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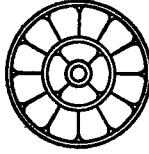
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.

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MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XXXI

No. 5

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail."

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WORLD-MANIFESTATION AND ITS MODES

A PRAYER AND MEDITATION OF THE MOTHER

FROM the point of view of the manifestation, the work to be carried forward upon earth, a hierarchy is needed—but in this world which is still in disorder, can it be established unarbitrarily, that is, in perfect conformity with Thy law?...The witness being, calm, indifferent, smiling, looks upon the play, the comedy which is unfolding itself, and awaits circumstances with serenity, knowing that they are nothing but a very imperfect translation of what should be.

But the religious being turns to Thee, O Lord, in a great aspiration of love, and implores Thy help so that it may be *the best* that shall be realised, so that as many obstacles as possible shall be overcome, all possible obscurities dispelled, all possible egoistic ill-will vanquished. It is not *the best* possible in circumstances of the present disorder which must happen—for that always happens—it is these circumstances themselves which, through a greater effort than ever yet was made, must be transfigured, so that a “best”, new in quality, new in quantity, an altogether exceptional “best” may be manifested.

So let it be.

*

It is always wrong to want to evaluate the future or even to foresee it by the thought we have about it, for this thought is the present, it is in its very impersonality the translation of present relations which are necessarily not the future relations between all the elements of the terrestrial problem. Deducing future circumstances from present ones is a mental activity of the nature of reasoning, even if the deduction takes place in the subconscious and is translated in the being into the form of intuition; but reasoning is a human faculty, that is, it is individual; its inspirations do not come from the infinite, the unlimited, the Divine. It is only in the Omniscience, only when one is at once What knows, what is to be known and the power of knowing that one can become conscious of all relations, past, present and future; but in this state there is no longer a past, present or future, *all is eternally*. The order of manifestation of all these relations does not solely depend upon the supreme impulsion, the divine Law, it depends also upon the resistance put up against this law by the most external world; from the combination of the two there comes forth the manifestation and so far as it is at present possible for me to know, this combination is in a way undetermined. This is what makes the play, the unexpectedness of the play.

June 24, 1914

BUDDHISM—AND BEYOND IT

THE CONCLUSION OF THE MOTHER'S READING OF AND COMMENTARY ON THE DHAMMAPADA

THERE is one thing which is not spoken of here, in the Dhammapada: a supreme disinterestedness and a supreme liberation is to follow the discipline of self-perfection, the march of progress, not with a precise end in view as described here, the liberation of Nirvana, but because this march of progress is the profound law and the purpose of earthly life, the truth of universal existence and because you put yourself in harmony with it, spontaneously, whatever the result may be.

There is a deep trust in the divine Grace, a total surrender to the divine Will, an integral adhesion to the divine Plan which makes one do the thing to be done without concern for the result. That is the perfect liberation.

That is truly the abolition of suffering. The consciousness is filled with an unchanging delight and each step you take reveals a marvel of splendour.

We are grateful to the Buddha for what he has brought for human progress and, as I told you at the beginning, we shall try to realise a little of all the beautiful things he has taught us, but we shall leave the goal and the result of our endeavour to the Supreme Wisdom that surpasses all understanding.

5 September 1958

THE MOTHER AND HER ACTION

FROM A LETTER OF SRI AUROBINDO

...I REFUSE to answer criticisms, attacks and questionings directed against the Mother. Whether in work or in Yoga, the Mother acts not from the mind or from the level of consciousness from which these criticisms arise but from quite another vision and consciousness. It is perfectly useless therefore and it is inconsistent with the position she ought to occupy to accept the ordinary mind and consciousness as judge and tribunal and allow her to appear before it and defend her. Such a procedure is itself illogical and inconsequent and can lead nowhere; it can only create or prolong a false atmosphere wholly inimical to success in the Sadhana. For that reason if these doubts are raised, I no longer answer them or answer in such a way as to discourage a repetition of any such challenge. If people want to understand why the Mother does things, let them get into the same inner consciousness from which she sees and acts. As to what she is, that also can only be seen either with the eye of faith or of a deeper vision. That too is the reason why we keep here people who have not yet acquired the necessary faith or vision; we leave them to acquire it from within as they will do if their will of Sadhana is sincere.

SOME NOTES ON THE MOTHER'S *PRIÈRES ET MÉDITATIONS*

(Continued from the issue of April 24, 1979)

(9)

June 7, 1916

"THE external circumstances" are the circumstances of the voyage to Japan. The Mother had stopped writing for a time before she left France and did not begin again till some time after going to Japan.

"Perceptions" and "Observations". One can perceive without observing, but not observe without perceiving. One can perceive something without taking notice of it.

In this connection the Mother said that when she was being shown a film which she did not want to be shown to people in the Ashram, she was hardly noticing the film and was occupied with quite other things. Some days later, many of the scenes and even the exact words of the dialogue came up before her mind as vividly as if they had been closely observed. Annie Besant also had a similar experience with the letters and numbers on a railway engine which she had just casually glanced at while walking on a platform.

This is quite possible if one has the habit of bringing up things from the sub-conscious, *faire ressortir des choses de la subconscience*.

"Thy individual form." When one rises towards the Divine, one meets at first a Divine which is impersonal and without form, then a state of consciousness which has a personal reality. Generally, it is this Divine to which certain religions ascribe the origin of the world. For some religions, there is a form of consciousness which can have a contact with you in the same way as a person can; it is beyond form and yet personal.

"Now the vital being...can...perceive Thy supreme Beauty." The vital being had fallen into a state of repose in order to be transformed as far as possible. Now it has passed beyond its personal limits. It is conscious now of Beauty in its essential form, the Divine Will behind all things. It was a step in the inner progress, from its personal sensation to a universal sensation. It has no longer any preferences, it could perceive the Divine Beauty everywhere.

November 8, 1916

"I feel like the bird that opens its wings for an unopposed soar." This was the liberation of the purely physical consciousness. It had no longer any attachments, it had cut off its links with the past, *liens du passé*.

December 8, 1916

“Magic wand of Thy impulsion.” Nothing is impossible to the vital when it is touched by the Divine Will. The image in “the bow of Thy Will” is that of an arrow let loose that goes straight to its target.

In the course of this talk, the Mother said that when she came back to Pondicherry in 1920, she had not the faintest idea of the work she had to do. For the first seven years, she remained upstairs and did not even come down for a stroll.

December 9, 1916

“Collective centres of consciousness.” Each nation has a collective consciousness. The group of nations which forms a continent has likewise its own collective consciousness. The earth and the other planets have too their own consciousnesses.

December 10, 1916

“Certain apparent weaknesses.” The point here is that when one assumes a body, one accepts its limitations at the same time. And one has to assume the body and its limitations in order that the Work may be done. If one remained in the highest Consciousness from the beginning, there would be no contact with the earth, and no work could be done.

“To be beyond all desires...” The Mother had been forced to stay in Japan even when she wanted to come away, because of the misguided zeal of a British ambassador. The British were still suspicious of Sri Aurobindo and, as the ambassador knew she was going to join Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry, he swore that he would not let her have a visa so long as he was there. The Mother had to wait till after the War was over when a new ambassador came. That was in 1920. Even then the suspicions of the British were not allayed. Secret instructions were given that she should be interned on the way if there were any doubts about her.

During her stay in Japan, the Mother had been doing all kinds of little things, like learning the Japanese language, teaching French, and so on. She had collected some fine paintings and done some painting herself. But all that really did not interest her. She was surrounded by things that attract desire, but they did not attract her at all.

“A new cause of wonder.” The more one grows in knowledge, the more one is struck by the wonder of things. Even things like walking or eating that we take for granted as the most common occurrences lose their commonness and become a source of astonishment.

December 21, 1916

“At present its love is a passive state and Thy Will is to bring about its birth

into an active state." It is somewhat like this, the Mother explained. Supposing someone is sitting in his room and is full of benevolence and good-will for others, wants with all his heart that the best that can happen should happen. That would be an example of passive love. If the same person goes out to help others by his talks, his works, that becomes a form of active love. This is only an image. The reality is too difficult to grasp.

The Consciousness that seeks to manifest is so vast and the body through which it has to work is so small, so limited in space and time—one can do only one thing at a time, speak to one person at a time—that the thing realised is small compared with the thing seen.

May one say the Divine could manifest Himself in a number of beings at the same time? He can and He has done so in the past. It has actually so happened that four different persons, minor emanations, did manifest something of the Divine at one and the same time. It is the central Consciousness that decides and does the different things, *fait des choses différentes*, small things in comparison to the immensity to be realised.

There have been two ideas at work. One was to effect the transformation of two individuals, who could then transform the rest. The other idea was to form a group who could be a centre of radiation, *rayonnement*, and contagion for other centres, so that a new world might be organised. The task is one of great difficulty, it is extremely difficult. There is an ancient tradition that if twelve persons joined together in invoking the Divine, the Divine would manifest Himself. But it is extremely difficult to get even twelve persons to be in complete harmony and want the same things, *s'harmoniser et vouloir les même choses*.

"I implored Lord Mitra." In this connection, the Mother said that when she came to Pondicherry for the first time, she saw a vision in which four beings appeared at the four corners of an immense plateau which formed a sort of a square. They spoke to the Mother. She told Sri Aurobindo what she had seen. He explained that they were the four Vedic gods, Mitra, Varuna, Bhaga and Aryaman.

Their action may be lent, *prêtée*, to those who wish to find them. They have an origin older than the Trinity, Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva.

A new body is needed to manifest the new life in a new world, *il faut un nouveau corps pour manifester la nouvelle vie dans un nouveau monde*. It will be something that has not manifested, the Mother concluded.

(To be continued)

SANAT K. BANERJI

A POEM BY NIRODBARAN

WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S CORRECTIONS AND COMMENTS

UNDER the banner of a golden sun
My flame-shaped visions rise up one by one
And gain a summit where in (a) tranquil mood
lie dumb solitude
They (dwell) (with)in the (deep) folds of (a seerhood).

dream-
The (dream-) importunities of delight
Are
(Grow) like the vastness of a shimmering night
ing
(And) fill with starry memories the deep
Vacancy of a half-forgetful sleep.

All that was dark and hidden behind a veil
into form by a magician spell
Wakes (like the rapturous song of a nightingale)
miraculous nothingness
From a (mysterious) depth of (emptiness)
In
(On) the changeless silence of my spirit-space.

leads
Now through (an) unbroken ecstasy (is) my way
And every heart-beat brings a glorious day,
A
(From the) timeless vast burdened with mysteries
the mystic deathless
Under (a deathless) beauty of (mystic) skies.
Bearing the beauty of immortal skies.

31.10.38

Q: Today I faithfully surrendered myself to inspiration, hence I can't make any head or tail of this. I hope it has a head and a tail. But I fear you will chop them off and replace them by something new. If by fluke you find the poem O.K., then please tell me what the 2nd and 3rd stanzas mean.

A: Well, the result is very creditable and it has an obvious head even if there is no tail to make. It is only the irruption of the nightingale to which I object, as that is

cheap and obvious. The first two stanzas are very fine, the second developing an admirable image. I don't see what there is to explain in it. A sleep full of dreams, a fantasia of half-forgotten memories as it were, can be very well called "half-forgetful sleep..." and such a sleep filled with the importunities of dream-delight (a beautiful phrase) can very well seem like the vastness etc. What is there so difficult to catch in that? The 3rd stanza is also very fine with its idea of the dreams coming up from a mysterious or miraculous depth of nothingness into the silence of the sleep-trance revealing all that was hidden darkly behind a veil—it is an admirably profound description of the happenings of deep sleep—samadhi. It seems to me perfectly plain, true and simple. But the nightingale won't do; it spoils the depth of the utterance.

Q: I read Meredith and he has a line: '...to drill the stubborn earth to shape' whereas I would have hesitated a thousand times to use the word 'stubborn'.

A: Why? it is an admirably apt epithet in that place.

Q: But while I profit in this way, I get an unconscious influence in other ways. Should I then stop reading these poets?

A: No, you should be able to read and profit by the beautiful language without losing your own inspiration.

BLISS-PANORAMA

THE wandering wind kissed every dewy leaf
And sunlight awoke the corn, piled sheaf on sheaf.

The humming bird fled to the forest's violet ways
And butterflies went chequering the rising sun's rays.

Wild flowers to the vernal air began to yield
Sweet perfumes, wafting from each bush and field.

Happy fauns raced across the dream-blue air
To drink the nectared streamlets gliding unaware

Towards the distant Heaven's rainbow-bridge,
Afire on yonder highest mountain-ridge.

Oh how my soul has yearned this climb to essay
Which gods alone can tread—Thy Light's Himalay!

LALITA

OUR LIGHT AND DELIGHT

RECOLLECTIONS OF LIFE WITH THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of April 24, 1979)

16

Apropos of *Savitri*

WHEN I was preparing *Savitri* for our International University Centre's one-volume edition in 1954 I was very careful about the collection of Sri Aurobindo's letters, to me, which was to accompany it at the end. I made several alterations in the arrangement—some actually at the page-proof stage. Not unexpectedly the Press felt bothered, but it did not put any hitch in my way. The Mother was kept in touch with all the goings-on.

Once I seemed to overstep the limit. After a letter of 1936 had been printed I made a new reading of two words from Sri Aurobindo's manuscript. The letter as it stood in print read: "Savitri is represented in the poem as an incarnation of the Divine Mother... The narrative is supposed to have taken place in far past times when the whole thing had to be opened, so as to 'hew the ways of Immortality'." Now, instead of "The narrative" I deciphered "This incarnation". Naturally I wanted a change to be introduced. Just as naturally the Press was upset. But it realised that the change was imperative. Either an *erratum* was to be put somewhere or the new words were to be printed on a small slip and pasted over the old ones. I opted for the slip to set right my own slip in decipherment a dozen years earlier. But the new words were longer by three letters and, even if we took advantage of the three dots after the fullstop to the preceding sentence, the words could not be fitted into the context. I suggested the use of a slightly smaller type. The aesthetic sense of the Press was somewhat shocked. I agreed with its disgust, but to leave the wrong reading intact and resort to an *erratum* elsewhere was hardly a harmonious and felicitous solution either. I thought of submitting the whole matter to the Mother the next morning when I would be seeing her.

On finishing my pranam I told the Mother: "A special problem has come up in a certain letter of Sri Aurobindo's to me on *Savitri*." The Mother replied with a slight tinge of sternness: "I know all about it. The Press sent me the news last afternoon. I was informed that you had made a wrong reading in a letter and that a correction was now necessary. The printing is already done. So to correct is very inconvenient. I told Amiyo what I thought of you." "Mother, what did you say?" "You won't like it." "Well, whatever comes from you is welcome, even if it is not to one's liking. There's something to learn. Please tell me." "I said: 'Amal is too sure of himself.'"

