

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

MAY 1981

Price : Rs. 2.00

AN URGENT APPEAL TO OUR WELL-WISHERS

The resources of MOTHER INDIA have been extremely strained because of the enormous rise in the cost of paper, production and distribution.

This year we have not raised our subscription-rate—and even if we did raise it our need would not be sufficiently met. **What we appeal for is generous donations.** Our most recent expenditure on a substantial scale was buying paper-stock for at least nine months with Rs. 13,000/-.

The donations will be tax-free if sent ear-marked for us through the Ashram Trust.

We shall be very thankful for any help given.

The good number of our advertisements must not be taken as a sign of great gain. We pay a very large commission on several of them, and after deducting press-charges our profit is small.

INLAND

Annual: Rs.20.00

Life Membership: Rs.280.00

OVERSEAS

Sea Mail:

Annual: \$7.00 or £3.50

Life Membership: \$98.00 or £50.00

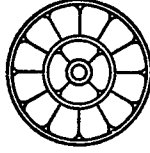
Air Mail:

Annual: \$22.00 for American & Pacific countries

£9.00 for all other countries

Life Membership: \$308.00 for American & Pacific countries

£126.00 for all other countries

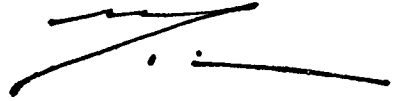


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



All Rights Reserved. No matter appearing in this journal or part thereof may be reproduced or translated without written permission from the publishers except for short extracts as quotations.

All correspondence to be addressed to:

MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605 002, India

Editor's Phone: 782

Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Editor: K. D. SETHNA

Managing Editor: K. R. PODDAR

Published by: P. COUNOUMA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST, PONDICHERRY - 605 002

Printed by: AMIYO RANJAN GANGULI

at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry - 605 002

PRINTED IN INDIA

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

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XXXIII

No. 5

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail.”

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
THE IDEAL ATTITUDE: FROM A TALK BY THE MOTHER	... 243
THE DIVINE AND THE SADHAK: FROM A LETTER BY SRI AUROBINDO	... 243
THE MASTER MANTRA	<i>The Mother & Sri Aurobindo</i> ... 243
“THE OLD MAN” OF SRI AUROBINDO: A COMMENT BY THE MOTHER	... 244
ONLY ONE THING... A POINTER BY THE MOTHER	... 244
NIRODBARAN’S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO: THE COMPLETE SET	... 245
A GLIMPSE OF THE INFINITE (Poem)	<i>Raghunandan</i> ... 252
THE REVISED EDITION OF <i>The Future Poetry</i> : NEWLY WRITTEN OR CORRECTED MATTER	<i>Sri Aurobindo</i> ... 253
ONLY THE BLIND SHALL SEE (Poem)	<i>J. N. Chubb</i> ... 256
OVERHEAD POETRY: SOME UNPUBLISHED ANSWERS BY SRI AUROBINDO TO NIRODBARAN	... 257
AT THE FEET OF THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO: RECOLLECTIONS BY SAHANA (Translated by Nirodbaran from the Bengali)	... 259
OMNIPRESENT (Poem)	<i>Chunital Chowdhury</i> ... 264
IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT	... 265

CONTENTS

SRI AUROBINDO IN POLITICS:			
HIGH NOON OF HINDU NATIONALISM	<i>Paul Mundschenk</i>	...	266
LACK (Poem)	<i>Peter Heehs</i>	...	272
LONELINESS	<i>Dinkar</i>	...	273
THE HISTORICITY OF CHRIST:			
A LETTER OF JANUARY 6, 1981	<i>K. D. Sethna</i>	...	274
THE SECRET OF THE <i>Mahābhārata</i> :			
AN AUROBINDONIAN APPROACH	<i>Pradip Bhattacharya</i>	...	282
THE SECRET OF THE ALLIES' SUCCESS IN WORLD WAR II		<i>Jibendra</i>	... 288
THE LORD OF HORSES:			
A NOVELLA	<i>Christine & Archak</i>	...	290
(Translated by Maurice from the French)			
EUROPE 1974:			
A TRAVELOGUE	<i>Chaundona & Sanat K. Banerji</i>	...	295
CROSSWORD		...	298
BOOKS IN THE BALANCE			
SRI AUROBINDO: THE PERFECT AND THE GOOD			
by ROBERT N. MINOR	<i>Review by Dick Batstone</i>	...	300
THE STUPID GURU AND HIS FOOLISH DISCIPLES:			
A FREE TRANSLATION OF VEERAMA MUNIVAR'S			
TAMIL STORY OF GURU PARAMARTHA by P. RAJA		<i>Review by Prema Nandakumar</i>	... 301

THE IDEAL ATTITUDE

FROM A TALK BY THE MOTHER

To be grateful, never to forget this wonderful Grace of the Supreme who leads each one to his divine goal by the shortest ways, in spite of himself, his ignorance and misunderstandings, in spite of the ego, its protests and its revolts.

