justice to the informal discourses Sri Aurobindo used to give to his disciples before he went into seclusion, and definitely succeeds in recreating the atmosphere of that period—an atmosphere of erudition and spiritual enlightenment, of friendship and good humour, of love and goodwill, an atmosphere that can only be possible among men who live together in brotherhood for the pursuit of a high spiritual ideal and look up to their God-realised leader to give them light and realisation.

“Synergist”

On Rebirth and Sex

At one of the evening talks somebody asked Sri Aurobindo, “If one practises Yoga in this life, will it be possible for him to take it up again early in his next life?”

“That depends upon the progress achieved,” Sri Aurobindo replied. “No general rule can be laid down. If the higher truth has come down and partly transformed the lower being, in the next life it will certainly be a help, but the Yoga will not be necessarily taken

MOTHER INDIA

up at once. The call will come easily, and when the Yoga is taken up, the former personalities touched by Yoga may come to the front and pursue further development; or the crude parts may come to the surface and the whole of the next life may be taken up in working these out—Yoga may not be taken up at all. All sorts of things may happen, depending upon individual conditions.”

“Is there any general rule that Indians get born in India, Europeans in Europe, and so on.”

“There is no such bar. As a matter of fact, there are very few here who have not the stamp of a foreign birth. You were a professor at Heidelberg”. . . . (laughter).

On the evening of 9th September, 1926, there was a discussion on the possibility of utilising set-backs and attacks in sadhana as opportunities for further progress. In this connection a disciple asked Sri Aurobindo if an attack of sex, instead of being a set-back, could be turned into a means for attaining progress.

Sri Aurobindo answered, “How can sex be made to help the spiritual life? In itself the sexual act is not bad, as the moralists say—it is a movement of Nature which has its purpose, and is neither good nor bad. From the Yogic point of view, the sexual force if properly utilised, can help to re-create and regenerate the being, but the manner in which it is used in ordinary life creates great obstacles for two reasons; first, it involves a great loss of vital force—it is a movement towards death, though this is compensated by the creation of new life. That it is a movement towards death is proved by the exhaustion felt after the act; many people even feel a disgust.”

“But statistics have been collected to show that married people live longer than bachelors.”

“That is a fallacy. It is like one man saying that he has lived to a ripe old age because he has not been smoking, and another quite the opposite thing—that he has done so even though he has been smoking.

“Secondly, the excitement and the act destroy the psychic possibilities of the man. He is separated or dissociated from the higher centres and goes downwards. People say that they take the attitude of Shakti taking the *bhoga* through them—but these are only words; I have never seen any man rising by such acts. People indulge in the lower movements, yield to the hostile forces, and at the same time pose as yogis. Even the Vedantic attitude is often made an excuse

for yielding to these forces; they say that the action of Nature, of hostile forces, is *maya*—illusion, that there is no virtue or sin, no good or evil, and then give themselves up to the lower vital forces. They offer an opening to the hostile forces and these use the lower movements for their own purpose.”

Then someone asked, “As regards the degrading effects of the sexual act, does marriage and legal intercourse make any difference?”

“Absolutely none,” Sri Aurobindo replied. “These moral injunctions are for the maintenance of society, for the welfare of the children born; but so far as yogic life is concerned, a sexual act with one’s own wife is as much harmful as that with any other woman.”

“But my original question was whether an attack from the adverse forces can be somehow utilised by the sadhak for making further progress.”

“Yes, by conquering it. The sadhak thereby acquires knowledge of the action of the hostile forces—also of the defects in his own nature which invite the attacks.”

“Is there anything more to it than this knowledge?”

“Yes; new openings may occur for the higher power, the strength increases, and so on.”

To be continued

Student

I am a student of thy infinity
With a heart simple like a blossoming flower;
Out of hushed caves there wakes an ecstasy,
In a blank breast to drink thy endless shower.

A god-will sprung from the inconscience’ sleep
In a stream of magic rushes thro’ my being
Of dumb nakedness to the soul’s silent deep—
And all a light that is a flickerless seeing!

I am a student of thy Truth’s triumphings
And I carry my heart to a dream-distant Sun
Where a giant wideness shall its wonder-wings
Spread over my trance in a deathless union.

Life shall new-glow in the lore of spirit-fire
To clasp the Unknown in a white-flame desire.

RENUKADAS DESHPANDE

THE EXPANDING BODY CONSCIOUSNESS (BASED ON THE MOTHER'S TALKS)

Nolini Kanta Gupta

The field of our physical activity is very limited. If you look at it closely you will find it indeed extremely narrow and our capacities confined within a small circle. We are bound by the outline of our material body. I cannot, for instance, be sitting in my room and at the same time doing gymnastics in the playground. If you wish to do one thing you cannot do another, if you are at one place you cannot be at another simultaneously. How convenient it would be if while I was writing at the table, I could get there immediately a book from a far-off shelf for consultation without moving or taking anybody's help! And yet is the thing so very impossible? We know, for example, of extraordinary—at least, queer—things happening at what are called “spirit *seances*”, things that cannot be explained by the normal functioning of the body senses; they are explained as interventions from the spirit world. In reality, however, spirits or ghosts have, in general, very little to do in this matter. It is action not of disembodied beings but of the normal human energies—especially the vital or life energy—freed from the body's control and exerting itself independently. An example, a true fact that happened, will best illustrate what I mean to say.

A young man, in Paris, a clerk at a railway station, used to receive there his *fiancee* and her mother from time to time. One day he was expecting them and waiting for the train time; they had to come by train. As he was busy with his work at the table, at about the appointed hour, people around him saw him all on a sudden bending down his head with a loud shout and then resting it on the table; he lay unconscious. In the meantime, what happened on the other side was a terrible railway disaster: the two women were involved in it. The trains were smashed and all passengers killed or mortally wounded. But, curious to say, the young woman, the *fiancee*, was found, living and almost unscathed, in the midst of the debris, within a sort of cover made by a fallen beam that lay across over her. She was pulled out with only a few bruises upon her body. Here is, however, the young man's version of the story. He said that as he was

working at the table, suddenly he heard the voice of his *fiancee* calling loudly for help and he saw in a flash, as it were, the situation she was in, he rushed out, not physically indeed, and ran and threw himself over the body of his *fiancee* to protect her; that is the only thing he could do. As a result he did in fact protect her. True, he did not rush out in his body, for that matter, if he had done, it would have been of no use. What rushed out of him was his vital body, a formation of that life energy which is most close to the body and almost as concrete as physical energy but much more powerful and effective. This vital power concentrated and projected out of him acted as a veritable shield over the woman. The young man himself, curious to say, bore marks of bruises upon his head as if a huge load had fallen upon it. A strong impact upon the vital can and does leave scars upon the material body. It is not an uncommon phenomenon. Many of the Christian saints (Saint Francis of Assisi, for example) are reported to have borne on their body the marks—the stigmata—of crucifixion of Christ's body; Ramakrishna too, it is said, once showed marks of scourging on his back when a boy was whipped in his presence.

All this means that the physical body is not man's sole means of action in the physical world. The physical extends and expands into more and more subtle modes of activity and all the more, not less, effective for that very reason. Behind the physical lies the subtle physical, behind which again is the vital physical and then the various grades of the vital. Indeed the vital or life energy as a whole is the real dynamism of all our physical activities and if it usually acts through its bodily instruments, it can act independently of them too; normally too it often acts in this way, only we are not conscious or observant enough to notice. A conscious concentration of the vital energy directed upon a material object can handle it with the effectivity of material energy. When it needs physical conditions it creates them, as the protective vital energy of the young man created the physical disposition of objects that formed a covert for the girl.

In the present case, the phenomenon happened automatically, without any premeditation on the part of the persons concerned; because the sympathy between the two was so strong, other considerations did not weigh in the balance against it. Needless to say, if one wishes to obtain conscious mastery of this occult power, one will have to go through a long and arduous discipline. But, if difficult, the thing is not impossible. In the matter of physical feats, for example, a particular development may seem for the moment beyond your reach; but

with practice and persistence, stubborn will and wise guidance, you can not only arrive at your immediate end but do much more. The story of many who have broken Olympic records is revealing in this respect. In the same way, one can master the subtle forces, if one goes about the thing earnestly and in the right way. It is more difficult—much more perhaps—but the way is there provided the will is there.

Three Poems

(1)

Mother, a mortal among mortal men you roam
Treading a narrow edge of earthly life,
Bearing the creature's heavy care-burdened hours,
Ever unperturbed by human love or strife.
Yet from your eyes the stars and suns take birth
And round you flame-born visions joyous flit
Weaving a magic aura of delight
And on your brows the dreaming centuries sit.

(2)

Tender as a flower yet thunderous in your might,
Dark demon forces from your presence fly
As, from their grip, with giant strength you wrest
Man's soul so kin to earth, to heaven nigh.
Through unnumbered births you roam to enact your high
Mission, still straying in regions veiled in night . . .
Soon shall you clear those deeps of titan shades
And flood with sun-dreams of supernal light.

(3)

The laughter of light is in your eyes, your smile,
And in your steps the aeons swiftly glide,
For you have glimpsed the prisoned god in man
Fiery-footed, puissant, ardent-eyed.
But still from matter's grasp must he be saved
And fate's unchanging law, whose circle vast
None may cross ever Him you nurse in arms
Maternal, till earth's tyrannies are past.

LOTIKA

THE SADHANA OF SRĪ AUROBINDO'S YOGA

COMPILER'S NOTE

In recent years Sri Aurobindo's teaching and his Ashram at Pondicherry have attracted a great deal of attention. People from India as well as abroad who visit this spiritual centre are greatly impressed by its numerous activities and by the perfect organisation of the collective life of its seven hundred and fifty residents. Nevertheless, many of them, though they appreciate the outer side of the Ashram life, find it difficult to understand in what way exactly the actual sadhana of the Integral Yoga is done, in the absence of a set form of discipline which they can see being followed by all alike, they are unable to have a clear grasp of the inner yogic life of the sadhaks and their spiritual development

It is therefore felt that an account of typical day-to-day sadhana of different disciples written by themselves and published in the form of a diary, will greatly help people to have an insight into the working of the inner life of the Ashram.

The account published below is entitled *My Sadhana with the Mother*. This account is all the more interesting and valuable because under each statement there is Sri Aurobindo's comment—often brief, but always illuminating. As the reader will go through it he will understand, apart from other things, the extremely important part played by the Mother in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga of Transformation, and how she and Sri Aurobindo have established a spiritual poise by which they act together on the sadhaks. He will also begin to realise how this Yoga cannot be done and followed to its logical consummation by one's own efforts, but only through the Mother.

"Synergist"

MY SADHANA WITH THE MOTHER

BY "AB"

April, 1935.

AB. When the outer Prakriti found it impossible to disturb me by subtle ways, it at last resorted to a physical means,—it pushed my old pain in front which was lying dormant all this time.

Sri Aurobindo. I hope it will soon be pushed out—meanwhile it need not disturb anything—the inner realisation.

12-4-35.

AB. The pain has again become active.

Sri Aurobindo. We shall have to cure it by constant application of the Force—but it is very obstinate.

13-4-35.

AB. I do not care for such attacks on my body even if they come with a much greater force. Moreover, the Mother has helped me to develop what may be called a "non-body sense". So how can such illnesses disturb or delay the sadhana? Let these attacks come—we shall tackle them

Sri Aurobindo. It must be got rid of by the Force—that is the only thing

16-4-35.

AB. Since the subconscious¹ is so very active and trying to veil the conscious and enlightened parts I shall have to revive my personal effort.

Sri Aurobindo Yes, you can do that.

AB. I presume the Mother wants that first of all, at least one part of our being should be kept in Her, so that whatever happens, there will always be something solid in us to lean upon

Sri Aurobindo Yes, that is the first necessity

16-4-35.

AB. By thus keeping one part in direct contact with the Mother we automatically weaken the fundamental hold of the forces of Darkness and Ignorance on the nature; and this becomes a great gain in the sadhana.

Sri Aurobindo. Yes.

AB. But we are not fully conscious all the time and in all conditions; therefore we may miss that inner contact with Her, especially when the darkness veils the heart and the inner being. The union is there all the same, but veiled.

Sri Aurobindo Even then the self ought not be veiled—it must remain conscious

AB. After realising this oneness we should look below from above instead of being satisfied with the union only and leaving the outer nature untransformed

Sri Aurobindo Yes, that is the next step after being securely founded in the self.

AB. The other question is, how are we to look below without getting involved in it? When one part of our being has joined itself with the Mother, it is easier, I suppose, to derive through it all the necessary help for the other parts—it becomes a sort of a channel

for the direct help of the Mother.

Sri Aurobindo Yes.

AB. From this general statement how much do you think is applicable in my case?

Sri Aurobindo. You must remain always aware of the self and the obscure nature must not be felt as the self but as an instrument which has to be put into tune with the self.

AB. The subconscious inertia is rising more and more every hour. It has enveloped almost all my active or conscious parts.

Sri Aurobindo. Keep the knowledge secure—do not allow that to be clouded

17-4-35.

AB. Today I had a new kind of attack. It came from the Mother to snatch me from the darkness and put me back into Her safe castle—Her Heart!

Sri Aurobindo. If an attack has that result, it is all right. It is true that if one has the true basis, then after every attack one finds oneself further advanced in progress.

AB. I wonder why the Mother does not ask me to forget altogether the subconscious, inertia and all, as She did with my pain.

Sri Aurobindo. If you can do so until the higher consciousness is entirely fixed and you yourself can live above in the Self with fixed peace, calm and joy in the inner being, it would be good. This is the ideal method—but is not always possible.

AB. Yoga becomes full of difficulties and falls only if one keeps an attitude of bargaining with the Divine Mother.

Sri Aurobindo. Right. That is the thing that should be got rid of entirely.

AB. If a sadhaka does not take care of his ego from the beginning it is possible that in the later stages he might come across a very strong spiritual ego.

When he finds that he is progressing wonderfully and the divine grace is with him he might demand special care and attention. Because of this cherished ego he might say "I am the Mother's instrument, more open than other sadhakas, so She must give me something more, I should have some extra grace from Her even physically (for the inner grace, there is no question, because it is always there)". The real cause for these desires and all this show is, that the ego wants to demonstrate before other sadhaks that the Mother loves him

more than all the others. The ego also takes many other forms according to the need and the occasion.