I was extremely puzzled. Obviously the Mother had somehow not seized the si-

tuation in its total bearing. I answered: "You must be right—but from what you say it seems that somebody else than myself detected my blunder and offered the correction." "Yes, and isn't that so?" "Mother, it is I who found my own mistake and I wanted to rectify it with my new reading of the manuscript." "Oh, that's how it is? I did not get such an impression." "Mother, let me again be a little too sure of myself and say that not even in a hundred years would anybody else, on reading the printed version, suspect a mistake. I felt uneasy over the version and went back to the original in Sri Aurobindo's hand and then I thought I must correct myself at all costs. What would you say now?" "I say that you have the courage to declare your mistakes." "Thank you, Mother."

As for my proposal to get a slip in smaller type stuck over the old misreading on my part, the Mother remarked. "I too had the same idea. But the Press was not very happy." Ultimately the Press got over its initial recoil and did the sticking. No reader, to my knowledge, has drawn my notice to anything odd on the page concerned.

Before leaving, I told the Mother. "Tomorrow I'll bring Sri Aurobindo's manuscript for you to see for yourself that my old reading was wrong." The next morning I presented the letter to the Mother. She took up a magnifying glass and scrutinised Sri Aurobindo's semi-hieroglyphics. Looking at me, she asked: "Are you sure it is not as you first read it?" This consoled me no end: after all, if even the Mother could be in doubt, mine had not been a Himalayan blunder. Finally she agreed to my new version, which makes better sense and is more consistent.

There must have been a bit of intellectual pride in my ambience, for on more than one occasion the Mother appeared to counteract the importance I seemed to attach to my own mind. To give one instance. The Press sent to the Mother the proof of the Contents of the *Savitri*-volume. When I came as usual to meet her, she showed me the pages and said: "Nolini and I have gone through everything. It's all right. There is no need for you to look at the proof." "Still, Mother, will you give it to me?" "Oh, you think we are wrong? Here are the pages. You won't find anything to correct." I glanced at the proof. Indeed there was no misprint, and in that sense nothing to correct, but I immediately saw that a certain title differed from the form in which it stood in the body of the book. Inside it had run: "Sri Aurobindo's Letters on *Savitri*." In the proof the first two words were missing. Neither the Mother nor Nolini knew of the form inside; so they saw nothing wrong. But it was necessary to make the titles match. Plucking up courage I faced the Mother's challenging eyes and said as quietly as I could: "I am afraid there is an error. One item does not correspond to the wording inside the volume. It has to be changed. The Contents should be accurate." The Mother kept silent for a few seconds and then nodded approval.

When the title was to be composed, there was discussion about the wording to be used in order to indicate the presence of Sri Aurobindo's letters at the end. The Mother cut short the debate and brought out the formula to be put between the mention of "Savitri" and the line giving the name "Sri Aurobindo". Her formula was.

“(Followed by the Author’s Letters on the Poem).” On hearing such a long-drawn-out phrase, Udar grinned broadly and let out even a ghost of a chuckle. The Mother looked at him steadily and said in a serious tone: “It is a little long, I know, but nothing else will make things quite clear.” After the book came out, I suggested to the Mother: “If *Savitri* is reprinted, don’t you think a smaller formula can serve just as well? I propose simply: ‘With Letters on the Poem.’ As Sri Aurobindo’s name comes in the next line it should be clear whose letters these are.” The Mother readily accepted the shorter phrase as both elegant and sufficient. It now stands in all editions, along with a subtitle to “*Savitri*”, which Sri Aurobindo himself intended: “A Legend and a Symbol.”

In subsequent editions new matter has been added to the “Letters”, but two letters in my collection have been overlooked by me. Perhaps it is not necessary to include them, but I give them here for future consideration of the parts in them that bring in *Savitri*. The earlier is in reference to the first number of *Sri Aurobindo Circle Annual*, which I was editing. It is also one of the last two handwritten letters of Sri Aurobindo. It goes:

“Don’t wait for any poems for your Annual. I think the Pondicherry poets will have to march without a captain, unless you take the lead. I have been hunting among a number of poems which I perpetrated at intervals, mostly sonnets, but I am altogether dissatisfied with the inspiration which led me to perpetrate them, none of them is in my present opinion good enough to publish, at any rate in their present form, and I am too busy to recast, especially as poetically I am very much taken up with ‘*Savitri*’ which is attaining a giant stature, she has grown immensely since you last saw the baby. I am besides revising and revising without end so as to let nothing pass which is not up to the mark. And I have much else to do” (March 18, 1945).

The second letter, which was sent to me in typescript, is the last to allude—after touching on other things—to the epic:

“I am afraid I am too much preoccupied with constant clashes with the world and the devil to write anything at length even about your new poems; a few lines must suffice. In fact, as I had to explain the other day to Dilip, my only other regular correspondent, my push to write letters or to new literary production has dwindled almost to zero—this apart from ‘*Savitri*’ and even ‘*Savitri*’ has very much slowed down and I am only making the last revisions of the First Part already completed, the other two parts are just now in cold storage” (July 20, 1948).

The rather grim tone at the beginning of the note alludes to a state of affairs which called for an even grimmer accent with the same turn of phrase at the start of a typewritten letter to me in May 1949 about my discussion of the philosophical implications of modern physics: “I am afraid I have lost all interest in these speculations; things are getting too serious for me to waste time on these inconclusive intellectualities...” However, interest in the writing of *Savitri* revived and resulted in almost an unwonted hurry towards the end of 1950. Nirodbaran has recorded how anxious Sri Aurobindo was to complete whatever he thought most important in the

epic, as if, because of the increasing seriousness of the Yogic situation, he knew of the sacrifice he would soon have to make of his body—as he did in the early hours of December 5.

After the one-volume *Savitri* had come out I expected the Mother to give me a copy with her own hands. But nothing was done. I felt perplexed and said to her somewhat dramatically though not insincerely: “I don’t know why you haven’t given me a copy. *Savitri* means so much to me. I would give my heart’s blood for it.” The Mother replied: “I am sorry. I haven’t distributed the book at all. But certainly I’ll give you a copy.” She called for a copy, wrote “To Amal with blessings” and put her symbolic signature. It was a precious gift and one has only to look at my markings and my copious marginalia to realise how closely the book has been studied and cherished.

I have related elsewhere some other incidents connected with my editorial work on *Savitri*. I may here mention the *grand finale*, as it were. After the last pages had been printed, the Mother calmly announced to me: “The Press is very displeased with you.” I answered: “I know it, Mother, and I am sorry I have troubled the Press. But are you displeased with my work?” She gave a faint smile and said: “No.”

The Press’s displeasure found a concrete expression in a long manifesto that came out on the heels of the *Savitri*-publication, asking all future customers to observe a set of rather Draconian-sounding rules. I was not mentioned anywhere but I knew that every shot fired had me as its main target. I accepted the charter without a word of protest. What it demanded was fair enough. However, the Press’s bark is seldom followed by a bite. In fact, the people who work there have been exceedingly considerate and I cannot thank them enough for letting me break every rule of the charter now and again. I honestly do my best to behave, but inspiration of the moment sometimes gets the better of me and I cannot help some chopping and changing. My “copy” too is occasionally far from being a model. As much as possible the Press co-operates in a true Yogi’s spirit full of understanding, tolerance, dedication to the Mother’s Cause, fellow-feeling and even a dash of semi-Aurobindonian humour. Perhaps it even appreciates that, if not in anything else, at least in my dealings with the proofs I have walked rather faithfully in the footsteps of my Master who was an inveterate practitioner of creative proof-reading.

Perhaps the master-stroke of the Master occurred when *Savitri* was first appearing canto by canto in small fascicules. After all the pages of a certain canto were ready for printing, the Press sent up again to Sri Aurobindo the proof of one page, asking whether a particular comma was quite in place. Sri Aurobindo, instead of just replying “Yes” or “No”, added a dozen or more new lines! The additional verses upset the arrangement of the fascicule and much had to be redone. I have not yet achieved anything so gloriously disturbing—but there is always hope of being more and more Aurobindonian.

Soon after the one-volume edition was out, the Mother said to our small group upstairs:

“*Savitri* is occult knowledge and spiritual experience. Some part of it can be understood mentally—but much of it needs the same knowledge and experience for understanding it. Nobody here except myself can explain *Savitri*. One day I hope to explain it in its true sense.”

An appreciative treatment of *Savitri* in terms of its poetic quality—an elucidation of its thought-content, its imagery-inspiration, its word-craft and its rhythm-impact: this she did not consider as beyond another interpreter than herself. I can conclude thus because she fully approved Huta’s proposal to her that I should go through the whole of the epic with Huta during the period when the Mother and she were doing the illustrations of the poem, the Mother making outline sketches or suggesting the general disposition of the required picture and Huta following her instructions, invoking Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual help, keeping the Mother’s presence constantly linked to both her heart and hand and producing the final finished painting.

It was a long-drawn-out pleasure—my study-sessions with the young artist who proved to be a most eager and receptive pupil, indeed so receptive that on a few occasions, with my expository enthusiasm serving as a spur, she would come out with ideas that taught a thing or two to the teacher.

*

There was a period when the Mother was reciting passages from *Savitri* in front of a tape-recorder. Her longest recitation was from Book Eleven Canto One, the lines beginning with

Around her some tremendous spirit lived

and ending with

Built is the golden tower, the flame-child born.

It was a most exalting performance. In connection with it the Mother disclosed to us that in the line

For ever love, O beautiful slave of God!

the word she saw in place of “beautiful”, although she did not read it, was “powerful”. In the late hours of the evening, when she used to be inwardly absorbed in Sri Aurobindo’s presence, she asked him why she had made that variant in the line. He answered: “What you have read is a truth—but a truth of the future. At present, ‘beautiful’ and not ‘powerful’ is the true word.”

One day in the same period the Mother came down to the first floor from her room on the second after one more recitation and exclaimed: "Do you know what pains I take? I spent nearly two hours early this morning consulting an English Dictionary to get the correct pronunciation of several words. Now I hope my reading was good." We had the chance to hear the tape-record. It was really a good reading—though in two or three places there still lingered a slight shift of accent or a French way of speaking a word.

Often the Mother spoke excellent English so far as phrasing and construction were concerned. Her modulation always had a French ring, but that was a charming trait and not for the world would I have missed it any more than I would have wanted her voice—resonant and thrilling—to be changed one whit.

She never claimed to be an expert in English, but when corrected she could be obstinate if our attitude was pompous and self-important. Not that she would let the matter be printed as it was, she would withdraw it from being published, especially if she considered the matter not original enough. With the attitude right she was always willing to change. On 29 November 1967 I wrote to her: "In one of your declarations on Auroville you have the title-phrase: 'The first condition to live in Auroville.' Would you mind very much if, instead of 'to live', we put 'for living'? Both Tehmi and I felt that this would satisfy English idiom better." She wrote under my typescript: "Certainly yes—'for living' is much more correct."

As a P.S. I had typed: "There is a little oversight in another phrase—in your letter on gossip. Would you permit us to print 'I wish all would repent like you...' in place of 'I wish all repent like you...'? Of course these are only suggestions. I shall do exactly what you want." The Mother's answer to my question here was "Yes." As a general comment she wrote: "To correct is quite all right and I fully agree!"

Sometimes I was too hasty in thinking there was an error or oversight. Nolini, on the other hand, always tried—unless forced by overwhelming evidence to the contrary—to believe the Mother to have somehow been intuitively right. This habit of his was in tune with his other stance face to face with any question put by the Mother. He would be very reticent—keep looking silently at her, pull a little at his moustache at times and wait for her to come out with the right formula instead of himself rushing forward with his own version. Once, when she asked him for a statement and he would not say a word, Champaklal drew everybody's attention to his modest behaviour. By his half shy half patient dumbness we got the Mother's own statement: otherwise she might have let pass a lesser couching of the truth. Confronting her written statements he would feel that an attempt to make her alter her English might also take away a part of the power of the truth she wanted to articulate.

On 30 September 1963 I made a translation of some French words of hers written four days earlier, beginning with: "Il ne faut pas confondre un mental calme et un mental silencieux." My opening English sentence read: "One should not mix up a calm mind and a silent mind." She corrected it to: "One should not confuse

between a calm mind and a silent mind." I told Nolini that, as far as I knew, English never employed "confuse" as an intransitive verb and that it always followed the model of: "Do not confuse this thing with that" or "Do not confuse the two things together" or else possibly "Do not confuse this thing and that" (in the style of the Mother's own French way with "confondre"). But Nolini, who often consulted me on the fine points of English, was not satisfied on this occasion. He hurried away to consult the monumental Oxford English Dictionary and came back triumphantly with a solitary example of "confuse" in the Mother's manner, meaning "to fail to distinguish". It was a quotation in Volume II, p. 816, from the *Pall Mall Gazette*, p. 5, col. 2 of 13 July 1885. So I had to shut up.

Later, I found that the first occurrence of the usage which the OED had listed had not gone without the honour of a sequel. Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* (1966), Vol. I, cites one W.F. Morgan as writing: "I always confuse between him and Orion."

Evidently, a wide acquaintance with modern English idiom is not all-sufficing and even a good knowledge of English literature through the ages can fall short. But, among other parts they play, they are valuable in helping one to distinguish the typical Englishness of certain expressions. Indians who believe themselves efficient in English often come croppers over this quality. Even Englishmen who are not particularly attentive fail sometimes to realise it. I have heard many educated Indians—and one who had lived in England—say: "I'll take your leave." A mix-up is here of two legitimate locutions: "I'll take leave of you" and "I ask your leave to go." The correct form is "I'll take my leave." One cannot take somebody else's when one is oneself leaving. Another slip—and non-University Englishmen seem as prone to it as Indians—is: "I'll do it as best as I can." English indeed says "as well as I can" but always "as best I can". The second "as" is to be cut out. The phrase is equivalent to: "in the way I can best do it."

Indian pedants, not aware how naturally English flowed in Sri Aurobindo's veins both because of his education in England from his seventh to his twenty-first year and because of an in-born ability as linguist which made him score record marks in Greek and Latin in the open examination held in London for the Indian Civil Service and easily master French as well as be fairly at home in Italian and German—Indian pedants, spurred by the perversity we may pin down by turning a Tennysonian tag negative as "We needs must hate the highest when we see it", attempted again and again to fault his usage. The Mother referred to this ridiculous hobby on several occasions. Even one or two Ashramites indulged in it. Doubtless, the amount of correspondence Sri Aurobindo had to carry on day after day compelled a breakneck speed in writing and debarred revision. So one might expect oversights. In February 1931 he wrote to me: "Dealing with correspondence now occupies anything from five to seven hours—except a few slack days—so you can understand I have no time for accuracy. You must supply the gaps left by pen-slips for yourself." Such *lacunae* apart, it was impossible that he should have shortcomings in knowledge of the

language.

