

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

SPECIAL ISSUE : NOVEMBER 24, 1977

Price : Rs. 2/-

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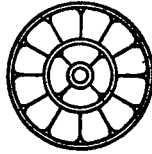
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Editor's Phone: 782.

Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.

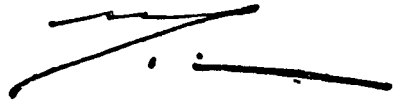


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XXIX

No. 11

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail."

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Editor: K. D. SETHNA

Managing Editor: K. R. PODDAR

Published by: P. COUNUMA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST, PONDICHERRY-605002

Printed by: AMIYO RANJAN GANGULI

at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry-605002

PRINTED IN INDIA

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers under No. R. N. 8667/63

LAST DARSHAN

I NEVER saw Her physical body.

I saw first only a small paper book placed so carefully on a bookshelf: *The Mother*. I did not know then what a mantra was, but as I read those two words I heard their sound in my mind. Later there was Her photograph, an almost life-size one, that met me as I entered the library at the East-West Cultural Center in Los Angeles. I did not know what a darshan was, but when I looked up at Her face, those eyes looked into mine.

For a long time afterward I had only my questions and doubts to offer Her. People around me spoke of Her, recounted experiences; they were writing letters, travelling to Pondicherry. Who was She?

Letters from Pondicherry were an eagerly-awaited event. They were my link. "Your letter was taken to Mother...She sends Her Blessings." There were books, messages, photographs, journals, blessing packets, but they mostly seemed like so many riddles, half-understood clues to the Mystery Woman.

It was 1:00 in the morning of November 18 that I was jolted from sleep by the ringing of the telephone. For several minutes women operators chattered in a foreign language, and at that hour I was ready to hang up. But something made me wait and then there were familiar voices: "We called to tell you that Mother left her body last night..." Still the questions came, but no shock, no sting; inside something was un-moved.

In the morning there was another message, a telegram: "Divine Mother left the body 17-11-73. Last Darshan of the body." To me it was a call. I wanted to be in Pondicherry for the last darshan. I wanted to be in Her physical presence.

On the morning of November 22 I walked into the Ashram compound for the first time. I came to the Meditation Hall, and there at one end of the room was the most wonderful bed I had ever seen, draped in white, surrounded with golden curtains. But the body was not there—it had been laid in the samadhi two days before.

"Whether one feels the Mother's love or not depends on whether one is open or not...it does not depend on physical nearness"... "She has not come to establish a 'physical relation' with people"... "The union with the Mother must be essentially psychic and spiritual..."

I put my disappointment away as best I could, but couldn't contain those ever-present questions. Nothing in my entire life experience taught of anything but 'physical relations' with other people. I had no choice but to wait and hope, supported by simple offerings like the small voice of my two-year-old daughter, holding a photo of Mother in Mahasamadhi, repeating "Mother's Body. Bindo's Body." It was remarkable, like a devotional chant.

I returned to California and things went on. During those years how many times I must have looked at Her photograph, read Her words, seen Her handwriting, heard recordings of Her very voice. I wished for a way to meet Her, see Her, know Her, and

none of those things were Her.

But naturally, imperceptibly something was growing; there was opening in me something else—besides the senses that can only know things there began to be another sense that can reveal the Thing. I had read and been told that Mother is even more present since She left her physical body; She is there in the subtle worlds, people said. I could only imagine some ethereal body floating in space, not present in this physical existence.

I never had any visions, but one day I simply recognized Her in someone's face. Inside (maybe outside too) I smiled the biggest smile, the kind that comes when suddenly you "get" a joke. No more opposition of subtle body versus physical body; the subtle can work through the physical.

I saw Her too in the curve of a hand, the ease of a smile, in an open face, clear eyes. It was Her in that voice that strengthened me, Her in a touch that soothed.

Divine Mother left the body, but there was no last darshan. She left Her single body, but She is present in the collective body. That one body is becoming "the million-bodied One".

JUDY FERRIS

WORDS OF THE MOTHER

TOWARDS THE GOAL

THE more a person is quiet in front of all occurrences, equal in all circumstances, and keeps a perfect mastery of himself and remains peaceful in the presence of whatever happens, the more he has progressed towards the goal.

*
**

The Grace is something that pushes you towards the goal to be attained. Do not try to judge it by your mind, you will not reach anywhere. For it is something immense which does not explain itself by human words or feelings. When the Grace acts, the result may be pleasant or not—it takes no account of any human value, it may even be a catastrophe from the ordinary and superficial point of view. But it is always the best for the individual. It is a blow of the Divine sent so that the progress may be by leaps and bounds. The Grace is that which makes you march swiftly towards the realisation.

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE PROGRESS

FROM A TALK OF THE MOTHER

BETWEEN the individual and the collectivity there is an interdependence from which one can't totally free oneself, no matter if one tries. And even a person who tried in his yoga to liberate himself totally from the terrestrial and human state of consciousness, would be tied down, in his subconscious at least, to the state of the mass, which acts as a brake and actually *pulls* backwards. One can try to go much faster, try to drop all the weight of attachments and responsibilities, but despite everything, the realisation, even of one who is at the very summit and is the very first in the evolutionary march, is dependent on the realisation of the whole, dependent on the state of the terrestrial collectivity. And that indeed *pulls* one back, to such an extent that at times one must wait for centuries for the Earth to be ready, in order to be able to realise what is to be realised.

And that is why Sri Aurobindo also says... that a double movement is necessary, and that the effort for individual progress and realisation should be combined with an effort to try to uplift the whole mass and enable it to make the progress that is indispensable for the greater progress of the individual: a mass-progress, it could be called, which would allow the individual to take one more step forward.

3 July 1957

THE HOLOCAUST

EXTRACTS FROM TWO PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS OF THE MOTHER

(These extracts seem very appropriate to the event of November 17 four years ago.)

AUGUST 4, 1914

Lord, eternal Master!

Men, pushed by the conflict of forces, are making a sublime sacrifice, they are offering their life in a sanguinary holocaust....

Lord, eternal Master, grant that all this may not be in vain, that the inexhaustible torrents of Thy divine Force may spread over the earth, penetrating into the troubled atmosphere, the struggling energies, all the violent chaos of the battling elements; and that the pure light of Thy Knowledge and the inexhaustible love of Thy Benediction may fill all hearts, penetrate into all souls, illumine every consciousness and, out of this darkness, these sombre, terrible and powerful obscurities, bring forth the living waters of the splendour of Thy majestic Presence!

My being is before Thee in an integral holocaust so that it may make their unconscious holocaust effective.

Accept this offering, answer our call: *Come!*

AUGUST 5, 1914

Eternal Master, Thou art in all things as a vivifying breath, as a sweet peace, as a luminous sun of love piercing through all the clouds of darkness.

Grant that we may be Thy vivifying breath, Thy sweet peace, Thy luminous love upon the earth amidst our human brothers, so ignorant and sorrowful.

O divine Master, accept the offering of my integral holocaust so that Thy work may be accomplished and the time not pass away in vain.

In a serene ecstasy I give myself to Thee, so that Thou mayst once again become the Master of what is Thine, the possessor of Thyself, in every one of the countless atoms and in the synthetic unity of the consciousness.

O divine Master, accept the offering of this integral holocaust so that the time may not have come in vain!

The whole being is transformed into the living flame of a sacrifice of pure love.

Become once again the king of Thy kingdom, deliver the earth from the heavy weight which crushes it, from the weight of its inert, ignorant, obscure ill-will.

O my sweet Master, my being burns with the ardent flame of the sacrifice of love: accept my offering so that the obstacle may be overcome.

DEATH AND REBIRTH

FROM A TALK BY THE MOTHER

SOMEONE has asked me a question about death: what happens after death and how one takes a new body.

Needless to say, it is a subject which could fill volumes, no two cases are alike: practically *everything* is possible on earth when one is in a physical body, and all statements when generalised become dogmatic. But still one may look at the problem in some detail, and sometimes one makes interesting discoveries.

The question is like this:

“When an especially developed soul leaves the body, does it take with it the subtle physical sheath? When it reincarnates, how does it introduce this into the new body?”

Even to answer this, as I have told you, it would be necessary to write volumes or to speak for hours. For, to tell the truth, no two cases are alike—there are similarities, classifications can be made, but they are purely arbitrary. What I wanted to do was to read to you the following, for it is quite amusing—oh, I don’t want to be... not serious! Let us say it is quite interesting:

“These questions are asked with reference to an old Indian tradition, the occult knowledge of the sage-king Pravanahana who is mentioned in the Upanishads (Chhandogya and Brihadaranyaka):

“It is said that after death, the soul of one who has done good deeds takes the path of the ancestors, ‘pitriyana’, it becomes smoke, night, etc., attains to the world of the fathers and finally to the lunar paradise. The Brahmasutra deduces from this that the soul takes with it all the elements, even those of the subtle physical, which will be needed in the next incarnation.”

So a question:

“Is this correct? Is the subtle physical sufficiently conscious in that case?”

We shall keep aside the questions; I am continuing:

“Then the Upanishads add: after having exhausted the store of good deeds, the soul leaves the lunar paradise, reaches the sky, then the air, then the clouds, taking on the nature of each of these things, precipitates on the earth as rain, enters the seeds, penetrates the body of the father in the form of food, and finally builds up the body of the child.”

This is really a rather complicated process, isn’t it? (*Laughter*) But I found it very amusing. And now the question (*laughing*):

“Is it necessary to follow this uncertain and hazardous process? Does not the soul directly animate the body with all the mental, vital and subtle physical elements organ-

ised around it and necessary for the next life? Does it take up the elements of the subtle physical world? If so, how do they harmonise with the hereditary characteristics? Above all, must it pass through the body of the father?"

There we are!

The only thing I can say is that it is possible things sometimes happen like that. Quite probably—at least I hope so—the person who described this may have observed a phenomenon of this kind; I hope it is not a mere mental construction of his occult imagination.... It raises a few practical problems! But still, of course, there is nothing impossible. Only, it is difficult to imagine the soul entering the rain, which enters the seed which makes the plant sprout up, and then entering the father's stomach in the form of food, more or less cooked (!) and finally proceeding to the conception of the child. I don't say it is impossible, but it is very, very, *very* complicated!

I may say that I have been present at innumerable incarnations of evolved souls in beings either preparing to be born or already born. As I said, the cases are quite different; it depends more on psychological conditions than on material ones, but it also depends on material conditions. It depends on the state of development of the soul which wants to reincarnate—we take the word "soul" here in the sense of the psychic being, what we call the psychic being—it depends on its state of development, on the milieu in which it is going to incarnate, on the mission it has to fulfil—that makes many different conditions.... It depends very largely on the state of consciousness of the parents. For it goes without saying that there is a stupendous difference between conceiving a child deliberately, with a conscious aspiration, a call to the invisible world and a spiritual ardour, and conceiving a child by accident and without intending to have it, and sometimes even without wanting it at all. I don't say that in the latter case there cannot also be an incarnation, but it usually takes place later, not at the conception.

For the formation of the child it makes a great difference.

If the incarnation takes place at the conception, the whole formation of the child to be born is directed and governed by the consciousness which is going to incarnate: the choice of the elements, the attraction of the substance—a choice of the forces and even the substance of the matter which is assimilated. There is already a selection. And this naturally creates altogether special conditions for the formation of the body, which may already be fairly developed, evolved, harmonised before its birth. I must say that this is quite, quite exceptional; but still it does happen.

More frequently there are cases in which, just at the moment of its birth, that is to say, of its first gesture of independence, when the child begins to develop its lungs by crying as much as it can, at that moment, very often, this sort of call from life makes the descent easier and more effective.

Sometimes days and at times months pass, and the preparation is slow and the

entry takes place very gradually, in quite a subtle and almost imperceptible way.

Sometimes it comes much later, when the child itself becomes a little conscious and feels a very subtle but very real relation with something from above, far above, which is like an influence pressing upon it; and then it can begin to feel the need of being in contact with this something which it does not know, does not understand, but which it can only feel; and this aspiration draws the psychic and makes it descend into the child.

I am giving you here a few fairly common instances; there are many others; this may happen in innumerable different ways. What I have described to you are the most frequent cases I have seen.

So, the soul which wants to incarnate stays at times in a domain of the higher mind, quite close to the earth, having chosen its future home; or else it can descend further, into the vital, and from there have a more direct action; or again it can enter the subtle physical and very closely govern the development of its future body.

Now the other question—the one about departure.

That too depends on the degree of development, the conditions of death—and above all on the unification of the being and its attitude at the time of leaving the body. The question here was about fully developed beings, that is, fully developed psychic beings—and I don't know if it means a psychic being which has profited by its presence in a physical body to do yoga, for then the conditions are quite different. But in a more general way, I have often told you that, with regard to the external envelope of the being, everything depends on its attitude at the moment of death, and that attitude necessarily depends on its inner development and its unification.

If we take the best instance, of someone who has unified his being completely around the divine Presence within him, who is now only *one* will, *one* consciousness, this person will have grouped around his central psychic being a fully developed and organised mind, an absolutely surrendered and collaborating vital and an obedient, docile and supple physical being. This physical being, as it is fully developed, will have a subtle body—what Sri Aurobindo calls the “true physical”—which will infinitely surpass the limits of its body and have enough suppleness, plasticity, balance to be able to adhere to the inner parts of the being and follow the movement of the soul in its .. I don't want to say in its ascent, but in its peregrinations outside the body. What the soul will do, where it will go—it all depends on what it has decided before leaving the body. And this capacity to keep around itself the being that has been fully organised and unified in its physical life, will allow it to really choose what it wants to do. And this also represents a very different field of possibilities, from passing consciously from one body into another, directly—there are instances in which one of these fully conscious and fully developed beings has slowly prepared another being capable of receiving and assimilating it, and in order not to stop its material work when it leaves one body, it goes and joins an-

other psychic being, merges with it, combines with it in another physical body; that is an extreme case, extremely rare also, but one which forms part of an altogether traditional occult knowledge—to the instance at the other extreme, where the soul having finished its bodily experience wants to assimilate it in repose and prepare for another physical existence later, sometimes much later. And so this is what happens, among many other possibilities: it leaves in each domain—in the subtle physical, in the vital, in the mental domain—the corresponding beings; it leaves them with a sort of link between them, but each one keeps its independent existence, and it itself goes into the zone, the reality, the world of the psychic proper, and enters into a blissful repose for assimilation, until it has assimilated (*laughing*), as described in this paper, all its good deeds, digested all its good deeds, and is ready to begin a new experience. And then, if its work has been well done and the parts or sheaths of its being which it has left in their different domains have acted as they should there, when it descends again, it will put on one after another all these parts which lived with it in a former life, and with this wealth of knowledge and experience will prepare to enter a new body.... This may be after hundreds or thousands of years, for in those domains all that is organised is no longer necessarily subject to the decomposition which here we call “death”. As soon as a vital being is fully harmonised, it becomes immortal. What dissolves it and breaks it up are all the disorders within it and all the tendencies towards destruction and decomposition; but if it is fully harmonised and organised and, so to say, divinised, it becomes immortal. It is the same thing for the mind. And even in the subtle physical, beings who are fully developed and have been impregnated with spiritual forces do not necessarily dissolve after death. They may continue to act or may take a beneficial rest in certain elements of Nature like water—generally it is in some liquid, in water or the sap of trees—or it may be, as described here (*laughing*), in the clouds. But they may also remain active and continue to act on the more material elements of physical Nature.

I have given you here a certain number of examples; I tell you, I could talk to you for hours and there would always be new examples to give! But this covers the subject broadly and opens the door to imagination.

Voilà.