Sri Aurobindo. You are quite right—It is the ego that wants the satisfaction of being the first or specially singled out. It is this egoistic vital demand with all its consequent results and disturbances that made it necessary for Mother to limit the physical manifestation of nearness to a minimum.

AB. The difficulty is, that once any of these wrong movements are harboured consciously as by many, they remain as a stumbling block throughout the journey. It is very hard to throw them out afterwards.

Sri Aurobindo. You are right again. It becomes a persistent movement habitually repeating itself like a machine.

AB. There is another danger against which the sadhaka has to guard himself; it is of "helping" others in their sadhana. But how can he really help others when he is himself still imperfect? Some of course can help others to a certain extent, but the way in which they would do it would be different. They would do nothing till they felt an inner urge, till they felt that they had become a pure channel of the Mother's force and that it was the Mother who was really helping and not they. Ordinarily it is the vital ego in the person that wants to show that he has now so much advanced that he can help others.

Sri Aurobindo. Quite right. One can be a channel for the Mother's help, but the idea of oneself helping others comes in the way and so long as it is there one cannot be a truly effective channel.

AB. When I suspend my correspondence with You and the Mother even for a day I feel some uneasiness. It is not Your answers that matter but something inner that You both send me with or in the letters.

Sri Aurobindo. Yes.

AB. Since the last few days my consciousness has been feeling the working of the Mother's Force below the navel centre—on the sex centre and on the upper parts of the legs.

Sri Aurobindo. Good, that action is needed.

AB. During the morning meditation, all my parts were filled with so much inertia that it was with great difficulty that I could maintain the aspiration. Then, suddenly the body consciousness emerged from the darkness and took the lead! Would you believe it, it actually directed my mind and vital! It made them rise from their stupor--their sleep of inertia.

Sri Aurobinda. It is very possible when one reaches a certain stage. The Force acts directly through the part needed for the action.

AB. This was how the subconscious disturbance of the last two days was diffused and the consciousness again turned towards the Mother's light.

Sri Aurobindo. It is because, the subconscious being just below the physical, the enlightened physical can act on it directly and completely in a way in which mind and vital cannot and by this direct action can help to liberate the mind and vital also.

25-9-35.

AB. You wrote to me, "I suppose, the most material consciousness has come up or you have gone into it". Does this reaching the material consciousness mean that all the layers above it (like the physical etc.) have been passed through already?

Sri Aurobindo. No, but they have been penetrated in your case by the peace and by some light of knowledge. The higher parts of course more than the lower, but that is always the case.

God's Waiting

An arrow of light broods on my motionless brow,
A messenger-dart from his unhorizoned peak;
An inversed shaft is fixed on my point of thought
From his irresistible bow of infinity;
Like a waiting thunder's sapphire-sudden laugh
A vastness wings over my spirit-face;
A white revelation's deep-checked magical stroke
Awaits the peeling of God's cathedral-bells;
Ungrasped a large intuition's hammer-head
Is poised above the firmament of my mind,
A grand unclosing of the supernal core.
But above all these magnificent symbol-flares
Looms His body of golden immanence
To unmask his godhood to my ignorant soil
And change my flesh to his immaculate whole,
A shape of dust flowering into heavenly fire.

ROMEN

REMINISCENCES AND REFLECTIONS OF A DISCIPLE

This is rather a feeble attempt to express the ideas of the writer about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo formed from personal observation and experience, and to describe some of the wonderful and utterly bewildering things that happened to himself and some of his acquaintances, and even outsiders—when they first came under the influence of these two beings who have spiritually moulded the lives of so many for the last three decades. It is interesting to see how their grace and blessings can act on people even from a distance when their help is invoked.

A short personal note on the writer will not be out of place here to give the reader an idea what kind of man he was before he began to look up to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as his Gurus, and how he slowly came under their direct influence. Though a believer in God and religion, he did not follow any religious practices, nor did he have any fixed aim in life, either mundane or spiritual. He led a care-free existence; no vocation of life could give him an abiding interest or satisfaction. At the same time he had no idea that only the spiritual life would ultimately satisfy his soul.

He first heard of the Mother from an article of Dilip Kumar Roy's, published in a newspaper, on his short stay at the Pondicherry Ashram. A foreign lady adopting the Indian spiritual life, efficiently conducting an Ashram with sleepless vigilance, and looking to the needs, both spiritual and material, of its 60 inmates, was something he had not heard before. These things caught his imagination and he was all admiration for her. However, a long time elapsed before he came to know more of her and the Ashram.

In 1935, owing to some family misfortunes, his mind was much perturbed, when a gentleman of position named B.M., who had spiritual experience, gave him the salutary advice to develop a spiritual bent of mind through meditation and regular reading of sacred books like the Gita, in order to find abiding peace. At that time he also happened to come into contact with two other gentlemen, one of whom had once been to Pondicherry. Quite sure of obtaining permission for the writer to visit the Ashram for the next "Darshan", they decided to form a party of three with him, and began to persuade him day after day to write to Sri Aurobindo for permission, with a concise history of his life, and if possible to send his photograph with the letter. But he persistently refused as he had no urge in him to come to Pondicherry. At last he yielded to their pressure reluctantly, and

wrote a few lines to Sri Aurobindo, tendering his pranams to him, and expressing his desire to come and see him once. Primarily the motive behind sending the letter was to please the two gentlemen, to keep the promise he had given them,—but he also wished to take the opportunity of seeing one whom he believed to be the greatest man and yogi of the time. He little thought that such a half-hearted letter would merit a reply. But to his utter surprise and joy a reply came through the Secretary of the Ashram (N. K. Gupta) informing him that the necessary permission had been given to him to come for the February “Darshan”. It carried such an occult force of Sri Aurobindo’s silent blessings that he felt tremendously elated, with mixed feelings of joy, wonder and thankfulness. Strange to say, the two gentlemen did not receive permission. So he began to make preparations to go to Pondicherry alone.

A few days before his start for Pondicherry, one of his clerks fell ill with pneumonia, and a relative of his, being also attacked with the same disease, came to his house for better treatment without giving any previous intimation. Now the problem was, how to start in such circumstances? The writer was in a fix. The condition of the clerk became hopeless and he fell unconscious and was actually collapsing one day. Hearing this news he went to the patient’s house; he saw there two doctors ready to administer an injection to him. His old father in despair asked the unconscious boy to open his eyes to see who had come there. The boy in that very state suddenly burst out, “Babu! you have come. Go away, doctor babus! I am cured.” The writer was so much moved by this, that he at once resolved not to leave the patients in order to attend the “Darshan” till they were cured. In that helpless state his silent but fervent prayers to Sri Aurobindo for their speedy recovery proved so effective that even the attending doctors were flabbergasted. The patients were quickly cured. He then prepared for the journey, but he was short of money. Lo, the money came from unexpected quarters at the last moment, and all other obstacles to the journey cleared off through the palpable Grace of Sri Aurobindo

In those days, in a beautiful saree the Mother used to come down every morning and evening to the “Meditation-hall.” She would give blessings to the Ashramites and visitors with flowers and touch their bowed heads with the palm of her hand. The expression of her face varied in infinite ways while receiving their pranams one by one.

Her touch was so electrifying that the colour on the face of many new-comers visibly changed to a peculiar glow as if imbued with some all-consuming aspiration. Such was the first personal contact of the writer with the Mother. She appeared to him extremely sweet and full of charm.

Then the "Darshan" came. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo were seated with flowers beautifully arranged on all sides, and blessed each one with their touch separately and jointly, reminding him of the well-known picture of Shiva and Durga, and Sri Krishna and Radha giving benedictions to Sri Ramakrishna from either side. The people admitted to the "Darshan" began to move past them in a queue, when a very interesting incident took place. An American doctor stood fixed before them for about half-an-hour, dizzy and confounded at the vision of the whole of America lying beneath Sri Aurobindo's feet! Who could tell the true significance of this vision? Could it mean that America would be used as an instrument of Sri Aurobindo's for his new world-creation (as subsequent events suggest) or that America would one day come under his spiritual influence? When the writer came in their presence he felt as if he was in Kailash before Shiva and Parvati or in Gokul before Narayan and his mate. Sri Aurobindo appeared to him so grand and majestic, shining with a golden hue.

Before he left he was permitted to remain alone in the Mother's presence for a short while. On his setting foot in the corridor upstairs through which he had to pass, a sudden deep sob burst from him. The first idea that struck him on seeing the Mother there, was of the sombre and mighty Mahakali in a meditative mood, as if fronting Time and Eternity. She blessed him with two flowers, signifying Agni and Faith. Before he came out he broke the silence to pray to Her to grant "Darshan" to his mother who had wanted at the last minute to come along with him when he left for Pondicherry. The Mother paused for a moment and said "She is too old"—perhaps meaning, for this strenuous journey. On his insistence however, she nodded her head as if to signify "granted".

What a crude idea the writer had about Yoga will be evident from the talk he had with the Secretary of the Ashram just before his departure. He vividly remembers having said to him, "I don't know why I came here, why I am going away, nor do I know what I shall do hereafter. I feel attracted by the Mother but I am more drawn

towards Sri Aurobindo. After all, the Mother is a French lady". To this the secretary, as is his wont, pithily replied, "Both are one. Try to remember at times any of the two. You will understand everything gradually." He could then hardly grasp the meaning of these significant words which proved prophetic very soon.

It took him a few days to settle down to normal life after his return, when the parting advice of the Secretary came sharp into his mind, and he began to pray in silence to Sri Aurobindo to enlighten him a little as he did not realise anything at all. Within a short time the prayer seemed to have been heard. The clue to his sadhana seemed to have been found. The Mother became his dominant thought, and the sadhana developed into an easy, refreshing and spontaneous movement. Experiences followed one after another in quick succession. There was positive proof that thoughts and ideas generally came from outside and could be made to retreat by exerting one's will. A presence was felt by almost all who entered his bedroom (and even its surroundings). It appeared surcharged with a calm, balmy, dense atmosphere which some people could not bear long.

Shortly after his return a wonderful incident took place. B.M. (the gentleman already referred to) came to him to enquire about Sri Aurobindo and the spiritual discipline followed in the Ashram. He had a deep regard for Sri Aurobindo as he had known him in his younger days. Not knowing what to say about the sadhana as he himself had little understanding of it, the writer requested the gentleman to read the three books he had bought, namely, *Lights on Yoga*, *Bases of Yoga* and *The Mother*. After a cursory glance through them he came again to say that he could find nothing new in Sri Aurobindo's teaching compared to what spiritual men of the past had already taught, and that Sri Aurobindo was also a Mayavadin (Illusionist), as all spiritual leaders must necessarily be. All the attempts of the writer, even supported by some passages from those books, utterly failed to convince him that his notions were wrong. All his efforts to identify the Mother of the Ashram with the "Mother" of the book went in vain. He argued that Sri Ramakrishna worshipped Kali and always called Her the Mother; that he himself worshipped one whom he saw to be Her incarnation—even greater, because Kali was only an aspect of the Divine Mother, and that if the Mother herself looked up to Sri Aurobindo one could just imagine his spiritual stature. He further stated that if they had nothing new to give to the world, there would have been no use for them to toil incessantly day

and night for its regeneration. He then sat before their photographs for a while and prayed fervently to make the gentleman realise who they really were. On that very night when the gentleman sat for meditation, he saw the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in front of him and taking the forms alternately of the principal gods and goddesses of the Hindus. Next morning too, at meditation, he saw them again in all the familiar shapes of gods and goddesses of the Hindu mythology. Overwhelmed with joy and wonder, the gentleman hurried to the writer to narrate his experiences. Since then his mind changed and whenever he got any leisure he would come and sit before the photographs for meditation. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo very often appeared before the gentleman, they would bless him or speak to him something. On a "Darshan" day the gentleman came to the writer's house for prayer and meditation. Just as he crossed the threshold he saw the Mother and Sri Aurobindo standing together on a vast sea rolling with innumerable mile-long breakers. On another night the same gentleman came to his house to hear the devotional songs of a Tantric sadhu who happened to be a relation of Sri Aurobindo. Throughout the songs he saw the whole house flooded with a dazzling white light (the Light of the Mother) and could see nothing else. All these experiences the gentleman used to tell him at the very moment they were occurring.

One another "Darshan" night, a flash of golden light was seen darting out like lightning through Sri Aurobindo's eyes in the photograph, with two beings of the animal kingdom on either side of him.

There were few among those who came eagerly to see the photographs who did not receive inspiration from them. A judge once came accompanied by B. M. to his house; but finding him absent the latter requested the judge to enter the bedroom and to see the photographs. They both entered and passed about half-an-hour there. Some time afterwards when the writer met him, the judge said that he just could not express what he felt and saw there.

Many men, including some disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, some high government officials, and lawyers often used to come and sit before the photographs to pay their respects to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

An unknown gentleman, hardly familiar with the name of Sri Aurobindo came to see the writer on some business and stayed with him. He felt eager to see the photographs. When he saw them he ad-

vanced only a few steps, kept his eyes fixed on them and then suddenly fell down and remained prostrate and motionless for about an hour and a half. Then he got up and retraced a step or two reeling, and again stepped forward a little to fall down again and remain in the same state for about an hour. He himself could not explain why he fell down, and wondered how he could remain there bowing to them for such a long time in full consciousness without even a painful sensation in the nose pressed on the ground. In that state the gentleman saw the Mother and Sri Aurobindo below the hanging photographs. He saw at the same time some flowers, and incense burning on the table. But to the outer eye there was nothing of the kind there or anywhere in the room; and such things had hardly ever been offered to them before. The gentleman insisted on his offering these things to them regularly. He also asked the writer to secure their photographs for him from the Ashram. He received them by post, while he was in a state of delirium owing to a serious illness, and at once placed them on his chest and from that moment the illness began to take a good turn. After his recovery the gentleman came to the writer and narrated the whole incident.

One day a swarm of ants was seen inside the glass frame of the photographs framed together. The writer kept them exposed to the sun for a long time in the hope that the ants would come out by the heat. But the heat completely damaged and disfigured the pictures. Bubbles of a watery substance like dew-drops erupted all over the paper, and when dried up, left indelible black marks. Lapse of time did not effect any change. Silent prayers went in vain. Being at his wits' end and in despair, he wrote to the Mother a few weeks after, praying to her to remove the marks, or in the alternative, to send a new pair of photographs free, at Her own cost for not having endowed him with enough common sense. Soon after posting the letter he woke one morning to find to his utter joy and wonder the photos restored to the original state.