The pure flame of gratefulness must always burn in our heart, warm, sweet and bright, to dissolve all egoism and all obscurity; the flame of gratefulness for the Supreme's Grace who leads the sadhak to his goal—and the more he is grateful, recognises this action of the Grace and is thankful for it, the shorter is the way.

26 June 1964

THE DIVINE AND THE SADHAK

FROM A LETTER BY SRI AUROBINDO

THE Divine Grace and Power can do everything, but with the assent of the Sadhak. To learn to give that full assent is the whole meaning of the Sadhana. It may take time either because of ideas in the mind, desires in the vital or inertia in the physical consciousness. But these have to be and can be removed with the aid of or by calling in the action of the Divine Force.

THE MASTER MANTRA

I

DISCIPLE: It occurs to me to beg Thee for a keyword for Japa.

THE MOTHER: OM. OM is the signature of the Lord.

2

DISCIPLE: The word OM is said to represent Brahman.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, the word OM is of great power—the utterance produces a sound-force which contains in itself all the sound-forces in the world and thus it is said to represent the Brahman. (18.7.1926)

“THE OLD MAN” OF SRI AUROBINDO

A COMMENT BY THE MOTHER

ALL human reactions, even the highest, the purest, the noblest, appeared so childish!... There is a sentence written by Sri Aurobindo somewhere that was coming all the while to me. One day, I do not remember where, he had written something, a rather long sentence in which there was this: “And when I feel jealous, I know that the old man is still there.” It is now perhaps more than thirty years since I read it—yes, almost thirty years—and I remember, when I read “jealous”, I said to myself: How can Sri Aurobindo be jealous? And so after thirty years I have understood what he meant by being “jealous”—it is not at all what men call “jealous”, it was altogether another state of consciousness. I saw it clearly. And this morning it came back to me: “And when I feel jealous, I know that the old man is still there.” To be “jealous” for him did not mean what we call “jealous”.... It is this infinitesimal particle that we call the individual, this particle of infinitesimal consciousness which places itself at the centre, which is the centre of the perception, and which consequently perceives things coming like that (*gesture towards oneself*) or going like that (*gesture outward*) and all that does not come to it gives it a kind of perception that Sri Aurobindo called “jealous”: the perception that things are going towards diffusion, instead of coming in towards centralisation; it was that which he called “jealous”. So he said: When I feel jealous (this was what he learnt to say), I know that the old man is still there; that is to say, this infinitesimal particle of consciousness can *still* be at the centre of itself, it is the centre of action, the centre of perception, the centre of sensation....

ONLY ONE THING...

A POINTER BY THE MOTHER

THERE is only one thing that can truly save you, it is to have a contact, even the slightest, with your psychic being—to have felt the solidity of that contact. Then whatever comes to you from this person or that circumstance you place in front of that and see whether it is all right or not. Even if you are satisfied—in every way—even if you say to yourself: “At last I have found the friend I wanted to have. I am in the best circumstances of my life, etc.”, then put that before this little contact with your psychic being, you will see whether it keeps its bright colour or suddenly there comes a little uneasiness, not much, nothing making a great noise, but just a little uneasiness. You are no longer so sure that it was as you thought! Then you know: yes, it is that small voice which one must listen to always. It is that which is the truth and the other can’t trouble you any longer.

NIRODBARAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

THE COMPLETE SET

(Continued from the issue of 24 April 1981)

October 1, 1935

Absolutely in the physical consciousness! Don't find any trace of the psychic anywhere, Sir! Are you handling the blessed subconscious physical or what?

I AM handling the handle. Sticky! If you are absolutely in the physical consciousness so much the better. It shows you are on the way. If you were in your uproarious mental or tragic vital then there would be little chance for the psychic to emerge. But now that you are in the physical, there is some prospect of our finishing the circle M. V. Ph. Afterwards possibly there will be a chance for the line Ps. HC. S. Rejoice.

October 2, 1935

What are the abbreviations—Ps. HC.S.?

Psychic—Higher Consciousness—Supramental.

You are trying to adopt shorthand now.