Quite frequently it was what I have called typical Englishness that stumped the critics in his usage. Or they would be grammar-bound and not conscious of a freer English practice. For instance, they would cry "Mistake!" if in a sentence of "neither...nor" a plural verb were used. Technically the verb should be in the singular, yet to the born English ear the opposite can come just as naturally. Thus we see Churchill in *Their Finest Hour* override mere academic propriety by writing: "I must confess that at the time neither I nor any of my colleagues were aware of the peril of this particular incident." Again, a word like "someone" normally calls for a singular pronoun in reference back to it, yet—often combining, as it does, the two sexes—it is much more elegantly served by "they" as in a phrase like Agatha Christie's in a talk which she makes a doctor give with great acuteness on a psycho-pathological subject: "it's someone who's got a definite grudge (or thinks they have) and who chooses a particularly nasty and underhand way of working it off."

A common practice in India, even among pedants, is the employment of "had" with a verb although there is no sense of a nearer past and a farther past in the narration. Every now and then one hears: "I had gone to the theatre last evening" instead of simply "I went..." Equally frequent is the speech-turn: "Shall I go to your house in the afternoon?" instead of "Shall I come..." If one expects a party to be at home to receive one when one calls, one "comes": one "goes" to that party's house only if the person is expected to be out at the hour. Then there is the tendency to say, for instance, "Both Minna as well as Nancy have done typing for me." Here, however, the situation is rather delicate. In proper English "both" is followed by "and". But, it would appear, the temptation of substituting "as well as" is so natural that even a fine English writer like Sir Herbert Reade commits this solecism once in his book *A Coat of Many Colours*. Although it seems preferable to avoid it, I wonder whether it does not have something of a smack of the typically English. I have spotted it in a letter of Sri Aurobindo too.

English has many native quirks of correctness. In the matter of "both" itself, we would have our knuckles rapped in a good Indian school if we used it for more than two persons, yet all lexicons larger than pocket ones will spring a surprise on us with an extended application of it. Thus Volume I, p. 258, col. 1 of the authoritative Webster which I have already quoted records from no less a writer than Cyril Connolly the phrase: "both a musician, an archaeologist, and an anti-Fascist."

However, we Indians have to be on guard and be attentive to the niceties of the language which so many of us have adopted as our own. We are likely to trip up in tiny yet significant points. Careful as I always try to be, an error I have myself to avoid is a statement like: "I searched in vain for my *Savitri*-volume on the first shelf, and I couldn't find it on the second also." That "also" is *gauche*, if not dead wrong: the fitting word is "either". "Also" would be correct with an affirmative phrase but "either" is the *mot juste* in a negative one.

Provided we have somehow acquired an inner "feel" of the language we may dare

to turn it this way and that when the truly creative afflatus moves us. With what originality English can be pressed into suggestive service we can best gather from a study of Sri Aurobindo's extensive writings which always include the "luminous" in the "voluminous". I may illustrate it with a stroke of audacity which I came across in my plunge into his poetry in my early Ashram-days.

I wrote to him:

"I should like to know what exactly the meaning of the word 'absolve' is in the following lines from your *Love and Death*. I have been puzzled because the ordinary dictionary meanings don't seem to fit in.

But if with price, ah God! what easier! Tears
Dreadful, innumerable I will absolve
Or pay with anguish through the centuries...

There is another passage a few pages later where the same word is used differently:

For late

I saw her mid those pale inhabitants
Whom bodily anguish visits not, but thoughts
Sorrowful and dumb memories absolve,
And martyrdom of scourged hearts quivering.

Sri Aurobindo replied:

"In the second passage it is used in its ordinary sense. 'Absolution' means release from sins or from debts—the sorrowful thoughts and memories are the penalty or payment which procures the release from the debt which has been accumulated by the sins and errors of human life.

"In the first passage 'absolve' is used in its Latin and not in its English sense,—'to pay off a debt', but here the sense is stretched a little. Instead of saying 'I will pay off with tears', Ruru says: 'I will pay off tears' as the price of the absolution. This Latinisation and the inversion of syntactical connections are familiar licenses in English poetry,—of course, it is incorrect, but a deliberate incorrectness, a violence purposely done to the language in order to produce a poetic effect. The English language, unlike the French and some others, likes, as Stephen Phillips used to say, to have liberties taken with it. But, of course, before one can take these liberties, one must be a master of the language,—and, in this case, of the Latin also" (1931).

*

By the way, "absolve", not a common word by any means, is a verb of which Sri Aurobindo seems rather fond. It appears six times in *Savitri*¹, mostly as a past parti-

¹ pp. 69, 98, 140, 229, 676, 780 (The University Edition, 1954).

ciple passive in the sense of “having been released”, a natural English usage, but twice the meaning is Latinised, amounting to variants of “pay off”. Thus we read:

The conscious Force that acts in Nature’s breast...
Absolves from hour to hour her secret charge¹.

Here the suggestion is of acquitting oneself of a task or duty assigned to one. In

This most she must absolve with endless pangs,
Her deep original sin, the will to be...²

the “pay-off” connotation is more direct: “the will to be” is the culpable sin-debt incurred and “endless pangs” are the price for getting rid of it.

But the linguistic adventurousness of *Savitri* strikes us in a thousand ways. A few instances may be culled. We have a French noun boldly turned into a verb expressing the mind’s mode of working by over-simplification:

A single law simplessed the cosmic theme,
Compressing Nature into a formula.³

Elsewhere a French adjective meaning “limp, slack, flabby, flaccid” faces us vividly:

Torn from its immediacy of errorless sight
Knowledge was rebuilt from cells of inference
Into a fixed body flasque and perishable.⁴

An English noun is employed as a transitive verb telling us how the Life-Force

Ambitioned the seas for robe, for crown the stars.⁵

Another Aurobindonian coinage, now a new noun framed on a valid analogy, comes three times—first in

And driven by a pointing hand of Light
Across his soul’s unmapped immensitudes.⁶

We get an unusual adjective-shaped noun about the doings of “a secret Nature”:

As if her rash superb wagered to outvie
The veiled Creator’s cosmic secrecies.⁷

¹ p. 69. ² p. 373. ³ p. 310. ⁴ p. 304 ⁵ p. 132.

⁶ p. 91. The two other occurrences are on pp. 268 and 595. ⁷ p. 96.

In a similar category is the phrase:

In man a dim disturbing somewhat lives;
It knows but turns away from divine Light
Preferring the dark ignorance of the fall.¹

The sole difference is that an adverbial instead of an adjectival noun is at work. Again we meet an unfamiliar transformation with

A manifest of the Imperishable,²

a line which may well characterise the whole of *Savitri* from the viewpoint of spiritual revelatory literature.

This line could focus what the Mother meant when she called Sri Aurobindo's epic "that marvellous prophetic poem which will be humanity's guide towards the future realisation" (27.11.1963) and when she said to Norman Dowsett: "For the opening of the psychic, for the growth of consciousness and even for the improvement of English it is good to read one or two pages of *Savitri* each day."

(To be continued)

AMAL KIRAN

¹ p. 416. ² p. 793.

Tapogiri, Ramgarh Talla, Dist. Naini Tal

SRI AUROBINDO STUDY SEMINAR

June 2 to 6, 1979

Subject: The Human Aspiration

and

The Divine Grace

Programme

- (1) Meditation and reflections on Meditation—5.30 to 6.30 a.m.
- (2) Consideration of the Essential subject—10 to 11.30 a.m.
- (3) Discourses—5 to 6 p.m.

Discourses are held in the forenoon and recitations from *Savitri* along with reflections on them in the afternoon.

All who are interested may write to

Dr. Sitaram Jayaswal
Lucknow

Dr K.L Shrimali
Udaipur

Prof. Bhum Sen
Ajmer

Dr. Indra Sen
Pondicherry

Dr. Hargopal Singh and Dr. Sachchidanand
Hardwar

P.N. Tripathi (convener)
Jawalapur
(Hardwar) 249407

WITH MY SWEET MOTHER

REMINISCENCES BY LALITA

I

Early Ashram Days

ONE of the things I said to the Mother soon after my arrival at the Ashram on the 16th December 1927 with Amal Kiran (at that time my husband and known as Kekoo D. Sethna) was this: "Mother, I don't think that I will be able to do this Yoga: I am not an intellectual person. Kekoo, who is highly developed intellectually, will surely be able to do it."

The Mother looked at me with astonishment and after a short silence said: "Who has told you that only intellectual people can do Sri Aurobindo's Yoga?" "Nobody, Mother," I replied, "but as Sri Aurobindo Himself is very intellectual, His Yoga must be of the same kind."

"Nonsense!" said the Mother. "Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is an integral Yoga, which includes Devotion, Knowledge, Works and many other things. And as for your being able to do it or not—we shall see." She was silent for a while and then said: "Do not worry."

I was very much consoled by these words, accompanied (as always) by Her wonderful smile. After this, whenever I told Her that I did not know the ABC of sadhana and so was not aware if I was making any progress or not, She always told me: "Do not worry. *I* am doing the sadhana and not *you*. You just do the work I have given you and stop troubling yourself." So I had nothing more to say in the matter.

*

I had been married only a few months before coming to Pondicherry. So I had a fresh trousseau with me. This trousseau and whatever jewelry went with it, I sent to the Mother through Ambalal Purani, our most intimate friend at that time, as an offering. I am mentioning this because of what happened in connection with my first "darshan" of Sri Aurobindo on the 21st February 1928.

On the 20th the Mother called me to what was then the Meditation Hall on the first floor. I was happy not only because it would give me a chance of meeting Her, but also because I believed I would receive a new cotton sari (like the other sadhikas) to wear on the "darshan" day. I was always wearing the silk and georgette saris which I had brought with me, and feeling a bit odd among the Ashramites.

The Mother was smiling when I reached upstairs and went and stood at the place where that beautiful chair is now placed. There was somebody with Her, I do not remember who, unless it was Datta (Miss Dorothy Hodgeson). The Mother

opened the bundle this person was holding and, taking out a string of pearls, she slipped it over my head, and pulled the adjustment at the back till the necklace was of the right length. Then, taking some clothes from Her attendant's hands, She gave them to me with Her charming smile, saying softly: "You must wear these when you come for 'darshan' tomorrow." I was very much astonished (and also a bit disappointed) because I had not been given an Ashram sari to wear. I asked: "But why these, Mother?" The Mother looked into my eyes for a few seconds and said with Her sweet smile, "Because it is my wish." What could I say after that? If *She* wanted me to be dressed differently I must accept Her wish with gratitude. I fell at Her feet and kissed them with love.

The silk sari along with the other articles had been part of what I had offered to the Mother with great joy. If it was Her wish that I should wear at least one full set from the articles that had made up my offering, nothing was left for me to say.

*

On the "darshan" day I went upstairs with Kekoo, who seemed quite calm and confident, whereas I was a bit shaky inside. At that time there were not many photographs of Sri Aurobindo, and the one or two I had seen were not very impressive. I thought of Sri Aurobindo to be somewhat superior to the sadhaks, but nothing more. Imagine my surprise when I saw Him sitting to the Mother's left, on the long sofa (in the same hall), on which is now placed His single photo.

"Surprise" is hardly an appropriate word. I should say I was wonderstruck. For that was exactly what I felt. "If God can take a human form, it is surely this," I said to myself. I felt so lowly and unworthy before Him that I did not even touch His feet. I made my "pranam" at a little distance. "Surely he is the supreme Divine, a true Avatar," I said again to myself. He looked so majestic and marvellous, yet so compassionate, I simply stared in bewilderment. The Mother understood my embarrassed state and kept smiling sweetly. I felt like weeping but I controlled myself.

I went home, but a part of me remained with Them. I did not feel like doing anything except lying down quietly and living the experience once again from within. But I had to attend to my usual work at home.

A day or two later Mother sent for me. I was very happy. She opened the staircase door of the Meditation Hall Herself, and led me to the small room at the other end, which became the "darshan" room later. She seated Herself on the same sofa as the one which now holds Their large joint photo. At that time, this sofa was placed against the wall between the window and the door leading to Nirod's present office-room upstairs. I made my "pranam" to Her and offered the bundle I had brought with me. The Mother opened it and said "Oh! You don't want to keep these clothes?" "No, Mother," I said. "They were already offered to you, but as it was *Your* wish that I should wear them on the 'darshan' day, I did so."

She closed the bundle and put it aside; then taking my hand in Hers She said in a soft voice, "Sri Aurobindo was pleased with you. He told me all sorts of things I could teach you and make \of you."

At the mention of Sri Aurobindo's name I started to feel what I had felt when I had stood in front of Him. Tears threatened to come out of my eyes. I bowed at the Mother's sacred feet, saying: "A worthless creature like me!"

She blessed me for a long time and when I rose She took me to the door to see me off. I could not speak a word. I was so overwhelmed by Her love and kindness.

*

One of the many jobs which the Mother first gave me to do was covering Her bags with new cloth. While doing it for one of them the silver-and-gold ornamental top came off. I was trying to push the new piece of cloth under it. I did not know what to do and felt very sad at having broken Her bag in this way. I went to Purani and confessed everything. He took the bag to the Mother and, after showing Her what had happened, he had it repaired by a silversmith in the town. He gave it back to me, and after fixing the new cloth on it I went timidly to the Mother and offered it to Her.

I was expecting a scolding, because I was new, and I did not know Her so well. But, instead, She was all smiles and praised my work. "The screws on the sides must have become loose," she said. "So the top piece came off. The bag looks very pretty, I will start using it at once." I felt amply rewarded.

*

As the Mother was wearing a band round Her head, covered with jewels (whenever She went out in Her sari) I got the idea of embroidering a crown for Her with silver lotuses. I spoke to Her about it and, with Her approval, told Kekoo to make a design for it. Kekoo was a good artist and the Mother liked his paintings and drawings very much. He made a fine design according to the measurements given by me, and I sent for the necessary silver threads, etc., from Bombay and set to work. As the embroidery progressed She had a look at it, and was very pleased with it.

Finally the crown was ready and it looked beautiful when She wore it. Each lotus was embroidered in a specially prepared "Kasab" cut to size and, before stitching the two ends of the crown together, I had cut the top part according to the size and shape of each flower, which was unique in each case. The crown was much liked by the Mother.

(To be continued)

SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION

(Continued from the issue of April 24, 1979)

2

NEW PRINCIPLES IN EDUCATION

THE greater part of fourteen years of Sri Aurobindo's life were spent as a Professor. After he left Baroda in 1906 he became the first Principal of the first Indian National College which is now known as Yadavpore University in West Bengal. Sri Aurobindo was well acquainted with the deficiencies and inadequacies of the system of education introduced by the British in India, which remains a dubious legacy to the present day.