During his Ashram-life, in 1948 a neighbour connected with the Ashram and now an officer of the local French Government used to come to his house to prepare for an examination. One day he felt tired and lay down on his cot to take rest; he closed his eyes and relaxed. A few minutes later, when he opened them again, he was struck dumb by the unexpected presence of Sri Aurobindo standing by his side in front of the photographs; as soon as he recognised Sri Aurobindo, the vision faded.

To be continued

THE FUTURE POETRY

Sri Aurobindo

(12)

THE COURSE OF ENGLISH POETRY

(4)

In the work of the intellectual and classical age of English poetry, one is again struck by the same phenomenon that we meet throughout, of a great power of achievement limited by a characteristic defect which turns to failure, wastes the power spent and makes the total result much inferior to what it should have been with so much nerve of energy to speed it or so broad a wing of genius to raise it into the highest heights of the empyrean. The mind of this age went for its sustaining influence and its suggestive models to Greece, Rome and France. That was inevitable; for these have been the three intellectual nations, their literatures have achieved, each following its own different way and spirit, the best in form and substance that that kind of inspiration can produce, and not having the root of the matter in itself, the inborn intellectual depth and subtlety, the fine classical lucidity and aesthetic taste, if the attempt was to be made at all, it was here that the English mind must turn. Steeping itself in these sources, it might have blended with the classical clarity and form its own masculine force and strenuousness, its strong imagination, its deeper colour and profounder intuitive suggestiveness and arrived at something new and great to which the world could have turned as another supreme element of its aesthetic culture. But the effect did not answer to the possibility. To have arrived at it, it was essential to keep, transmuted, all that was best in the Elizabethan spirit and to colour, enrich and sweeten with its touch the classical form and the intellectual motive. There was instead a breaking away, a decisive rejection, an entirely new attempt with no roots in the past. In the end not only was the preceding structure of poetry abolished, but all its Muses were expelled; a stucco imitation classical temple, very elegant, very cold and very empty, was erected and the gods of satire and didactic commonplace set up in a shrine which was built more like a coffee house than a sanctuary. A sterile brilliance, a set polished rhetoric was the poor final outcome.

The age set out with a promise of better things; for a time it seemed almost on the right path. Milton's early poetry is the fruit

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of a strong classical intellectuality still touched with the glow and beauty of a receding romantic colour, emotion and vital intuition. Many softer influences have woven themselves together into his high language and rhythm and been fused in his personality into something wonderfully strong and rich and beautiful. Suggestions and secrets have been caught from Chaucer, Peele, Spencer, Shakespeare, and their hints have given a strange grace to a style whose austerity of power has been nourished by great classical influences; Virgilian beauty and majesty, Lucretian grandeur and Aeschylean sublimity coloured or mellowed by the romantic elements and toned into each other under the stress of an original personality make the early Miltonic manner which maintains a peculiar blending of greatness and beauty not elsewhere found in English verse. The substance is often slight, for it is as yet Milton's imagination rather than his soul or his whole mind that is using the poetic form, though the form itself is of a faultless beauty. But still here we already have the coming change, the turning of the intelligence upon life to view it from its own intellectual centre of vision. Some of the Elizabethans had attempted it, but with no great poetical success; when they wrote their best, then even though they tried to think closely and strongly, life took possession of the thought or rather itself quivered out into thought-expression. Here on the contrary, even in the two poems that are avowedly expressions of vital moods, it is yet the intellect and its imaginations that are making the mood a material for reflective brooding, not the life mood itself chanting its own sight and emotion. In the minor Carolean poets too we have some lingering of the colours of the Elizabethan sunset, something of the life-sense and emotional value, but, much thinned and diluted, finally they die away into trivialities of the intelligence playing insincerely with the objects of the emotional being. For here too the idea already predominates, is already rather looking at the thing felt than taken up in the feeling. Some of this work is even mystical, but that too suffers from the same characteristic; the opening of an age of intellect was not the time when a great mystical poetry could be created.

In the end we find the change complete; colour has gone, sweetness has vanished, song has fallen into a dead hush: for a whole long century the lyrical faculty disappears from the English tongue, to re-awaken again first in the Celtic north. Only the grandiose epic chant of Milton breaks the complete silence of genuine poetry; but it is a Milton who has turned away from the richer beauty and promise of his youth, lost the Virgilian accent, put away from him all delicacies of colour and grace and sweetness to express only in fit greatness of

speech and form the conception of Heaven and Hell and man and the universe which his imagination had constructed out of his intellectual beliefs and reviewed in the vision of his soul. One might speculate on what we might have had if, instead of writing after the long silence during which he was absorbed in political controversy until public and private calamities compelled him to go back into himself, he had written his master work in a continuity of ripening from his earlier style and vision. Nothing quite so great perhaps, but surely something more opulent and otherwise perfect. As it is, it is by *Paradise Lost* that he occupies his high rank among the poets; that is the one supreme fruit of the attempt of English poetry to seize the classical manner, to achieve a poetical expression disciplined by a high intellectual severity and to forge a complete balance and measured perfection of form.

Paradise Lost is assuredly a great poem, one of the five great epical poems of European literature, and in certain qualities it reaches heights which no other of them had attained, even though as a whole it comes a long way behind them. Rhythm and speech have never attained to a mightier amplitude of epic expression and movement, seldom to an equal sublimity. And to a great extent Milton has done in this respect what he had set out to do; he has given English poetic speech a language of intellectual thought which is of itself highly poetic without depending in the least on any of the formal aids of poetic expression except those which are always essential and indispensable, a speech which is in its very grain poetry and in its very grain intellectual thought-utterance. This is always the aim of the classical poet in his style and movement, and Milton has fulfilled it, adding at the same time that peculiar grandeur in both the soul and manner of the utterance and in both the soul and the gait of the rhythm which belongs to him alone of poets. These qualities are, besides, easily sustained throughout, because with him they are less an art, great artist though he is, than the natural language of his spirit and the natural sound of its motion. His aim too is high, his subject loftier than that of any one of his predecessors except Dante; there is nowhere any more magnificently successful opening than the conception and execution of his Satan and Hell, the living spirit of egoistic revolt fallen to its natural element of darkness and pain, yet preserving still the greatness of the divine principle from which he was born. If the rest had been equal to the opening, there would have been no greater poem, few as great in literature.

Here too the performance failed the promise. *Paradise Lost* commands admiration, but as a whole, apart from its opening, it has failed

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either to go home to the heart of the world and lodge itself in its imagination or to enrich sovereignly what we may describe as the acquired stock of its more intimate poetical thought and experience. But the poem that does neither of these things, however fine its powers of language and rhythm, has missed its best aim. The reason is not to be found in the disparity between Milton's professed aim, which was to justify the ways of God to man, and his intellectual means for fulfilling it. The theology of the Puritan religion was a poor enough aid for so ambitious a purpose, but the Scriptural legend treated was still quite sufficient poetically if only it had received throughout a deeper interpretation. Dante's theology, though it has the advantage of the greater richness of import and spiritual experience of mediaeval Catholicism, is still intellectually insufficient, but through his primitive symbols Dante has seen and has revealed things which make his work poetically great and sufficient. It is here that Milton has failed. Nor is the failure mainly intellectual. It is true that he had not an original intellectuality, his mind was rather scholastic and traditional, but he had an original soul and personality and the vision of a poet. To justify the ways of God to man intellectually is not the province of poetry; what it can do, is to reveal them. Yet just here is the point of failure. Milton has seen Satan and Death and Sin and Hell and Chaos; there is a Scriptural greatness in his account of these things: he has not so seen God and heaven and man or the soul of humanity at once divine and fallen, subject to evil and striving for redemption; here there is no inner greatness in the poetic interpretation of his materials. In other words, he has ended by stumbling over the rock of offence that always awaits poetry in which the intellectual element becomes too predominant, the fatal danger of a failure of vision.

This failure extends itself to all the elements of his later poetry; it is definitive and he never, except in passages, recovered from it. His language and rhythm remain unfalteringly great to the end, but they are only a splendid robe and the body they clothe is a nobly carved but lifeless image. His architectural structure is always greatly and classically proportioned; but structure has two elements or, perhaps we should say, two methods, that which is thought out and that which grows from an inward artistic and poetic vision. Milton's structures are thought out; they have not been seen, much less been lived out into their inevitable measures and free inspired lines of perfection. The difference becomes evident by a simple comparison with Homer and Dante or even with the structural power, much less inspired and vital than theirs, but always finely aesthetic and artistic, of Virgil. Poetry may be intellectual, but only in the sense of having a strong

intellectual strain in it and of putting forward as its aim the play of imaginative thought in the service of the poetical intelligence; but that must be supported very strongly by the emotion or sentiment or by the imaginative vision to which the idea opens. Milton's earlier work is suffused by his power of imaginative vision, the opening books of *Paradise Lost* are upborne by the greatness of the soul that finds expression in its harmonies of speech and sound and the greatness of its sight. But in the later books and still more in the *Samson Agonistes* and the *Paradise Regained* this flame sinks; the sight, the thought become intellectually externalised. Milton writing poetry could never fail in a certain greatness and power, nor could he descend, as did Wordsworth and others, below his well-attained poetical level, but the supreme vitalising fire has sunk; the method and idea retain sublimity, the deeper spirit has departed.

Much greater, initial and essential was the defect in the poetry that followed. Here all is unredeemed intellectuality and even the very first elements of the genuine poetic inspiration are for the most part, one might almost say entirely, absent. Pope and Dryden and their school, except now and then,—Dryden especially has lines sometimes in which he suddenly rises above his method,—are busy only with one aim, with thinking in verse, thinking with a clear force, energy and point or with a certain rhetorical pomp and effectiveness, in a well-turned and well-polished metrical system. That seems to have been their sole idea of "numbers", of poetry, and it is an idea of unexampled falsity. No doubt this was a necessary phase, and perhaps, the English mind being what it then was, being always so much addicted in its poetry to quite the reverse method, it had to go to an extreme, to sacrifice even for a time many of its native powers in order to learn as best it could how to arrive at the clear and straightforward expression of thought with a just, harmonious and lucid turn; an inborn gift in all the Latin tongues, in a half-Teutonic speech attacked by the Celtic richness of imagination it had to be acquired. But the sacrifice made was great and cost much effort of recovery to the later development of the language. These writers got rid of the Elizabethan confusions, the involved expression, the lapses into trailing and awkward syntax, the perplexed turn in which ideas and images jostle and stumble together, fall into each other's arms and strain and burden the expression in a way which is sometimes exhilarating, but sometimes merely awkward and embarrassing; they got rid too of the crudeness and extravagance; but also of all the rich imagination and vision, the sweetness, lyricism, grace and colour. They replaced it with mere point and false glitter.

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They got rid too of Milton's Latinisms and poetic inversions,—though they replaced them by some merely rhetorical artifices of their own,—dismissed his great and packed turns of speech and replaced his grandeurs by what they thought to be a noble style, though it was no more than a spurious rhetorical pomp. Still the work they had to do they did effectively, with talent, energy, even a certain kind of genius.

Therefore, if the substance of this poetry had been of real worth, it would have been less open to depreciation and need not have excited so vehement a reaction or fallen so low from its exaggerated pride of place. But the substance was on a par with, often below the method. It took for its models the Augustan poets of Rome, but it substituted for the strength and weight of the Latin manner an exceeding superficiality and triviality. It followed more really contemporary French models, but missed their best ordinary qualities, their culture, taste, tact of expression, and missed too the greater gifts of the classical French poetry, which though it may suffer by its excessive cult of reason and taste or its rhetorical tendency, may run often in too thin a stream, has yet ideas, power, a strong nobility of character in Corneille, a fine grace of poetic sentiment in Racine. But this poetry cares nothing for such gifts it is occupied with expressing thought, but its thought is of little or no value; for the most part it is brilliant commonplace, and even ideas which have depths behind them become shallow and external by the way of their expression. The thought of these writers has no real eye on life, except when it turns to satire. Therefore that is the part of their work which is still most alive; for here the Anglo-Saxon spirit gets back to itself, leaves the attempt at a Gallicised refinement, finds its own robust vigour and arrives at a brutal, but still genuine and sometimes really poetic vigour and truth of expression. Energy, driving force is, however, a general merit of the verse of Pope and Dryden and in this one respect they excel their nearest French exemplars. Their expression is striking in its precision, each couplet rings out with a remarkable force of finality and much coin of their minting has passed into common speech and citation it is not gold of poetry for all that, but it is well-gilt copper coin of a good currency. But all turns to a monotonous brilliance of language, a monotonous decisiveness and point of rhythm. It has to be read by couplets and passages, for each poem is only a long string of these and except in one instance the true classical gift, the power of structure is quite wanting. The larger thought-power which is necessary for structure, was absent. This intellectual age of English poetry did its work, but, as must happen when there is in art a departure from what is best in the national mind, ended in a failure and for a time even a death of the true poetic faculty.

“LAST POEMS”
A REJOINDER AND AN APPRECIATION

R. N. Khanna

The year 1798 is a great landmark in the history of English Poetry, for it was in this year that *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge appeared and thus inaugurated the ‘Romantic Movement’. This marked the end of the poet who saw Nature and Life with a superficial eye and,

*A primrose by a river’s brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more.*

Lyrical Ballads opened with ‘*The Ancient Mariner*’ and closed with *Tintern Abbey*, both immortal poems, the former opening the vision to the world of occult forces and happenings that intervene from behind the veil in the life of men and shape destiny, and the latter bringing into luminous view the Presence of the Eternal Spirit that pervades ‘the mighty world of eye and ear’:

*A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns.*

This brought about a new capacity for vision so that Nature became the manifestation of the Eternal and Infinite Spirit which transcends all the apparent contradictions that so much baffle the intellect. All objects became

. . . the features

*The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.*

Such was the dawn that came with tides of gold sweeping the realms
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.

Splendour after splendour poured from the higher planes like a wide-sweeping flood that hurtles down from lofty uplands and surges through canyons of its own carving

Yet the orthodox critics could not adjust their eyes to the ever-shifting horizons and raised a storm of derision and threw aside

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Lyrical Ballads as 'no better than nursery rhymes.' Wordsworth took all this with equanimity and wrote in his classic Preface: "They who have been accustomed to the gaudier and inane phraseology of many modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will, no doubt, frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness; they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to inquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title." The climate of critical opinion changed in course of time and now that the age has grown ripe, we hear Lytton Strachey say: "The publication of *The Ancient Mariner* is a landmark in the history of letters, not because of its descriptions of natural objects, but because it swept into the poet's vision a whole new universe of infinite and eternal things; it was the discovery of the Unknown." Poetry is no longer understood as answering to the formula.