24 October 1956

THE MOTHER'S CARE FOR THE ASHRAM ANIMALS

ENTRIES IN KRISHNAYYA'S NOTEBOOKS

(Continued from the issue of October 1977)

Krishnayya used to be in charge of the cows, bullocks and carts belonging to the Ashram in the 1930's. He was instructed to consult the Mother whenever there was any problem. At times she herself took the initiative and asked the disciple for information bearing on the welfare of her animals. The manner in which she corresponded with him, either by writing in her own hand or by making Sri Aurobindo write, shows a side of her which is not often realised—the Universal Mother to whom the non-human part of the Creation is of no less importance than the human—the Compassionate Care-taker of all beings. However, the Mother never loses her dynamic practical sense and does not keep her animal-children for the sake of mere luxury, either hers or theirs: she has always her eye on fruitful utility in the midst of all her deep feeling for them.

3.1.1933

KRISHNAYYA: Mother,

As I submitted in my last night report—as per Doctor Babu's instruction, I have milked separately from that teat where there is a cut. Doctor asked me not to send that milk even for Dining Hall but to give only to the calf Ra. He does not permit even to use it to be mixed with cow feed. But although I tried my best, Ra does not drink this milk. She is too big and strong to have it poured in her mouth by force. After waiting for some time I have thrown away this milk which is more than 1½ seer.

As far as I can see—from colour and smell—the milk appears as good as any other milk drawn from the other teats. I liked to taste it in order to know, but as I have not obtained Thy permission I did not taste...

THE MOTHER: I do not see how it can be hoped that Ra will take the milk in that way. Moreover I fail to understand if the milk is bad for the cow how it can be good for the calf. You can taste if you like, but as the doctor says it must not be given, we cannot give it!...

11.1.1933

THE MOTHER: I think that Chakki work is very disgusting for the bullocks, it brings down their vitality because of that, and makes them become old very soon. That is why I do not wish them to be given that work.

About the other proposal you make, I shall see what can be done and will give you an answer to-morrow.

1.2.1934

THE MOTHER: We have no car with a pass for British India and consequently cannot pass the frontier.

THE MOTHER: As I told you already, I cannot give him a car to go back because there is no car registered for British India. We intend to have one registered, (as it was before it got repaired) but for that Duraiswami's presence for a few days is needed. If to bring the Dr. to *the customs gate* is of any use, that can be done on, condition Joseph, the driver, is here, which is not the case for the moment. Perhaps you might go, explain matters and bring back the medicine.

THE MOTHER: I find Tej *very much reduced*. He is certainly ill and needs some close attention. I would like to know from the Dr. if it would not be good for Tej to let him move freely in a pasture for some time, so that he may have air, sun and movement without doing work. This question must be put clearly to the Dr. asking for a precise answer. It is well known now, that there is no better cure for illnesses, whatever they are, than *air* and *sun*.

5.2.1934

THE MOTHER: It seems to me a rather long way for Tej to go. If the Doctor could come, it would be much better.

For the car, the chauffeur is back, but as I told you already, the car cannot go further than the Customs. Would it be of any use? Could you not send a telegram with the prepaid answer asking the Dr. if he can come?

THE MOTHER: ... but do you not think it would be better to send Tej to the Cuddalore hospital until his wound is cured? There he would nicely be taken care of.

19.2.1934

KRISHNAYYA: Mother, Tej's illness appears to be very peculiar. Doctors too do not seem to diagnose properly. It is nearly 4 months since he fell ill. Somehow, I begin to lose faith in doctors and their medicines. You alone can save Tej. I want to bring out Tej and wait for Your Darshan one day after the 21st, whenever you are pleased to decide. We are trying all means of feeding but my unfitness and incapacity are proved....

Another thing we find in Tej is that he prefers to remain outside and not in the shed, either in the sun or at night. He spends much time in standing both day and night. As we rub his whole body very closely he appreciates and welcomes it. In no part does he feel any sort of pain. So we presume that his standing for a longer period is not due to any pain in the body, either in the bones or the muscles. Awaiting orders and instructions.

THE MOTHER: I fear Tej has been poisoned perhaps by one of these plants that poison very slowly.

10.3.1934

KRISHNAYYA: I thought there will be no objection from the Municipality or others for fixing rings on foot-path walls to tie cows. I wanted to have one ring fixed.

THE MOTHER: All this is absolutely forbidden by the Municipal rules, and if any of these things were done by us it was a *great mistake* and I intend that it *should never be renewed*.

2.4.1934

KRISHNAYYA: The boy Doraiswamy who was working in Building Department was dismissed some two days back, not for the crime of theft but for some rash dragging of the cart and thus causing some slight hurt to a dog. So may I keep him as a substitute for his brother Veerappa?

THE MOTHER: *Certainly not.*

KRISHNAYYA: If you are pleased to permit, as it is only for a day, I have no objection. He works very satisfactorily. Awaiting orders.

THE MOTHER: *No*, he is very rude and a boy who can almost willingly hurt a dog is likely to do the same with the cow and calf.

This boy has been dismissed by *my orders* and will not be given work in the Ashram.

A man who is cruel with beasts is worse than a beast.

(Concluded)

THE ASHRAM

AN UNPUBLISHED LETTER FROM SRI AUROBINDO

This letter was written, probably in 1930, by a sadhak under Sri Aurobindo's directions and corrected by him.

I AM afraid that you labour under a fundamental misconception regarding the Ashram. It is not an institution planned by Sri Aurobindo with certain rules of management, laws or regulations fixed and made to order. It has grown up of itself out of the force of the Truth he manifests and can follow only the movement of that Truth. Sri Aurobindo and the Ashram form one integral whole. His being is spread out in the Ashram, gathers and takes up the entire life of the latter into itself and into one harmonious spiritual unity. Its life is the life of the Spirit; its growth is the growth of the Spirit. It is entirely wrong to look at the Ashram as a group or collection of Sadhakas or to look at it as having a life or an aspiration or an aim that does or can exist apart from Sri Aurobindo. Its life and movements and activities are an expression, integrally, of its growth and development from within. It has no laws, rules or regulations, except the one law of spiritual growth and development in and through Sri Aurobindo.

SRI AUROBINDO'S BAZAR ACCOUNT

AN exercise-book came to my hand bearing on the cover the impressions of King Edward VII and his queen. Against the title was written "Record of yogic details" in Sri Aurobindo's hand in the month of June 1913. The cover of the book has undergone a big change through the long process of time: it has turned dull brown with a few worm-holes here and there.

When I opened the book, the very first page made me extremely curious. With great surprise I read entries of some accounts by Sri Aurobindo. Here are one or two examples:

Credit	June 1913 June 1st	(May 31st)	
Rs. 15.00 (Rent for May)			Rs. 15
Rs. 40.00 in notes			
Rs. 28.00 (Rent and servant for June)			
Rs. 20.00 reserve			
Rs. 7.00 in cash			Rs. 85
Rs. 70 00 out in loans			Rs. 70
Rs. 150.00 in loan			
Rs. 150.00 in Fr. notes			Rs. 300
			470

June 2nd

Rs. 20	in notes	
„ 8	in cash	
„ 2-9-0	in purse	
30-9-0		

May 0-8-7 (Rs. 2 for monthly feast)
(„ 1 for charity)

June 12th

Rs. 50 loans recovered	Paid
Rs. 150 in Fr. notes	Rs. 15 rent for May
Rs. 150 in loan	Rs. 6 charity
Rs. 8-1 from last month	Rs. 14 Bejoy out of rent money

On another page a still greater surprise was waiting for me: a long account under Miscellaneous Expenses followed, of which I shall mention only a few items:

Suresh	0-0-6		
Cigarettes	0-1-6	June 1st	[cigarettes have four entries]
Oil	0-2-0	„	
Feast, last month	2-0-0	June 2nd	
Saurin	0-0-3	June 4th	
Brooms	0-1-0	June 9th	
Telegram	0-6-0	„ 11th	
Barber	0-2-6	„ 15th	
Nolini	0-0-6	June 13th	

In another entry under the heading Store Account & Standing we find:

Rice	11-0-0	May 31st
Tea	0-13-0	„
Matches	0-0-9	„
Spices	1-10-6	„
S's cigarettes	0-8-0	June 1st
Cigarettes (Self)	0-1-3	June 1st
„ „	0-1-3	4th
„ „	0-0-6	10th
„ „	0-0-6	12th

Now a long list of meals is given under Daily Meal: I shall mention only a few of them:

Breakfast	0-2-6	June 1st
Meals	0-8-6	„ „
Breakfast	0-2-3	„ 2nd
Meals	0-4-0	„
Extra for feast	0-4-7(?)	„

In this way the account is carried down to June 15th and the total expenses made are Rs. 11-3-0.

A small entry under Extraordinary:

Charity	6-0-0	June 2nd
		(to be recovered from May & July)
Bejoy's journey	Rs. 47-14-0	June 11th

There is a short account of the Daily Balance:

June 1st	Rs. 31-3-10
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„ 2nd Rs. 27-15-0
 „ 3rd Rs. 26-7-5 etc. till June 15th

Then follows Record of Yoga
 Theosophic

Under this caption a Sanscrit sloka is written marked in the margin in English 'Sortilege' followed by a translation. Two instances of "Typical Trikaladrishṭi" are noted, of which I give one:

Sept. 15

Two crows descend into the road behind the wall fighting and are invisible. Indication that they will immediately rise above the wall fighting in the air and part. Fulfilled precisely, though the trikaladrishṭi itself was not jyotirmaya.

Then come some translations probably of Vedic hymns, and lastly three or four notations of what Sri Aurobindo calls siddhi. Here trikaladrishṭi recurs again and again. Sri Aurobindo is carefully watching the development and progress of some inner movements which he terms siddhi. The record stops after a few entries. So in one single book, we find heterogeneous items neighbouring one another without causing any jar or jolt. From trikaladrishṭi to the mundane earthly kaladrishṭi—all brought together under one yoke—is it not the very essence of Sri Aurobindo's yoga?

I am, however, interested in the earthly kaladrishṭi, standing as I am on the lower ground, নিম্নভূমি, and I cannot but be struck with wonder by the long list of bazar accounts noted by Sri Aurobindo's own hand. My question is: If he wanted to keep an account, what made him note down such petty items as "Nolini—0-0-6" or "Cigarettes 0-1-6", etc., etc.? In 1913 the year of these accounts, that is three years after his arrival at Pondicherry, he was living with four or five young men in one small house on Mission Street. Its rent was Rs. 15/-. They had to leave a bigger house due to shortage of money.

Was it then want of money that made him keep these accounts? The nature of the expenses would hardly testify to this fact. However pressing the want, the expenses over a broom, a piece of soap, etc. are not such that the world-economic laws would get unbalanced if he did not keep these accounts. Could it be his fancy? I do not believe so, for he was never driven by any fancy. No great man was moved by fancy. I cannot imagine Buddha keeping a daily bazar account. He was a world-renouncing Avatar; he did not touch money. To the bhikkhus money was untouchable. Shankara was a sannyasi and an illusionist. Ramakrishna, though not an illusionist, would not touch money. We remember how once tested by Vivekananda his whole being cried out in pain by his contact with the hidden money.

Among the yogis, we see only the Mother and Sri Aurobindo dealing with money and considering money as a divine power. They were very scrupulous guardians of this money-power and never wasted a single pie. In the early days the Mother used

to give Rs. 2/- as pocket money to each sadhak to teach him how to make the right use of money.

Sri Aurobindo's letter to Mrinalini bears witness to this fact. He writes: "...I have the right to spend only as much as is needed for the maintenance of the family and on what is absolutely necessary. Whatever remains should be returned to the Divine. If I spend all of it on myself, for personal comfort, personal enjoyment, I am a thief..." So he could not afford to give one pie more than was required even to his wife!

The Divine, being the Lord of the universe, has no right to squander even a small pie. He has to be accountable to himself for every expense small or big. The Avatar coming down to us shows us the way.

Is that the meaning of his strange bazar account?

NIRODBARAN

O THIS OLD AGE...

(This poem has some interest attached to it because it was completed on 17 November, 1973, the day of the Mother's passing. Although it took shape before the author, who was in Bombay at the time, heard of that event and although it has ostensibly nothing to do with it, the theme and the language seem haunted by something beyond their immediate purport, an indirect touch of spiritual prophecy.)

O THIS old age that makes a mockery
 Of Helen and Troy's fire a waste of love
 To Menelaus's blurred and bounded eye!
 Alone the poet's will—"Time shall not move
 When once the flawless note is struck"—keeps bright
 The Swan-sired face and the reddening topless towers.
 Nought save his reverie knows through human sight
 Eternities go flashing mid the hours.

AMAL KIRAN

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF THE MOTHER'S LIFE-EVENTS

1. 21 February 1878 Birth in Paris at 10:15 a.m., Paris meridian time.
2. 23 August 1898 Birth of son André Morisset.
3. 1905 The Mother started holding meetings of a small group named *Idéa* of spiritual seekers in Paris.
4. 1906 First contact in Paris with the Polish adept Théon of Algeria to learn higher occultism.
5. January 1907 A representative of a group of revolutionary youngsters of Kiev, Russia, met the Mother in Paris to solve their problems of spirituality and politics.
6. 1907-8 Visit to Algeria.
7. 2 November 1912 The Mother started writing her diary.
8. 5 March 1914 She started from Paris to meet Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry.
9. 29 March 1914 First meeting with Sri Aurobindo at 3.30 p.m. in Pondicherry.
10. 15 August 1914 Collaboration with Sri Aurobindo in publishing the first issue of the monthly, *Arya*.
11. 21 February 1915 The Mother's Birthday celebration in Pondicherry for the first time in the presence of Sri Aurobindo.
12. 22 February 1915 She left Pondicherry to go back to Paris on account of the First World War.
13. 1916 Visit to Japan.
14. May or September 1916 The Mother met Poet Rabindranath Tagore in Japan.
15. January or March 1919 Second meeting with Tagore in Japan.
16. 24 April 1920 Arrival in Pondicherry from Japan for permanent stay with Sri Aurobindo.
17. 24 November 1920 The Mother shifted to Sri Aurobindo's house from Dupleix House on account of a cyclone. She was given a room on the upper storey of the house.
18. 1 January 1922 She took charge of Sri Aurobindo's household with eight or ten disciples.
19. 15 August 1923 First Darshan Day of Sri Aurobindo arranged by the Mother.
20. 24 November 1926 Day of Descent of the Overmind into the physical being of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The Ashram came into existence and the Mother took charge of it.
21. 24 November 1931 The Mother stopped writing her diary.

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|----------------------|--|
| 22. 1943 | She started organised educational activities of the Ashram under her supervision. |
| 23. 5 December 1950 | Sri Aurobindo left his body. |
| 24. 24 April 1951 | The Mother opened the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre. |
| 25. 1 November 1954 | Pondicherry became free from French domination and joined the Indian Union. The Mother expressed happiness and welcomed the great event. |
| 26. 29 February 1956 | The Supramental Manifestation. |
| 27. 29 February 1960 | Celebration of the Supramental Manifestation Day. |
| 28. 28 February 1968 | Inauguration of Auroville at 10:30 a.m. |
| 29. 15 August 1973 | The last Balcony Darshan of the Mother. |
| 30. 17 November 1973 | The Mother passed away at 7:25 p.m. |
| 31. 20 November 1973 | Mahasamadhi at 8:20 a.m. in the Ashram courtyard. |
| 32. 21 February 1977 | The Mother's Birth Centenary year began. |

RANDHIR UPADHYAYA

THE EXACT TIME OF THE MOTHER'S PASSING

A LETTER

Dear K. D. S.,

We are fast approaching that day when four years ago the Mother left her body.