The greatest contribution of Sri Aurobindo to our country in the field of education is that he showed us how to link the great past of India with her future, how to build education upon the solid pillars of spirituality. One day his educational philosophy will challenge the attention of the world. The following extract from his writings will tell us what new principles he intended to introduce in the existing pattern of education:

“The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught....The teacher does not impart knowledge. He shows the pupil how to acquire knowledge for himself.

“The second principle is...that everyone has in him something divine.... The task is to find it, develop it and use it. The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use.

“The third principle of education is to work from near to far.... The basis of a man's nature is almost always...his soul's past, his heredity, his surroundings, his nationality, his country, the soil from which he draws sustenance, the air which he breathes.... They mould him....”

These principles he enumerated as far back as 1909.

Many years later the Mother said: “In any country, the best education to give to children consists in teaching them what is the true nature of their country, its particular qualities and the mission their nation has to fulfil in the world. To that should be added a large comprehension of the role of other nations but without the imitative spirit and without ever losing sight of the peculiar genius of their country.”

Among these preliminaries must be added another important utterance of the Mother:

“We are here to open the way of the Future to children who belong to the Future.”

No imitation but a new creation is the aspiration of our school. We stand for the evolution of life and not for a mere outer revolution. Because of its creative, constructive and evolutionary method, this institution stands apart from others.

Learning is not the exclusive province of the mind or the intellect. It must engage the whole person—the eye, the hand, the muscles, the brain as well as the outer faculties of the being. Due importance must be given to the development of character.

There is a German saying which translated into English would read:

“When wealth is lost nothing is lost;
When health is lost something is lost;
When character is lost all is lost.”

True education comprises not only character-building but also inner building, the growth of consciousness. For Sri Aurobindo, all is a play of consciousness.

The most important function of true education is the bringing out of the inner potentialities of the student, the building of his true personality.

It can be achieved only under the guiding light of a seer—a yogi.

We must devise means to realise this ideal at all stages of education—primary, secondary and university.

Education does not stop when one starts working. Work provides the testing ground of what one has achieved in his educational life.

On the very first page of *The Synthesis of Yoga* there occurs this passage:

“The world today presents the aspect of a huge cauldron of Medea in which all things are being cast, shredded into pieces, experimented on, combined and recombined either to perish and provide the scattered material of new forms or to emerge rejuvenated and changed for a fresh term of existence.”

The overall aim of Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga is to make the world “the home of the Wonderful”. This also seems to be the aim of the ascending evolutionary Nature.

Man, because he is the last rung of evolution so far, thinks that there can be nothing superior to him. “In his physical nature man is almost wholly an animal—a thinking and speaking animal.” He has created more problems than he is able to solve.

Undoubtedly Nature cannot be satisfied with such an imperfect creation. Sri Aurobindo holds: “All life is a vast Yoga of Nature attempting to realise perfection.”¹

In the ordinary course what takes nature centuries or millenniums² Yoga accomplishes in a few decades.

A turn in the stream of evolution seems imminent. Sri Aurobindo worked all his life for a new dawn. He saw the hope of humanity in the advent of a new consciousness and he staked his all to see it achieved.

Nature seems to be trying hard “to bring out a being who would outwardly remain man” but embody the Divine Consciousness. It is the Divine who will see through his eyes, speak through his mouth, work through his hands. His will be

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 2.

² Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (American ed.), p. 825.

a divine life in a divine body.¹ That will mark the concluding phase of man's evolutionary journey.

When Professor Mitra came to the Ashram as a visitor with the Chinese professor Tan Yun-Shan his first impression was:

"There is freedom in the midst of perfect discipline; and the whole Ashram is run on principles which are difficult for outsiders to understand easily. There are no written rules; yet everything goes on with clock-wise precision."

Out of the mud and mire rises the radiant lotus; out of the strife and chaos of today will rise the new civilisation.

The whole philosophy of Sri Aurobindo centres upon the principle of evolution.

Much of the nation's future depends on the system of education. In this spirit and to this end we proceed to study what is being done in the Sri Aurobindo Centre of Education with a view to giving these principles a practical shape—how philosophy and practice go together.

(To be continued)

NARAYAN PRASAD

¹ "To make the body also divine must be God's final seal upon his work in the universe"—*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 7.

ONE DAY

OURS the destiny one day to see
 The vast expanse of infinity,
 Hold time and space in one regard
 And all the illusion old discard.
 Inheritors of love's sweetness
 We shall bear the gods' delight
 As sun-white footsteps greet us
 On a verge of inner sight.
 For even now a strange wind blows
 That heralds her return,
 The blood once spilt becomes a rose
 And the flames unkindled burn.
 The yellow moon has turned dark red,
 Strange stars have crossed the sky,
 Fire consumes the marriage bed
 Where soul and body lie.
 O trembling tyrant ecstasy,
 What brings you now so nigh?

ROGER HARRIS

TOWARDS THE HIGHER LIFE

(Continued from the issue of April 24, 1979)

PART TWO

Chapter I

Glimpses of Some Changes in Nature

(I)

LIFE now seems to have reached a poise, a stable position. It “announces a favourable turn in sadhana” and offers some hope that the cherished ideal may be realised step by step. Sri Aurobindo declares, “It is perfectly possible for a quite human sadhak to get such a poise of *ānandamaya* intensity. It is not necessary to be divine before one can attain it.”¹ My being seems to have made it an immediate goal.

To rise from the plane of *annam* to the plane of *ananda* every fibre of the vital must undergo a radical change. To put it in another way: “The consent of all the being is needed for a divine change.”² Until the “vital is transformed and made a pure and strong instrument of the Divine Shakti there can be no divine life”.³

Thus what is demanded of Yoga is a sweeping change, a spiritual change: Life must be governed by the Law of Light instead of the Law of Darkness. Viewed from this standpoint, mine was only a surface change. If I went into details as to what kind of war I had to wage with my own self to bring about even this much change, it would require a book by itself. Every blow I received from life gave me an impetus for a new stride, and I drew from it a much-needed inner strength. Though the oppressive vital being has grown less oppressive yet the change achieved is only skin-deep. Sri Aurobindo lays down:

“Establish a sincere will in the vital...then alone the vital in you will become fit for sadhana.”⁴

This is a most important issue. In my quest for the procedure I should adopt to put these two lines into action I came across these words of the Mother which had a magical effect on me:

“One must know why one does this, does that...and this knowing must lead to conscious control...begin to study yourself and know yourself and *little by little* to control yourself.”⁵

It touches daily life intimately. To give this formula a practical shape I began to study my nature, keep a sharp eye on my inner and outer movements, and measure my progress. In trying to search what was lacking in me and find out what was de-

¹ *On Yoga* II, Tome II, p. 463.

² *Ibid.*, 410

³ *Ibid.*, 389.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

⁵ *Bulletin*, February 1964, p. 45.

manded of me, my life virtually became a laboratory.

Even before joining the Ashram it was a habit with me to calculate the bright and the dark sides of a problem. What to do and not to do? What if I do this? What if I do that? What will be the gains? And what the losses? What will retrace my feet backward and what push me forward? This habit of pros and cons led to the growth of the power of introspection and made my "life a marvellous journey".

Sri Aurobindo points out;

"When the light of the higher consciousness is turned against them then only one begins to see one's defects."¹

By and by I became conscious of the obscurities and crudities of my vital nature and tried to expose them to the light. Some of them were clinging like a leech and I could not pull them out. Sri Aurobindo assures us:

"To recognise a defect is already a great step."

It is only when the mind and the vital come under the influence of the psychic that "one begins to see clearly and rightly one's own nature and action".²

Up to the year 1962 there was a cry in me. "I have got nothing abiding—nothing worth the name as yet." Thereafter, life no more appeared meaningless—an empty dream. With the passing of time, my hopes rose high and I felt tempted to turn to the future.

I was sailing quite smoothly in the rough sea of sadhana led by the favourable wind of the Mother's grace in two spheres—the mental and the physical. It was in the vital—rather in the higher vital—that my entire project, if I am allowed to say so, suffered almost a shipwreck. If, pushed by the higher forces, the life-boat moved one yard forward, then it was forced back three yards by a contrary current; sometimes it nearly sank.

Let us see here what we stand to gain when the *ādhāra* readily opens, welcomes the working of the Mother's Force and when it refuses to open, prefers to remain sealed.

A novice has to begin sadhana with mental control, moral discipline. If "some do not think control necessary and let themselves go"³ they are likely to remain where they are for years and years.

And what does opening denote?

When "there is an opening the Divine power descends and conducts the necessary working, does what is needed, each thing in its time, and yogic consciousness begins to be born in the sadhak".⁴

What a blessing it was that my lower vital opened to the working of the Higher Force right from the beginning. It has its advantages, but disadvantages too. By its very first touch I seemed to have been blown off like a dry leaf but it did much for "the clearance of the inner atmosphere".

Without the purification of the vital one may have a high degree of experiences

¹ *On Yoga* II, Tome II, p. 435.

² *Ibid.*, p. 217

³ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

“and yet be impotent to face vital difficulties”¹. Before its revolt man stands helpless. He is forced to do what he abhors:

“He is compelled to be what he is not.”²

It was the Divine Force that did everything for me. That is why I smile at the very idea that it was I who was doing Yoga. We live as others live but there is a world of difference in attitude, in consciousness.

The sense of purity, tranquillity and aspiration in the body itself to become the temple for the Divine Presence are all due to the working of the Mother's Force in me. I doubt whether, left to myself, even a fraction would have ever been possible, no matter if I had moved heaven and earth. My worldly life was full of falsehood from top to toe. Telling lies was business policy. Why lose any profit that may come by my posing as an honest man? To pretend to be what one is not is so natural for a man of common clay. The vital is so eager to rise in the estimation of others.

“The cosmic evil is too deep to uproot.”³

The only hope is that a day will come when all will change by the pressure of the psychic.

We must first grow conscious of the nature of the vital. It must be borne in mind that nothing worth the name can be done without the vital push, without the vital fuel. Here it is appropriate to quote what the Mother says about the nature of the vital:

“All your troubles, depression, discouragement, disgust, fury, all, all come from the vital.... It is that which discourages you when things are difficult and not to its liking. When it is not satisfied, it hides in a corner and does not budge. Your will is like a withering plant. All resentment, disgust, fury, all despair, grief, anger—all that comes from this gentleman.

“Therefore it depends on which side it turns. When you have succeeded in taming it, you have something powerful in hand for realisation. It is that which can carry by storm the biggest obstacles. It is that which is capable of turning an idiot into an intelligent person—it alone can do so; for it yearns passionately for progress...”⁴

Here must be added what Sri Aurobindo wants to impress upon us:

“The purification of the vital takes a long time because until all the parts are freed, none is quite free.”⁵

And in the same breath he says, “The change is most extraordinarily difficult.”⁶ However you try, the “vital refuses to relax its hold”.⁷ “The little mind is tied

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 418. ² *Savitri*, Part I, Bk. III, C. 4, p. 306.

³ *Mother India*, February 1979, p. 130. ⁴ *The Mother*, Cent Vol. V, pp. 257-8

⁵ *On Yoga II*, Tome II, p. 438. ⁶ *Ibid*, p. 398 ⁷ *The Synthesis of Yoga*.

to little things” and keeps us wedded to the old self.

For the purification of the vital, “remorse, repentance”¹ are not thought necessary in our way of sadhana as is done in Christianity, for “sometimes it leads to depression or disappointment”.² We are taught to treat the defects of the vital as something wrong in the human machinery which has to be set right by calling down the Light and Force.

In the traditional yogas the hidden foe is lulled to sleep or “suppressed, not eliminated”,³ so it lies in wait to pounce whenever there is lack of vigilance. We have to force it to come into the open. When it falls on us like a lion on a lamb, we have to bear its tortures and torments with a calm mind, try to tame it, make it consent to change its old habits. Hence there is no end of struggle in our life.

To come back to my subject of “opening”.

Despite a ceaseless cry, “Let a ray of Thy Grace penetrate into my heart,” my vital never consented to open to the working of the Mother’s Force. “At times opening came, a door was opened”⁴, but it closed suddenly and the higher force had to wait not days or months but five to ten years to get another chance. For the vital abhorred “change as an audacious sin”,⁵ and never allowed the “dreadful knots” of the heart to get loosened. It was the Grace that triumphed from time to time over the tyranny of the circumstances created by the vital.

Sri Aurobindo insists:

“...if you want a change you must get rid of the defects of your vital being, however difficult it may be, however long it may take.”⁶

It is necessary to point out here that we are not to cripple the vital but create conditions for the true vital to emerge. That will bring a new colour and tone in life and raise its standard to an unexpected height.

But what is one, “tied to matter by a thousand bonds”,⁷ to do to bring about a change in the way of the vital and put a yoke on its neck? The one remedy recommended by Sri Aurobindo is, “to insist upon this vital to pray for the change”.⁸

What a terrible job! Is it ever possible? Can a serpent⁹ ever agree to shake off its inborn, inherent habits? If its wrath is provoked, will it not rush to strike? Someone seated within muttered to itself: “When the Divine has equipped it with poison, how can it offer milk? Is this not a logical point?”

There was no end to the vital’s grumblings and grievances. It further complained: “No earthly Government could frame or formulate such nerve-racking rules and regulations! Some of them so rigorous and repressive as to make one feel strangled!”

Was it a cry of that part of the vital which had till now been fed by the joys and pleasures of life, governed by the law of desires? Yoga demanded that it must now learn to be “governed by the Divine”.

¹ *On Yoga* II, Tome II, p. 446 ² *Savitri*, Part I, Bk II, C. X. p. 234.

³ *Ibid.*, Part I, Bk. II., C. X, p. 224 ⁴ *On Yoga* II, Tome II, p. 400.

⁵ *Savitri*, Part I, Bk. III, C. IV, p. 307. ⁶ *On Yoga* II, Tome II, p. 127.

⁷ “the difficulty rises like a snake whose head is touched.” *Ibid.*, p. 317.

Despite battling for years "to free the system from the siege of the lower forces" I could not rend asunder even one knot of the heart (*hridgranthi*) till that particular part, cornered by the constant beatings of life itself, raised a cry for redemption. In order to understand the tangle it is necessary to go back to the episodes of 1942 and link them with those continuing up to 1976. Hell indeed is the short cut to heaven.

"Selfishness is the only sin, meanness the only vice, hatred the only criminality. All else can easily be turned into good, but these are obstinate resisters of deity."

Here I speak about one of them, hatred.