True wit is Nature to advantage dressed,

What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed,

but as "primarily, something which suggests by means of words, mysteries and infinitudes."

If we cast a glance at the course of English Poetry from Chaucer down to our own times we cannot fail to be struck by the rhythm which it has followed, alternately rising in spate and then failing like an unreplenished stream, and yet each renewal has not been a repetition of the old inspiration, but the revelation of a higher world, bringing in its wake a new sensibility and taste, new values of life. Such was the flood that outstreamed in the Elizabethan age, in the poetry of Milton, in the Metaphysicals, and the acme came with the Romantic Movement. Elizabethan poetry welled forth from the vital joy and pain of life; Milton's embodies a great thought-power, penetrates with the mighty and puissant wings of creative imagination the truth of hell and chaos, the truth of the unregenerate but intellectualised ego manifesting in the Titanic nature and at times makes us bathe in the ethereal light of heaven also and we begin to enjoy not only the pretty and the beautiful but the Sublime too. In the nineteenth century Poetry is lifted to a still higher plane of meaning and brings close intimations of Immortality and the miracle of Spiritual Beauty which is one with Truth. It is this observation of continual heightening of its source that Wordsworth expressed so precisely when he wrote, "Every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great or original, must create the taste by which he is to be relished, he must teach the art by which he is to be seen." Again it is the failure to see this truth which vitiates Matthew

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Arnold's literary criticism. He declared that the value of a new poem might be gauged - by comparing it with the greatest passages in the acknowledged masterpieces of literature. But as Lytton Strachey asks in his essay on Racine, "Who could tell that the poem in question was not itself a masterpiece, living by the light of an unknown beauty, and a law unto itself? It is the business of the poet to break rules and to baffle expectation; and all the masterpieces in the world cannot make a precedent." Can we estimate greatness of *Paradise Lost* by comparing it with the *Iliad* unless we confine our gaze to the most superficial similarities in their outer form such as the sports in which the fallen angels engage themselves and the feats of athletic prowess in the ancient epic or the detailed epic similes which both the poets employ? The two poets, in fact, draw their inspiration from quite different spheres whose orbits nowhere intersect.

To-day again, with Sri Aurobindo, poetry has become the revelation of the highest spiritual planes in their dazzling beauty and rapture and comes suffused with 'a light that never was on sea or land.' He has forged and hammered out for the first time a language which rings out into rhythms that can transmit in their pristine luminosity and power 'the sea-like downpour of masses of knowledge' released from the planes of 'plenary supramental illumination.' It is quite natural if the eyes accustomed to 'hardly a trickle from the suns' are dazed with this splendour.

Sri Aurobindo in his spiritual poetry has charted the whole range of spiritual experiences, assigned to each its due plane, with a directness and grandeur rarely seen elsewhere. But, though a full appreciation is not expected till the age grows to a higher stature, still critics must not stoop low and repeat the error of the *Quarterly Review* and invite the indictment from Shelley, "Miserable man! you, one of the meanest, have wantonly defaced one of the noblest specimens of the workmanship of God Nor shall it be your excuse that, murderer as you are, you have spoken daggers, but used none." The writer in the *Hindu* of October 5 in reviewing Sri Aurobindo's *Last Poems** has betrayed the same spirit as actuated the *Quarterly Review* to fling those cheap jibes at Keats's *Endymion*. Literary Criticism has a high function to perform, viz., to bring into clear relief the hidden significances with which a poem is packed, to draw the untrained reader's attention to the subtler beauties of sound-suggestion which he is likely to bypass. But here what we find is that a line is torn from its

* Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry Price Rs. 6/-

"LAST POEMS"

context in the poem and made the target of pointless criticism. He says, for instance, that Sri Aurobindo in these poems is "impatiently careless in his rhythm and lazily indifferent to the rhyme harmonies." I have gone through the poems again and again and each time some new beauty or a deeper significance of rhythm has revealed itself to me. It would have been much better if the critic had substantiated his remarks by actual illustrations. It seems very probable that he is insensible to the subtle variations of effect brought about by modulations and perhaps he is one of those about whom it has been written:

*. . . with a puling infant's force
They swayed about upon a rocking horse
And thought it Pegasus: Ah aismal sou'd!*

Who can miss the majestic flow of rhythm in the poem, *The Pilgrim of the Night?*

*I left the glory of the illumined Mind
And the calm rapture of the divinised soul
And travelled through a vastness dim and blind
To the grey shore where her ignorant waters roll.*

The pyrrhic followed by the spondee at the start of the second and the fourth line each time coming close on the heels of a perfect iambic line vividly brings home to us the nature of the transition from one vastitude to another. In the second line the spondee combines both the stress ictus and the quantitative long, thus communicating to the reader the sense of a 'calm rapture' embedded in the boundless expanse of some 'high far ether'.

A sonnet on Light ends with this forceful and clinching couplet:

*I move in an ocean of stupendous Light
Joining my depths to his eternal height.*

Describing the working of the Cosmic Force Sri Aurobindo writes:

*This mute stupendous Energy that whirls
The stars and nebulae in its long train,
Like a huge Serpent through my being curls
With its diamond hood of joy and fangs of pain.*

How the rhythm moves with a serpentine energy and every sound echoes the sense and how the last spondee in the second line carries powerfully the sense of the infinite continuity of Space!

But the greatest shock came to me when the critic sneered even at such a line:

The laughter of the sea's enormous mirth,
and I began to wonder whether onomatopoeia is not altogether a myth, for here it is as patent as in Tennyson's famous line,

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This mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon.

The stress falling on the first syllable of 'laughter' and then, with three 'slacks' in between, sweeping up again in 'sea' and 'enormous' and 'mirth', deepens and reinforces the outward sense of the plangency of the dashing waves. How after the first accent the voice sinks for a while and then rises in a crescendo towards the end!

From his remarks about the rhyme it appears that he based the stricture merely on one sentence in the Publisher's note which runs, "One or two irregularities of rhyming may be noticed, but whether they were purposely meant to be like that or kept only provisionally, it is not possible to say". Far from being indifferent to the rhyme harmonies, Sri Aurobindo attaches a very important place to the exquisite effects of rhyme in the structure of a poem. But the beauty of rhyme, as of metre, consists in being uninsistent and mildly suggestive and not in being "a jingle of like-endings too obvious to be missed by any ear." Sri Aurobindo is strongly opposed to Milton when he considers rhyme as "the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame metre." In order to clear the mist from the critic's mind we will quote Sri Aurobindo's luminous words on the subject. He writes in his series *The Future Poetry*:

"Milton disparaging rhyme, which he had himself used with so much skill in his earlier, less sublime, but more beautiful poetry, forgot or ignored the spiritual value of rhyme, its power to enforce and clinch the appeal of melodic or harmonic recurrence which is a principal element in the measured movement of poetry, its habit of opening sealed doors to the inspiration, its capacity to suggest and reveal beauty to that supra-intellectual something in us which music is powerful to awake." So Sri Aurobindo freely makes use of such rhymes as 'eyes-agonies' or 'onenesses-seize' it is not because he is 'lazily indifferent' but because the ideal of rhyme is that it should be so soothing that at times we cease to be sensible of it. Milton does not hesitate to rhyme 'victories' with 'arise' and 'one' with 'soon', and even the faultily faultless Pope has the rhyme 'esteem-them' while preaching a strict observance of rules by the poet:

*Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;
To copy Nature is to copy them.*

And Tennyson the supreme craftsman in *The Charge of the Light Brigade* is satisfied to rhyme 'hundred' with 'blundered' and 'wondered' and Shelley rhymes 'Urania' with 'lay' in *Adonais*. He further remarks: "Pondicherry is no Cumberland. There are no ghylls, cliffs, crags or mountain streams kindling intimations of mortality

(immortality ?). In the rarified atmosphere of an ashram recollections of Nature's exhilarating strength and the raptures of her welcoming arms exist merely as the vaguest penumbra of a more central and celestial philosophy. Its monasticism concentrates on the metaphysics of 'being' not on its 'beauty.' Aurobindo is not of the company of Wordsworth or Keats." Pondicherry is no Cumberland. True. But the critic cannot be unaware of what Wordsworth wrote about the process of poetic creation. Poems are written long after the actual experiences take place, because the subliminal consciousness takes its own time in straining out what is non-essential in an experience and thus making it a fit subject for poetry. The poem *Daffodils* so vivid and suggestive, was written years after the actual thrill of the experience. The flowers, flashed only on the 'inward eye. Again, there cannot be a more flagrant misrepresentation of the Ashram than to say that its monasticism concentrates on the metaphysics of 'being' not on its beauty. The Ashram is not a monastery for anchorites, it is the centre of a comprehensive spiritual culture and the manifestation of Divine Beauty in the actual life of the sadhaks is an integral part of their *sadhana*. The Mother, who is the spiritual guide of the Ashram, says: "In the world of forms a lack of Beauty is a fault as great as a lack of Truth in the world of ideas. For Beauty is the homage which Nature renders to the supreme Master of the universe; Beauty is the Divine language in the form. A consciousness of the Divine which is not externally translated by an understanding and an expression of Beauty would be an incomplete consciousness" (*Prayers and Meditations of the Mother*).

In *Last Poems* itself there are many lines on the aspect of the Beauty of the Divine and they throb with the intensest rapture. A poem begins with these lines:

*Because Thou art All-Beauty and All-bliss,
My soul blind and enamoured yearns for Thee;
Thy sweetness haunts my heart through Nature's ways;
Nowhere it beats now from Thy snare immune.*

and then

Sight's endless artistry is Thou alone.
Then the haunting music of these lines from the poem, *The Divine Sight*—

*Into an ecstasy of vision caught
Each natural object is of Thee a part,
A rapture symbol from Thy substance wrought,
A poem shaped in Beauty's living heart.*
At times the critic willfully tries to muffle those lines of a poem which

will show the absurdity of his remarks. He takes the earlier lines of the poem, *The Miracle of Birth* and writes, "Treading the cosmic ways the poet grows oppressed with the sense of frustration." I will content myself only with quoting the last couplet of the sonnet to show the malicious nature of the remarks. It runs:

*Still by slow steps the miracle goes on,
The Immortal's gradual birth mid mire and stone.*

Surely one who talks of 'frustration' in any writing of Sri Aurobindo's can only evoke an ironic smile for, the whole world knows the vast Sun of Deathless Light that is Sri Aurobindo. Can one charge Sri Aurobindo with frustration in the face of these lines in the fourth poem of the book?—

*However long Night's hour, I will not dream
That the small ego and the person's mask
Are all that God reveals in our life-scheme,
The last result of Nature's cosmic task.
A greater Presence in her bosom works;
Long it prepares its far epiphany:
Even in the stone and beast the godhead lurks,
A bright Persona of eternity.*

On the basis of one line,

I have thrown from me the whirling dance of mind.

he writes, "curiously enough liberation is not liberation from the body so much as it is liberation from the mind." In Sri Aurobindo's yoga there is no need of a liberation from the body because the body is a source of bondage only so long as it remains impervious to the alchemic touch of the Spirit, and Sri Aurobindo aims at the divinisation of the body thus making it "God's happy living tool." Still for the critic we may quote these lines from another poem and clear the deck of misconception.

*I am no more a vassal of the flesh,
A slave to Nature and her leaden rule;
I am caught no more in the senses' narrow mesh.*

Surely posterity will reverse these judgments and when the generations to come will feel high-uplifted by these luminous revelations and read such shabby criticism they will only repeat Keats's lines addressed to the eighteenth century poets:

*. . . Beauty was awake.
Why were ye not awake? But ye were dead
To things ye knew not on,—were closely wed
To musty laws lined out with wretched rule
And compass vile . . .*

(From "Sunday Times", Madras).

AN ADDRESS*

A. B. Purani

I do not want to speak today about Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, because he has not brought merely a philosophy to humanity. What he has given in terms of philosophy is so rich in intellectual substance that man's intellect can go on delving into it for years and years and yet may never come to the end of its task.

Nor do I want to speak of his outer life, his childhood spent in England in an alien environment in which his father carefully excluded him from things Indian—an environment, however, in which he imbibed all the best elements of European culture. It was there that he flowered into a poet and brought to his country on his return from England the flame of nascent patriotism which blazed forth into a wild-fire before long and changed the course not only of his life but also of the political thought of his country. Nor do I want to dwell upon his long years of *tapasya* at Pondicherry, where sitting in his room he got aspiring souls to come to him in their hundreds and established the largest known Yoga Ashram in the world which may now become an International University Centre commemorating and perpetuating his memory and his work.

What he has brought to mankind is a truth, a power, a vision of a dynamic reality. I wish I could carry to you something of that reality, of that light. The only language for doing that task is Silence, the method which our ancient seers prescribed for the communication of the highest knowledge (*para vidya*). But I know this method will not do for carrying on a discussion for the acquisition of knowledge. So I will try to give you a rough outline of what Sri Aurobind has brought to mankind. In one word, we may say that he has made the relation between Life and God organic and intimate. Such relation we had lost for centuries. The current idea is that God and Life are incompatible realities, that if one wants God, one must run away from life, and if one wants Life, one must forget God. This has increased the distance between them and this distance has steadily

* Delivered to the Sri Aurobindo Study Centre, Banaras.

increased till in recent times there threatens to be a complete rupture between the two. This separation has worked to the detriment and impoverishment of Life.

Sri Aurobindo has shown that Life emanates from God, that it belongs to the Divine in the sense that it is an expression of Him and that therefore it is proper that it should go back to the Divine and so change as to become fit for manifesting God. Men always complain of the hard conditions of life and put them forward as an excuse for their inability or rather their unwillingness to approach God. They seem to imply that God has left them in such a condition that to bring in the Divine, nay, even to think of God, is out of the question. This, however, is a great error, for it means that ignorance is more potent than God. God in His omnipotence has not resigned in favour of ignorance permanently. He has kept a path, like a golden thread, even in the midst of the darkest ignorance by which man with a sincere aspiration can always reach Him.