If you remember, you printed an article of mine in your journal about the cosmic harmonies with respect to her passing. In that piece, as in my books, I stated that the official time given for her passing was incorrect by one minute. It was given as 7:25 p.m.—and I said it was 7:26—this I was able to say by considering the Mother's passing in relation to Sri Aurobindo's, and the perfect synchronisation of the two in terms of time and number harmonies—and other considerations as well.

I had heard that there was a clock in the Centre of Education which stopped exactly on the day and hour and presumably minute when the passing occurred. Yesterday I went to see this clock and, glory be! there it was: 7:26.

Blessed be clocks and the occult hearts that animate them!

PATRIZIA

YEATS AND SHAW

The death of Bernard Shaw on the 2nd of November 1950, at the grand old age of 94, posed the question: "What is the outstanding characteristic of his mind?" Something of a Voltairean quality, though somewhat prevented from being quintessential by idiosyncratic dilutions, emerges as the typical Shaw from the various modes of expression he adopted. In view of that brilliant intellectual incisiveness the following note apropos of a letter by another great Irishman may be of interest to our readers.

YEATS once wrote to Dorothy Wellesley: "Shaw has written a long, rambling, vegetarian, sexless letter, disturbed by my causing 'bad blood' between the nations."

It is curious to find any act of the most efficient fighter of our day described thus. The very efficiency of Shaw's fighting seems to have misled Yeats. Measured against Shaw, Yeats on the war-path can be nothing except quivering rage, with a quixotic sword which he waves about but mostly to cut thin air. Shaw is like a fencing expert, parrying blows and dealing death-wounds with such smooth ease, such effortlessness, such absence of violent waste that he appears to many eyes "vegetarian" and "sexless". But you have just to look around and you will see the corpses mounting up. It is also a certain intellectual impersonality in Shaw, a freedom from pseudo-romantic fog, that creates that impression and hides from Yeats the clean supple strength. Shaw may not strike out of sheer feeling; he lifts everything to the cerebral plane—above mere meat and sex, so to speak—but that does not make his activity anaemic and impotent. He sublimates his elemental nature into idea-force; that is all. The force is superb and intense—only it issues through the channel of thought.

"Long" and "rambling" are another pair of inapt and superficial adjectives. If Shaw is "long", it is because he is both inexhaustible and many-angered—he has much to fight and plenty of energy to go on fighting. "Rambling" is a mis-observation of his intellectual fecundity: he has everywhere the fencing expert's skill that never fails to touch the right spot, but he has a multiplicity of strokes and a delight in complex movements and gestures—leaping here, prancing there, driving at the midriff, thrusting at the heart, sticking into the jugular. He loves to play with his opponents in an intricate all-wounding manner; he does not want merely to kill, he wants also to expose on as many sides as possible the rottenness of which his opponents are composed; he "rambles" over their whole bodies and attacks them from every quarter and with his entire repertory of strokes either fiercely pointed or furiously sweeping.

And then there is the laughter running through each rapier-flash. Such confidence is Shaw's that he pokes fun with his deadly jabs and cuts capers while slashing at people's follies. The caper-cutting has another aspect too: he acts a bit of a clown while making his antagonists look fools, because he wishes to relieve the

duel of over-grimness on either side and to save himself from pompous pretentiousness and the pride that may render him forgetful of his own humanity.

Yeats makes no mention of this double-edged humour. Just as he missed the Shavian idea-force and ingenious gusto, I suppose he would have dubbed the Shavian laughter lack of seriousness.

Yeats's "blind spot" towards Shaw is regrettable. However, we must not conclude he has less valuable things to give us than Shaw. The two men are different and bring us different treasures. Shaw is the analyst mind and the ironic spirit taking art as their instrument; Yeats the mind of insight and the spirit of aristocracy, fused with the artist. Yeats is certainly more artistic and has in his work a closer touch with inner realities. Shaw does not know these realities intimately even when he champions some mode of them like the Life Force as conceived by him, a vast urge in the world to attain through trial and error a deific consciousness. The occult, the visionary, the hierophantic are not truly his domain: he can probe them but without getting to their heart, for to get to their heart one needs a glowing intuitive faculty plucking words out of one's depths and not just a sharp intellect with a gift for imaginative rhetoric. Yeats in his own sphere cannot be equalled by Shaw: there is much more food for our souls in a few "Celtic" or else "Byzantine" poems of Yeats's than in all the forceful argumentation set to drama in *Man and Superman* or *Back to Methuselah*. The same holds good between Yeats's essays and Shaw's prefaces.

But when Yeats impinges on the field of the intellect, with its demand for an argus-eyed acuteness, he must suffer by comparison with the Shavian genius. Political science, whether concerned with national or international affairs, is not, generally speaking, a poet's métier, what though the poet may have passed from reveries and wizardries to "passionate masterful personality". The early Yeats was a rapt whisperer of enchantments, the later Yeats a man of intense will dabbling in ideas and handling many matters besides soul-secrets. Still, "passionate masterful personality," go as it may through a noticeable thought-process, does not tend to a satisfying play of the intellect proper if made the keynote not merely of poetry where it is quite in place but also of all the departments of one's life. It leads to a marked self-grooved condition, not caring to enter into the skins of those who hold a vision dissimilar to one's own; it encourages neither an open mind nor a real detachment—states that are requisite for genuine intellectual activity.

Shaw too is full of personal penchants: he, nonetheless, works them out like a logician, capable of seeing all the points of his antagonists and therefore capable of refuting them if they are weak or of readjusting his own case to make it more strong. Yeats's temper as well as method is unShavian: even outside poetry he feels like a pontiff and the reasons he brings forth have an air as of revelation, a tincture of poetry, but he is mostly blind to the merits or demerits of a case from the standpoint of the pure intellect which has to preserve a calm dispassionate centre amidst the whirl of personality. A certain intolerant heat and a lean-

ing towards Fascism were characteristic of Yeats in old age. The latter came from a confusion of Fascism with aristocracy and the superman's strength, the former from that strain in him which developed as a reaction against his early dreaminess and which insisted on the "vigour of blood" and which even made him ribald in his last writings. Shaw does not lack zest and energy but they are more of the nerves than of the blood and his penetrating intellect is lord over them. He seems to Yeats bloodless and to be insufficiently gripping the stuff of the world. The impression is not false if Shaw's dramatic characters are put by the side of, say, Shakespeare's: it is wrong if meant to charge him everywhere with defective force and dispersed light.

Shaw is one of the greatest breakers of Victorian hypocrisy and sentimentality: the nineteenth century's citadel of sham received the strongest, most vital blows from him; its unhealthy air was made bright and clean most by the laughing and penetrating Shavian sunshine. Shaw gets indeed outstatured by Yeats when that poet is seer-mooded and mystical, but on the plane of moral and political and sociological theory as well as of critical thought in general it is Yeats who is the diminished head—wholly unconvincing when he denies edge and *élan* to G. B. S. on his own grounds and pronounces him a long-winded bore or an empty meanderer.

K. D. SETHNA

THE CARPET

I SAW a flying-carpet of souls in space:
 Each light beside, within, enfolding Light;
 And yet
 All separate:
 For each was named, each had a golden face,
 But all went whistling the same Will through space.

JOYCE CHADWICK

THE TIDE COMES

AN awareness has taken root somewhere in the depth of men's consciousness that all that was cherished and known in our lives before is now being dispersed, as if touched by an unseen hand. It bedevils the best of our minds and makes nought of most of our well-thought-out plans and manoeuvres. What to make of it, is the question of the day. Even the weather does not behave as it should and our climates are doing very strange things. Natural calamities are on the increase, social and political orders are challenged—unrest, changes everywhere. In short, events have penetrated and are seemingly overtaking every sphere of our lives. Why all of a sudden? People begin to feel uneasy, some are disturbed, even bewildered, yet others understand it all and are serenely at ease

But by and large, humanity goes on with its business of living in more or less the same fashion as before, not quite willing to acknowledge that certain feeling now present in it. Maybe it will go away, like some uninvited guest who came to stay, if not given too much attention. Yet here we are, signs of its presence persist unmistakably, perhaps it is best to take notice of what they read. What seems as yet to be an intimation is advisable to investigate, maybe it has a conscious design at its core, and it is good to be on the right side of it.

A design it has, larger than anything that confronted us before and it affords us the greatest of all possibilities: a New Existence on earth. It signals to a period of thrilling adventure ahead [for those who learn to strive and hope—and a thundering, rousing roar and a blow to awake and move those who would still linger on and miss their chance thereby.

If the old and the known is made to disintegrate, as we are forced to observe, then it stands to reason that it becomes unusable and, if it is once removed, a better structure is planned to take its place. For such a gigantic scheme obviously there is a carefully prepared and constructed master plan made, and since it is all about us, about our lives on this planet, it aims to include and instrumentalize all the usable elements in us, that prove convertible for its new structure. That which is not, may well have to fall by the wayside.

Already portions of this plan have touched down upon our lives, and events have overtaken our mind's most forward abilities. No longer can we smugly outline our speculations and manoeuvres, nor predict or compute their outcomes. Apparently more powerful forces than our limited reasoning ability can comprehend, impose their will and direct the events of this world, as they do now, in this incredible season of changing things. Clearly, a period of transition, with all the movements it may necessitate, is upon us. To observe it, to be alert, ready to aid it, as it aims to aid us, is crucial.

It may be wise to review our estimated values now, and take good stock of our affairs, before it may be too late to alter them. It seems that an all-seeing power has already sent its agencies in our midst, if as yet on a fact-assessing mission, which

for the time being leaves but a warning note behind where it calls. It may not be according to our fondest hopes and wishes, when it will find us wrongly poised.

What velocity this altering force may take to disrupt all that is undesirable from our midst, cannot be all that difficult to assess, after careful observation of the way things are with us and in the world in general. This must be looked at now with care so that, when becoming aware of matters as they stand, we might make all possible effort to participate in this unequalled event in a positive way and not be stationed against its trend.

A trying time of transition is ahead, we must not fail when its transforming hour strikes. Each thought, each move and act is decisive now and may raise or undo us, when its mighty power will press down on our imperfections. Difficulties may be felt more severely as it will bear down upon rigidities and resistances that would stand in its way. "Is there any time left for tactics of delay?" one wonders. The time for those smart centre-positions, of placing one foot on either side of the line, is fast running out. What use now of our multitudinous hypocrisies and self-seeking, the clever use of the right platforms for wrong and small-visioned ends? Will the bastions of vanity, ill use of power and pride stand the assault? Their tyrannies of cruelty and fear will tumble and crumble; dust into dust they will fall to make way for a happier existence. Gone will be our ephemeral and false values and hoarded treasures, when the clean waves of Truth come rolling in.

Washed clean and unburdened of our heaviest loads at last, redeemed and delivered we shall stand. Freed from the shackles that for so long enslaves the finest longings of our souls—yes, naked and free as the new-born we shall be, and put forth our faith and empty hands humbly to receive the Grace of God; and the Golden Seeds of a New Creation will be cast into the depths of our beings.

Be ready, willing to change or be swept by: thus sounds the new commandment. The onrush of a mighty tide is irrevocably on the move, formidable its impact on resistance. Heaven shall not aid the soul in that heavy hour of accounting and reckoning, when its waves will come roaring by. But to the strong and willing, a gigantic aid; those will it carry forth in an easy sweep on its shoreward tide. As conquerers, they will ride upon the crest of the victorious waves.

The heavy yet great hour is near. The rumblings of the mighty on-coming waves can already be heard. The long-awaited New Age is coming with the incoming tide.

*

Be careful now and observe, the Plan is sealed, the stage is set. The Play of the Gods, unseen Forces, is about to start. They are going to involve you in the Play. Any minute now, they may call you to come forth and act out your part. The curtain is still drawn but soon the real movers of the Play will be revealed. Be conscious and you will know that, as on some giant chess-board, in our universe great strategies will be displayed. The Queen of Light is pitted against the Queen of the Dark; next to

them are their Kings. A universal Play is here. On which side are you? Take up positions, the time is near.

Know that on one side the Queen of Light stands and smiles, she only smiles. Will you soldier her battle, your armour her face of radiance? Or will you serve that other, with the voice of a thousand whispers invading your mind? Careful when you will hear that whisper, she knows your every hidden thought and will use your weaknesses and cunningly set each one against his best of kin. Her voice ensnares and with intricate skill she cloaks the lowest desires in the garb of the highest thought. In her eyes a thousand sweet promises shine, blinding to the eye. Quick, look away to the other side. There is your place and hope, on the side of the all-loving Mother of Life and Light, one with the Will of the Lord, in whose heart rests the salvation of our world.

This is the time of the Grace and it is the time of undoing for the unwary; in this great wonder that is the long story of God, Asura and Man, told in small chapters to the poet souls and to the hearts of the Sage. Your story and mine...

GEORGETTE COTY

TOWARDS THE HIGHER LIFE

(Continued from the month of October 1977)

CHAPTER III

IN THE WHIRLPOOL OF DESIRES

I HAD to begin almost from scratch, so I am unable to paint a rosy picture of my sadhana life. Initially I was no better or worse as a human being than others nor did I possess those higher qualities which are usually associated with spiritual luminaries entitling them to divine favour. The only saving point was that I never allowed myself to remain on the dust broken and fallen for long. My mind was clear about the purpose of life and never wavered. This feeling of mine is echoed in the Mother's words:

“It is better to be a stone on the road to the Divine than soft and weak clay in the muddy paths of the ordinary human vital nature.”

Though the inner flame was feeble and flickered, it struggled hard to stand the storm. As *Savitri* puts it:

The spirit arises mightier by defeat.
Heaven's call is rare, rarer the heart that heeds.

Let us ask why. Sri Aurobindo gives the answer:

“Most men are, like animals, driven by the forces of Nature: whatever desires come, they fulfil them, whatever emotions come they allow them to play, whatever physical wants they have, they try to satisfy...”

At another place he points out:

“Desire is at once the motive power of our action ...individual life acts, moves, enjoys and suffers predominantly for the satisfaction of desires.”

But we may argue, “to eliminate them would be to extinguish the impulse of life”.¹

If there is no desire to gain anything how could one take interest in any work?—this was the question that my enquiring mind asked.

All scriptures are one in enjoining that desires must be killed:

*Yadā sarve prabhidyante hṛdayasyeha granthayah
Atha martyo'mṛto bhavati...* (Katha Upanishad, 2.3.15)

“Yea, when all the strings of the heart are rent asunder, then even here, in this human birth, the mortal becomes immortal.”

¹ Sri Aurobindo: *The Synthesis of Yoga* (6th edition), p. 615.

Sri Aurobindo has also said:

“There are three obstacles that one has to overcome in the vital and they are very difficult to overcome, lust (sexual desire), wrath and rajasic ego.”

When I looked within I saw only chaos. What did it denote?

“The emotional mind is a hurtling field of joy and grief, love and hatred, wrath, fear, struggle, aspiration, disgust, likes, dislikes, indifferences, content, discontent, hopes, disappointments, gratitude, revenge and all the stupendous play of passion which is the drama of life in the world. This chaos we call our soul.”¹

In dreams we can see a picture of what we are and of what stuff we are made. One is haunted by sexual dreams for years and years even when sex has been controlled in the waking hours. How I got rid of the fire of the lower desires is a lengthy history. The struggle had begun long before I touched the sacred soil of Pondicherry.

Before consenting to marry I had taken the resolution that I would set out for the higher joys of life after 10 years of worldly pursuits. In the very first year of married life there was a friction. I left home at night without letting anybody know; spent hours and hours all alone in a spacious field imploring Sri Krishna with as much earnestness as I could to show me the light.