I was very careful even from my younger days that no bad habit should strike root in my life. Once in the company of a relative I started smoking. While in Calcutta, hiring a car one day I took a long drive, chewing pan and smoking merrily. Then a fear came that if I got into the habit of smoking it would be very difficult for me to throw it off when I would take to sadhana. This fear helped me to keep free from other bad habits too. I did not allow myself even to get into the tea-habit.

After coming here my desire to keep the heart free from ill-will took a little definite form. I became somewhat cautious that no ill-will against anybody should find room in me. I give an instance of 1942.

R reported something against me to the Mother and sent me her note in reply. It made me furious. Violent suggestions prompted hitting him back and hard.

In the heat of that moment there came to my ears a sharp rebuke: "Is it for this you have come here?" At once my inner temperature came down. Then a happy reaction set in. I took a broom and went to sweep his room. The doors were shut. So I swept the outer portion. That was the first inner triumph over my ego.

Since then whenever there was an ill-feeling against anyone I have taken care that no spirit of vengeance or sense of grievance should lurk within.

There was a time (1942-48) when I used to get very easily irritated. B was a constant trouble to me and I always roared at him, but I tried hard not to harbour ill-will against him. Whenever he took an attitude quite contrary to mine, something in me felt greatly humiliated. I felt humiliated because I took every event as it affected my ego. I simply swallowed the bitter pill but tried to draw lessons from various events. How well my nature fits almost to the letter the Master's depiction of the ego-centric man!—

"The ego-centric man feels and takes things as they affect him. Does this please or displease me, give me gladness or pain, flatter my pride, vanity, ambition or hurt it, satisfy my desires or thwart them, etc."¹

In writing to me C would not have the courtesy to follow even ordinary etiquette. He would not use "please"—a simple term of civility. This cut my vital to the quick. I was in a position to retaliate in several ways. But I always did the opposite, ignoring vehement inner protests, and never failed to use "please" nor did I ever lack in politeness in my dealings with him, although he took my attitude as a

¹ *On Yoga II, Tome II, p. 467.*

weakness. One day he demanded more than his quota. He tried to persuade me. When I refused he flared up: "A slap should be given to you."

"All right," I said and turned my face towards him. This did not soften his rage, rather he used the words again with the same threatening gesture.

It might be that I acted as I did as a show of saintliness. My response may have been influenced by the Christian idea. My lips and heart were quivering, which was certainly a sign not of strength but of suppression. Such events goad the brute in us to come out in the open.

In the evening of the same day, quite unexpectedly he returned of his own initiative to offer me an apology and wrote to the Mother to forgive him for the rudeness he had shown to me.

Three months later, when we met on the way, instead of passing by him cold and silent I greeted him with a deliberate smile. In dealing with labour also I have seen many a time that if the ray of a smile could shine on my lips when I was red-hot with anger, my heat cooled down then and there.

Till 1948 my chief attribute was explosive anger—a slight provocation was enough to make the hidden fire spring forth. Even for minor grievances I would not fail to write pages to the Mother, sometimes expressing hot temper. Once R was removed from my place all of a sudden; I wrote that I felt I had been stabbed in the back. When I compare this state of things with the incident that occurred on June 30, 1964 I ask myself whether I am the same person.

D: I want my things tomorrow.

I: Not possible.

D (*in a threatening tone*): I shall write to the Mother.

I: All right.

D: Do you think we shall be ruled by your whims?

Though I made no reply it did create in me a wrong vibration. It is not easy to break through "the binding of Nature."

My silence added fuel to his blazing fire. He thundered: "What's the use of writing big things if there is no change in nature? You are still an animal." This remark made me cautious and roused my will-power. With a full smile on my lips I said: "Be calm, please, be calm." But he went on shouting.

When he left I went out to get my first poem in English typed. I could not decide whether it was a defeat or victory. If defeat, it would be a matter of strong condemnation by my own conscience, but there was nothing of the kind. Not a single thought troubled me. I almost forgot all about it.

Next day when my memory turned to the past I saw what a difference had come in my nature. There was not the least feeling of retaliation although chances for it were many. When one was roaring and hurling abuses against me in the presence of servants, to bring a smile at that crucial moment is no joke, but smiles came of themselves to me with no effort on my part. Perhaps this is a necessary stage. Let us go further:

The general notion is that nature cannot be changed. If there is no change in na-

ture, there can be no Yoga worth the name. But how to cut the age-long fixed knots? The imperfections pursue to the end of the journey. I knew my weaknesses, I knew all that resisted the onward march but did not know how to free myself from their iron grip.

One of the most difficult things in Yoga is to surrender one's pride. J had done something which had touched my family-pride. The very sight of him made my blood boil. Unable to control myself, one day I thundered: "You deserve to be beaten with a shoe." It is difficult to imagine I could go to that length. What was more startling was that when I was looking for a chance to hit him again there rang a commanding voice that stunned me: "I, Sri Aurobindo, say, 'Keep quiet. See the Mother's glory in yourself and others.'" Awfully shaken, I could not help exclaiming, "Was it Sri Aurobindo's voice? Is he so close to us? Does he keep an eye on all our life-movements?" My physical mind did not fail to poke its nose: "What guarantee is there that it is Sri Aurobindo's utterance?"

Has not the Mother said, "He is always with us, aware of what we are doing, of all our thoughts, of all our feelings and all our actions"¹? Can any argument stand before this unequivocal statement of the Mother? Nor were signs lacking of its truth. An unmistakable, an unquestionable sign was that, though the inner fever was still there, a change came in the whole trend of my attitude from that very moment. Instead of punishing J, I felt inclined to punish myself. More than all this, it looked as if someone had turned my gaze inward. Before bringing a change in others, why not bring a change first in myself?

I recall these significant lines of Savitri:

He comes unseen into our darker parts
And, curtained by the darkness, does his work,
A subtle and all-knowing guest and guide,
Till they too feel the need and will to change.²

The seal that is put upon the soul cannot be broken by one stroke. It needs knock after knock till it feels the urgency, the imperative call to change. The evil in me was suppressed not uprooted. Finding a loophole, the devil in us who works as a delegate of the Universal Force hurled a blow—I actually felt a piercing pain in the heart. The occasion was provided by my meeting J on the road. Without opening my mouth I rushed to my Puja Room and, pressing the Mother's portrait to my bosom, cried, "Mother, I beseech Thee to help me get rid of this brute that is arising in me." At once I heaved a sigh of relief, experiencing a sense of a vacuum, a void.

"If you want to change, call always the Divine's help" served as a weapon. Wielding this weapon, in the years that followed I cut several knots.

(To be continued)

¹ Reproduced from *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A. B. Purani, p. 241 (Fourth Edition).

² *Savitri*, Part I, Book I, Canto III, p. 33.

SAINT JOAN

(In view of our belief that one of the past emanations of the Mother was the famous Maid of Orleans our readers may welcome for factual information and the modern outlook, though not for any spiritual insight, these reviews of two recent books, which appeared in the London weekly, The Times Literary Supplement, of 19 November 1976, p. 1448. Our acknowledgments are due to this well-known periodical. We may add that the month of May has two days connected by the Roman Catholic Church with the Maid.)

I

FROM HERESY TO A HALO

Edward Lucie-Smith: JOAN OF ARC. 326 pp. Allen Lane. £7.50.

JOAN of Arc is perhaps the best documented woman of the entire Middle Ages. We know more about her as a person than we do about contemporary kings, since until the sixteenth century writers tended to describe personalities in appropriate stereotypes, and the interesting details came out only by chance, in court records and so forth. In Joan's case we have the very full account of her trial and condemnation, and of the rehabilitation process twenty years later. Her career as a public figure was brief. She was probably born in 1412, on the borders of the duchy of Lorraine, daughter of a substantial tenant farmer, who was also a village representative. In May 1428, she appeared at a castle held in the name of the uncrowned Valois claimant to the French throne, Charles VII, announced she had a divine mission to free France from the English, and demanded to be sent to the king. She was taken to see Charles at Chinon in February 1429, and persuaded him to listen to her. She then underwent a clerical examination, which judged her to be acting in good faith, and began her military career by issuing a challenge to the Anglo-Burgundians, who were besieging Orleans, calling on them to surrender.

She arrived at Orleans on April 29, raised the siege, and made a deep thrust into Anglo-Burgundian territory, ending at Rheims, where she had Charles crowned on July 17. Thereafter her luck changed, and on May 23, 1430, she was captured by Burgundians at Compiègne. The University of Paris demanded her trial as a heretic; she was sold to the English, handed over to the Inquisition, and tried by an Inquisitorial court under Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais, appointed by the Inquisitor of France. The proceedings lasted from January 9 to May 24, 1431, when Joan admitted heresy; on May 27 she relapsed, was reinterrogated and handed over to the secular authorities, who burnt her on May 30.

Edward Lucie-Smith moves over this well-trodden ground with considerable skill. He makes admirable use of the published sources, has visited all the places

associated with Joan, and provides fascinating photographs of them. Joan has often made otherwise sensible writers take leave of their senses, and Mr. Lucie-Smith is not entirely immune to the bug. Thus, we find him writing: "It may be that Joan's relationship with her father and her brother Pierre took the form of 'double displacement'. The incestuous feelings she originally felt for her father were transferred to her brother, and thence to the king..."

There are several other unconvincing attempts at psychoanalysis. But in general he is shrewd and objective, and the Joan he presents is a perfectly credible human being. She was not a physical freak. Her squire, Jean d'Aulon, testified that she did not menstruate, but in other respects there is abundant evidence that she was a perfectly normal woman. Yolanda of Aragon, Queen of Sicily and Charles's mother-in-law, plus a posse of court ladies, examined Joan "in the secret parts of her body", and pronounced her "a true and entire maid, in whom could be found no corruption nor mark of violence". The Duke of Alençon, who knew her well, admired her beautiful breasts. She had a "soft womanly voice", although she could shout loudly in battle. She was not homosexual, or we would certainly have had testimony from the various women who shared her bed (a normal practice until the seventeenth century). There is evidence that she was sometimes rude, and arrogant; occasionally gave vent to rages; was not above asking for personal favours (she got her family ennobled), and could be extremely bloodthirsty, at any rate in theory. On one occasion she stole a bishop's horse, an affront His Lordship still resented long afterwards, and she did herself much damage by breaking the blade of her supposedly miraculous sword on the back of a camp-prostitute. She was illiterate, being able only to sign her name; but she was not without intelligence, even guile. In battle she was fearless, but she had a horror of death by burning, and the circumstances of her execution were pitiless, disgusting even the professional executioner.

The oddest thing about Joan was her attachment to male clothes. She denied that this was important to her, but it clearly was. It made sense for Joan to dress as a soldier on campaign. But she carried on the charade on every possible occasion. Moreover, she did not dress plainly as soon as she got the chance to do otherwise. In an age of sartorial extravagance which was both a social and a moral issue, she flaunted the attire of a young nobleman; she wore "a shirt, breeches, a doublet with leggings joined to the doublet by twenty laces, high slippers laced on the outside, a short robe to the knee or thereabouts, a scalloped hat, tight boots, long spurs, a sword, a dagger, a mail tunic, a lance and other arms...". The charges at her trial also specified that she was "sometimes clad in magnificent and sumptuous habits of precious cloth, gold and also furs...tabards and robes open at every side; and the thing is notorious as she was taken in a gold *huque*, open on every side". Joan's resumption of male clothes was indeed to be objective proof of her relapse, as she knew it would be; the urge was plainly a compulsion, and it was never satisfactorily explained away either at her rehabilitation or in the process of her cannonization.

Mr. Lucie-Smith is excellent on Joan; less impressive on the historical back-

ground. Malcolm Vale has argued persuasively, in his recent life of Charles VII, that Joan may have been exploited as the instrument of a court faction. Otherwise it is difficult to understand how she came to be accepted as an authentic visionary. She was not unique in hearing voices. Since the success of Abbot Joachim of Flora, prophecy had become a salient feature of late medieval spiritual and even political life. Charismatics abounded, many of them female. Joan's role had been adumbrated by Marie d'Avignon, in a prophecy to Charles VII some years before. In 1413 Paris University appealed to anyone possessing the gift of prophecy to come forward to help the public service. Women were prominent in the no-man's-land where credulity, intense spirituality, and plain fraud met. One of Joan's patrons was an impudent Franciscan called Brother Richard, who preached sensational sermons and collected female mystics; at one time he had four in tow, including Joan. Women were an important part of fifteenth-century ecclesiastical showbiz, indeed of showbiz itself: the Duke of Burgundy had a female jester. Within a few years of Joan's death, a woman appeared claiming to be her reincarnation. Indeed the plethora of women fanatics may have helped to spur on the witch craze which began towards the end of the century. It could be that Joan was rehabilitated just in time, 1450-56.

As it is, her second process remains an odd affair. The motive was political, as indeed was the first trial. Charles wanted to end any doubts which suggested that he owed his kingdom to a heretic and a sorceress. But the second trial did not, strictly speaking, vindicate Joan's claims; it merely "proved" that the first one was irregular and void. It certainly did not condemn Joan's clerical accusers. The first trial was as much an episode in a French civil war as an English ramp. Of the 131 clergymen involved in it, only eight were English, and only two of these attended more than three sessions. Many of these *collaborateurs* were still alive when the second process started, indeed took part in it. One of the guilty men, the theologian Thomas de Courcelles, had debated with Cauchon whether Joan should be tortured to get a confession. At the second trial he perjured himself when he swore that "he had never decided that any physical pain should be inflicted on the said Joan". But by then he had become the Dean of Nôtre Dame; he lived to preach Charles's funeral sermon, in a spirit of pious patriotism. Another guilty man, Raoul Roussel, could not be summoned to give evidence about his own malpractices because he had since become Archbishop of Rouen. Politics muddied the waters of the rehabilitation.

One could say, in fact, that politics provide the key both to Joan's rise, and to her fall; certainly to both her trials. In a sense, she was more a victim than an active agent. I wish Mr Lucie-Smith had devoted more space to this aspect of the affair, and to the subsequent history of the Joan cult. It is odd that the triumphant Valois monarchy did not seek, or possibly did not wish, to secure her rapid canonization. The Bourbons were not interested either. Joan was essentially a Gallican figure, but her cause was not taken up with any vigour in Rome until after Gallicanism had been stamped out and the ultramontanists had secured control of the French church. The official petition for her canonization was not presented by the French hierarchy

until May 1869. She was declared "venerable" in 1894, beatified in 1909, and finally canonized in 1920. This belated but triumphant progress reflected the passionate identification of French ultramontane Catholics with patriotism and the army, the impact of the Dreyfus affair, and finally the French victory in the First World War. Benedict XV was glad to give Joan her halo, as a gesture to President Doumergue, a Calvinist rather than an anti-clerical, as an acknowledgement that the conflict between the church and the Republic was over, and as the final proof that he had not been "neutral-for-Germany" in the holocaust. Would Pius XI, still less Pius XII, have been equally accommodating? Joan's religious life was certainly heterodox; she was not obviously a saintly woman, and it is strange that she is officially classified simply as a virgin, and not as a virgin and martyr. I suppose she really ought to be the patron saint of transvestites, a thought which has not yet struck the trendies who now have their place in Vatican policy-making. All in all, Joan has proved just as odd (and interesting) in death as in life.