But when Sri Aurobindo accepts Life for the Divine, he is emphatic about the imperative need of rejecting the ignorance of Life as it is today. In fact his principle is: Acceptance of Life but rejection of ignorance which is in Life. This acceptance of Life for the Divine embraces all the outer fields of man's activity, in fact, the whole of a man's individual and collective life. It includes poetry, art, literature, science, indeed, the whole life of man. This all-embracing sweep is a special feature of Sri Aurobindo's vision of Truth.

Secondly, Sri Aurobindo's scheme of man's perfection does not leave out any inner or outer instrument of man from fulfilment in the Divine. All the powers of man must find a place in the harmonious and integral perfection.

The third great thing in his programme of man's spiritual perfection is his emphasis on collective life as an essential mould for the manifestation of the Divine. This cannot be brought about by institutions and constitutions, though they may be useful in their own way. No institution or constitution has the power to change man. The true change is not from outside inwards, but from inside out. The change in the collectivity must also come from within. The reason why Sri Aurobindo lays so much emphasis upon collective life is that in his view individual perfection is not enough. The problem of man's freedom and perfection is not individual only, but also collective. If one observes the long course of millions of years of evolution

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during which Nature has evolved different and ascending emergents, one will find that every new emergent becomes a permanent part of this earth consciousness only when it manifest itself in the collectivity.

And this conception of a collective perfection of life has been with man from the very beginning. This collective perfection has in fact been called the Satyayuga. Read the description of Ayodhya in the *Ramayana* or of Dwarka, and you will find there this idea of collective perfection which is not merely outward prosperity of organised life but an expression of an inner spiritual attainment organising the whole of life.

Take the plan of the ancient cities of India, Madura, for example. There you will find the Divine established in the temple in the centre of the town and then from it four roads spreading out in four different directions. The whole life of the town was to turn round the Divine as its centre. All moves round the Divine, looks up to the Divine for inspiration and becomes an offering to the Divine, so that life on earth may become Divine

But why go to other places? Take the case of Banaras City itself. The conception of Shiva as the dweller in the cemetery, as the dancer of destruction is not the whole truth of Him. Here He is properly called Viswanath, the Lord of the Universe. The world, the Cosmos, belongs to Him and He must rule it. A day must come when He will rule the whole life on earth.

Banaras is termed, like Rome, the Eternal City. It is here that man looks up to the Eternal and the Infinite that transcends this mundane and sordid world. Banaras turns the eyes of man to the Divine above. But if Banaras is to carry to the world this great truth of resurgent spirituality, if she is to interpret the message of New India to the world, she must first accept this great truth, this new light which the Divine has brought to our country for mankind.

THE INTEGRAL YOGA OF SRI AUROBINDO

Rishabhchand

CHAPTER XIII

THE PHYSICAL NATURE AND ITS PURIFICATION

PART II

By physical nature Sri Aurobindo means the physical mind, the physical part of life called the physical-vital or nervous being, and the body. Before we enter upon the process of their purification, we had better be clear about what these terms signify. As we have already indicated elsewhere, there is no Hegelian obscurity about Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, nor an indefinite fluidity in the connotation of the terms he uses. There is, on the contrary, a remarkably scientific precision and definiteness which disarms all fear of incomprehension in those who have the will, a subtle and flexible intelligence and the necessary concentration to follow him in his expositions.

The Physical Mind

The physical mind is that part of our mind which is linked to our physical and nervous organism through the brain and preoccupied with the gross objects of sense. It is the lowest and most materialised part of our mind, partaking more or less of the density, obscurity and inertia of Matter and incapable of breathing in any rarefied ether. It is the stronghold of all doubt and scepticism in us. It delights in material pursuits and feels proudly at home in them. It has an innate contempt for anything that is abstract, imaginative or visionary—anything, indeed, that is removed from its all too narrow orbit of perception. Lift it as much as you can, it will gravitate back to its normal level and spin round its cherished or accustomed objects of sense. It has a settled distrust of the supraphysical realities of existence and seeks its heaven in the possession and enjoyment of the material objects and amenities of life.

The physical mind in itself is the typical Shudra mind. It knows no eagle-flights of thought and vision, like the mind of the Brahmin, nor the high courage and noble strength of the Kshatriya, nor the adventures and achievements of the Vaishya who seeks to turn life into a thing of joy and beauty and harmonious plenty. It is burdened with the lowest of the three qualitative modes of Prakriti, *tamas*. It

is mechanical and self-repetitive, rigid and wary in its movements, always a prisoner of its bounded horizons and customary ruts. It is practical, in the sense that it has a more or less sure grasp of the material forces and a steady eye on the main chance and a certain deftness in the handling of material objects and opportunities. It is pragmatic and utilitarian, inasmuch as it is rivetted to the earth and the human body, and avid of material success. It has and can further develop an aesthetic sense, a perception of beauty and rhythmic proportion, but it can hardly extend this sense beyond the material plane of existence—it cannot make it operative in the deeper regions of thought and feeling with which it has no intimate contact. It can only endeavour to build a life of limited material ease and well-being and a brief-lived symmetry, never quite secure against the assaults of the uncontrolled forces and the progressive elements of life.

One of the main traits of the physical mind is its conservatism. It is attached to the traditional, the conventional and the habitual,—to all that keeps up the mechanical nature of its movements,—and is reluctant to admit any change or departure from its safe moorings. Inertia is at the bottom of this congenital conservatism, this natural proneness to submit to the yoke of Matter. Left to itself, the physical mind will oppose all new ideas and reforms, regarding them as a menace to its very existence and branding them as rash and dangerous. Its main concern is to preserve the *status quo*, the fixed and hedged pathways, the unalterable tenor. It is instinctively afraid of the new, the unexpected and the hazardous. When a man shies at an innovation or a decisive departure in the realm of thought or in the field of action, it is usually his physical mind that is responsible for it. It advances all kinds of arguments in support of its inert adherence to the beaten track and the ragged routine. In religion, in education and in general life and culture, it is always unprogressive, narrowly sectarian and fanatically loyal to “the letter that killeth.” It is an ardent advocate of the past and would fain live in it, if that were possible, wilfully blind to the forward march of time. But time flows on, unheeding of its protests, and dragging it along through a series of constrained and painful self-adaptations, for, in this world of change and progress, nothing can afford to remain for long sterile and stagnant,—it must either submit to the universal law or vanish out of existence. The physical mind condemns itself to the hard knocks of evolutionary life by its obstinate refusal to change.

Another chief characteristic of the physical mind is doubt, to which we have already referred. It doubts everything except what

is concrete, materially objective and well within the range of its crude perceptions. The Johnsonian kick is its stock test of the reality of things. It doubts not only what is of uncertain validity, but even what it has known to be true; it questions even its cherished convictions. There are many typical instances of promising men held back again and again from higher spiritual experiences by the besetting doubts of their physical mind, or having once had those experiences, forgetting, minimising or denying them altogether afterwards. If only they knew the secret of silencing or transcending the physical mind, faith would return as naturally as dawn returns after the night; but they cling to its obscurity which they mistake for light. And when the reasoning mind is allied to the physical mind, we have the dogmatic scepticism which proves a great bar to the progress of knowledge by its wilful shutting out of the unexplored levels of human consciousness and the unawakened faculties of human nature. Its vaunted rationalism is a stubborn blindness to the higher light. Its triumph in the material field spells its spiritual suicide.

The physical mind is not the whole of the human mind, but in many men it is the most dominant. In the modern age of materialism it is almost deified,* and Marxist communism dreams to bring all mankind down to the level of the vital-physical being and achieve there an equality which will do away with all differences and disparities of life and establish a reign of unity, both physical and mental. It is a dream which runs counter to the ideal of ancient culture, which was to raise the physical being of man, by progressive stages, towards the glories of the infinite spiritual consciousness, delivering him more and more from the ignorance and obscurity of his gross mind, and make him realise the unity and harmony of all in the eternal omnipresence of the Spirit. The ancient endeavour was the exalting of the Shudra to the knowledge, freedom, peace and purity of the Brahmin whereas the modern labour,—which is vain, because against the evolutionary spirit in man,—is to pull all grades of men, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vashyas, down to the level of the Shudra and unite them there by economic, social and political bonds. If the philosophy of communism carries the day, it will be the end of all higher hopes and ideals of mankind and its relapse into the Shudra-type, the merely physical, economic being, the human animal. It will be a reversion to the dead uniformity of a mechanised society, bound up with its material needs and their satisfaction and harnessing the intellect to the service of Matter. But the soul and the higher

* The typical modern mind is a combination of the vital mind and the physical, exploiting the intellect for its own ends.

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mind of man will not consent to immolate themselves on the altar of the body or barter away their boundless riches for a mess of pottage. Diversity in unity is the basic principle of creation,—diversity not only on the physical plane but on all the other planes of existence as well—and whenever there is a suppression of diversity, there is the implied threat of an explosion and a disruption of the social fabric, resulting in a return to healthier conditions of individual freedom and high-soaring aspiration. Man's pilgrimage is from untruth to truth, from darkness to Light and from mortality to immortality; or, in other words, from Matter to Spirit. But his ascent is both a sublimation and an integration, so that when man reaches the glories of his spiritual existence, he does not necessarily die to his mental and material life, but can bring those glories down into his earthly nature and achieve a dynamic harmony of divine existence. Therefore, any philosophy or culture that clips his spiritual wings and chains him to the material life is, by the very logic of evolution, an obscurantism, a reactionary movement doomed to a disastrous defeat.

The physical mind, the sense-mind, the vital mind and the mind proper with its triple order of the understanding, reason and higher intelligence are the different planes of the human mental consciousness. Man, in his evolution starts perforce from the lower levels, but has to ascend to the higher. He should, therefore, arrange and regulate his life and nature and environment in such a way that they may help him in this evolutionary ascent and the awakening of the higher planes of consciousness, for, beyond the intelligence there are still higher planes of the spiritual mind to which also he has to climb and through which he has to pass on his way to the infinitudes of the Spirit.

Our consciousness is in constant flux and movement. It rises or falls according to the quality of our thought and feeling and action. Each thought, each feeling, each action of ours has a corresponding effect upon our consciousness, and consequently upon our life and nature. This is a truth which the seekers of perfection should never lose sight of. But there is another complementary truth which has also to be borne in mind, that it is our consciousness that determines our thought, feeling and action. Everything in our life and nature is an instrumental working of our consciousness. If we take into consideration these two complementary truths or dynamic principles of our being, we are led to conclude that our consciousness is a developing evolutionary thing struggling up through a maze of myriad forces, favourable and unfavourable, towards its own luminous vastness above. But even in the midst of its variations and fluctuations, it seems to preserve in itself a more or less fixed status, a

relatively stable foothold balancing its ups and downs. This transitional foothold gives its distinctive character to our consciousness. We may call a man a physical man, if the foothold of his consciousness is in the physical being, or a vital man if he lives predominantly in the tossing desires and ambitions and passions of his life-being or vital-being. Similarly a man may be called mental or intellectual if he lives not so much in his physical and vital as in his mental being. But a physical man may have vital desires and ambitions as well as mental interests and pursuits, or a vital man may have the latter and may also be susceptible to spells of physical inertia and material preoccupation, or, again, a mental or intellectual man may have occasional lapses into the obscurity of the physical or the turmoil of the vital consciousness. Yet in spite of these oscillations and overlappings, each human being keeps a certain temporary station of his evolutionary consciousness which determines his distinctive nature and should also determine his place and function in society. The origin of the four-fold order in Hindu society was an intuitive perception of the truth of this transitional station of the evolving consciousness of man. A man who lived mainly in the physical consciousness was called a Shudra, for whom an obedient, faithful and conscientious service, in whatever walk of life it might be, was the best possible means of self-development. If a zealot humanitarian placed him on a higher status and trained him for a different vocation, he would be transplanting him from his swadharma to a paradharma, from the self-law of his nature to a foreign law, and creating in him a psychological confusion, Varnasankara. The ancient order was not rigid, nor had it anything to do with birth, as it is commonly supposed, but was a subtle recognition of a man's poise of consciousness and a furnishing of flexible means and opportunities for his growth and self-transcendence. There were other deeply psychological factors that necessitated and justified the ancient system, but it would be going beyond our scope to dwell upon them here. But times have changed, and the evolution of humanity has reached a stage at which the old ways and systems have to be replaced by others, more embracing and synthetic, that would do justice to the increasing demand for a harmonious development and perfection of man and the realisation of the universal unity in his consciousness and life.

The physical mind, because of its obscurity and attachment to Matter, has always been the despair of the spiritual seekers. The intense yearning for a self-annihilating absorption in the unconditioned Absolute derives a part of its stimulus from the apparently

irredeemable character of the physical mind, and the constant resistance it opposes to the expansive movement of the inner being. An increasing resort to meditation and a withdrawal from the activities of life are the usual means adopted for an escape from the dull bondage of the physical mind and its engrossing material cares. But as an escape is ruled out in the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo—its aim being a perfect self-fulfilment and divine Manifestation in life—the physical mind has to be accepted fully and just as it is, and then purified, enlightened and finally transformed into a flexible medium of the self-expressing Spirit.