R was held in great esteem by the modern followers of Sri Chatanya. My grandmother used to take the dust of his feet to her head, whenever he came to the place where I lived in Calcutta. She felt greatly blessed. She always prayed for grace and not gift. My prayers to Sri Krishna could not elicit any response. Finding no way out I stood before R with the intention of being initiated but could not utter a word. His Presence did not evoke any thrill in me. Of a sudden a voice of my own heart spoke, “Kicked by the world you want to go in quest of Sri Krishna? He who cannot win the world, can he win God?” Astounded, I looked around and exclaimed, “No, never! Till I win the battle of life, I shall not go in search of light. Light is not for a weakling like me.”

When I was plunged in ordinary activities the question arose in my mind from time to time, “Shall I never be able to pull myself out of this whirlpool of desires? What will remain to offer to the Divine when limbs are shaking with age? What will He do with one who is a spent force?”

Down-hearted and disappointed I approached a well-known sannyasin of my native place. He said, “Desires never die, however you try. In between there is a recoil for a time.” He did not say anything that could help me to get out of the tangle. Dejected, I thought I was not cut out for the Higher Life.

The first control came by the touch of light in the sex-centre, on my return home after the first visit to the Ashram. This gave me so much inner strength that I put myself under a vow: if I failed to maintain complete abstinence for one full year even while leading a family life, I would not consider myself fit to join the Ashram. Here one important factor must not be overlooked: the Ashram atmosphere had brought me my finest boon. During my second visit to the Ashram I received a

¹ *Ibid*, Part II, Chapter VIII, p 324.

memorable letter from Sri Aurobindo.

“Mother is well pleased to see your progress.”

I could have taken up the Ashram life that very day but I wanted to be well-equipped before embarking on the perilous journey from the human to the divine.

As soon as I thought of launching out, all kinds of temptations came my way. Often I was found weak, but ultimately I confronted myself with a choice: the ordinary life or the Higher Life? The inner being clamoured to be at the feet of the Mother as soon as possible. It was this that saved me from many lures and pitfalls.

However, I often fell into a compromise. On the one hand I let something pacify my hunger of the lower nature and on the other hand I went on telling beads, praying all the time to conquer this weakness. I fell a victim to an evil suggestion, “Where is the harm in being a little lenient? The extreme indulgence has stopped.”

I was not conscious enough to notice that this might bring disaster to me one day. Here are the uncompromising words of Sri Aurobindo regarding a compromise in such affairs:

“The struggle cannot end by a compromise but by an entire spiritual victory and *complete surrender of the lower nature.*”

Does it not amount to taming a hungry lion and hoping to ride on its back?

I did not hide my weakness from Sri Aurobindo—the Great Healer of the ills of life. Towards the end of my second visit to the Ashram I prayed to him for inner strength. Instead of giving me a sharp rebuke he simply said, “This too must stop if you want to carry your sadhana to perfection.”

Could any ordinary guru have tolerated such nonsense from a disciple? The very mention of it would have made him exclaim, “Get out! How can a fool like you dream of Yoga?”

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, who had come to make the earth a home of happiness, knew that the deep-set habits of our nature could not be removed in a day, so they kept patience until the soul was ripe for a “perilous adventure”.

A striking instance comes to mind of one who is ripe for yoga:

Acharya Buddhārakṣita Thera is a Buddhist monk running a number of social institutions in Bangalore under the Maha Bodhi Society which he founded there in 1957.

When he was in service in his earlier life he was a chain-smoker and alternated cigarettes with a pipe. One day, while on an inspection tour, he forgot to take cigarettes with him. This made him irritable and he lost his temper with his subordinates even over minor things. His superior officer who happened to be there felt surprised at his behaviour. When the officer drew his attention to his folly Swamiji clearly spoke to him about the sudden change in his nature. The Director looked at him for full one minute and then said, “So the cigarette is your master?”

This touched him to the core. Swamiji says, “I have never smoked since then. After retiring to my headquarters I burned all the cigarettes and tobacco I had with me.” On reaching Calcutta, where his mother was then staying, he told

her by telephone that he was going to Hardwar and asked her not to worry about him.

In the course of a few years of sadhana his soul blossomed like a flower whose fragrance spread even to the villages. Rare are the souls who have such will-power.

To go back to my story. When I joined the Ashram I had not to suffer much from my old trouble. But desires cannot be conquered easily. It is a very laborious job to deal with them successfully. Whenever passions arose I came down upon them with a heavy hand, raising a cry within, "Kill this enemy"—like *viddheyānamihā vairiṇam* of the Gita (III. 37). The serpent at once lowered its hood.

The most disturbing element was the recurrence of sex-thoughts and a hundred others when I wanted to give myself to concentration. They hovered in the mind like humming bees and never allowed me to be one-pointed. Offering them to the psychic fire acted like a sword of Light but it could not give me release.

I tried various methods. One of them was walking meditation. Standing like a sentinel at the door of the mind I would allow the body to walk. I would keep the mind free from thoughts with great effort during the time I walked a furlong. Slowly I increased the duration to one hour. This I could do only when all went well with the mental, vital and physical. A distraction from any source hampered the free flow of concentration. To keep the eyes downward, remain withdrawn while walking, this itself required long practice. Now I can do so without the least strain.

I stood the test for 320 days and felt happy that the day of making the Ashram my permanent abode was fast approaching, but once I was caught unawares. One slip and what a heavy penalty I had to pay! Had I taken Sri Aurobindo's words as the law of life, great would have been my gain! There was no disturbance in my sleep during all those 320 days but one moment of laxity and its consequences stretched to more than 30 years. Later on, Sri Aurobindo gave me courage, saying I need not be so concerned over what was disturbing my sleep at night, for it would not stop until the subconscious was clear enough.

Once I saw myself climbing down a ladder into the depth of the sea. On my request to enlighten me about it, Sri Aurobindo replied: "It might be descent through the physical into the subconscious."

On September 24, 1936 I saw the Mother in a dream, giving a flower and saying, "It is the light in the subconscious." For two or three hours the thought remained turned to the Mother during sleep. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga demands that the influence of the lower elements must not be there even in our dreams. This was possible for me due to the frequent action of the Mother's Force in the subconscious—the domain of the demons. When sex-thoughts were eliminated even from dreams, then a new page opened in my life.

Here I want to say something before I proceed further.

"The process of raising up the lower movements into the full light of consciousness in order to know and deal with them is inevitable, for there can be no complete

change without it. But it can truly succeed only when a higher light and force are sufficiently at work.”

When I read this from Sri Aurobindo I remembered my own case. Once I was put to a severe test. I felt a quivering in my inner poise by meeting the gaze of a girl. I felt a shock! One day I took her to my Puja room, placed flowers and fruits at her feet, prayed with folded hands, “Mother, grant that I may now get rid of this animality in me.” Bewildered the girl retorted, “What is this? Have you gone mad?”

I took a more drastic step, as impelled from within. At the next meeting I requested her to kindly give me a massage, as at that time there was some pain all over the body. I kept full control over my mind. It is my repeated experience that if the mind could be kept still, the sex-desire dies down by itself. Says Sri Aurobindo, “None is more perilous, obstinate than the lower vital subconscious and its movements.” The moment any contrary vibration arose I offered it to the inner fire till there rose none despite her delicate touch. All along I kept myself immobile like a statue. This helped to bring out the “concealed subconscious adverse elements”. Thus ended the ancient “hold” of this brute force on me and a sense of stability arrived.

All these experiences created conditions which carried me momentarily to a new domain.

When there is a descent of the Mother’s force from the head to foot, one loses the sense of the body as well as the breath. On July 10, 1977 after an hour of such intense concentration there dawned two experiences.

I seemed to have gone out of the body and gazed at it from a distance like a witness. The intensity of concentration was so great that the body actually looked like a statue made out of a solid rock. I kept on looking at it from a distance. After a pause I saw my body as if it were made of marble.

There is some similarity here to the experience I had on September 19, 1936 regarding which Sri Aurobindo gave an illuminating remark:

“It seems to indicate the calm and stillness of the higher consciousness reaching the higher vital (heart) with the result that the psychic sits there full of that stillness (like a statue) and controls the emotional nature.”

This experience refers to the inner being, the other appears to bear in some way on the outer consciousness.

It took me decades to realise why Sri Aurobindo lays down:

“The consent of all the being is necessary for the divine change... the consent of the lower vital must not be only a mental profession or a passing emotional adhesion; it must translate itself into an abiding attitude and a persistent and consistent action”¹

(To be continued)

¹ *On Yoga II, Tome Two, p. 410.*

ILION: AN APPROACH AND A STUDY

I

THE poetic sensibility of Sri Aurobindo had a peculiar fascination for the epic form of poetry. The depth and vastness of the vision that he wanted to render through his poetry demanded the amplitude of theme and grandeur of conception that the epic provides its author.¹ He had undertaken the writing of an epic as early as 1894, when he was barely twenty-two. This poem was perhaps not completed and, even if completed, is not available except in the form of a few fragments.² Of the two available epics written by Sri Aurobindo, namely, *Savitri: a Legend and a Symbol*, and *Ihon: an Epic in Quantitative Hexameters*, the latter is the more problematic. In the first place, it is difficult to fix the date of its composition, though it may be safe to assume that it was composed sometime between 1910 and 1915.³ Next, only nine books of the poem are available, the last of which is unfinished; and we have to keep guessing what the structural importance of the unfinished part would be in relation to the entire poem if it were written in its entirety. Again, there are not many references to *Ihon* in Sri Aurobindo's letters on literature and poetry, and the references that are there do not provide sufficient evidence for the reader to form any conclusive opinion about the poet's own attitude towards this epic. Finally, *Ihon* has not received as much critical attention as Sri Aurobindo's other poems have. An extremely useful and brilliant exposition of the poem is to be found in K. D. Sethna's book *The Poetic Gemus of Sri Aurobindo*. Apart from it hardly a few critical articles have ever been written on it.⁴ Consequently, while analysing the poem, our critical aid is extremely limited.

¹ Sri Aurobindo's poetic genius can be fairly described as an epic genius. Dr. Prema Nandkumar rightly points out that the progression of all his earlier poetic creations was leading itself towards *Savitri*, "Wherever we may fix our starting-point in the Sri Aurobindo canon, we always arrive at last at *Savitri*. This is his final testament, rounded, perfect" — "Ahana", "Ihon" and "Savitri," *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1968, p. 82.

² Cf. Bibliographical Note to *Writings in Bengali*, Birth Centenary Volume No. 4, Pondicherry, 1972.

³ Earlier, for several thematic and technical reasons I had assumed the date of the composition of *Ihon* to be between 1910 and 1915. I need not, however, state the reasons now since I have got the date confirmed from the manuscript section of Sri Aurobindo Ashram in December, 1976. Thanks to Mr. Peter Heehs.

⁴ The articles on *Ihon* that I have come across so far are

Nandkumar, Prema, 'Approaches to "Ihon"', *Sri Aurobindo Circle* 20, 1964, pp. 41-80

"Ahana", "Ihon" and "Savitri", *Sri Aurobindo Circle* 24, 1968, pp. 61-82.

Sethna, K. D., '*Ihon*' · *an Epic in Quantitative Hexameters*', *Sri Aurobindo The Poet*, Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, 1970, pp. 107-132

'Sri Aurobindo and the Hexameter,' *The Poetic Gemus of Sri Aurobindo*, Pondicherry, 1974, pp. 29-74

Hughes, Eric, 'Name Glossary to Sri Aurobindo's "Ihon"', *Mother India*, August, 1969, through December, 1969

At the surface level *Ihon* creates an impression of being a traditional epic dealing with a traditional classical theme. This appearance, however, is deceptive. A careful study of the technical and thematic aspects of the poem shows that it is essentially a crisis poem.⁵ No one should think that Sri Aurobindo would at any time engage himself in a sterile recreation of the Homeric episode in the Homeric mode. He would have written a traditional epic only if he had not been a revolutionary artist and thinker. Hence an attempt at comparing *Ihon* with the *Iliad* may not prove to be the right approach to the former.

A more plausible way of interpreting *Ihon* is to treat it along with *Savitri* almost as a prologue to the latter; for in spite of the differences of the traditions from which their respective myths originate both the poems reduce themselves, in the ultimate analysis, to an autobiography of the evolving spirit. *Ihon* represents the Soul's Night of Darkness, the divided self groping pointlessly towards a unity, and *Savitri* represents the Spirit's Day of Illumination, the synthesis of the divided ego and the restoration of the Paradise in one's own self. Though both the poems draw on the past traditions of folklore and literatures (one Greek, the other Indian), *Ihon* becomes a statement of the present condition of humanity as seen by Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri* a symbol of the future he envisaged. Both the poems become symbolic since the situations depicted and the emotions evoked are archetypal even if the nature of the crises and their interpretations involved in these poems are more or less personal. Death is the cardinal issue round which the two epics of Sri Aurobindo revolve; and their symbolic power is so far-reaching that the symbolization becomes timeless and, in the case of *Savitri*, spaceless also. The chief concern of either epic, unlike the traditional epic, is humanity at large. At least on the symbolic level the amazing differences between the treatments of two such varied myths and the differences between techniques can be assimilated into one integral whole; and if we establish the interconnections between *Ihon* and *Savitri* we find that the two epics form a harmonious sequence, one of the main concerns of which is to depict the adventure of the consciousness of the poet as representative Man.

That *Ihon* is not a traditional epic and that it is a crisis poem, the precedents for which we find in the poetry of "The Poets of the Dawn",⁶ would become evident even from a cursory enquiry into the structure of the poem. In the first place, in *Ihon* there is no invocation of the Muse such as comes at the outset of the traditional epic as a rule. The poet is, it seems, not enthusiastic but rather regretful about the episode that he intends to narrate. The poem opens with a picture of the dawn which has come from "the mists and the chill of the Euxine" and which is also the "bringer of the day of man's downfall". Next, there is no human protagonist in this poem round whose life and deeds or adventures the plot of the traditional epic is woven. It is humanity and not any human being that is Sri Aurobindo's concern here. The central figure

⁵ By the term 'crisis poem' I mean such a poem as is itself a means to resolve the crisis facing its author and whose nature is mainly personal but may also be symbolic

⁶ Sri Aurobindo employs the term to denote what is popularly referred to by the term "the Romantics" in his *Future Poetry*, 1972 ed., pp. 111-131.

of *Iliion* is Ilion, the citadel of Priam. Penthesilea, measured from the scope given her in this poem, becomes only one among the illustrious gallery of portraits of the warriors who, all in a unison though each in his own way, are bent on drawing the doom of Troy nearer. *Iliion* is not, one can be certain, merely the Penthesilea story.⁷ Though her figure casts as large a shadow as those of Achilles and Paris over the plot-structure, the poem is neither about Penthesilea nor about Achilles but mainly about Ilion. The heroism of the so-called heroine (or perhaps the “anti-heroine”, for she works as one of the instruments of destruction, in the given set-up) occupies relatively very little space in the narration. Whereas the first eight books concentrate their attention on the tragic fate of Troy, only the last, ninth, unfinished book describes the “heroism” of Penthesilea. Both Achilles and Penthesilea play dominating roles in shaping the action depicted in the poem, but neither of them is *the* character. The concept of heroism is not at all the focal point of *Iliion* as it is in the traditional epic. And finally, a favourite technique utilized by the traditional epic—the technique of flashback—is not employed in *Iliion* by the poet. The narration is nowhere retrospective; it is always, more or less, introspective.