PAUL JOHNSON

2

THE MAID IN MODERN DRESS

William Searle: *The Saint and the Sceptics. Joan of Arc in the Work of Mark Twain, Anatole France, and Bernard Shaw.* 182 pp. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press. \$12.50.

To throw light on modern secularism and the obstacles to Christian belief by analysing three literary treatments of Saint Joan is the purpose of William Searle's small but sufficient essay, *The Saint and the Sceptics*. The scheme is ingenious, original, engaging; the choice of figures is judicious. Mark Twain, labouring under materialist determinism, yet in love with the Maid; Anatole France, acting the role of ancient and modern ironist and sceptical historian; and Shaw, attempting to be at once religious prophet and translator of old dogma into new and intelligible words, supply together the representative arguments against traditional faith and literal transcendence, while also giving signs of such profound regard for the girl believer and martyr that scepticism cannot claim the victory. The difficulties subsist; the ground has not been swept clean for a comfortable agnosticism or atheism.

Mr Searle's way of dealing with his authors follows scholarly precedent: he quotes and paraphrases and then interprets. But he is to be praised for much more than a "rewrite job" such as we too often get under the name of exact scholarship. He has manifestly read all that his three men ever said that could bear on the various topics related to the central theme of faith and reality. He has also read and used with discretion the writings of commentators. As a result the reader feels that genuine issues are being fought out, instead of suffering the tedium of merely verbal comparisons between three books. Treatment in the round is further aided by historical

evidence; the reader is enabled to form an opinion independent of any put forward in this compact and well-organized book.

This is not to say that he will necessarily be satisfied and persuaded on every important occasion. The first part, on Mark Twain, is the most difficult to agree with, because it presents a psychoanalytic interpretation of the writer and makes the diagnosis hinge on an unsuspected and unprovable theft of a \$50 bill by the youthful Mark Twain. Mr Searle says: "I am almost completely convinced that he actually stole that money", and he devotes an appendix of eight pages to supporting the hypothesis.

It is a well-argued case, but there is as wide an evidential gap in "almost" as in "if". How can he, who only almost convinced himself, expect the reader to accept that "it was a substantial sum at the time; yet the influence of its theft on Twain's career was greatly disproportionate to the amount involved". The hypothesis has turned into fact simply by starting a new paragraph, and this will not do. All one can say for this procedure is that it does not jar with the Freudian "meanings" discovered thereafter in Mark Twain's life and works. The only surprise is that Mr Searle never equates Joan's voices with the promptings of the unconscious which they so clearly resemble in all the parallels given, including those from the murky cerebrations of Thomas Mann.

Equally regrettable is the loose use of the word "romantic" and the description of Mark Twain's treatment of Joan as "Faustian". His fictional history does strike the note of heroism and championship of the people which meant so much to the sad American atheist, but the Faustian feeling of endless spiritual desire and intellectual quest does not fit Joan's destiny, nor is it easy to accept a Faust ridden by Calvinistic sin, which was Mark Twain's unhappy lot. In short, this part is the least cogent of the three, and only Mr. Searle's knack of saying good things about fiction and character saves it from being a barrier to further reading.

With the section on Anatole France Freud drops out. One notices it with relief—and fleeting speculation as to what the old roué of literature would have thought of the id and its cavortings in literary criticism. All by himself, Mr Searle does an excellent job of delineating France's vacillations in history and philosophy. Joan considered naturalistically by a man of the nineteenth century could only be a half-legendary product of superstition, whose radiance comes from her purity and martyrdom; and these, after all, are incidental to her work and her power. What the author neglects in putting France in his place is the state of mind that affected so much of his work, the mind of the Paris salons. The irony about human nature which he made his trade-mark allowed him to be a serious writer only at times. His literary criticism belongs to his serious work because literature mattered to him, as politics was to do later, giving us *Penguin Island*. But in *Joan*, France is only occasionally serious; the rest of the time he is merely conversing—with Madame de Caillavet or the young Proust.

France might have been stripped of his smiling mask had he learnt from a recent

paper by the Regius Professor of Physics at Cambridge that hearing voices and seeing visions accompanies certain localized brain tumours, often the result of bovine tuberculosis. Or again, France might have responded to the anthropological view that when a culture believes in visions and voices, these do in fact occur. At any rate, it is not hard to accept Mr. Searle's showing that France's attraction to the Maid and wish to explain her away typify the conflict between faith in science and faith in Christianity, the conflict which France himself named as the answer to the question, "Why are we so sad?"

As the survey turns to Shaw, morale improves, the tone becomes brisk, and Mr. Searle produces the best of his three critiques. This quality is in part due to Shaw's having done some of the work for him. Shaw is a first-rate cultural historian, as well as the systematizer of religious feeling and dogma which Mr. Searle (and Colin Wilson before him) have shown him to be. Only at the very end does our critic misread his author, taking Joan's famous Shavian speech about God's loneliness and her own as an expression of pride, self-esteem, and the desire to emulate divine self-sufficiency. This is to forget that Shaw's God is not omnipotent or self-sufficient. He is but a powerful worker in a corner of the universe and his loneliness comes from there being relatively few Joans and Shaws around to help him do his work. Hence all three are lonely among the self-centred and self-seeking. This is not orthodoxy, to be sure, but it is Shaw and says nothing about pride and competitive self-esteem.

To speak of orthodoxy as well as of textual accuracy makes it appropriate to mention a few flaws in Mr. Searle's vocabulary that may throw the reader off the track. I have referred to the misconception of "romantic" at the beginning. Towards the end, "pragmatic" is similarly miscast. In the middle, the translations from the French are literal and thereby often wrong. Who would guess that Joan as "a polytechnic phenomenon" means, in France's book, "Joan as a brilliant Ecole Polytechnique type"? Even in English, our author sometimes stumbles. Whatever one may think of Mark Twain's "theft", it did not spring from "avarice": greed or gain is the idea.

More serious still is the confusion in the account of Joan's canonization, where we are told that the case was opened in 1888 by "the promoter, or devil's advocate", Caprera. He was devil's advocate because he was "general promoter of the faith", not of the case. His duty was to preserve the church from error by—among other things—raising objections about candidates for sainthood. Should not, by the way, a work of scholarship about St Joan point out that "of Arc" is a purely English misnomer? Her name was Darc and she was from—or "of"—Domremy. But these are trifles compared to the solid merits of a work which fulfils its stated purpose and makes one think.

JACQUES BARZUN

INDIAN LIFE IN ENGLISH WRITINGS

(Continued from the issue of April 24, 1979)

PART I: RELIVING THE DAYS GONE BY (Contd.)

WE shall now shift our regard to the thirteenth century, skipping about one thousand four hundred years. This interval was very important and significant to India, witnessing as it did the decline of the Mauryan empire, the rise of Buddhism, the golden age of the Guptas, the advent of Samkara, and the decadence of Buddhism and finally the rise of some of the lesser kingdoms in Kalinga, Vijayanagar, and that last upheaval—the advent of Islam. Unfortunately no writer ventured to write on these colourful events.

After Seligman, Alfred F. Desmond, another almost obscure writer, attempted to narrate in *The Temple by the Sea* one of the glorious episodes of Indian history, the romance of the building of the sun-temple at Konarak in Orissa.

The Konarak Temple, in spite of its being half-destroyed, is yet a marvel of Indian art and sculpture and remains a landmark and example of the religious genius of India, specially that of the people of Orissa.

The creation of this great edifice is veiled in mystery and a swarm of legends have sprung up around it. But the majority of historians such as R.C. Majumdar, Vincent Smith and Nilakanta Sastri agree that it was built by Narsingha Raya and dedicated to the god of the sun, *Surya*.

But Desmond was of the opinion that it was built by Dev-Raya, that the chief architect and force behind this creation was one Chandra Mohan, and that Narsingha Raya was Chandra Mohan's son who had wed Vijayalakshmi, Dev Raya's daughter.

Desmond took great pains in reconstructing the entire period, the planning and the epic execution of the temple which according to him covered over fifteen years and involved the employment of almost four to five thousand people—artisans, stonemasons, sculptors, labourers, rope-makers, boatmen and scores of elephants. It meant the emptying of the royal treasury and consequent weakening of the kingdom, which led to the invasion by Deva Raya's neighbouring king. Part of the destruction of the temple was due to these ruthless men.

The story ran as follows. This part of the country was then known as the land of many rivers whose king was Mahadev Raya. Deva Raya was the crown prince who wed almost by force Indira, the daughter of the neighbouring Dasgupta. Dasgupta and Mohandas, to whom Indira had previously been betrothed, did not forget the wrong done; but Mahadeva Raya was a powerful king and they did not dare to oppose this match or openly attack this land of many rivers.

Deva Raya had three children, Savitha and two others. Indira fell sick and Deva Raya after his ascension to the throne spent most of his time either with his daughter, on whom he doted, or with his dancing girls.

On a full-moon night there was a special celebration on the seashore, which was attended by the royalty as well. That night Deva Raya had a beautiful dream of a temple. On waking up he decided to build such an edifice. He summoned the builder Chandra Mohan. Chandra Mohan was the son of a sculptor, who had already outdone his father in designing houses and temples. He lived quietly at his own place with his wife and three children, the youngest of whom was a son, Narasingha.

The king narrated to Chandra Mohan his dream and expressed his will to build a sun-temple by the seashore. He ordered Chandra Mohan to travel all over India and visit renowned temples. From these temples he must cull the best of designs, bas-reliefs, sculptures, constructions, so that the sun-temple could be the finest in the land.

Deva Raya provided Chandra Mohan with the necessary money, men and facilities. Then Chandra Mohan set out.

He visited Mahabalipuram, Kanchipuram, Madurai, Ajanta and Ellora and finally Khujuraho, taking notes and making drawings of the main features.

The tour took almost a year. On return he went to the king and began a detailed planning of the temple. By the time princess Savitha was fifteen years old and had turned out to be exquisitely beautiful. Chandra Mohan and Savitha fell in love with each other.

Chandra Mohan had a dream of a temple in the shape of a vast chariot with twenty-four wheels, seven horses, and a large monolith of an elephant in front.

A period of intense preparation took place. Chandra Mohan did numerous drawings in detail down to the ornate spokes of the wheels, to the *garbha grha*, the sanctum sanctorum of the temple.

Side by side with this ran the love-affair between Chandra Mohan and Savitha. Of course, it was all covert, and known to none.

Here are some of the details Chandra Mohan planned. The *Nat mandir*, the outer vestibule hall, would be forty feet in length, the whole temple would be 250 feet long and 150 feet broad, surrounded by a wall with three gates and an extra temple at the rear meant exclusively for the use of the royal family.

The plinth itself would be fifteen feet high from the shore level. The twenty-four wheels signified the twenty-four fortnights of the year, the seven horses the seven rays of the sun.

The friezes would include scenes of the life of the common man, great events of the past, including love-scenes. Desmond held that the inspiration for these friezes came from Khujuraho, which had been built in the 10th Century.

Chandra Mohan was a bit unsure if the king would agree to include the love-scenes in the panels, to which Deva Raya exclaimed, 'What! do you really mean that I wanted to leave out God's greatest gift from the walls of the temple? Life would not be worth living without love.' (*The Temple by the Sea*, p. 58)

This is the concept of the modern man, specially the western man. Only, perhaps he would delete "God" for "Nature", and "love" for "sex". No doubt, Indians did

not have a puritanical regard towards sex, but sex was only one ideal, *Kāma*, and there were other ideals as well, which were *Artha*, material possessions, and *Mokṣa*, liberation, involving moral purification. These three ideals formed the gamut of the Indian's existence.

Elsewhere in the book Desmond opined that there was a close link between religion and sex, a point which is only superficially or partially valid. The cult of the Devadasi and their sex relations with the priests and the nobility were well-known. These women were little better than open prostitutes. This was a degradation and could not be taken at its face-value as an ideal.

Another point of difference.

'We will,' commented the sculptor, 'of course portray the whole of life on the temple walls.' (*Ibid.*, p. 59-60)

The portraying of life either in part or in its totality was never the aim of an Indian temple-builder. On the contrary, 'An Indian temple,' said Sri Aurobindo, 'to whatever godhead it may be built, is in its inmost reality an altar raised to the divine self, a house of the cosmic spirit, an appeal and aspiration to the Infinite.' (Sri Aurobindo Birth Cent. Vol. 14, p. 214)

Further, these erotic scenes were tests to the mind of the worshipper, whether he succumbed to the lure of the senses or could transcend it; whether he was psychologically ready to face the deity embodied in the inner shrine.

The drawings and detailed organisation of the whole project took several months. Then the king and his retinue visited the stone-quarries. Some of them lay over a hundred miles away, inland. A huge army of stone-cutters was employed to hew the stones into the required blocks, which were rolled on wooden rollers, put in large flat-bottomed boats and carried to the site. All this must have meant terrific labour, and the job was formidable. Just imagine all done over seven hundred years back without the aid of heavy machinery.

Here Desmond has painstakingly gone into the details as to how the temple was built, right from the foundation up to the topmost *kalās*, the size of the stones used, (some of them granite, some sandstone), the precision of the job done; he has also given a graphic description of how the stones were raised to the height of over two hundred feet.

The builders probably massed a great deal of sand and made two ramps on the side of the construction. On one side, elephants standing backward were ranged, with ropes around their middles. On the opposite side, at the bottom of the ramp were the stones around which the other end of the rope passed. Now as the elephant walked down, the stones rose up.

Side by side with the giant task ran the love-affair of Chandra Mohan and Savitha, the princess. She had by now married, had had a child and returned home as her husband was a debauchee and a maniac. Her attention to and love for Chandra Mohan went on unabated.

The work of the construction of the temple continued slowly but steadily. More

and more workmen were employed, whose huts all around the site swarmed like a sprawling village. There were stone-masons, sculptors, labourers, elephant-drivers, rope-makers, boatmen, and many others in the milling multitude.

The temple began to take shape. Sand-ramps, as they rose higher, stretched several hundred feet on either side. By the time the temple had risen to fifty feet, it had become a thing of wonder and men from all over the land, including those from Emperor Kiliji's court, paid visits and bestowed lavish praise on the construction.

It took fifteen years to reach the height of two hundred feet, which were covered in three stages.