What are the means of purifying and enlightening the physical mind? Sri Aurobindo lays particular stress on detachment. The inner consciousness, seeking identification with the soul, must detach itself from the physical mind and refuse to give sanction to its mechanical, self-repetitive movements, which are an obstacle to sadhana. First of all, its preoccupation with the body and its needs and demands and comforts must be studiously renounced. This does not mean that the body has to be despised or neglected, but the mind's morbid obsession with it must be discarded, otherwise there would be no further evolution of consciousness. In the Integral Yoga the body is regarded as an indispensable instrument of the self-manifesting Spirit and as much important as any other part of our nature, but to be attached to it is to remain tied only to the gross material principle of our being and forfeit our birthright to the light and bliss and freedom of our spiritual existence. Detachment from the physical mind gives us a release from the grossness of the material consciousness; it gives wings to our inner consciousness to soar into the Spirit-skies. Referring to the recurrence of material thoughts and the consequent obscuration of consciousness, which is a common enough experience in sadhana the Mother says in her Prayer of January 4, 1914:

“The tide of material thoughts lies always in wait for the least weakness, and if we relax our vigilance even for a moment, if we are negligent, to however small an extent, it rushes forward and invades us from all sides, submerging sometimes under its heavy flood the result of innumerable efforts. Then the being enters into a sort of torpor, its physical needs of food and sleep increase, its intelligence is obscured, its inner vision is veiled, and in spite of its feeling little real interest in these superficial activities, they occupy him almost exclusively. This condition is very troublesome and fatiguing, for nothing is more fatiguing than thoughts about material things, and the wearied mind suffers like a caged bird unable to spread its wings

yet aspiring for the power to take its free flight.”*

Expressing herself on the same subject, the Mother says elsewhere (Prayer of August 17, 1913)

“Nothing can be more humiliating, nothing more depressing than these thoughts turned always towards the preservation of the body, this preoccupation with health, with our subsistence, with the framework of our life ”*

A constant loving concentration of our thought on the Divine is another potent means of freeing ourselves from the hold of the physical mind. Whenever the mind turns towards the objects of sense or towards the body and its urges, it has to be directed with love towards the Divine, the infinite and Eternal Master and Author of our being. The higher the aspiration, the less the chance of the consciousness sinking down into the morass of material cares. And along with concentration and aspiration, there must be an opening to the Mother’s Force, so that it may come down and effect the purification and release of the physical being from its own grossness. “The higher consciousness and its force have to work long and come again and again before they can become constant and normal in the physical nature.”†

Another very common experience of the sadhaka is that the physical mind harasses him with its swarms of mechanical thoughts during the time of meditation or concentration. These thoughts in themselves have no interest for him—they are trite and futile and tediously self-repetitive, they only buzz about and disturb his meditation. Sri Aurobindo advises a very quiet rejection of this mechanical buzzing of the physical mind. He deprecates all restlessness, all feverish effort to smother the buzzing or shut it out, and teaches a serene withdrawal of sanction and attention from it. The quieter one is, the easier it becomes to get rid of this mechanical action of the physical mind; for, the will of the Purusha is a calm will of irresistible force which can never fail, but the secret of its power lies in its *masterful calmness*.

Another experience is that the intensities of the deeper and higher parts of the being that sweep into the physical mind and fire it into spells of love and devotion and surrender, do not abide long in it—they are soon covered up or fade away. The sadhaka feels drained and depleted.

When one falls into the physical consciousness, one finds it so dull and stupid, so cold and wearying. Depression, disappointment and even despair usually follow this fall, and one feels, as it were,

* “Prayers and Meditations of the Mother” † “Bases of Yoga” by Sri Aurobindo

lost in a dreary desert. Or, there is the agonised sense of a stalemate or stagnation, as if the spiritual journey had come to a standstill and no further progress was being made. Or, one is overwhelmed with a sense of one's own impurities and incapacity and tortures oneself with an exaggerated repentance and lamentation. Or, there is a sudden irruption of doubts which darken the intelligence and eclipse the memory of past experiences. One feels as if the very ground were cut away from under one's feet and that one had nowhere to turn to for solace or encouragement. One comes sometimes even to think of giving up the yogic life and returning to the ordinary ways of worldly desires. All this is a state of bleak forlornness and corroding gloom.

What is the remedy? The remedy lies in not brooding over the fall and its disheartening results, but in recovering contact with the psychic being and infusing its fire and light into the physical mind. Once the rays of the soul penetrate and permeate the physical mind, it will tend to lose its habitual tendency to doubt and depression and develop the capacity for sustained aspiration, devotion and self-offering. There is another remedy which may prove more immediately effective: it is to step back from the unpurified physical mind, which is the home of doubt and despondency, and try to take one's stand in the inner consciousness. Those who have practised the technique of self-withdrawal—it is a primary, fundamental technique in the Integral Yoga—will find it very helpful in such cases. As soon as they step back, they can breathe freely in an atmosphere which is impervious to doubt.

The purification of the physical mind, as, indeed, of the whole physical nature, depends considerably on the conquest and enlightenment of the subconscious. If a passive peace were the sole objective, the physical mind could be left to spin and buzz till it fell into a wearied quiescence but for a radical purification one has to tackle the base upon which it stands and from which it derives its obstinate habits and associations and its irrational impulses. We shall touch upon this subject at the end of this chapter.

The object of purifying the physical mind is not to reduce it to an inert automaton, but to release it from its doped slavery to Matter, enlighten its native grossness by bringing down into it more and more of the higher light, and finally open it to the direct influx of the Supramental Consciousness, so that, liberated and illumined, it can sense and contact the Divine everywhere, in all men and creatures and things, and express His Light and Bliss and fulfil His Will and purpose in all its movements. *To be continued*

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

THE PROBLEM OF REBIRTH By Sri Aurobindo. Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. Pp. 194 (Demy). Price Rs. 3-8.

There are certain Ideas which have clung to the mind of man ever since he began to think. They have been questioned, scrutinised and frequently dismissed as superstitions by his reasoning. Still they survive and continue to exercise their hold. That is because of the Truth-content in the Idea which is not affected by the form in which it has been clothed. It is usually these idea-forms which get dissolved under the cleansing pressure of the growing intelligence in man. To put it in other words, it is the arguments and reasonings erected by the still imperfect minds of men that topple down when subjected to a vigorous shake-up by the investigating Reason. But the core of the idea, the truth behind it continues unaffected. The Idea of Rebirth is one such notable example. The forms in which this Idea of being born again after death has been current have varied from time to time, from place to place. The ground on which it is believed to be based have not been always the same, indeed, that was inevitable since many of the supporting bases failed to pass the test of reason and fresh ones were devised. That has not, however, affected the fundamental truth behind the idea which stands in its own right, exercising a profound influence in shaping the lives of millions of men. Sri Aurobindo dealt with this subject in a series of essays in his Journal, *Arya*, four decades ago, and their present publication in book-form is very welcome for the light they shed on the development of this theory across the centuries, the merciless scrutiny to which the arguments for and against it have been exposed and the reasoned exposition of the inherent truth and functional indispensability of the process of Rebirth and its inevitable corollary of the mechanism of Karma in the scheme of the Cosmos.

Divided into three Sections, the book opens with a general survey of the battle of arguments in favour of and opposed to the Doctrine of Rebirth. Popular arguments like the ethical one seeking to establish rebirth as a means for the moral governance of the world are shown to be as futile as those advanced on the other side in disproof of the soundness of the theory, viz. lack of memory of past lives, the part played by heredity etc—all of which “are all-sufficient only to those who already believe in it” (P. 8). Clearing certain misconcep-

tions that have gathered round this doctrine in the common mind, Sri Aurobindo points out that rebirth is not simply the taking of a new body by the same personality that has been obliged to cast off the old. He notes: "It is this survival of the identical personality that attracts the European mind today in the theory of reincarnation" (P. 16); the fact is that "there is a constant re-forming of personality in new bodies" (P. 19).

"The true foundation of the theory of rebirth is the evolution of the soul" (P. 12). Our life is not a happening without a before and an after. It is just one chapter lived by the soul in its progressive ascent on the scale of its spiritual evolution. From ignorance to Knowledge, from darkness to Light, from animality to Godhead—this is the gamut of the journey of the human soul and to achieve this it takes on a series of births—since one life is pitifully insufficient for the purpose—utilising the life-experiences in each for the formation and development of its personality. The process continues till either the soul decides to withdraw from the labour or completes it in fulfilment of the Cosmic objective. This in outline is the doctrine of rebirth which figures in many philosophical systems, but everywhere with a different emphasis. It is interesting to follow Sri Aurobindo in tracing the colours in which this doctrine is presented in the different systems of philosophy and religion.

In the old Indian version, the secret of creation is "a soul evolution of which Time is the course and the earth among many other worlds the theatre . . . evolution, heredity and rebirth are three companion processes of the universal unfolding, evolution the processional aim, rebirth the main method, heredity one of the physical conditions." (P. 31).

In the Buddhist philosophy which lays more stress on rebirth than any other system of thought, the recurrence of rebirth is viewed "as a prolonged mechanical chain; it sees, with a sense of suffering and distaste, the eternal revolving of an immense cosmic wheel of energy with no divine sense in its revolutions, its beginning an affirmation of ignorant desire, its end a nullifying bliss of escape" (PP. 46). Thus to the Buddhist rebirth is a mechanical chain of recurrence of birth forged by Karma, the child of desire, from which a "willed self-extinction" is the only way of escape. Body and soul are both formations in Time, which it is the counsel of wisdom to dissolve.

The Illusionist, positing an "eternity of our absolute being" behind all our birth and becoming, adds a "positive strain" to the solution of the problem. "There is a recognition of a divine source of life but a non-recognition of any divine meaning in life." (P. 49). In

this view also, rebirth is "reduced . . . to a constant mechanism of self-deception" and the one way out is an absolute denial of all our becoming. Pointing to the unsatisfying nature of this solution, Sri Aurobindo cites, with tremendous effect, the following phrase of the Koran: "Thinkest thou that I have made the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in a jest?"

In the Vaishnava idea of the world as a play of God, "Rebirth . . . becomes too much of a divine caprice with no object but its playing and ours is too great and strenuous a world to be so accounted for" (P. 51).

The Tantric solution "shows us a supreme superconscient Energy which casts itself out here into teeming worlds and multitudinous beings and in its order the soul rises from birth to birth and follows its million forms, till in a last human series it opens to the consciousness and powers of its own divinity and returns through them by a rapid illumination to the eternal superconscience. We find at last the commencement of a satisfying synthesis, some justification of existence, a meaningful consequence in rebirth . . . but there is a too minor stress on the soul's divine potentialities, a haste of insistence on the escape into superconscience; the supreme Energy constructs too long and stupendous a preparation for so brief and so insufficient a flowering. There is a *lacuna* here, some secret is still missing" (P. 51).

Rebirth, Sri Aurobindo proceeds to point out, is in fact "not a dragging chain, but rather at first a ladder of the soul's ascension and at last a succession of mighty spiritual opportunities." Rebirth is the process and Karma the means by which the soul works out its possibilities. Each birth is a step in advance of the previous; the last birth provides the material and prepares for the next. The soul-personality put forward in Nature by the spirit behind moves from birth to birth taking on fresh bodies when the old ones cease to be serviceable for its purpose. Karma is the propelling mechanism devised and utilised by Nature to precipitate the soul into this series of births and deaths through which it accumulates the needed stuff for its growth. The latter half of the First Section and the Second and Third Sections (*Lines of Karma* and *Higher Lines of Karma*) are devoted to a study of this Doctrine of Karma.

Put simply, Karma means that for a given output of energy there is an equivalent return. Every action is followed by a return of the released energies in the form of its result. There is no escape from this mathematical law of returns, quantitative and qualitative. But the world does not always fit in with this idyllic picture of the logi-

cian. At every step life around us baffles the pious moralist, the sophisticated humanist and the one-track metaphysician with its cruel and sardonic posers. The "good" man does not always prosper; nor does the "bad" one go under. Actions do not yield the expected fruit: the sower rarely reaps the crop. Sri Aurobindo has examined and given a very satisfying answer to these and allied questions in this study.

The truth of Karma is complex. Just as there are many planes of being and consciousness, there are also many strands in the Law of Karma. What is true of one layer need not apply to another. There is, for instance, the law of the output and return of physical energy, the law of the output and return of energies on the life and mind levels, not to speak of those on other levels subliminal and spiritual. and, man being what he is, a complex web of many personalities, it is inevitable, that there is an interaction of the functioning of the energies of Karma on all the levels of his being and the combined result is frequently very different from what we expect to see, aware as we are only of the energies active on our surface being or those consciously put forward by us. Not only that. Overshadowing the Karma of the individual there is the larger Karma of the nation or race in which he dwells: the good Karma of an individual can often well be swallowed up in the avalanche of the rebound of the opposite kind of Karma accumulated by the ancestors in his race. Drawing pertinent attention to this aspect of the problem, Sri Aurobindo makes an interesting observation:*

"A commercially minded king of Belgium is moved to make a good thing of the nation's rubber estate and human cattle farm in Africa and his agents murder and mutilate and immolate thousands of cheap negro lives to hasten the yield and swell his coffers. This able monarch dies in the splendour of riches and the sacred odour of good fortune, his agents in no way suffer: but here of a sudden comes Germany trampling her armed way towards a dream of military and commercial empire through prosperous Belgium and massacred men and women and mutilated children startlingly remind us of Karma . . ." (P 171). Individually the innocent may sometimes have to suffer for the corporate sins.

Again, *good* and *bad* are not the only values in life. There are other values of Knowledge, of Power, of Beauty etc. The various outputs of energies in each of these fields demand their own fulfilment irrespective of their goodness or badness from the standpoint of the moralist and the result depends on which of them has the

* Written in 1920

greatest potency to effectuate itself. That is how the powerful man who exerts himself prospers whatever his moral deserts whereas his virtuous competitor lacking the requisite will of power fails to make good. A moral act can only demand a return on the moral plane—ethical development and greater growth in virtue and goodness,—but not necessarily at times even this is possible. This interaction of the diverse currents of Karmic output explains much that is bewildering in life.

Another topic We speak of Fate, Destiny and the predetermined results. Sri Aurobindo points out, as he has done tirelessly elsewhere also, that the determinism of Karma, the rigidity of Destiny differs from plane to plane. It is most hard and secure on levels where the play of consciousness is the least. Freedom is least there and that is just, because, as he says, “an Ignorance cannot be permitted to have free mastery”. With the development of Consciousness, the rigidity tends to loosen gradually. The sense of liberty grows as we rise towards the mind (P. 100), and, as we reach the subtler levels of the soul, we find destiny is what the soul chooses to make. The soul is free and, to the extent we succeed in making its influence operative, the workings of Karma on other levels are controlled, checked and even, at times, changed. To grow in Knowledge, to grow in the strength of the Spirit is to outgrow the tutelage of Karma.

Every page of this philosophical treatment of the subject of Rebirth has something illuminating to say on the problems that confront man in his every-day life; it has indeed a pragmatic value, pragmatic in a higher sense of the word. We could do no more than touch upon just a few of them, as we have done, for illustration. In Sri Aurobindo's treatment all these problems find solutions that are so satisfying and natural because the solutions proceed out of a single larger solution he gives to the Problem of Man. True, evolution is not a concept peculiar to his thought alone. But most certainly, the truth of *spiritual evolution* is his especial contribution and it invests the spiral movement of the soul in its ascent through the mechanism of Karma and Rebirth with a new significance—the significance of purpose in the cycle of its journey towards a high aim. That aim involves its liberation from the hold of Nature which is not the end, but a means, an indispensable condition for the fulfilment of the purpose which is the realisation of the Divine Being with which it is one in essence—a realisation that does not rest content with the soul's release but moves on to give all the instruments their share in the high attainment for which the Divine has ordained the soul's toil in terrestrial life.