2

The design of the entire poem and the fabric of the story delineated by Sri Aurobindo in the plot of this poem indicate that the aim of the poet is to provide, in his own terms, a reinterpretation of the tragedy of Troy which is also symbolic of a recurrent phenomenon of human life. His tremendous concern with the tragic fatality that Troy has to face is made evident by the scene in which Sri Aurobindo sets up the subject matter. The city Ilion, along with her inhabitants, gradually treads towards a total extinction of life and all that is human; and though the poem opens with a picture of dawn, as in *Savitri*, it is the dawn preceding the crucial day on which the character representing the state of human affairs—which is Ilion in the case of this poem—is fated to die. The dawn with which the poem begins is the dawn of the last fatal day in the life of Ilion. Thus the poem begins:

Dawn in her journey eternal compelling the labour of mortals,
Dawn the beginner of things with the night for their rest or their ending,
Pallid and bright-lipped arrived from the mists and the chill of the
Euxine.⁸

Unlike as in *Savitri* it is not a redemptive dawn, not the dawn preceding the Spirit's Day of Illumination, but one preceding the Soul's Night of Darkness:

Fateful she came with her eyes impartial looking on all things,

⁷ Dr. Prema Nandkumar suggests in her articles on *Iliion* that Panthesilea may be treated as the heroine of *Iliion* just as Savitri is the heroine of *Savitri* (*S.A. Circle*, 1964, 1968), but I think the claim can be disputed.

⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Iliion, Collected Poems*, Birth Centenary Library, Vol. No.5, Ashram, 1972, p 391.

Bringer to man of the day of his fortune and the day of his downfall.⁹

The dawn thus ominously arriving has brought a message of disaster to men through the herald of Argos, Talthybius. The herald has come from Achilles with terms of peace which are to conclude the nine-year-long war between the Trojans and the Greeks. But humiliation is implied in these terms and also is implied a threat of total extinction of honour and freedom for the Apollo-built city of Troy; and it becomes clear to us that even before Talthybius has delivered the message, the attempt of Achilles to conclude peacefully the war is bound to be futile and to lead, paradoxically, to the most devastating of battles, for both the Trojans and the Greeks are still under the spell of the unconscious's slumber and grope at divinity through their obscured vision:

Even as fleets on a chariot divine through the gold streets of ether,
Swiftly when life fleets, invisibly changing the arc of the soul-drift,
Weighted, the moment travels driving the past towards the future,
Only its face and its feet are seen, not the burden it carries.
Weight of the event and its surface we bear, but the meaning is hidden.
Earth sees not; life's clamour deafens the ear of the spirit:
Man knows not; least knows the messenger chosen for the summons.¹⁰

Upon being received by the Trojans, Talthybius delivers the message and asks for a reply; but the Trojans feel pressed to discuss the issue in an open assembly and so immediately call for one. Nevertheless, even before the assembly has been convened, it becomes clear to us through Penthesilea's speech that the eventuality of the war is unavoidable. As her personal reply to Achilles, she takes her vow to meet him in the battlefield to kill or be killed. She pours out the fire in her heart:

"Well do I hope that Achilles enslaved shall taste of that glory
Or on the Phrygian fields lie slain by the spear of a woman."¹¹

From the viewpoint of plot-structure Penthesilea's speech concludes the first book 'The Book of the Herald': but Sri Aurobindo does not conclude it thus. The most striking literary merit of this part of *Iliou* lies in the few lines that follow and describe Talthybius as a human being pure and simple, remembering his home, wife and children:

So for his hour he abode in earth's palace of lordliest beauty,
But in its caverns his heart was weary and, hurt by the splendours,
Longed for Greece and the smoke-darkened roof of a cottage in Argos,
Eyes of a woman faded and children crowding the hearthside.
Joyless he rose and eastward expected the sunrise on Ida.¹²

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 408.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 409

The picture of a forlorn old man completes the mood evoked by the depiction of the gloomy dawn. The tone is set, it is a tone fit for the poem which is to describe extinction and annihilation. The first Book of *Ihon*, like *Savitri*, is thus quintessential of the epic.

The poem continues in the next book titled 'The Book of the Statesman' which is occupied solely by the speech of Antenor. Antenor urges upon the Trojans to pacify their strong feelings against the Greeks and to accept the terms of Achilles; but to his dismay he finds his voice a cry in the wilderness. He prophesies the doom of Troy in a pathetic eloquence, but to no avail:

 "...The high gods watch in their silence,
Mute they endure for a while that the doom may be swifter and greater.
Hast thou then lasted, O Troy? ho, the Greeks at thy gates and Achilles.
Dream, when Virtue departs, that Wisdom will linger, her sister!
Wisdom has turned from your hearts; shall Fortune dwell with the foolish?
Fatal oracles came to you great-tongued, vaunting of empires
Stretched from the risen sun to his rest in the occident waters,
Dream of a city throned on the hills with her foot on the nations.
Meanwhile the sword was prepared for our breasts and the flame for our
 housetops.
Wake, awake, O my people! the fire-brand mounts up your doorsteps;
Gods who deceived to slay, press swords on your children's bosom.
See, O ye blind, ere death in pale countries open your eyelids!
Hear, O ye deaf, the sounds in your ears and the voices of evening!"¹³

It is all an exhortation and invocation lost upon the deaf and blind. The assembly is ready to stone Antenor and he is bluntly asked to "find house outside the walls of Troy". The voice of wisdom is silenced and, as we find in the next book, the assembly is dominated by the voices of Lust. The mounting fanaticism finds its voice mainly through Paris, who stands to speak "as if to speak the last word, as if everything spoken before him was a mere prelude." The Trojans undisputedly decide that the true honour lies in fighting to the death; and the assembly breaks only to prepare for the last crusade:

 They with a voice as of Oceans meeting rose from their sessions,—
 Filling the streets with her tread Troy strode from her Ilian forum.¹⁴

Thus Troy has decided to meet the last wreck of her fortune; and in the wake of the ruin, Cassandra's vision is mistaken for the sign for victory. We come to it in the next book, 'The Book of Partings'. Cassandra by voicing her vision has clearly given the signal of danger, though the Trojan Warriors decipher in it an indication of triumph,

¹³ *Ibid*, pp 418-19

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp 418-19

for it is only a part of the truth that she speaks. Her prophetic utterance to Paris is:

“Thou shalt return for thy hour while Troy yet stands in the sunshine.”
 But in his spirit exultant Paris seizing the omen,
 “Hearest thou, my father, my mother? She who still prophesied evil
 Now perceives of our night this dawning.”¹⁵

But all the Trojans have a premonition of the doom of Troy, of which they themselves were the active instrument, for when they cross the city-gates they “gazed back silent on Troya” for the last time. The Trojans are now out to the final round of the self-destruction.

After giving these glimpses of Troy on her way to doom, the poem opens in the fifth book, ‘The Book of Achilles’, outside the tent of Achilles where he is lying “on a couch...loved by the Fates and doomed by them”. He has sworn to Zeus and Apollo that he would not re-enter his tent till he has defeated the last of the Trojans. Then the poem turns its focus to the Greek chieftains whom we see disputing Achilles’s claim of absolute leadership over their armies. But the “wise” and “crafty” Odysseus pacifies them. He speaks:

...like the Master who bends o’er his creatures,
 Suffers their sins and their errors and guides them screening His guidance;
 Each through his nature He leads and the world by the lure of his wisdom...

So Odysseus spoke and the Achaians heard him applauding;
 Loud their assembly broke with a stern and martial rumour.¹⁶

Thus Fate has put her seal on the decree of annihilation of Troy; and the prophecy of Briseis—the slave girl of Achilles—that even Achilles would end with Troy goes in vain like the exhortation of Antenor and the oracle of Cassandra. Meanwhile the decree is ratified by the Olympian gods in the assembly convened by Zeus who gives free rein to the deities of destruction. Thus both the sides of the warring camp enter the battle-field compelled by the divine will and by the mortals’ incapacity to realise the true nature of the human soul and the true meaning of human life.

The ninth (unfinished) book describes the scene on the battle-field where almost every human character in the poem—excepting the prophets of God’s voice—are seen engaged in the *melée*. The poem is left unfinished by the poet at this crucial point, but the foregoing episodes clearly indicate what the end is going to be.

(To be concluded)

G. N. DEVY

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 452. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 481-83.

IN-SIGHT

O MY soul,
I see you, a face
Carved by the patient hands of time—
Eyes of ecstatic golden splendor,
As if by a short gaze
They could colour the earth's space
With a deep orange glow—
Lashes whose curves touch the tears of gods,
Nose a jewel-handled sword
For the battle of life,
And lips smiling so soft
As if to disappear
Into infinity on both sides.

I wonder whether you are
Just a fantasy.
You tell me it cannot be—
O tell me more
That I may breathe the air
From which you sent me far
By the sigh of your lonely lips.

O my soul,
I repose
In the grass and flowers
Awaiting. When shall I hear
Your messenger galloping near
To carry me off to your mystery's abode?

RAJESHWARI

A CRITIC'S COMMENT

It has much colour and image conveying deep feeling, and there are two snatches of perfect suggestive expression in it which go beyond colour and image to a subtle overtone of soul in one and a tender undertone of soul in the other. Here are the lines undulating out the former:

And lips smiling so soft
As if to disappear
Into infinity on both sides.

And here are those that waft the latter:

That I may breathe the air
From which you sent me far
By the sigh of your lonely lips.

If you could often write with this kind of delicate intuitive touch, you would make your name in poetry.

AN UNUSUAL AND SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE

ON the 14th of September while I was resting on my bed at about 2 p.m. I had a very unusual experience which struck me as highly significant.

There were two parts of my being, both dressed in a plain white sari and standing side by side. One was reading to the Mother something written on a white piece of paper, and the other which was standing to the right was weeping in a heart-breaking manner.

The Mother was there in front listening attentively to what was being read to Her, and shaking Her head from side to side. She too was dressed in white and, though She was full of love and compassion, there was a deep sorrow on Her face.

The most surprising part of the experience was that, as soon as I finished reading one para or one part of what was written, it slowly faded away, and another para or portion emerged to take its place. The writing was about what people were doing after the Mother's withdrawal. Although She knew all about it, She was listening to everything read as if it were for the first time that She was hearing of it.

The writing was not composed by me, nor did I have any knowledge of what was written. I was only an instrument used for reading the passages that emerged on the page.

The other part of my being, which was weeping, was saying to itself, "Is this the way in which we repay You and all Your wonderful Love, Grace and everything You did for us—all that both You and our beloved Lord endured, suffered and accomplished for our sake?"

Never before had I seen two different parts of my being together, each doing its own work. The part that was weeping was so profoundly grieved that, even when I woke up suddenly, I could hear it crying deep down within my heart, and I had to make an effort to stop it. This was because, from the beginning of my contact with the divine Mother and Sri Aurobindo, I have never been able to bear anything by which they were made to suffer.

The present experience came to me spontaneously and most unexpectedly, to show me how much we hurt the Mother by going against Her Will, letting anything happen which might tend to undo Her great work. She has repeatedly assured us of Her constant presence watching over us. I have also been shown on various occasions how a drop of sincerity on our part and of consciousness of this presence can bring a flood of Her Love and Grace.

LALITA

A SHEAF OF SYMBOLS

(Concluded from the issue of October 1977)

21

“Angels go, that archangels may come in”:
How true this epigram echoing the Concord-Sage!
True not only for our earthly stage
Where we narrowly strut about for a brief space,
In perennial roles of Exits and Entrances.
True also for wide courts of heavenly floors,
Which presumably the Sage may have visited
To glean experience first-hand of mysteries.

But truer still, ironically, for our earth—
Where we see angelic figures flitting by,
And angelic ministers fleeting away too soon.
How they leave us plunged in depths of dark despair,
Wherefrom we can hardly hope to rise to heights
Of chastened vision to mark out archangels!
Sense-ridden and sensation-wed that we are,
So we have ever need to forgo charms
Of ‘sight of vernal bloom or summer’s rose’
To prove our apprenticeship for the Inner Eye
And inner sense of values: losing to gain
And rise ever higher in the scale of growth—
Even to the Inner Ranks of Michael-Raphael Gabriel-Abdiel.

22

Come out, my Darling, come out into open air!
Long have I hatched thee, long thou hast borne pain
Of dark confinement; but it’s now right time,
When a little peck of bill will bring thee out
Into the cool, clear, wide, refreshing air!
Strive but a little, and break the natal shell
That sheltered thee awhile in thy non-age days.
O come out now, and try thy unsure feet
In skipping from bough to bough—and learn at last
To fly with outstretched wings to farthest sky!

Then haply thou'lt forget this watch-and-ward,
 This mother of thine who gave her life and blood
 To bring thee into Birth of Love-Light-Life!
 Then haply thou shalt have thy own sweet home,
 Rearing up thy brood into handsome choristers,
 Forever lifting canticles to the Most High
 (Be it sun or shower, or even the kite's fell clutch),
 And thou shalt pass on thy Heritage of Joy—
 So shall we not have lived or died in vain,
 So shall the poets not sung of us in vain,
 And so shall these blessings poured on thee—again and again—not go IN VAIN!

CHIMANBHAI

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THE CHARACTER OF LIFE

CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH TO SHAKESPEARE

(Continued from the issue of October 1977)

The Character of Life in *Hamlet* (Contd.)

POLONIUS's death marks the beginning of tragedy. A seemingly innocent bystander receives the blow meant for the guilty king. But if we can withdraw our moral conceptions, we will see the "reason" or "sanction" in life for what takes place. As we said earlier, Polonius is the first to take initiative against Hamlet by forbidding Ophelia to meet him. That act adds immeasurably to Hamlet's emotional strain. Thereafter his love for Ophelia and most of his affections are dead. That death of emotion is a sanction for Polonius's death.

After the nunnery scene, Polonius intervenes again in the action when Claudius first proposes to send Hamlet to England. Polonius is convinced he knows the cause of Hamlet's suffering.

The origin and commencement of his grief
Spring from neglected love. (III.I.185)

He asks Claudius to postpone the voyage and arrange for a meeting between Hamlet and the queen which he will overhear from behind the curtain. He takes initiative to save Hamlet from his death in England and to arrange the very encounter in which he dies in place of Hamlet. Claudius spares Hamlet. Hamlet spares Claudius at prayer, slaying Polonius instead. Unconsciously, Polonius puts himself in the very middle of the conflict and he is consumed by it, just as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are later on. Hamlet contemplates the cause of the old man's death—

Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!
I took thee for thy better: take thy fortune;
Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger (III.IV.31)

and perceives that it too must have its just consequence:

I do repent: but heaven hath pleased it so,
To punish me with this and this with me,
That I must be their scourge and minister.
I will bestow him and will answer well
The death I gave him. (III.IV.173)

Hamlet's chief concern is still the queen. The death of Polonius only further excites him against her—"let me wring your heart." He confronts her with the ugliness of her deeds with words like daggers. The first time Hamlet mentions murder, she shows surprise.

HAM: A bloody deed! almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king, and marry with his brother.
QUEEN: As kill a king! (III.iv.27)

But she never asks for an explanation. Again he returns to the theme of murder and she only cries "No more!" Though she probably did not participate in planning the murder, her silence here suggests she knew or suspected it afterwards. She claims the same innocence with regard to her own sins:

What have I done, that thou darest wag thy tongue
In noise so rude against me? (III.iv.39)

But surely she is not ignorant of committing adultery and incest.
Much earlier she suspected the cause of Hamlet's grief was she:

I doubt it is no other but the main;
His father's death, and our o'erhasty marriage. (II.ii.56)

Just as Hamlet presses further, the Ghost appears to save the queen from further anguish. By sparing her, he makes inevitable the tragedy which follows. Again Hamlet confronts her and asks her to repent. He requests the one thing that really concerns him, "go not to mine uncle's bed." As the meeting concludes, Hamlet's feelings towards his mother soften. The act of expressing his condemnation of her relieved him from his extreme inner emotional suffering and frees some of his energies for action.