By the time Chandra Mohan was forty-one, his eldest son Narasingha was fourteen. The engineering skill of the latter enabled the heavy metal *kalas*, the top-piece of the edifice, to be raised and put into place.

Just then by an evil turn of fate, Chandra Mohan's wife died. The king agreed to wed Savitha's daughter Vijaylakshmi to Narasingha.

After the completion of the temple, it took another year to clear the hundreds of feet of sand ramps and to build the surrounding walls.

Then the tragedy struck.

Mohandas, the brother of the queen, and the prince to whom she had been formerly engaged to be married, had not forgotten the old feud. He and his neighbouring king invaded the land of many rivers.

Devaraya was ill-prepared for this eventuality. All his money, men and energy had been spent in the building at Konarak. But he and his few hundred followers died fighting valiantly, while Narasingha, Savitha and Vijaylakshmi fled to the hills. Mohandas's men looted the capital, destroyed part of the temple and departed.

Narasingha had great organising ability. He gradually gathered men around him, actually guerillas and spies, who taking advantage of the revelry and merriment in Mohandas's palace killed the guards, surprised the soldiers in their barracks and slaughtered them. Finally they killed Mohandas and his henchmen, who were having an orgy of dancing and drinking in the palace. Narasingha killed the men responsible for the deaths of Devaraya and his father. Others he punished by public hanging.

He posted his men in Mohandas's city and left. He married Vijayalakshmi and his line continued for two generations till the Moghul forces overran Kalinga. The temple itself suffered—part of the second stage and the *kalas* crumpled down. Yet what remains is, even in ruins, a thing of wonder.

A historian's comment on Konarak: 'The final achievement of Orissan builders is the *Surya-Deul*, the temple of the sun at Konarak. This sanctuary was erected in the reign of Narasimhadevam (1238-64).' (*The Art and Architecture of India* by Benjamin Rowland, p. 171)

(To be continued)

ROMEN PALIT

THE MASTER-KEY TO KNOWLEDGE

A STORY FROM THE JAIN *KATHANUYOGA*

THE master-key to knowledge is humility. In days gone by, when one wanted to learn, one would go to a preceptor—guru—with an offering. One would place the offering at the feet of the preceptor and then with folded hands request him to impart the necessary knowledge. Humility and adoration for the guru were considered to be the basic requisites. In this connection I am reminded of a story in the Jain *Kathanuyoga*. It is double-themed and therefore a little complicated as well as somewhat unconventional in one place but it has a fine spirit and an acute intelligence running throughout and is narrated in a simple manner. Here is the story.

RAJAGRIHA was the name of the city.

SHRENİK was the name of the king.

ABHAYKUMAR was the son and prime minister of the king. He was very clever and it was said that there was no problem in the world which he could not solve. He had no equal.

There lived a pariah named Ramlal known as Ramla. He had a wife whose name was Rama, known as Ramli. Ramli was pregnant and when she was carrying four-to-five months, a craving to eat a mango arose in her. So she asked Ramla to bring a mango. But it was not the mango season. Ramla tried his level best to procure the fruit but his efforts failed. Ramli insisted that Ramla should procure it at any cost. When Ramla tried again, he came to know that in the King's garden there was a mango tree which yielded fruits all the year. But how to enter the garden and obtain the fruit was the question that confronted Ramla. He ransacked his brain for a solution and at last he remembered that he knew two mantras. The recital of the one would bring the branch of the tree down. The recital of the second would restore the branch to its original position.

He had seen that though the King's garden was surrounded by a wall, the mango tree was higher than the wall. So when night came he went near the wall where the mango tree was. He recited the first mantra and the branch came down. He took the mangoes and then recited the second mantra.

The branch was restored to its original position. In the morning the watchman noticed the theft and reported the matter to the King. Strict watch was kept next day and still the theft took place again. Nobody was seen entering the garden. This went on for seven days. However much the watchmen tried they were unable to catch the thief. Next day the King asked Abhaykumar to find the culprit.

On the following day jugglers came to the city. They started preparing a stage for their performance. People assembled to see the performance. As the jugglers were making their preparations, Abhaykumar who had come there said to the people, "The jugglers are preparing the stage. It will take some time. So to amuse you I will tell you a short story." So saying Abhaykumar related the following story to

the people.

There was a person by name Gurrabhadra. The goddess of wealth had completely forsaken him. He had a daughter named Rupmati. She was very beautiful as her name suggested, but nobody was prepared to accept her as a wife as her father was very poor. Rupmati used to worship Kamdev—god of love—for getting a husband of her choice. For this she used to steal flowers from a nearby garden. One day the gardener caught her red-handed and when he saw that she was beautiful, he asked her to make love with him and said that he would use force if necessary. Rupmati entreated him not to use force and not to dishonour her as she was a *kuvarika*—an unmarried girl. The gardener agreed on one condition—that Rupmati should come to him on the first day of her married life. Rupmati promised to visit the gardener on the first night of her marriage.

Some days passed and a merchant's son, by name Rupsingh, who was both wise and clever, married Rupmati. When night came, Rupmati went into the bedroom. She remembered the promise given to the gardener. She was on the horns of a dilemma. How to go to the gardener? What to tell her husband? After much thought she decided to tell the whole truth to her husband. So she told the entire story to him and sought his permission to fulfil the promise. At first Rupsingh was amazed at the boldness and frankness of Rupmati. Being wise and clever he did not fly into a rage but dived deep into his heart and sought for an answer. The answer came: "Let her go." So Rupsingh told Rupmati: "Go and fulfil your promise."

Rupmati started for the gardener's place. On the way a thief met her. The thief demanded all the ornaments Rupmati had. Rupmati told her story to the thief and said: "You can have all the ornaments when I return." So the thief allowed her to go. Rupmati proceeded on her way. A *rakshasa* met her and he said: "I have not eaten anything for the last eight days, so I will eat you." Rupmati told the *rakshasa* her mission and said: "You can eat me when I return." So the *rakshasa* allowed her to go. Ultimately Rupmati reached the gardener's place at the dead of night. The gardener was asleep. So Rupmati knocked on the door. The gardener woke up and opened the door. He was surprised to see Rupmati at this hour and asked her: "Why have you come?" Rupmati replied: "It seems you have forgotten the promise that you have extracted from me. Today is the first day of my marriage and I have come to fulfil the promise." The gardener was wonderstruck and said: "You are my sister and, as this is your marriage day, I give you some ornaments as a gift. Accept a brother's gift, go home and be happy."

Rupmati accepted the gift and started on her way back. First she met the *rakshasa* and said to him: "You can now eat me." The *rakshasa* said: "How is it that you return so soon?" Rupmati told all that had happened at the gardener's place. On hearing this the *rakshasa* said: "You can go." Rupmati proceeded on her way and met the thief. She said to the thief: "You can have all the ornaments that I have." The thief enquired what had happened at the gardener's place. Rupmati told him all that had happened after she had first met him. The thief said: "After you

met me, I went on my business and I got more than I expected. I think that happened because I met you—it was a good omen—so I do not want your ornaments, instead I give you some as a gift.” Rupmati accepted the ornaments and returned to her husband and related to him the whole episode. Naturally the husband rejoiced.

Abhaykumar said to the audience: “Here the story ends. Will you tell me who was the fool? Was it the husband, the thief, the rakshasa or the gardener?”

Some said the husband was a fool, some the rakshasa while others the gardener.

Now, Ramla who was present there, jumped up and said: “May I tell you, sir, who was the fool? The thief was the fool.”

When Abhaykumar heard this he called Ramla to his side and taxed him with the theft of the mangoes. After some faint denial Ramla admitted the theft. So on the next day Ramla was hauled up before King Shrenik as the thief.

The King asked Ramla: “You never entered the garden; how did you commit the theft?” Ramla told the King about the two mantras. The King said: “You have committed a great crime that deserves severe punishment, but if you will teach me the mantras, I will let you go.” Ramla agreed.

Shrenik was on his throne and Ramla was standing before him with folded hands.

Ramla began to recite the mantras, but though possessed of sharp memory Shrenik could not memorize them.

This process went on for a week but to no purpose. So on the eighth day Shrenik asked Abhaykumar: “I have been hearing the mantras for the last seven days, still I am not able to commit them to memory. Why?”

Abhaykumar said: “Excuse me for saying the truth. You are on the wrong track. When Ramla is teaching you, he is not Ramla the pariah but your guru. Naturally the seat of the guru has to be on a higher level than that of the pupil. Here the reverse is the case. You are sitting on the throne and Ramla is standing before you as a suppliant. How can you expect to learn the mantras? If you want to learn, make Ramla sit on the throne and then standing before him with folded hands request him to impart to you the mantras.”

Shrenik could see the truth underlying Abhaykumar’s saying. He at once got down from the throne, requested Ramla to occupy it and when Ramla occupied it, Shrenik with folded hands requested him with humility to impart to him the mantras. Ramla recited the mantras and Shrenik was able to memorize them at once.

Verily, verily, it is humility that is the master-key—the *passe-partout*—to knowledge.

VALLABH SHETH

CORRECTION

“Two Visions of Champaklal” in the *Mother India* of April 24 was not translated by Pujalal from the original Gujarati: it was written by Champaklal himself in English.

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Collected Works Of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol. VII (Sweet Mother), xii+503 pp; Pic; 14 x 22; 1st 1978; Rs.25/- bd. Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry.

HERE is yet another volume of Nolini Kanta Gupta. For all those who have read and digested the earlier six volumes here awaits a grand fête again.

The book consists of two parts: I. Sweet Mother and II. Original Bengali Writings. The first part named after the title of the book 'Sweet Mother' comprises six new talks in English. In all these new talks on the Mother, the reader finds a number of mini stories and anecdotes recounted by Nolini to the top of his bent. But none of them is without a purpose of its own. By narrating the anecdotes and stories in a novel way, the author slowly draws the reader to feel the presence of the Mother. The author is well versed in the knack of hitting the nail on the head. The main point—"you are not one person—you are many persons"—is stressed in almost all these talks. And it is substantiated now and then with exquisite examples like the story of 'little girl and her image—the story of double person.' The anecdote of the professor of Philosophy, who one fine morning miraculously flowered into a very fine poet and wrote poetry of extreme sensitiveness, is told to illustrate the influence of the beings of other worlds on human beings—'a mixture, a co-mingling and at times a fusion of these two dissimilar realms.' The talks, spiced here and there with cross-references to literary figures like Alfred de Musset and others, are palatable indeed.

Automatic writing and automatic speech—two things that are beyond the reach of any ordinary common man—can be acquired, says the author, through Yoga, though the process is a Herculean labour. The importance of Yoga—the divine process—is stressed now and then. And once you follow the divine process, the invisible beings from other worlds will make their way to be present before you, just to look after your magic performance. And, to be sure, it needs a Mother and a Sri Aurobindo to make us perform inner magic.

There is food here even for the non-residents of the Ashram. The author furnishes some information about the customs in the Ashram. There is no favouritism. There is no nepotism. There is no difference of age, specially no difference of sex and all the boys and girls undergo the same exercises and the same programme. Freedom is in plenty, though with boundary lines. Addressing each other by their mere names, with no dādā or didi tagged on, is indeed a great pleasure, for after all what are names meant for? But one question the sensitive reader is bound to ask: if there is no difference of age in the Ashram, why then are the old people discriminated from the youngsters by making them wear blue shorts for differentiation from green and red ones? And are not the blues made aware of their old age?

All those who know that the number '6' is the sign of death and yet unaware of

the significance of any other number will find an opportunity to know about 7, 4, 3 and 8. The author knows the art of playing not only with words but also with numbers.

Above all, what attracts one in all these talks is the 'grand style simple'.

The second part 'Original Bengali Writings' is made up of four divisions. (1) On Art and Literature (2) On National Heritage (3) On Spirituality and (4) Reminiscences. Excepting the essay 'The Evolutionary Imperative' all other essays are translated into English.

The essays grouped under the heading 'On Art and Literature' are of immense value to the lovers of Literature. Nolini waves his magic wand and World Literature is conjured up, standing at his beck and call. Much importance is given to poets and poetry. Stress is laid on *World* poetry and the pioneer poets of different techniques are brought upon the scene. The author raises questions like, Why cannot Plebeian or Popular Literature form the best literature?—Is it obligatory that one should have a great soul in order to be a great poet?—On what occasions do the poet and the seer become united?—How does the same speech grow into Mantra on one side and into poetry on the other?—What is the difference between decency and obscenity?—When does the obscene happen to become ugly?—and he furnishes answers and cites many examples from World Literature to the entire satisfaction of the inquisitive reader. Nolini makes a thorough analysis of Greek Drama, unravels the mysteries of the Siddhacharyas and shows the subtle difference between prose and Modern Poetry. On Modern Poetry, the author comments, "However intellectualised may be the mode of Modern Western Poetry, it is the particular expression of Western life. Behind it there lies a profound need, an urge of life. But here in our country this sort of creation is an artificial flower." Can we feel absolutely sure here? May there not be a hint in the fact that the artificial rose lasts longer than a fast-withering real one? The essays on Tagore form a gold-mine to the students of Indo-Anglian literature. Nothing is left unsaid about Tagore the poet. All the essays including the last one on 'Boris Pasternak' are replete with information. But the reader should be a polyglot to understand the chapter on 'Rhythm in Poetry'. The lover of literature who reads and digests these literary pieces will find a few more feathers added to his cap.

The origin of the Bengali race, the characteristic qualities of the Bengalis, their customs and manners, their ways of dressing and living, the charm of the shining teeth of Bengali women are all told admirably in the essays grouped under the heading 'On National Heritage.' More light is thrown on the outstanding figures of Bengal—Guru Ramakrishna and his disciple Vivekananda, patriots Rammohan Roy and Bankimchandra Chatterji, scientist Jagdish Chandra Bose—to emphasize their role in building up our nation. In short, this section is about everything you wanted to know about Bengal and Bengalis. Finally the author compares and contrasts the East with the West. The examples taken for comparing and contrasting, especially Valmiki and Shakespeare, the image of Venus and Buddha, are very ap-

pealing.

High philosophy plays a predominant role in the essays, 'On Spirituality'. The reader encounters the seven steps in the growth of consciousness, the scientists-cum-theists, and Man the store-house of the seven deadly sins. What is Yoga? What is the meaning of control of the senses and what is its necessity in life? How can sorrow and suffering, misery and pain, self-immolation and death be transformed into delight?—such issues are all explicated in an easier way than usually done though 'difficult matters cannot be explained as easily as easy ones.'

"Your denial of God is the first step towards God-realisation" is a death blow to all atheists and iconoclasts. The hope-instilling letter titled 'Fit and Unfit' is a marvellous piece of work worthy to be read every day along with the morning prayer by all those who suffer from the inferiority complex. Are not our own fears our worst enemies? And, since these spiritual essays are pregnant with high philosophy, they are not for the casual reader.