M. P. PANDIT

LITERATURE AND PSYCHOLOGY by F. L. Lucas. Published by Cassell & Co., Ltd., 37-38 St. Andrew's Hill, London, E.C. 4. —Pp. 340. Price 15s. net.

The invasion of literature by psychology seems complete and we have stalwarts like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Aldous Huxley and D. H. Lawrence; but with the majority of writers the invasion merely scratches the surface of literature and their contributions are slight and of ephemeral interest. But not so is the case with the older writers who had insight into human character and its abnormalities and brought to their works a psychological depth which is now being unearthed by the psychologists themselves. The critics of today, therefore, need to approach the great masters with humility and bring to their works sound knowledge of psychology before they treat them with condescension and earn for themselves the opprobrium—"lice in the locks of literature" or "horse-flies that hinder the horse from ploughing".

Literary criticism is tending to be personal and often erratic; at times scientific and rational; and both methods have their advantages when they are not stretched too far. *Literature and Psychology* belongs to the second category and will appeal to all who are wanting the critical field to be free of the noxious vermin that creep inside and spoil the harvest. As a critic Mr. Lucas has no predilections and brings to his readers what he calls a "pocket-torch" whereby they see the darkened portions of literature. His critical acumen is such that he sheds light on the problems and difficulties that have baffled critics of literature, particularly Shakespearean critics; and like Oscar Wilde he is perhaps inclined to ask them: "Are the commentators of *Hamlet* really mad or only pretending to be?" For he sees in their criticism, including those of Dr. Gregg and Dover Wilson, much of irrelevance that could have been avoided if they had seen life squarely. There is much, as Mr. Lucas points out, in the characters of Shakespeare that is "often astonishingly closer to real life than academic rationalism ever guessed"; and he comes to this startling, yet true conclusion, by comparison with a number of actual case-histories of Wilhelm Stekel, the German psychologist whom he admires for his outstanding "brilliance, honesty and good sense"—three qualities which Mr. Lucas also brings to his book. He explains his preference for Stekel in his Preface:

"I am aware that in orthodox Freudian circles Wilhelm Stekel is regarded with some disfavour. Sometimes their Unconscious

shows its dislike by even misspelling his name. But after the not inconsiderable test of reading some thousands of pages of Stekel's work, I have come to think him a better and finer mind than any other I have encountered in this field apart from Freud himself (not to mention Jung whose mysticism leaves me completely cold)."

Mr. Lucas divides his book into two parts—"The Interpretation of Literature" and "The Judgement of Literature"—that explain the dual role of critics—the role they must needs know if they are to do justice to themselves and the work in hand. A quarter of the book is devoted to elucidating points that arise in connexion with *Lady Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Lear* and *Hamlet* and the plays concerned are made clear. We see *Lady Macbeth* washing her hands over and over again as Pilate washed his, to proclaim innocence; *Othello's* jealousy springs from the fear that since, as a daughter *Desdemona* has been faithless to her father, she may also prove faithless as a wife; in *Lear* and *Cordelia* we have a lover's quarrel without either knowing it; and in *Hamlet* there is the supreme lesson of psychoanalysis.

"Face your conflicts, bring to light the terrible memories that have stalked so long, masked, through the Netherland of your soul, and what seemed the hideous nightmares of a morbid sense of guilt can give place to the kindly light of a balanced Ideal that sees life calmly, tolerantly, forgivingly . . ."

In the second quarter of the book (still the first part), there is the chapter on "Poetic Justice, Popular Legends, Romance". We see poetic justice meted out to people in life and also in literature where an avenging Destiny follows relentlessly its victims. Popular legends have a basis in reality and Duke Ferdinand, in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, after the murder of his sister and the melancholic guilt, imagines himself a wolf with the hair turned inwards. Stekel quotes a case in which the victim barked like a dog or crowed and scratched like a cock as the mood seized him. . . The Fairy Princess who awoke from a long sleep of a hundred years by a kiss is symbolic of girlhood passing into womanhood. The chapter on "Romanticism" brings forth, like the Nile, "a golden harvest and a crop of monsters" and the next chapter "Blake, Shelley, Dionysus" shows us the monstrous elements in Blake and Shelley who are father-haters, and Dionysus leads us "into the darker thickets of the primitive" "Romanticism in Decay" is illustrated by Poe and Surrealism. one shows us

his obsession with mother and sister (like Shelley and Wordsworth) and the other spells the death of literature or art. In the chapter on "Wit" we see its contribution to literature as a form of recreation and the release of pent-up energy in harmless laughter. "Criticism and Creation" leads us to the part which is played by critics and which will depend on how far they understand their function. It is all very well being tolerant as a critic but one need not admire a goitre because it is the season or fashion; and in present-day criticism we seem to have a large number of those goitre specimens.

The second part of the book brings us the "influence-value" of literature on which critics are stubbornly silent. In the chapter "The Relativity of Taste" we see that relativity plays as much a part in the realm of art as in science, and even acknowledged critics bring to their contemporaries adverse comments. Homer was ridiculed in antiquity by Zoilus. Even later, Landor thought much of Homer trash. Aristophanes was likened by Swinburne to "a mutilated monkey" and Goethe thought the *Inferno* abominable. But literature has not only "pleasure-value" but also "influence-value". As Mr. Lucas observes:

"Art is not merely a matter of pleasurable or ecstatic moments. There are also the moments after. Every man, as Suckling says, is his own judge of the food he likes; but what about the effects of that food? These are no longer a matter of personal taste, they are a matter of reason, knowledge, science."

But things are not so easy and the judicial standard must needs be revived if literary criticism is to bring to literature the sanity and freshness that were characteristic of the 18th century critics and is to a great extent illustrated by Matthew Arnold in the 19th. The chapter on "Art for Art's Sake" elucidates further the influence-value of literature. One sees in the works of Shakespeare life in its varied aspects, another sees moral lessons. "O for a life of sensations rather than of thought!" exclaims John Keats and he is dittoed by critics. There are others, like Dr. Johnson, who see no pleasure in a work unless it has a mission or purpose. Aristotle countered Plato with his Cathartic theory and this was taken up by others who saw in the great masters the message of life expressed in art's way. As Mr. Lucas writes:

"Though there can be no art without purpose, there can be art without result. Everything that moves men moves them

in some direction, up or down, for better or worse. In practice the result is often so imperceptible, the influence often so immaterial, that there is no need to consider it."

And Mr. Somerset Maugham (whom Mr. Lucas quotes) says in his biography:

"The value of art is not in beauty, but in good action . . . Little as I like the deduction, I cannot but accept it; and this is that the work of art must be judged by its fruits, and if these are not good, it is valueless. . . ."

As Mr. Lucas explains in his chapter on Values, the value of life, as of literature or art, lies in health and ethics, and ethics begins when two persons meet; and Ethics and Aesthetics need not be shy of each other. Having good and beautiful children, loving a home and one's mother, creating things—these are normal occurrences in a healthy civilisation. Much as Mr. Lucas leaves out the element of religion or mysticism, *Literature and Psychology* will awaken students of literature to things beyond their ken and show them the parallels of life and literature. . . .

WILLIAM HOOKENS

THE AGE OF THE SPIRIT

Sisirkumar Mitra

Continued from previous issue

The Secret Revealed

The Yoga of the Veda is symbolised in the idea of sacrifice by performing which the aspirant seeks to be led into the world of the gods, to have their benediction and companionship in his labour to conquer all opposition and achieve the goal. But was it only an outer ritual? It could not be, at least not exclusively so; because no externalia, however gorgeously and meticulously done, can vouchsafe to man such sublime visions of the Spirit, bring about such revolutionary inner change in the life and soul of man. What then is the deeper significance of this sacrifice? The whole of the Rigveda is nothing if not a high-ranking Song of humanity through which is invoked the aid of the gods in the ceaseless ascension of man's soul towards the vastitudes of an infinite existence. Its chants are, as it were, episodes of the lyrical epic of the soul in that heavenward ascension. But what is that infinite existence? and how is the ascension to it to be made? Answers to these are hidden in the figures and symbols the Mystics used for what they saw, heard and realised.

The hymns therefore centre round the most significant symbol of sacrifice—the symbol at once of a giving and a worship, of a battle and a journey. The battle rages in the inner world of man as it does in the outer between the powers of Light and the powers of Darkness. And sacrifice is the means by which man seeks to aspire to the gods for their help in his struggle against the forces that oppose his upward endeavours. But it is an inward means, an inner offering to the Godhead of all man is and all he has so that all the riches of the divine Truth and Light may come into his possession, descend into his life and become elements of his inner birth into the Truth, which implies the development in him of the right thinking, the right understanding and the right action of that higher Truth, by which man will build himself up into that Truth.

The sacrifice is also a journey, a pilgrimage, a travel towards the home of the Truth, the Sun-world, the home of the gods born in the Truth. Man as he takes to this path is opposed by the dark forces, to overcome which he calls in the aid of the gods, making to them all those offerings which in the Veda symbolise the dedication of inner powers and potentialities to the Lords of the Truth. From a yet larger view, "the Vedic sacrifice is psychologically a symbol of cosmic and individual activity become self-conscious, enlightened and aware of its goal."

The whole process of the universe is in its very nature a sacrifice,

voluntary or involuntary. "Self-fulfilment by self-immolation, to grow by giving, is the universal law." From Matter evolves the plant, from the plant the animal, from the animal the man, from man by the same continued process of self-giving and in response to the same divine impulsion will evolve godlike superman with infinite powers and possibilities. In its deepest sense the Sacrifice—the Sanskrit term for which, *yajna*, originally meant God—is the sacrifice of the Supreme by which He looses himself forth in his creation in order to prepare it for a greater manifestation which will come about when man—so far the highest point of creation—becomes fully conscious of the Divine and His Will in him, and offers himself wholly and entirely to the Divine so that he may fulfil His Will in the life of man. This would mean the return of the Divine in creation to his unveiled splendour in the Home of the Vast Truth. It is, as it were, the double process of involution and evolution continuously going on in the earth-consciousness. The Spirit becomes involved in matter and manifests in it the powers possible to its conditions waiting for the hour when its constant presence would prepare the earth for the emergence of its own force of Truth and Light through which earth, rather, man would evolve into a perfect type of gnostic being. Sacrifice is that inner process by which man grows in his readiness for that "divine event". When man aspires for the Light he does so because he is impelled to it by the Will of the Divine in him, the mounting flame of Agni.

In this sacrifice Agni is the god who is first to be invoked, since it is he who is the path-finder and the leader of the sacrifice. Physically, Agni is the god of sacrificial flame, the fire found in the external phenomena of Nature. Psychologically, the Lord of Fire is represented by knowledge and a blazing power, light and fiery force, the *tapas* of later terminology. He is the force of the universal Godhead, a conscious force or Will instinct with knowledge, the nature of the *tapas* that pervades the world and is behind all its workings. He is the seer, *kavi*, the supreme mover of thought, *prathamamanta*, the mover too of speech and the Word, *upavakta jananam*, the power in the heart that works, *hridisthita kratum*, the impeller of action and movement, the divine guide of man in the act of sacrifice of which he is the priest who calls and brings the gods and gives to them the offering. Therefore does the Rishi invoke the Divine Flame as the sacrificer, the luminous seer:

'O Seer, we kindle thee in thy light and thy vastness in the march of our sacrifice who carriest the offerings on their journey.

'O Flame, O purifier, bring to us by thy tongue of rapture, O god, the gods and offer to them sacrifice.

'Come, O Will, with all the godheads for the giving of the oblation; thee we accept as the priest of the offering.

'O Flame, thou burnest high and increasest the divine laws and art the conqueror of a thousandfold riches; thou art the messenger of the gods who has the word.'

All these functions cannot be predicated of the god of physical fire but they are all just attributes of the conscient divine Will in man and the universe, awakening in man when he makes the inner sacrifice in response to which Agni who knows the way to the home of the Truth leads his human worshipper to that home. This is how Agni mediates between God and man and fashions gods in the mortals.

One of the two most important of the Vedic deities, the other being Indra, Agni is called the beginning and the end. He is the Will that is Knowledge, and it is he who initiates the upward effort of the mortal towards Immortality: to this divine consciousness that is one with divine power, man arrives as the foundation of immortal existence. When therefore the sacrifice is properly made, that is to say, when we have made of ourselves a complete offering at the altar of Agni, the universal Will, Agni takes form in us awakening in us the Divine Will illumined with divine knowledge and "Born, the Flame shines out slaying the Destroyers, yea, he smites the Darkness with the Light and he finds the shining Herds and those Waters and the luminous world." Here the Destroyers are the dark forces, the Herds are the trooping rays of the divine Sun, the luminous Consciousness, whom the Destroyers shut up in the dark caves—regions—of man's being; the Waters are the outpouring of the luminous movement and impulse of the divine or supramental existence, and the luminous world is *Svar*, the world of divine solar light to which the human aspirant has to ascend and which is revealed by the release of the shining herds from the dark cave and the consequent uprising of the divine Sun, the Infinite Truth. Thus does Agni liberate man from ignorance and falsehood into the knowledge and light of the Infinite Truth. "O Seeing Flame, thou carriest man of the crooked ways into the abiding truth and knowledge."

When Agni the sacrificial Flame begins to burn on the altar of the soul as the power of the Will, a force of God, the upward movement to heaven starts, the ascent of the soul to the splendours of the Infinite begins. This is one end of life on earth, from where the journey is initiated. At the other end shines the bright god Indra who is the power of pure existence self-manifested as the Divine Mind. He is invoked to come down into our world as "the Hero with the shining horses—symbolising consciousness in the form of force—who slays darkness and division with his lightnings, pours down the life-

giving heavenly waters, finds in the trace of the hound, Intuition, the lost or hidden illuminations, makes the Sun of Truth mount high in the heaven of our mentality." The Rishi therefore declares:

'He with his shining companions won the field, won the sun won the waters.'

'O hero, thou didst conquer the cow, thou didst conquer the Soma; thou didst loose forth to their overflowing the seven rivers.'