Claudius feels his position threatened and he begins to lose his poise, "For like the hectic in my blood he rages." His strength is waning and he knows he must act quickly. But he fears the people's loyalty to Hamlet and the danger that his acts may rebound on the doer.

... The great love the gentle gender bear him;
Who, dipping all his faults in their affection,
Would, like the spring that turneth wood to stone,
Convert his gyves to graces; so that my arrows,
Too slightly timber'd for so loud a wind,
Would have reverted to my bow again,
And not where I had aim'd them. (IV.vii.18)

Claudius has a clear perception of the balance of forces and the great power of the people's loyalty. He states a life principle: that acts, done by a weaker man against a stronger, will recoil and fall back on the doer.

He sends Hamlet off to England accompanied by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who carry a secret order for Hamlet's execution. Hamlet, on his way to the ship, meets Fortinbras leading his army across Denmark on his way to Norway. The event is significant as a prelude to the final dispensation. As Hamlet leaves the country, Fortinbras arrives. The next time they meet it is at Hamlet's death and Fortinbras's ascension to power. Hamlet compares himself with the "delicate and tender prince" who risks everything to conquer a small patch of useless territory. Still he cannot understand the reason for his inaction.

Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
To do't. (IV.iv.45)

Ophelia has held herself responsible for Hamlet's madness but she was incapable of disobeying her father and Hamlet's behaviour has completely estranged her. At news of her father's death, her weak personality loses its balance. Claudius expresses his subconscious recognition that he is responsible.

O, this is the poison of deep grief, (IV.v.76)

for he is the true poisoner.

Suddenly Laertes bursts into the king's chambers intent on revenging his father's death. He is followed and supported by an angry mob ready to denounce Claudius and proclaim young Laertes the new king. His accusation against Claudius is correct at the level of life consciousness. This event shows just how precarious Claudius's position has become.

... the people muddied,
Thick and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers. (IV.v.81)

His only remaining strength is his crown.

There's such divinity doth hedge a king,
That treason can but peep to what it would,
Acts little of his will. (IV.v.123)

Laertes, like Fortinbras, shows the vital energy and initiative which Hamlet lacks and his reply to the queen when she asks him to be calm makes clear the reason.

That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bastard,

Cries cuckold to my father, brands the harlot
 Even here, between the chaste unsmirched brow
 Of my true mother. (IV.v.II7)

Only a man who was born a bastard to a cuckold and a harlot could feel calm when his father is killed. Is this not exactly Hamlet's position in his emotion? News comes of Hamlet's unexpected return to Denmark and Claudius incites Laertes to a plot to kill the prince. There is to be a duel in which Laertes will have a poisoned sword and Claudius will keep a poisoned cup of wine to offer Hamlet. Laertes himself proposes the use of poison. Immediately the queen enters announcing Ophelia's death by drowning. Her brother's conscious consent to the murder plot is sanction for her death. His sense of guilt for resorting to trickery and murder is sanction for his own.

Hamlet and Horatio approach the castle by way of the graveyard just as a grave is being dug for Ophelia. It is an indication of what is to follow. Hamlet contemplates the vanity of man's life which turns so swiftly to dust. Laertes, the king and queen enter with Ophelia's body. Hamlet and Laertes compete with one another in their display of grief and struggle in her grave.

Alone once again, Hamlet relates to Horatio the story of his voyage with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In the middle of the night he stole into their cabin and removed the packet containing the king's commission for his death. Having discovered the contents, he rewrote it, putting their names in place of his own, sealed it with his father's signet and replaced it in their room. The following day, pirates attacked their ship. In the course of battle Hamlet boarded the pirate ship and was stranded there when the ships parted ways. The pirates returned him to Denmark with his promise of some reward. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern continued their course to England and their own execution.

Here we find Hamlet quick to act and he himself explains the motive power behind his initiative:

Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting,
 That would not let me sleep: methought I lay
 Worse than the mutinies in the bilboes. Rashly,
 And prais'd be rashness for it, let us know,
 Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well,
 When our deep plots do pall: and that should teach us
 There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
 Rough-hew them how we will,— (V.ii.4)

It is not mind that woke him in the night and compelled him to steal the king's commission and rewrite it. Nor was it mind that moved him to board the pirate ship ahead of all his other countrymen. Rather it was the power in him that acts when

mind is brushed aside ("our deep plots do pall"), what Hamlet calls "rashness" or "indiscretion" which we understand as the impulsive action of the vital moving without mental decision or reflection.

What then of the power which he calls "divinity" and Bradley calls chance or accident by which Hamlet's own initiative is made an escape from death in England and a swift path back to Denmark? John Holloway cites this incident when he writes, "Over and over in *Hamlet*, chance turns into a larger design, randomness becomes retribution."⁴¹ We have already described in detail the forces of life seeking a restoration of order in the country, revenge of the king's murder and a moral cleansing of the court. These forces act through the characters of Hamlet and Claudius who both resist them but they are not limited to acting through characters. They can also express themselves through the chance or accidental movements of life.

In consenting to the journey to England, Hamlet disregards the Ghost's request and his duty to the country. In arranging for it, Claudius is denying the force in himself seeking purification from his sins. Their actions move in contradiction to the prevailing life conditions in the country, pressing for resolution. The result is that without his conscious intention, Hamlet is led by "circumstances" back to his destiny. As Helen Gardner writes, "Hamlet himself is far more of an instrument and far less of an agent" in revenging his father's murder.⁴² It is natural he feels providence at work. The arrival of the pirate ship is simply a channel through which the balance of social forces expresses itself.

We come to the final scene. The king sends a messenger to Hamlet proposing a rapier duel between Hamlet and Laertes. As Helen Gardner noted, it is Claudius who arranged the duel to kill Hamlet, yet he is "to some extent the agent of his own destruction. As initiator of the action he must be the initiator of its resolution."⁴³ Hamlet accepts, though he senses something wrong.

Ham: ...But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart: but it is no matter.

Hor: Nay, good my Lord—

Ham: It is but foolery; but it is such a kind of gain-giving, as would perhaps trouble a woman.

Hor: If your mind dislike anything, obey it: I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not fit.

Ham: Not a whit, we defy augury: there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all... (V.ii.219)

No longer does he strain to decide and act or excite himself to passion. He perceives a greater force in life working out its own inevitable design and he is ready to accept what life brings.

Hamlet meets Laertes and asks forgiveness for his behaviour, saying the cause

was madness. Laertes is moved but insists on "my terms of honour." He recognises Hamlet's sincerity but replies falsely:

I do receive your offer'd love like love,
And will not wrong it. (V.ii.262)

Laertes's further participation in premeditated murder and his moral hesitation "And yet 'tis almost 'gainst my conscience" are the sanction for his own death.

The duel begins. The queen toasts Hamlet with the cup of poisoned wine out of genuine affection for her son. Her act of sympathy comes too late to help him. It is the channel for her own demise, for she sympathises with one who now hates her and his ill-will acts through it. The queen feels the effects of poison and dies after warning her son. Her fall is brought by her own hand without Hamlet having violated his vow to the Ghost. Now his energies are free to turn on Claudius.

Laertes wounds Hamlet with the poisoned rapier. In the scuffle they drop their rapiers and exchange them. Hamlet wounds him. Seeing he is poisoned, Laertes cries out:

Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric;
I am justly kill'd with mine own treachery. (V.ii.317)

His words recall those of his father when he told Ophelia not to meet Hamlet any more:

Ay, springes to catch woodcocks. (I.iii.114)

Laertes tells Hamlet of the poisoned wine and the poisoned sword. Hamlet stabs Claudius with the envenomed point and then forces him to drink the cup of poisoned wine. Claudius dies of the "poison temper'd by himself." What was begun with the poisoning of Old Hamlet ends with the poisoning of the entire court. We can recall Macbeth's words:

We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which being taught, return
To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips. (I.vii.8)

Laertes exchanges forgiveness with Hamlet and then dies of the poison meant for him. Horatio reaches for the poisoned wine and tries to drink and join his friend, but Hamlet forbids it. Osric announces the arrival of Fortinbras. With his last breath as momentary ruler of Denmark, Hamlet gives his support to Fortinbras:

But I do prophesy the election lights
On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice; (V.ii.366)

and dies. The English ambassador brings news of the execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Fortinbras enters to assume power. What began thirty years ago with Hamlet's birth and his father's victory, ends with his death and the ascension of Fortinbras, who gains peacefully what his father lost in war. The margin of superior strength which Denmark maintained by virtue of a strong king, Old Hamlet, is lost. The balance of power tilts towards Norway. The ease of Fortinbras's election is a measure of his strength.

What happens here is the common pattern in nature when any new idea, force or movement is born. Initially it lacks the strength for permanent survival. It is destroyed and must be reborn several times before it can establish itself. In its initial appearances it may even resemble a negative power which threatens to destroy civilisation rather than a creative and progressive one, because the first act of any new force is to oppose and remove that which it is destined to replace and therefore it excites active opposition and resistance from the *status quo*. The result of Hamlet's birth is the fall of a decadent royal house and a loss of national sovereignty. Only when this newly manifesting force gains strength can it reappear and provide the basis for a higher mental consciousness to rule the country.

But even its initial appearance has left a promise of a better future. In accepting what life has brought him, Fortinbras displays a quality of restraint and compassion that is customary neither in war nor life and impossible for a mere warrior king:

For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune:
I have some rights of memory in this kingdom,
Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me. (V.ii.399)

The only remaining member of the Danish court is Horatio who remained untainted throughout by the poison which infected the court, who demonstrated qualities of prudence, honesty, courage, loyalty, and mature insight—surely the highest qualities which Denmark had yet achieved in her cultural evolution—and, most important, who showed a willingness to support the newly emerging consciousness represented by Hamlet in its effort to establish itself in the society.

(Concluded)

GARRY JACOBS

NOTES

⁴¹ John Holloway, *Shakespeare: Hamlet*, Casebook on Hamlet edited by John Jump, MacMullan & Co, 1968, p. 171.

⁴² Helen Gardner, *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

THE NEW AGE

A REVIEW-ARTICLE*

It was on 29 February 1956 that the Mother definitively willed the manifestation of the supramental Truth-Force from the higher to the lower hemisphere so as to charge the subtle-physical layer of the earth with its alchemic potency. It was by its very nature an omniscient Force that would complete its native work of transformation in the fulness of time. It was, however, desirable that man's response to this supramental manifestation should also be conscious, deliberate and integral, for otherwise the supramentalisation of earth, the terrestrial transformation, although decreed, might suffer some distortion and delay. The Mother accordingly exhorted the awakening and the awakened people of the earth to make the right choice and plunge fearlessly into right action. On 1 January 1956, she had warned that the manifestation of a new world was not to be proclaimed "by beat of drum", and indeed the stupendous event of 29 February was to pass largely unnoticed even in the Ashram itself. Next year the Mother said that, not a crucified, but a glorified body alone could save the world; the call was thus for radical change and transformation, not just for withdrawal, extinction or martyrdom. The battle for Next Future was to be fought in the theatre of illumined, dedicated and resolute action and realisation, and so one had to transcend even knowledge and action, and leap at attainment here and now. "This wonderful world of delight," she declared in 1961, was "waiting at our gates for our call." Knock, and it must open; call, and it must answer. Perfection, perfection—but not the current ego-reared human perfection, rather "that one perfection which has power to manifest upon earth the Eternal Truth". And so the New Year prayers and messages—coming one after another with an increasing pitch of urgency—culminated in 1964 with the peremptory: *Let us prepare for the Hour of God*, the Hour of God that would engineer the advent of the Truth.

In this broad context, Dr. Kishor Gandhi took to the Mother in mid-1964 a proposal to launch a senior students' group "with the central aim of giving an effective response to the Mother's repeated calls for collaboration" with the new Force awake and active in the Ashram (and the earth) atmosphere. Receiving god-speed from the Mother, 'The New Age Association', with its membership confined to the Higher Course students of the Centre of Education, had its inaugural meeting on 12 July 1964. Since then, quarterly seminars and annual conferences have been held under the auspices of the Association, and the proceedings of the first nine years (1964-1972) have now been edited and issued as a sumptuous volume by the Director, Dr. Kishor Gandhi. It was a grand collaborative enterprise rich in promise and impressive in achievement, and while patient planning and wise direction did much, it was the Mother's Grace that touched everything with life and made the

* **THE NEW AGE.** Speeches at the Seminars and the Conferences of the New Age Association, edited by Kishor Gandhi (Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry, 1977), Rs. 25.

whole work an agenda of the Ashram youth for the building of Tomorrow's World.

The roots of the New Age Association went back to the New Idea Association (L'Idée Nouvelle), which was brought into existence in 1914 by the Mother at Pondicherry. Its object was to forge in terms of "a common intellectual life and fraternity of sentiment" a group of young people who were imbued with the aspiration to transcend all inhibiting notions and practices and achieve creative unity in the Spirit. Going still further back, there was the group formed by the Mother in Paris and named after the Greek word 'Idéa'. It used to meet at her place in Rue de Val-de-Grace from 1906. The members of the group believed in a great future and dared to speculate about it. It was a small group at first, but the Mother's own contributions set the tone to the discussions and ensured quality. The group was enlarged in 1912 and its regular Wednesday meetings were attended by about twelve members who wished to 'know' themselves, master themselves, and hew new pathways to the Future. Explaining the *modus operandi*, the Mother said many years later in 1953:

"A subject was given; an answer was to be prepared for the following week. Each one brought along his little work. Generally, I too used to prepare a short paper and, at the end, read it out."

It is clear, then, that for the Mother, the New Age Association was almost a continuation, though under altered circumstances, of the work started nearly sixty years earlier. However, the New Age Association was to meet far less frequently (only four times in the year), with an annual conference superadded. Each seminar-meeting had a subject of its own, and some of the members—seldom more than a dozen—presented papers. Relevant extracts from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, a steering paper by the Director, and a message from the Mother usually served to keep the discussion within bounds and to impart to the proceedings a sense of direction. The annual conferences, on the other hand, were more like symposia, the different papers or talks orchestrating into symphonic patterns.

During the period covered by the present volume, there were thirty seminars and nine conferences. Although some of the papers seem to be lost, the material—the talks and the extracts—here brought together in these 626 large pages has such amplitude, variegated richness and moments of deep sincerity, profundity and experiential wisdom that it would not be too much of an exaggeration to describe the book as 'God's Plenty'.

There are two or three aspects of this concerted adventure in creative thinking that deserve more than a passing mention. In the first place, the seminarists are students who had all grown in the ambience of the Ashram, basking in the spiritual Light of the Mother. With his uncanny gift of foresight, Sri Aurobindo had glimpsed in these "flaming pioneers"

The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
The great creators with wide brows of calm,

The massive barrier-breakers of the world
 And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,
 The labourers in the quarries of the gods . . .

In the second place, while the 'subjects' covered a very wide range, the enveloping theme was still the grand evolutionary march from the human predicament of today with all its complexities, difficulties and possibilities towards the beckoning Life Divine of the not very distant future. From Here to Eternity: from the Human to the Divine! The movement had begun already, and the participants in the seminars were also involved in the process of change. And, in the third place, it was the Mother herself that ultimately initiated, directed and controlled the continuing experiment, partly through benediction and direct counselling, partly by filling the instruments—the Director, the speakers and the other members—with shining purpose, and above all by providing with her mystic presence the Ground of continuity from seminar to seminar, conference to conference.