Relaxing in an easy chair, Nolini relates the story of his past in his 'Reminiscences'. Sometimes thriller-like, sometimes comic, sometimes tragic, sometimes highly spiritual and sometimes sentimental, the essays in this section read like mini or short stories with informative literary digressions. Sub-Inspector Raicharan with his inimitable English, Patriot Ullaskar Datta with his slipper wrapped up in a newspaper sheet, Biren with his shaven head and Martyr Prafulla with his revolver are some of the unforgettable. The state of Old Pondicherry, some three score and ten years ago, the arrival of Sri Aurobindo and later the Mother, the foundation of the Ashram, are all vividly portrayed. Nolini's love for sports and games, the eminent Professors under whom he studied, his Revolutionary period and his involvement in the Alipur bomb conspiracy case are all of endless use to the biographers and historians. The secrets divulged by the author would surely make the British wince. The British never realised how they were fooled.

Nolini never gives the reader a chance to skip even a single line of his, so gripping is his subject-matter and so charming the style in which it is treated.

A few words more. Books are of two types—those that are ephemeral and those that are of permanent interest. And if a book is of the second type it is surely worth possessing. Yes, to say that this book is to be treasured and safeguarded for the use of posterity is no hyperbole.

P. RAJA

IDEAL CHILD

IDEAL Child, a small booklet containing words of the Mother was first published in 1953 with this wish from the Mother: "Let this book reach every child." On the occasion of the Mother's Centenary year, many devotees, parents and educationists have proposed to try to fulfil the Mother's wish, by raising funds for printing and by arranging for distribution, through educational departments, both in India and abroad, this precious little book.

The year 1979 has been declared by the United Nations as the "International Children's Year". Indeed it would be a great achievement if this booklet *Ideal Child* could reach every child throughout the world during the International Children's Year. About 350,000 copies have already reached the students in Kutch District of Gujarat, Bombay and elsewhere. Translations in Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, English, French, Tamil, Marathi, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, Bengali and Oriya are already published. The German edition is in the press. The Italian translation is ready. Translation in Japanese and other languages is getting ready. It is estimated that in India alone over 5 crore copies are required involving a total cost of Rs 1.50 crores.

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Those who would like to participate in this work may kindly send their contributions (for any number of copies) by cheque or demand draft payable to "Sri Aurobindo Ashram". All correspondence on this subject and all remittances should be sent to Shri Keshavji, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry-605002, stating in the coupon: "For *Ideal Child*."

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16 February 1979

Dear Keshavji,

The Director of the IYC Secretariat office in Europe has kindly forwarded to us your letter of January 20, and the accompanying booklet, "Ideal Child". It is a joy to know that, under the guidance of the Mother, the Sri Aurobindo Books Distribution Agency (Sabda), has decided to make available this "prayer of the student" to every child in the world during the UN International Year of the Child, 1979.

This IYC Secretariat does not have the vast resources of Sabda to be a distributing agency. We can only make known the availability of the booklet to all people involved in activities to observe the Year, through our IYC Report. This is published in four languages at the moment, and some 75,000 copies are sent out all over the world. I am sure that as a result of this initiative millions of children all over the world will be writing to you for the booklet.

It is, indeed, a high and noble ideal which inspires you to do this service for children during IYC.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

Victor Anant,
Editor IYC Report.

cc : Ms. Murray-Lee, IYC Geneva
Ms. Ismail, UNICEF, New Delhi
Ms. Dorothea Banks

Co-ordinated for the United Nations System by UNICEF/Coordination
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EUROPE 1974

A TRAVELOGUE

(Continued from the issue of April 24, 1979)

27

FOR the lovers of Art, London or for that matter England is an inexhaustible mine. In London itself there are twenty art galleries of the first magnitude, to say nothing of the smaller ones both public and private, in and around London, that are accessible to the tourist. All the bigger cities have an art gallery of their own, sometimes two or even three. Almost every ducal mansion all over England has an art gallery. Every man of wealth and refinement has aspired to have an art gallery of his own. Nor are they negligible, for in them sometimes we find rare and priceless paintings or *objects d'Art*. The English have proved to be untiring and enthusiastic collectors. All the great public galleries have grown to their present dimensions, not so much by purchase as by the bequests of generous and wealthy men, who for some reason or other have decided to offer their collections to the nation. The private galleries too are open to the public on certain days of the week.

About the art galleries in London we can say that they are not all of the same type and that none is a duplication of the others. Having seen some, one cannot summarily reject the rest by saying, "Oh, they are all alike." Each one came into existence in a special way, with a special aim and they still follow their objectives, although a certain admixture is inevitable. They are scattered all over London, so much so that no locality can lament that there is no gallery nearby. The Hyde Park area alone has six art galleries and permanent exhibitions. We shall describe a few here and perhaps a little digression now and then would not be out of place.

*

The Victoria Albert Museum near Hyde Park is the most interesting of them all. It came into existence under the inspiration of Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria and known in history as the Prince Consort. Its basic collection came from the Great Exhibition of 1851. The Exhibition itself was the handiwork of the Prince and it was through his enthusiasm that it proved to be a great success, a memorable event of the 19th century. Europe participated in it vigorously. But the building we see today is a modern one. It was done by Aston Webb whose design won the competition. The foundation was laid by Queen Victoria and it was opened after her death in 1909. By purchases and through bequests it has now grown into an enormous art gallery and exhibition. The greatest attraction here are the Raphael Cartoons, their best specimens in England. These are drawings that Raphael

made for the tapestry of the Sistine Chapel. He was commissioned for the work by Pope Leo X. Apart from these there is a vast collection of High Renaissance paintings by the Great Masters and their pupils. Another great attraction is a collection of miniatures of the Tudor period not to be found easily anywhere else. Other rooms display Near and Far Eastern art, Gothic tapestries, costumes, musical instruments and delightful *objects d'art* of all countries and of all periods. In the sculpture section Voltaire is there looking quizzically at you as if to say forever, "I will defend to the death your right to speak your mind."

At the farthest end of Hyde Park is a Royal Palace, called Kensington Palace. Here there is another museum planned and opened by George V in 1912. Its unique feature is that it is not so much an exhibition of paintings as a picture gallery that shows London in its historical and topographical aspects. The main concern of the directors is to illustrate by means of paintings and other objects London life and the great events that have happened in the city. In that way it is a highly interesting gallery for anyone who wants to know and gather information about London and explore the Metropolis. There is a whole set of pictures on the river Thames alone. Frozen Thames, Frost Fair on Thames, Thames above Greenwich: these are the names of some of the paintings. The Great Fire of 1666, the Houses of Parliament Burning during the war are also there. Very near Kensington Palace is to be found *Rima*, a creation of Sir Jacob Epstein in 1925. He was the greatest sculptor of 20th century England. There is also a very interesting statue by Watts of a rider and his horse called *Physical Energy*. Kensington Palace is the place where Princess Victoria, then a very young girl, received the Archbishop of Canterbury in the small hours of the morning to learn that she was now the Queen of England. It is recorded that she wept when she was told this.

On the south-western side of Hyde Park (just outside the Park) there are three museums, namely, the Imperial Institute, Science Museum, and Natural History Museum, for those who are interested in such subjects. Albert Hall too is very near. Opposite the Hall and inside the Park is the Albert Memorial. It is a huge statue of Prince Albert seated under a large canopy with the catalogue of the Exhibition on his lap. It is of white marble with inlay work of crystal, agate, and onyx and other precious stones. It was erected in the heyday of the Empire. At the base of the statue are four groups, Asia, Africa, Europe and America and a frieze of Agriculture, Manufacture, Commerce and Engineering. The whole *ensemble* is very grand and the Prince looks every inch a prince. One cannot but feel sympathetic towards the German princeling who worked himself to death for his adopted country. Sincere and enterprising, his only care was the moral and material welfare of the British Empire. The statue was done by Sir George Gilbert Scott and was completed in 1876. Someone once remarked: "Beyond question the finest monumental structure in Europe."

The next interesting place in this area is the Wellington Museum, known as Apsley House. It is situated inside Hyde Park at the corner where Park Lane and Picadilly meet. It was the home of the first Duke of Wellington and was offered to the nation by the seventh Duke in 1947. The collection of a life-time is there, and it may be classified thus: paintings purchased or given as gifts and paintings captured from Joseph Bonaparte in 1813 after the Peninsular War. The museum is extremely interesting to historians. One section of it is entirely devoted to paintings of the Iron Duke, his helpers and associates, and the important scenes of his life during the Napoleonic wars. A banquet hall in this museum is called the Waterloo Gallery; it was here that the Duke used to hold banquets every year (all-men parties). The table and the chairs, the silver used then, the cutglass chandelier that once hung over the heads of the diners are all there intact. In the staircase vestibule is a gigantic statue of Napoleon in marble by Canova, the greatest sculptor of those days. Some paintings of Napoleon's family are also there. Visible from Apsley House is a huge statue of Achilles. It was done in honour of the Duke of Wellington when he returned from the Napoleonic wars. On the plinth is engraved the following:

"To Arthur Duke of Wellington and his brave companions in arms this statue of Achilles, cast from the cannon taken in the victories of Salamanca, Vittoria, Toulouse and Waterloo, is inscribed by their country-women."

A close friend of the Duke once remarked that the Duke thought the statue was very badly done and that he groaned every time he saw it from his window at Apsley House.

(To be continued)

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18th-19th February 1978

(Continued from the issue of March 1979)

WHAT I HAVE LEARNT FROM THE MOTHER

Speech by Sunayana Panda

The Perfection of the Body

I HAVE chosen to speak about this aspect of the Mother's teaching—the perfection of the body—because She gave much importance to it. We have seen how much of Her time and attention She devoted to give to Her children a complete physical education. She Herself was active until such an advanced age that the world should take it as an example.

We see nowadays hundreds of books being published on subjects like: how to build a muscular body or how to control one's diet in order to maintain one's weight, etc. We also see the ease with which these books get sold. Men want to build such a body as will allow them to live longer to enjoy this artificial youth as long as they can.

We have also heard of that era when it was fashionable to pamper the body. To be frail and swooning was considered romantic in women. Among men, being of bad health was considered the sign of great intelligence.

On the other hand, there were the ascetics who despised the body to such an extent that they tortured it. We have heard of the bed of nails and the coat of thorns, the long fasts and the endless floggings.

But the Mother has shown us quite another way of looking at the body. She says it is that part of the being through which Divine Beauty shall manifest.

The Divine manifests itself in four ways: as Love through the psychic, as Knowledge through the mind, as Power through the vital and as Beauty through the body. The Mother explains the last by saying, "Beauty is the ideal which physical life has to realise. In every human being there is the possibility of establishing harmony among the different parts of the body and the different movements when the body is

in action. The human body that undergoes a rational method of physical culture from the beginning of its existence can realise its own harmony and thus be fit to express beauty."¹

But there are many who believe that the body being Matter, after all, is unchangeable, and that defects and weaknesses will forever remain in it, that disease is more natural to it than is good health. And unquestioningly they give themselves up to these enemies of the body.

To shatter all such wrong ideas and centuries-old misconceptions, the Mother says, "The body has a wonderful capacity of adaptation and endurance. It is fit to do so many more things than one can usually imagine. If, instead of the ignorant and despotic masters [the mind and the vital] that govern it, it is ruled by the central truth of the being, one will be surprised at what it is capable of doing. Calm and quiet, strong and poised, it will at every minute put forth the effort that is demanded of it, for it will have learnt to find rest in action, to replace through contact with the universal forces the energies it spends consciously and usefully. In this sound and balanced life a new harmony will manifest in the body, reflecting the harmony of the higher regions which will give it the perfect proportions and the ideal beauty of form."²

The Mother calls this discipline of beauty in the body the Tapasya of Beauty. She asks us "to build a body, beautiful in form, harmonious in posture, supple and agile in its movements, powerful in its activities and resistant in its health and organic function."³

In the integral yoga the body has an equal importance as the other parts of the being. In one sense, I would say, it is the most important, for the Mother says that in order to be able to receive the supreme consciousness and force one has to have a strong base and our base is the body. For the opening of the athletics competition in August 1964 this was Her message: "All the virtues and skills required to succeed in athletics are exactly those the physical man must have to be fit for receiving and manifesting the new force."

Up to now we have seen what the Mother has said about the perfection of the body. When we turn to Sri Aurobindo's poetic utterance we find these wonderful lines:

O worshipper of the formless Infinite,
 Reject not form, what lives in form is He.
 Each finite is that deep Infinity
 Enshrining His veiled soul of pure delight.
 Form in its heart of silence recondite
 Hides the significance of His mystery,
 Form is the wonder-house of eternity,
 A cavern of the deathless Eremite.⁴

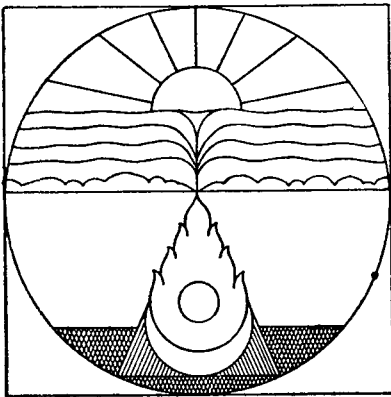
¹ *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother on Education* (1966), p. 61. ² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 82. ⁴ "Form" in *Collected Poems* (Centenary Edition, Vol. 5), p. 136.

It is important to note that this perfection of the body is not only important and indispensable but it is also crucial in our yoga, for if this is not done then nothing lasting is done. The body is the necessary physical base and instrument of the spirit on earth and until it is perfected by complete transformation the perfect divine life cannot manifest here. We see this clearly explained by Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine*: "The importance of the body is obvious; it is because he has developed or been given a body and brain capable of receiving and serving a progressive mental illumination that man has risen above the animal. Equally, it can only be by developing a body or at least a functioning of the physical instrument capable of receiving and serving a still higher illumination that he will rise above himself and realise, not merely in thought and in his internal being but in life, a perfectly divine manhood. Otherwise either the promise of Life is cancelled, its meaning annulled and earthly being can only realise Sachchidananda by abolishing itself, by shedding from it mind, life and body and returning to the pure Infinite, or else man is not the divine instrument, there is a destined limit to the consciously progressive power which distinguishes him from all other terrestrial existences and as he has replaced them in front of things, so another must eventually replace him and assume his heritage."¹

To conclude, let us remind ourselves of what the Mother wants of our body: "Build in yourself the total harmony so that when the time comes perfect Beauty can express itself through your body."

¹ *The Life Divine* (American Edition), p. 213.



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