The Vedic gods foster and increase men in all his substance and possessions. They continually enlarge him towards the unbounded plenitude of the vast Truth-Consciousness, upholding him in his struggle and labour so that he may reach, fully grown, the supreme goal of his existence. Indra is the greatest of these divine companions of man, whose help and strength man needs so much, in order that he might be able to retain and enjoy to his full the riches that his heavenly ascension—the upsoaring flame of Agni in him—brings to man. Indra is indeed the Lord of Heaven with the mythical thunderbolt as his weapon, to whom also the external sacrifice is made and who is known as such in the myths and legends of India. But psychologically he is the Lord of Heaven's Light, the radiant bringer of it to man, his thunderbolt symbolising the outflashings of divine illuminations which open the mentality of man to the Light of Truth. The Rishi therefore invokes him:

'Come to our Soma-offerings, O Soma-drinker, drink of the Soma-wine; the intoxication of thy rapture gives indeed the Light.'

'Then may we know somewhat of Thy uttermost right thinkings. Show not beyond us, come.'

'Come, O Indra, impelled by the mind, driven forward by the illumined thinker, to my soul-thoughts . . .'

'Come with forceful speed, O Lord of bright horses.'

Soma is delight, the wine of God, whose physical form—a juice of the plant of the same name—is variously spoken of in the Vedic hymns, all symbolising the divine intoxication, which its rise produces, particularly in Indra who is sustained by his ecstasy in his labour to conquer the forces that obstruct the awakening of man to his divine destiny. And Indra conquers when he breaks up the caves of man's subconsciousness and releases the cows of light and illumination which are shut there by the Panis, the Lords of lower sense activity. Indra then illumines the planes of man's consciousness with the splendour of the Swar, the world of the sun of Truth, which is the abode of Indra, who with his seeing knowledge fashions right thought-formations in the mind of man and opens him to the truth and light of a supramental existence.

But the Soma—delight—is concealed in the growths of the earth, in the waters of existence, from where it has to be pressed out and distilled into its original essence and purity, and in that form, offered to the Lord of Heaven who would then liberate his human worshipper into the vastness of the highest Beatitude. Thus does Indra reciprocate to earth its offering of Soma. That is how the mind of man receives its inflow of the Ananda of the Immortals from the supramental consciousness through the *Ritam*, the Truth.

In this work of Indra in the aspiring soul of man the Maruts are his shining collaborators, the Maruts who represent the progressive illumination of human mentality. They are the thought-gods, the powers of will and nervous or vital force, that impel thought and speech and with Indra battle for the foundation on earth of heavenly glories. Physically the Maruts are the powers of wind, storm and rain, the elements of Nature, which symbolise forces that help new-make the imperfect mentality of man enabling it to rise from its subconscious base into its superconscious summits. Therefore chants the Rishi:

‘To you I come with this obeisance, by perfect Word I seek right mentality. Take delight, O Maruts, in the things of knowledge. . . .’

‘O Maruts, upward all our days by the will towards Victory.’

The Maruts are also powers of Vayu, the Lord of Life, whose force pervades all material existence and whose force is a condition of all its activities. If Indra is the master of mental force, Vayu is the master of nervous or vital force; and their union is necessary for the effective movement of thought and action. They are therefore invited to come in one common chariot and drink together of the wine of the Ananda which brings with it the divinising energies. The Rishi therefore hymns.

‘With Indra for thy charioteer, come, O Vayu, in the car of happy light to the drinking of the Soma wine’

The chariot symbolises movement of energy and it is a glad movement of already-illumined vital energies that is invoked in the form of Vayu.

After Indra, the Maruts and Vayu have worked together in human consciousness awakening it to the bliss and truth of heaven which again they bring down and establish on earth, Varuna and Mitra have to be invoked to act on human mentality so as to perfect the intellect and widen it into larger ranges. Varuna in the Veda is always characterised as a power of wideness and purity. ‘He is also *rishadasa*, destroyer of the enemy, of all that tries to injure the inner growth of

man. Mitra, a power like Varuna of the Light and Truth, especially represents Love, Joy and Harmony, the foundations of Vedic beatitude. He works with purity of Varuna and imparts that purity to the intellect which then becomes free from all discords and confusions.' He is thus the harmoniser, of whose divine being Love is the very essence. He is the divine friend, a kingly helper of men and immortals, the most beloved of the gods, as the Veda so often speaks of him. Mitra brings within the reach of man the enjoyment of the divine felicity derived from pure possession and sinless pleasure in all things founded upon the unfailing touch of the Truth and Right in the freedom of a large universality.

Equally supreme among the Vedic deities is Varuna, 'the ethereal, oceanic, infinite King of wide being, wide knowledge and wide light, a manifestation of the one God's active omniscience and omnipotence, a mighty guardian of the Truth.' He is often invoked in the Veda as the finder of the Path, the Path that leads to new truths, new powers, new worlds, higher realisations. He holds in himself all the heights which the seeker is to climb in order to reach the summit of his quest. The entire universe is sustained and led forward by the single and perfect movement of Mitra-Varuna, the Light and the Purity, the Harmony and the Infinity. It is the rain of heaven—the streams of the Truth, waters that have knowledge—which these two Godheads pour down, upholding the physical existence in its fruits and the celestial in its herding radiances of illumination. They thus create in man a force full of divine knowledge and a wide being which they guard and increase. Therefore the Rishi declares:

'You uphold earth and heaven, O Mitra King and King Varuna, by your greatness; you increase the growths of earth, you nourish the shining herds of heaven, you pour forth the rain of its waters, O swift in strength.

'O Mitra and Varuna illumined in consciousness, by the Law, by the knowledge of the Mighty One you guard the workings; by the Truth you govern widely all the world of our becoming; you set the sun in heaven, a chariot of various splendour.'

All the strengths of heaven that new-make man into the highest plenitude of his being find on earth their desired fulfilment when on the horizon of the seeker's consciousness rises in his supernal glory the godhead of Light, Surya. This light is that of the Truth described in the Rigveda as the True, the Right, the Vast. It is the luminous supramental heaven of Swar—'vast Swar, the great Truth'—concealed beyond our heaven and our earth. Yet as Surya, the Sun, 'that Truth', dwells lost in the darkness, withheld from man in the secret cave

of his subconscious. But this Truth, which is the Vast, dwells manifest and free only on the supramental plane where existence, will, knowledge and joy move in a rapturous and boundless infinity and are not limited and hedged as in this many-walled existence of the mind, life and body which form the lower being of man. With the aid of the gods man must break beyond the two enclosing firmaments of the mental and physical and ascend to that divine existence free and large in its unbounded range. It is where roam freely the luminous herds of the Sun: it is the seat and house of the Truth, the gods' own home. Such is the world of the sun of the Vedic worship, the paradise of light to which the Fathers aspired:

'O Sun, thou all-seeing Intelligence, may we, living creatures, behold thee bringing to us the great Light, blazing out on us for vision upon vision of the beatitude, ascending to the bliss in the vast mass of thy strength above!'

Created in man by the divine Mind Indra and taught by Varuna who is divine Purity and Wideness, the Maruts the Life-powers in man, the purifying storm-gods, battle for the knowledge of the Truth, the vision of the Light of the solar world. And this they do that man may enjoy the riches of heaven. But Surya 'has not only the far-seeing eye of knowledge born of the gods'; he is also 'the speaker of the supreme word, the impeller of the illumined and illuminating thought', the thought that creates. It is in this aspect that Surya Savitri is invoked in the Gayatri, the chosen formula of the ancient Vedic religion. When man rises to the vision of Surya, the God of Light awakes in him and he sees all the worlds of divine Light as the bodies of the Infinite Aditi, the Mother of the gods; and this new-seeing of all things in the Divine Mother new-moulds all the parts of his being into the perfect harmony of a new creation. The function of Surya is to prepare that new birth and that new creation for man.

But the golden Light of Surya cannot burst on human consciousness without Dawn who alone can dispel the darkness by releasing the radiances of the sun on the night of human ignorance which envelops heaven and earth and the mid-region, man's mental and physical consciousness and vital being. Dawn the daughter of heaven is imaged as the bride of the luminous Lord of Beatitude, who when she rises, unveils the splendours of her bosom, reveals her shining limbs and makes the sun ascend upon the upclimbing tier of the worlds. Dawn is also imaged as the awakener who is full of the Truth by the illuminations of heaven, who comes uttering words of truth. 'She finds speech for every thinker'. It is she who creates the Path for mortals by her light. The Rishi therefore hymns:

'Thou art there for strength and knowledge and great impulsion, thou art our movement to the goal, thou makest us set forth on the journey.'

'O Dawn divine, shine out on us immortal, in thy chariot of bliss, uttering the words of Truth.'

But Dawn comes only after Night. Indeed Night holds hidden in her bosom her luminous sister. 'This life of our ignorance taught by the gods in their veiled human working prepares the birth of the divine Dawn so that, sped forth, she may manifest the creation of the luminous creator.' For the divine Dawn is the force or face of Aditi, by whose light the gods are born in man in their true forms. Dawn is often invoked to come with all 'the splendours of heaven, with all the bountiful companies of its gods and seers, the shining herds of its thought companioned, as they are, by the burning rays of the Sun of gnosis.' She is indeed, as the Rishi says,

'Dawn of the luminous journey, Dawn queen of truth, large with the Truth, how wide is the gleam from her rosy limbs,— Dawn divine who brings with her the heaven of light.'

By invoking her the Rishi seeks to be reborn into the Light, into Knowledge. It is this divine birth that is aspired after when the Rishi prays to be awakened 'in the sonhood of the birth of knowledge, in the inspired hearing of the Truth.'

Dawn is therefore the illumination of the Truth rising upon the mentality of man to bring the day of full consciousness into the darkness or the half-lit night of his being. The Rishi, when he saw "the wide-shining of this Dawn", followed by the continuous splendour of the all-illuminating Light bursts forth:

'Arise, O Souls, arise! Strength has come, darkness has passed away—the Light is arriving!'

When this Light of heaven descends on earth and becomes permanently established in its consciousness, the earth then changes into heaven for that is its destiny. As in the outer world, so in the inner, Dawn is a continuous phenomenon, and the Dawn that came to the vision of the Vedic Mystics is "the first of the eternal succession of the Dawns that are coming." This is how Dawn fulfils the ancient mornings in their future glory, the great Yesterday in a greater Tomorrow.

A significant figure in Vedic mysticism is the perpetual conflict between Gods and Titans, the powers of the Light and Truth and those of Darkness and Falsehood. The Light is that of the illumined Infinite Consciousness of Aditi, the Mother of the gods whose powers befriend man in his struggle towards the summit of his being. And

the darkness is that of the darkened finite consciousness of Diti, the Mother of the titans who dwell in the obscure regions of man's being and obstruct the rays of the dawn over them when the rays of the Light are sought by the aspiring soul of man.

In cosmic creation Aditi is the undivided unity of things and Diti is the separative duality, the cause of all division. It is the sons of Diti who dominate the earth. And they rule by dualising the consciousness of egoistic man. Knowledge, Force and Delight are the powers of the Godhead which are to be brought down to earth for the divine life which is to be built with them. In human activity Knowledge corresponds to thought and its formations; Force to will and its works; Delight to love and its harmonisings. These are the faint reflections of the working of the gods in the life of man. But the sons of Diti pervert knowledge into the duality of truth and falsehood, force into that of strength and weakness, love into that of joy and hatred, and through the play of these opposites they sway the life of man creating all those confusions that afflict him. But these perverted forms of the original powers of God that are meant to new-make man into His image have to be exalted into their divine originals, these crooked movements of the separative consciousness have to be replaced by the straight ones of the truth-conscious mind. Man therefore must master these powers in their heavenly form and bring them down into his being, into every activity of his life on earth. And this endeavour means his travelling on the path of the Truth, following the straight and perfect leading of the gods, the children of Aditi, a leading which will ultimately enable him to transcend the limitations of mind and body, to enjoy the beatific immortality, to grow into the epiphany of the gods, and build in his human existence the universal formations of the higher and divine creation. Man grows in his strength to achieve these as he is more and more able to meet and cleave through the resistance of the opposing powers of Diti whose work in terrestrial evolution is no less important in that without it there would have been no struggle, and therefore, no victory, no riches. It is by his capacity for struggle that man increases in his strength and grows towards the victory: and by victory he wins the heavenly riches that are for ever.

In a deeper psychological sense, Diti and Aditi are one in the all-pervading Force of the Truth, even as Night and Dawn are one in the all-revealing Light of the Truth; and they have each their part to play in the movement of cosmic creation towards its divine destiny. The Maruts who represent the forces of thought are in fact the sons of Diti who are described as assisting Indra by their functioning in the

thought-world of man which they prepare for Indra to build in its perfect formation. Besides, Diti, creator of the things of the earth, has also to be possessed so that earth may be restored to its heavenly truth. An Upanishad declares this as a condition for the attainment of immortality.

How do the gods help man in his striving to reach the goal, The Vedic riks explicitly declare that there is a greater heaven where shines eternally the Truth, the base of a triple Infinity, the Truth in which are born the gods and in which also they have their home. It is a creative power of this Truth having inherent in it Infinite Being, Infinite Light and Infinite Bliss, that motives creation, and always remains behind it upbearing its labour to grow in readiness for the manifestation in it of the light and power of the Truth. The cosmic order through which this subtle working takes place is formed by three successive planes, Heaven, Air and Earth, which symbolise the mental, vital and physical principles that constitute man and that have also each its world above the earth, from which they act on human life till they are called down into it when only they act straight and direct. It is these principles on earth that have to be purified, perfected, and prepared for the Manifestation of the Light. Therefore do the gods in response to man's prayer descend from their heavenly home into these planes and work in them so that they may be exalted into their—the gods'—radiance and strength.

Each god has his appropriate functioning and motion in each plane, though this functioning is not restricted to one plane, and being of the same Truth, each god contains in him all the gods. Generally, Indra works in Heaven, in mind, Varuna, Mitra and the Maruts, in Air, in life; Agni, in earth, in matter: but all of them ever seek to lift the mortals beyond themselves, beyond earth and sky, to the higher heaven of Truth, the Swar, the Sun-world, Agni the Divine Flame figuring most prominently in this effort of the gods. If the dynamics of the Truth is not explicitly stated in the Veda, it is because the gods work with the power of the Most-High, with the consciousness of the Supreme Consciousness. They are the children of the Light, and to the Light they lead their human worshipper. There is yet another purpose for which the gods come down to work in mortals. The worlds above the earth in which the gods live and move, have everything in them which the gods need, Truth, Light, Immortality and eternal Ananda. But these worlds being tygal have no growth, no evolution. Earth having 'a deeper power than Heaven', the power to evolve into higher forms of consciousness, is sought by the gods in order to be relieved of their tygal existence into the ever-growing progress of a larger and richer life that Earth so gloriously offers