The themes of the several seminars and conferences, while standing by themselves, have deeper affiliations and gradually add up to a massive testament. It was said by Sri Aurobindo: "Mind was the helper, Mind is the bar." How, then, shall we transcend the Mind? The Mother answers, "Keep silent!" It is out of the poise of silence that the music of aspiration, effort and realisation has rhythmically to unfold itself. There is the law of change and evolution, and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are the twin pathfinders to Next Future, and perhaps the first obscure beginnings of the New Age are there already, and only ask for man's seeing eye and total acceptance. In our schedule of priorities, we should know that the Life Divine is the one thing worth living and striving for. What is required, however, is not just a heroic pose but a deep sincerity, and a reliance on the psychic being rather than on the purblind and assertive ego.

But how is one to recognise the voice of the psychic being, the voice of Truth, as distinct from the voice of side-tracking falsehood? The Mother's simple test is to judge by results: Truth brings peace, faith, joy, harmony... while Falsehood occasions restlessness, doubt, sorrow, discord. Rukiya Dalal makes the test simpler still in Sri Aurobindo's words: "Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you."

With young people, 'studies' are all-important, but what is their role in sadhana? Well, all Life is Yoga; hence studies too. But, warns Kishor Gandhi, "only if they are pursued in a spirit of total self-consecration and offering to the Divine". Education is, with some, for success in life; with some others, for intellectual training and cultural fulfilment; but the highest aim of education, as of all activity, can only be to realise the Divine. Suppose difficulties confront us on the way, what shall we do? This was the question posed in the fifth seminar, and there were nine speeches, including the Director's. Difficulties are also an invitation to discipline, and in any case the only thing to do is to grin and get the better of them. A strong and unfal-

tering perseverance is the remedy, says Oscar Lasser; turn difficulties into opportunities, says Romen Palit; invoke the Mother's force, says Mita Chakravarti.

And so on, question after question is asked, the needed Light is sought in the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, thesis is met by antithesis, and clear guidance issues in the end:

What is the best way of making humanity progress?

What is true freedom and how to attain it?

How to serve Truth?

What is the destiny of Man?

What is true Love and how to find it?

As for the last, the Mother answers succinctly: "There is only *one* true love, the love *from* the Divine, which, in human beings, turns into love *for* the Divine. Shall we say that the nature of the Divine is Love!" Shoba Mitra elucidates it further by citing 'Radha's Prayer' by the Mother, and all indeed is said.

More themes for discussion, more occasions for recapitulating the words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, more dialectical exercises, more distilled enunciations. A pointed question: *Why is the Choice imperative?* This is one of the 'Hours of God'—that is why. And in this hour, the primary need is sincerity-cum-receptivity achieved through aspiration, peace and purity. Without such sincerity and receptivity, the avatar role of Sri Aurobindo as the creator of the new supramental Age cannot be properly visualised, and the New Age itself will defy one's comprehension.

There is then the new Aurobindonian outlook on Education, which is the energy required to give a decisive push to individual and social change and transformation. The real godheads of education are Truth, Harmony and Liberty, and these grow in the learner from the depths of silence. In ten minutes of attentive silence, says Manjula Sen, the teacher can bring down an effective power of consciousness.

Further inquiries: What do we expect from the Mother? Of course, *Everything!* Isn't she the Force, the Word, the magnet,

The Sun from which we kindle all our suns,
The Light that leans from the unrealised Vasts?

Again, it is only the Mother who can say:

I guide man to the path of the Divine
And guard him from the red Wolf and the Snake.

But to be worthy of the Mother's perpetual love, one must learn to remain young, and always to live in the future, for the future. But, of course, without a radical transcendence of our present nature, a real leap into the Future cannot be accom-

plished. There's the challenge, too, to transcend our current affiliations to the multitudinous gods of the religions in the adoration of the one Divine behind all. Likewise there is the further challenge to get beyond the refusals of the ascetic to the great affirmations, beyond the austerities to the quadruple liberations—Love, Knowledge, Power, Beauty. Such a leap from austerity to liberation, from aspiration to realisation,—what is it but a sustained spiritual adventure? An audaciously imaginative span of this adventure is to strive to translate the Mother's 'Dream' of 1954 into the 'Auroville' project of 1968 and after. In this grand operation of 'Big Change', the leap from the human to the Divine, all activities—science, reason, Yoga—have a place, and in this drama of transformation, nothing need be excluded, and Matter itself shall be lit with the Spirit's glow! The new man will also be the man of knowledge, puissance and *ānanda*. And when man the individual perfects himself, that will be the means of perfecting the race, redeeming and transfiguring the Future.

Variety without inner contradictoriness, diversity of notes but sustained by one *śruti*, many voices but one deep commitment to the Divine—such is the final impression. As one turns over the pages, ponders 'over the extracts from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, or the Mother's particular guidelines, as one reads the papers so richly laden with the results of scholarship and rumination, one has at first a sense of being overwhelmed by sheer Abundance, but on further scrutiny and reflection all are seen to fall into a pattern and build a marvellous bridgehead into the Future. And, quintessentially, the Mother, she alone, is this mystic bridgehead:

She is the golden bridge, the wonderful fire.
The luminous heart of the Unknown is she,
A power of silence in the depths of God...

Manjula Sen's speech on 'The Mother and Her Mission on Earth' at the third annual conference on 11 September 1966 is one of the most valuable in the volume, for it is a brilliant rapid review of the Mother's ministry on the earth. She is verily the creatrix of the New Age, said Romen Palit at the fourth conference: "There is one light within us, it is the Mother."

The New Age is at once an anthology of choice extracts from Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings, a symposium of inquiries, speculations and affirmations by some of her younger disciples, and a record of a movement in aspiration, effort and realisation in the Centre of Education and Sri Aurobindo Ashram spread over a decade. It is certainly not a book to be swallowed in one Gargantuan gulp, but one that is to be lingeringly tasted, chewed and digested. The editor, Kishor Gandhi, and the printers, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, deserve all credit for making available this spiritual treasure at so reasonable a price.

K. R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Image of Adoration by *Peter Heehs*. Auropublications, Auroville, Rs. 12.

THIS book is by one who clearly cares about craftsmanship. Today, that in itself is rare enough among those who write poems, to be remarkable. *Image of Adoration* is a cycle of seventy-four technically perfect sonnets—at least I detected no flaws of either metre or rhyme, although I must confess that I did not scan every line! And this simple fact of technical achievement gives the book a certain weight, like a well-shaped stone one handles with pleasure. But mere technique is not enough to make good poetry, or enjoyable reading, and this collection is more than a technical exercise.

The author sub-titles it 'section of a cycle'. Perhaps we are meant to understand that there is more to come, but I had no feeling of incompleteness; the shift and contrast of mood from one poem to another is in fact admirably balanced; each seems to have its place, and though only a few stand out as of exceptional value, even those of lesser perfection complement each other and one is left with the satisfying feeling of a well-rounded whole. So maybe it is legitimate to surmise that this is the poetic section or aspect of a cycle of experience—the expression of a whole period of psychological movement and growth. For Mr. Heehs's subject matter is himself. And one of the things which give these poems their value is the unpretentious directness with which he deals with his own feelings and thoughts.

Expression is always a diminution of experience. Words never have all the force of what is lived with the whole being. But of all forms of verbal expression, poetry is the least subject to this inevitable lessening. Indeed, by calling in rhythm, compression of idea, words and combinations of sounds which can evoke unusual intensities of feeling as well as of thought, the poet may succeed in arousing in his reader an experience which has something of the vividness of his own. For this is surely what we seek from poetry—the communication of an experience, something that may be a painful or even an ugly experience, but which enlarges our own limited or mundane existence by the subtlety and felicity of faultless form.

If we forcefully receive that, we have to accord the writer the title of 'poet'. Of course it is then our right to decide in which directions we wish our experience and being to be widened and led, and we shall value the poem or the poet accordingly. But in any case it seems clear that a writer can only give us this intensity of experience when he has deeply felt it himself.

The techniques of metre and rhyme, the various verse forms, can help the writer to achieve this vividness by obliging him to discover the most effective precision of expression. That is their true purpose. And the sonnet form has long provided a favourite field of experimentation for poets seeking to perfect their mastery over their tools. When the formal requirements of the sonnet are infused with the force of living experience the result is always memorable.

This poet lives much in his mind, and some of the most successful among these

poems are those where the form is filled with a lovely flow of thought, as in 'Images' and 'Fallow'; but in 'Mother of Negation' there is a rather striking contrast between the comparatively lifeless thought of the first eight lines and the sudden vividness of something intensely felt in the last six, which give the poem all its worth. Most of these poems are so integrated that it would be unjust to quote a few lines out of context. The finest of them all, 'Geode', which goes beyond the range of all the others into a deeper, more luminous experience, has already been published in *Mother India*. In a few there is a very pleasing humour, in 'Abstention' for example, or 'Mosquitoes'. One I would like to quote in full:

STARLIGHT

Although still made of earth's imperfect clay,
 And though the perfect radiance you are
 Is still to me the glow of a small star
 Unnumbered millions of light-years away,
 That starlight is to me a greater day,
 More illumined and illumining by far
 Than this sun's, whose bright beams of yellow mar
 The self-created glow of your clear ray—

That ray whose light once fell upon the dank
 Film of my mind and left a perfect blank
 That now can no more shadow forth the shapes
 Of ordinary life, but lets them pass
 Unaltered through it, like clear window-glass,
 When some strange, splendid hand has drawn the drapes.

These poems do not pretend to be more than they are. They deal with the mental and vital experiences of one who is on the path of self-discovery, but who has not yet scaled the heights or plumbed the profundities. In his 'Proem' he warns us:

I have no theme except my vagrant love:
 Its skies of rapture and its verdant glades
 Of rendezvous, and other, earthy hues,
 A total landscape.

And it is precisely the accuracy and clarity of such observations which are impressive here.

These things taken together make this sonnet-cycle an achievement which deserves to reach a wider public than the literary circles of Pondicherry alone. But we can hope for even more.

In his '*Envoi*' the poet promises:

Now I shall prepare
 In solitude, until my lips are trained
 To utter nothing but the words which leap
 Down from unconquered peaks of total seeing:
 Angels of inspiration, lightning-tressed;
 Or rise like mermaids from the unplumbed deep,
 In rhythmic waves of burdened psychic being,
 Gold-rose limbed sirens of the unexpressed.

Re-reading this collection of poems I was reminded of the young Milton consciously preparing himself to write an epic in his maturity. Whether Peter Heehs will achieve epic stature remains to be seen, but he gives us every reason to look forward to greater things from his pen. Meanwhile we can be grateful for this enjoyable volume.

SHRADDHAVAN

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THE TORTOISE AND THE MOUSE

A STORY

(Continued from the issue of October 1977)

ANGUS stuck his head as far out as he could and thought, *now I wonder why he did that* and he realised that while at home, before the disaster, he had been thought a rather clever animal, things were quite different here. There were all sorts of reactions in his friend that he could not understand. And this was strange for there had never been any such difficulty at home. Though they were not of the same species or even subspecies it had always given them a sense of great satisfaction to think that they had bridged this gap which many indeed regarded as an insurmountable obstacle to friendship. Many predicted that the relationship would come to a bad end. Had it taken the wilderness to make this prediction come true? Is that all it needed to dissolve an old and trusted and true friendship: a little loneliness, a little illness, a little scarcity of the good things of life? He had never imagined that Morry might have been coming to him for his soufflés and his protection and his pleasant home and now he would not allow himself to imagine it. He would keep all base thoughts away. Yet he could not shut out the awareness that without Maurizio he would be stranded in the middle of nowhere. It was Maurizio who knew the way to Hermione the hermit crab on the seashore. Angus had never before been out of Tortoise-land. And Maurizio knew this. Was it possible that the mouse had deserted him, knowing that without him he would in all likelihood wander about in slow circles until he dried up and nothing remained of him but his shell? Most unlikely; the look on Maurizio's face as he tore off his eyeshade and streaked into the bush had hardly been one of cold calculation. But what if he had actually cracked, gone completely mad? Even if the aberration were only temporary it would leave Angus plenty of time to shrivel up.

Meanwhile Maurizio was fighting his devil, and a lot stronger it was than Angus's. He was still intermittently feasting off Angus's flesh (all in his mind's eye) but to Maurizio this was as bad as reality for the very good reason that it tasted as good as reality. He had run away as far as he could from Angus because he was terrified that once he fell asleep he might become a sleep-walker or, from the way he now felt, a sleep-runner and do his friend irreparable harm. The only sensible thing to do under the circumstances was to flee to some civilised place where he could get a good meal, give his nerves a few days' rest and return to Angus with some provisions so that the temptation would be removed if not wiped out forever. He would, had it been possible, have run all the way, not stopping until he had reached home or some cultivated place, but he was in no state to do this. He ran until he dropped, but the horrible thing was that even while he lay in agony with a pounding heart seriously threatening to burst at any moment, the tortoise's succulent head swayed irresistibly before him. How he wished that he had worked on controlling his lower appetites before. If

ever, ever he was granted a second chance, if he ever returned to civilisation, which at the moment seemed by no means sure, he would lead a different life. He would live like Angus on lettuce leaves and grass for the rest of his days. But first he must have one good meal. He was starving. He would never make it back to civilisation in this condition and all his resolutions would perish with him in the wilderness. If only he had allowed himself a taste of tortoise shell, just a nibble...but as soon as he thought this he clearly saw himself, eating Angus's shellless body. For a few moments he felt richly satiated and then the realisation of the horror that he had perpetrated struck him. His stomach felt horribly bloated and his head reeled. Then he heard Angus's dear hopeful voice saying, "Morry, would you jump out as though you wanted a bite out of me, getting fiercer and fiercer every time?" He had wanted to exceed his nature and he had been destroyed, devoured. "Angus, Angus," he wailed in anguish. "Angus, come back. I'll never, never, never..." never what? It was already too late. Well, then all the same, since he had not only killed his friend, but prevented a noble being from fulfilling his noble destiny, he would take Angus's mission upon himself in the only way he knew how: he would not go home. He would never go home, but travel alone the road to the seashore that he should have taken with Angus. The moment he had decided this he felt his strength return. His head stopped aching. His vision cleared and he knew that he had been hallucinating. He tottered to the stream, dunked his head in it and sat on the bank.

After a while the idea had come back to Angus that Maurizio had been testing him when he had with such urgency ordered his head under his shell. There had been no danger, so what other reason could there be? and seeing that Angus had not fallen for this, Maurizio had quite possibly run off with the idea of suddenly pouncing on him, taking him by surprise. So far from sure that he wouldn't panic if it actually happened, Angus practised imagining the rodent suddenly leaping at him with bared teeth. At first even the idea of this made his head slide in, but after quite a long while he could no longer frighten himself and, however dreadful the picture he conjured up, his head stayed out.

Anxious to put his courage to the test he decided to look for Maurizio and plodded into the bush calling his name.

"Morry, Morry. You may as well come out. You're not going to frighten me whatever you do." But there was no answer. After a while he decided he'd go back to the spot where Morry had left him; for one thing it would be easier for the rodent to find him there; also, it was near a spring. An hour later he had to admit to himself that he was lost.

There was nothing Angus wanted more than to put his head in and forget about everything, forget that he was lost, that he had no water, that he was alone, forget even about Morry. But he had made a resolution. So he waited there with his head stuck far out. Sometimes small things scampered by and his head just went in by itself. But every time his resolution got stronger so that at last when a chameleon

flicked its tail against his shell his head simply stood its ground as it were and then finally he felt so confident he invited the chameleon to climb up on his back, but the chameleon, who had never received such an invitation before thought that a stone was speaking (he was a wilderness chameleon) and ran away in terror. This was something totally new for Angus. On the same day two animals had run away from him. Did it mean that he no longer looked timid? Did it mean that he *was* no longer timid? Would he have been able to look Clement Crool squarely in the face? On and on he went practising and practising until what with the newness of the situation and the aloneness and the lack of food and water he began to feel quite faint. But still he refused his head permission to go in. He seemed to hear Morry's voice saying: "That's right, just do it; that's the right method. Just do it." And he felt very pleased with himself because he had, after all, found the right method from the first without anybody's telling him. Finally, since his head which had been forced that day to do so many strange new things was going round and round, he thought, "Well, perhaps I'd better put it in after all and get a little sleep." But it wouldn't go in. It had forgotten how. He tried and tried. But it had got stuck and now it was Angus who grew delirious. He saw Morry springing out at him to try and make his head go in but Morry was smiling so he couldn't get frightened enough. And then Morry tried harder. He bared his teeth and grew bigger and bigger and fiercer and fiercer till he looked like nothing so much as a big hairy bandicoot rat. In terror Angus realised that it was no game, the savage creature meant to eat him. Struggling frantically (and unsuccessfully) Angus plunged into a restless sleep.

"Angus, old friend, put your head in." It was Morry, of normal dimensions, wetting his lips with a leaf pack. Angus couldn't answer at first. He licked his dry lips. The cool pack on his fevered brow felt delicious. Morry was gently trying to push his head in.

"Angus, old friend. I've never seen a tortoise sleeping with his head out in such sun, you know. I'm sure it can't be good for you. Please try and put it in." In spite of his great fatigue he tried. He tried and tried. But the head had received new orders and it wouldn't go in. Though it was the most uncomfortable thing that had ever happened to him in his whole life, there was, behind the anxiety, the beginning of a sense of victory. And Morry hadn't deserted him. All would be well. He licked his lips and tried to speak but his tongue filled his whole mouth. There was no room for it in which to move it around. Morry trickled water between his lips and Angus tried to smile his thanks. He felt his tongue begin to loosen.

"Mo, deamt... ate me." Though there was a good deal missing from the sentence and the articulation left much to be desired, the meaning was immediately clear to Maurizio. The old idea that it would be kinder to Angus to say nothing swam up and goggled at him but he held on firmly and said clearly "Yes, Angus, I did."

Then Angus mumbled something which the mouse recognised as his friend's old "Well then that's all right then," and with a sigh of contentment Angus fell asleep again.

They had to rest for a few days before continuing their journey. On the second day, with the help of Japanese foot-treading massage at which Maurizio was skilled, Angus regained his head-sliding mechanism. But at that point they had an argument, or, if you prefer, a disagreement. Angus said he didn't want his head to go in any more. The mouse said that if it didn't he might well go blind since he wasn't used to the sun. Angus said he'd rather be blind than timid. He had become so obsessed with the idea of timidity that he now saw it as the scourge of tortoise kind. Well nigh exasperated by his friend's stubbornness Maurizio finally convinced him by saying that if he wouldn't put his head in it was one thing, but that if he couldn't it had no value at all. Seeing the sense of this, Angus grudgingly let his neck be massaged until finally he could very creakily draw it back and forth. He was immediately eager to see whether it could involuntarily be frightened back.

"Let's do it, Morry," he said.

"Do what?"

"You know..."

"You mean..." Maurizio made an as-if-to-pounce movement.

"Yes, yes. Exactly."

"Angus, we've both been through so much. I really don't think we should try anything extra at the moment."

"But I'm perfectly all right today, Morry. Your massage was very good. You really are a man of parts. It was just that I hadn't drunk much and of course I'm not used to the exposure." Angus had already tottered up onto his legs and lifted his shell. Maurizio was much relieved to see Angus sink back.

"Perhaps we should wait a little after all," he croaked.

But the next day it was the first thing Angus thought of and this time he was almost steady on his legs.

"You see," he said when faced with Maurizio's reluctance, "it's the only thing that means anything to me now."

"But why, Angus? You were never a very heroic creature, with all due respect. Your considerable talents lay in another direction. Why this obsession now?"

"Because, because," said Angus, "I want to get rid of my shell."

"Eeek."

Angus hadn't known what he was about to say. The idea was as startling to him as it was to Maurizio. But Maurizio now had himself firmly in hand. He must tell his friend everything. It was the only safeguard for both of them. The sense of revulsion caused by his hallucination still lingered and neither Angus's shell nor his poor scorched head held any temptation for the mouse at present, but he also knew that a few more days of meagre fare might awaken the devil again. He didn't even want to think of Angus without a shell. But in any case the time had come for him to make his confession.

"Dear Angus," he said, "take the weight off your dear tottery old legs and sit down and listen to me. I have something much more frightening than a pounce

for you and if you can listen to me without your head going in you can consider yourself to have passed your final exams."

"You're not going to do Dracula for me, are you, Mousie? You know that only makes me laugh," Maurizio sighed.

"No, I'm not going to do Dracula. Just listen. Do you remember the soufflé you made for me the night before we were banished?"

"I was banished. You came with me of your own free will, kind, generous friend that you are."

Maurizio groaned.

"Don't make it worse. You remember?"

"Yes. I remember it very well indeed, our pleasant little dinner. It was the last of our pleasant little soirées, though I little dreamt it at the time, as they say in the novels."

"Yes. Well, being a rather gluttonous animal I ate it all. In fact I ate very heavily that night."

"You only did justice to the meal."

"Angus. Don't be kind to me, I beg you. You only make it more difficult. Please just listen; I have a sort of a horror story to tell you." Angus's face became attentive.

"I'm listening."

"You remember I fell asleep on your back in the early hours of the morning?"

"Yes. Yes, I think I do. If my memory serves me, Mousie, your sleep was rather troubled."

"Rather troubled," squeaked Maurizio. "Troubled indeed!" And then trembling, he told the story of how he had eaten Angus's shell, how he had developed an appetite for tortoise, how when food had become a problem in the wilderness his thoughts had turned increasingly towards Angus as foodstuff rather than friend, how at last he had had to flee screaming into the bush. He spoke shudderingly of the hallucination and of what he had resolved immediately afterwards. "And so you see, Angus, old friend, if you will still allow me so to call you, here I am completely at your mercy and I'll do whatever you say but I'm sure after what I've told you you won't ask me to spring at you with bared teeth."

Angus pondered this.

"Well, why not?"

"Oh Angus, you haven't even been listening."

"Of course I've been listening. You developed a taste for tortoise and you wanted to eat me. But the point is that you didn't. Now you're afraid you may get tempted again?"

"Yes."

"But don't you see? We can kill two birds with one stone. I have to learn not to be timid and you have to learn not to be tempted. We can do it all at once."

"Yes, but..."

“But nothing. How else are we going to do it? You’re my three oranges and I’m your three oranges and the only possible method is by doing.”

“The danger.”

“There are always risks. Even when you think you’re living a nice safe life. Look at what happened to me at a nice quiet scholars’ gathering. I’m lucky they didn’t decide to chop my head off.”

Maurizio didn’t answer. He was thinking that with the practice of not pulling his head in Angus seemed to have become very resolute.

“Isn’t it true?” insisted Angus.

“I suppose it is.”

“Then when shall we start?”

“Tomorrow morning?”

“No, right away,” said Angus sticking his head out as far as he could. Maurizio said with a sigh:

“You look like a bust of Julius Caesar so don’t worry too much. I doubt that I can work up much of an appetite for you.” He trudged away. “Are you ready? Here goes.” And half-heartedly he ran a few steps towards Angus. Almost immediately Angus’s head went in.

“Hey,” said Maurizio, “I didn’t come anywhere near you.” He noticed that his mouth had started watering.

“Near enough,” said Angus peeping out cautiously. “Now my knowing that you really would like to eat me makes you a most valuable three oranges. Don’t you see? I couldn’t have found a better practice partner in the whole world.”

“Yes. Yes. I see.”

So they practised all morning.

And the tortoise could not keep his head out. You may find this difficult to believe when just yesterday he could not get it in but there is something in the knowledge that your partner dreams of devouring you that tells heavily in this sort of thing. And indeed Angus and Maurizio were a most perfectly matched pair for the work they had undertaken, for Maurizio had to take no more than a few charging steps towards the tortoise to feel his gums itching with anticipation.

There were days when Angus could not be coaxed out of his shell at all and Maurizio would shout from a great distance, “Come out, you fool tortoise. I’m a hundred miles away from you,” but Angus who knew that Maurizio had been trained to throw his voice waited huddled in his shell. And sometimes he wasted a whole day like this and would only come out at evening when his tummy rumbled so much with hunger that he simply had to nibble a wild shoot or two. But when it was not actually practice time the instincts of fear and hunger lay dormant in these two though when there were strange wilderness noises in the night Maurizio would actually lie curled up against Angus’s shell.

The days turned into weeks and the weeks into months and still Angus could not keep his head from sliding in when Maurizio charged at him and Maurizio

could not keep his mouth from watering, but the strange thing was that Angus feared nothing else but Maurizio and Maurizio's mouth watered for nothing else in the world except Angus, and that only when he ran towards him. They discussed this strange situation and wondered whether they had not gone as far as they could go together but they always ended up by agreeing that it was precisely together they had to resolve this.

"You see," said Angus, "if doing is our method then not doing would be an admission of failure. So we must do."

"Or die."

"Do or die," agreed Angus and it became their motto. Not very original perhaps but in the wilderness even old chestnuts seem new-minted, to mix metaphors rather horribly. They evolved a whole jargon. They called what they were doing the do method and then they changed it to the don't method. They gargled and ablated before starting and bowed to each other ceremoniously. It was threatening to become more complicated and formal than a full scale Japanese tea ceremony but no matter how civilised they became their old fears and appetites remained intact.

So the months turned into a year and the year into another year and their whole lives now revolved around their don't-do method. From the moment they got up to the moment they went to bed. And in their sleep suggestions came to them as to how to proceed. They continually made innovations in their method and all the energy of their minds and hearts and bodies went into this great and heroic activity.

(To be continued)

MAGGI

EUROPE 1974

A TRAVELOGUE

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LONDON is a city of parks, and the parks are full of birds. Was Shelley in one of these parks when he wrote, addressing the skylark?

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow,
The world should listen then, as I am listening now.

That immense metropolis with its unnumbered men and dwellings has yet kept touch with Nature. At one moment you could be in the densest of traffic jams and yet within a few minutes you could be in a park where even the honks of cars do not reach you through the woodland: almost a rural atmosphere surrounds you and you can go to sleep under an oak tree. These parks are the breathing spaces where one can gain peace of mind and rest from the hustle and bustle and stress that the Londoners have to live with. It is a credit to the people and their long tradition that they have preserved so lovingly and guarded so jealously the parks and open spaces and woodlands of London.

There are at least fifteen very beautiful parks in London. Among them Regent's Park is the work of the gifted architect Nash. It is the most beautiful of all the parks. Apart from its trees and flowers and bowers there are facilities for games and rowing within the park. Swans and other water birds float on the water of the artificial lake. The London Zoological Gardens are on the north side of this park while the lake is more to the west. There is also an open air theatre where ballets and Shakespeare's plays are performed during the summer months. Originally this whole area was the hunting ground of the Lords. And the cricket grounds where the Test matches are held are very near Regent's Park.

St. James's Park too is very beautiful. It was created for Henry VIII in 1535. St. James's Palace inside the park was the London residence of the sovereign till the time of William IV. Even today official documents are issued and dated from St. James's Palace. It is from this Palace that all royal proclamations were made and are still being made. Ambassadors are accredited to the "Court of St. James". The most interesting part of the mansion is the gate-house with its beautiful Tudor carving and the initials of Henry VIII. There is a story that Queen Caroline, wife of George II, wanted to reserve St. James's Park for the exclusive use of the Royal Family. She called the Prime Minister, Walpole, and asked him how much it

would cost. Walpole calmly answered, "Only a crown, Madame." Obviously he did not mean the two-and-a-half-shilling piece that was in circulation then. He meant that this might cost the king his crown. A part of St. James's Park was developed by Charles II, in imitation of Versailles. He was fond of birds and his aviary gives the name to the Bird Cage Walk which still exists.

Hyde Park was once a forest where wild bears and bulls and deer used to roam. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, military parades were held there. James I is said to have improved it, and William III installed 300 lamps to illumine it. There are cafés now near the lake Serpentine and one can sip coca-cola and enjoy the surrounding beauty. The corner near Marble Arch is called the Speakers' Corner where on Sunday afternoons one can just stand upon a wooden box and start lecturing on any subject. And a crowd would gather around one. Then there are the bronze rabbits and Peter Pans that are polished up by children's kisses.

Greenwich Park is famous all the world over. For it is from the observatory there that the world gets its Greenwich Time. Greenwich Park existed from the time of the Romans who did much to improve it. Its stately cedars and chestnut trees, islands and lakes and cascades and rose gardens make it look like a fairyland.

Hamstead Heath is not a park but a vast semi-wild tract and has become a recreation ground for the people living in its vicinity. It is about the highest point in London and offers an opportunity for tobogganing and even skung when the snow is sufficiently thick. They fly kites there till ten o'clock in the evening during summer. Keats's house is situated just across the road. It is a national monument now.

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We went to see the Westminster Abbey. We stood for a while on the opposite bank of the river Thames at a place between Lambeth Bridge and Westminster Bridge. From this place one gets a beautiful view of the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben. Looking at the bridge just in front of us we suddenly realised that it was Wordsworth's bridge. As he stood on Westminster bridge these lines came to him:

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

Later on we found that there are about fourteen bridges on the river Thames in London itself. And there are many more in the countryside. Each one of these

bridges is different from the other. Each has a history of its own, and a special name. From the historical point of view there is none that can beat the one called London Bridge. It is very likely that even as far back as 43 A.D. a bridge was there exactly on the spot where the modern one is. It was over this bridge that the British fled when the Roman General Aulus Paulius attacked them. In 1014 king Ethelred fought the Danes near this bridge. There is a fantastic story that king Ethelred ordered his men to tie ropes around the wooden piles that supported the bridge; and the boats just towed away the bridge. In 1136 the old bridge was destroyed by a fire. An engineer called Peter Colechurch started to build another at exactly the same place. But he died before it was completed. He had built a small chapel on the bridge and it was there that he was buried: quite a unique thing to be buried on a bridge, isn't it?

By 1358 London Bridge had become a busy trading centre with some 138 shops on it. But a whale, "a monster of prodigious size", swam up the river and damaged the bridge. Once the snowfall was so heavy in the winter that huge blocks of ice came like an avalanche and washed away the bridge. From this incident came the song: "The London Bridge is broken down." A new bridge was built once again, complete with shops and everything. When, after some years by an Act of Parliament the shops were removed from the bridge, the shop-owners and their families complained that they could not sleep in their new habitations because they could not hear the Thames flowing under their homes. The bridge we see today was completed in 1831, and it is unique in the sense that while the old one had twenty arches the present one has only five. It was opened by William IV.

Lambeth Bridge near Westminster Bridge is a fine structure, with gilded pineapples forming part of the decorations, in memory of one John Tradescant who brought pineapples to England for the first time. Further down the river is Waterloo Bridge known as the finest bridge in Europe. Then there is the Southwark Bridge which was opened in 1819 at midnight with a candle-light ceremony. But the bridge we liked best was the Tower Bridge. This bridge is just opposite the Tower of London. There is something very majestic about it. It is the tallest of all the bridges in London and stands high above the water level as it has to admit the ships entering London from beyond the seas. It stands like a sentinel and equals the Tower in its grandeur. Its dark metallic look matches perfectly with the grim battlements of the citadel. Regent's Park shows London at its beautiful best; this bridge symbolises the city's power and majesty.

(To be continued)