Of course! what to do? shorthand lessens the labour of the writer, even if it increases that of the reader. Besides the attempt to find out what the abbs mean should stimulate your intuition and sharpen your intelligence.

I told you I'm feeling lazy, have no aspiration, no inclination to write poetry. Isn't it a drop into the physical?

Yes, that's the joker—physical consciousness.

And this, you say, is the better condition?

No, where did I say that?

Why, this is almost next to inconstance.

Of course it is.

I don't know how the psychic is going to emerge from the physical consciousness.

Well, it is the bottom of the first curve, so logically the next thing is to make an upward tangent and get into the second curve.

Suppose one finishes the circle M.V.Ph. it can go round again before one is shifted to the starting of the other line.

That would be very clever but it is not usually done except by people with big egos. Yours is no doubt a well-developed chubby chap but it is not a giant.

Do you think the Yogic Force will enable a doctor, even if he is not trained, to do things like cutting off an appendix or a cataract?

Good Heavens, no!...The Force has to prepare its instrument first—it is not a miracle-monger. The Force can develop in you intuition and skill if you are sufficiently open, even if you did not have it before—but not like that. That kind of thing happens once in a way but it is not the fixed method of the Divine to act like that.

I believe one must know the technique, not by heart only, but by hands as well!

Yes.

Or, is it that in the yogic world operations will be tabooed since the Force alone will dissolve the cataract?

Whatever it does, it will do by a method, not in the void.

October 3, 1935

Again, about the Intuition! You speak of keeping oneself sufficiently open to get the intuition. If I keep myself open and intuition favours me, how shall I know that it is the true thing?

Practise and learn, learn and practise. When you have had a few thousand intuitions you can get the knack—for there is a recognizable difference between the true ones and the imitations or half ones.

In one or two cases my off-hand diagnosis was correct. But how far can I take it as an intuition?

It depends on how it came, what was the stuff of the perception and the light in it

and whether it bobbed up as one among potentials though dominant or seized you as an inevitable dead cert. Also whether it was a pure intuition or a mixed mental. Difficult, isn't it?

About how to develop it, I won't ask you—though it would enlighten us; but I suppose you will develop it some day, though a big condition of 'sufficiently open' overhangs. Yes, everything one can have if one is 'sufficiently open', but there's the rub, for one isn't and can't!

Well, instead of letting your Man of Sorrows sob and grumble all the lachrymose time, you should labour manfully to enlarge the opening.

P has made copies of your letters to me. Naturally, I suppose he will show them to his friends in Calcutta.

No. They must not be shown to people outside.

And R has most pathetically requested me to forward him your letters written to me. Then life becomes cheerful by their splendour.

Have you told him they are not for exhibition? It is only on that condition he can have them.

October 4, 1935

Is there any truth behind animal sacrifices to Kah?

If animal sacrifices are to be made they may just as well be made to Kali as to one's stomach — the Europeans who object to it have no *locus standi*.

Is the killing of mosquitoes, bugs, snakes and scorpions permissible for self-protection?

Certainly. One might just as well object to the killing of germs by fumigation or otherwise.

What about the sacrifice of harmless animals to Kali?

Useless and therefore inadvisable. External sacrifices of this kind have no longer any meaning — as so many saints have said, sacrifice ego, anger, lust, etc. to Kali, not goats or cocks.

How does the Divine benefit by it? Very hungry, I suppose—would like a nice goat-chop?

I wonder if you know that some Sharma has gone on hunger-strike to stop the sacrifices at Calcutta. Tagore supports him.

Of course, I know. But he objects to animal sacrifice; why does he make a goat-offering of himself to Kali? Is human sacrifice better than animal sacrifice?

The argument is: what does the loss of one life matter if by it other lives can be saved?

I know the South African saying "How glorious if the whole world were to destroy itself to save the life of a single mosquito." I used always to wonder what would become of the poor mosquito if the world were destroyed? It seemed to my poor common sense that it would perish also in the glorious holocaust.

I suppose you are watching with great apprehension the war-clouds that are gathering.

No, I am not trembling, but I agree that it is a beastly affair.

I hope Mussolini got no indirect impetus from your Essays on the Gita.

He never read them, I suppose.

But however much one may deplore war, that seems to be the only opportunity for India's liberation.

?

October 5, 1935

D.R. is running a temperature. Etiology is obscure; I presume it may be yogic.

Rubbish! D.R. is not Yogic enough to have a Yogic fever.

By India's opportunity I meant that if England is involved, she will naturally fall on India for help with men and money and India would be in a good bargaining position.

What India? The Legislative Assembly? You think it has force enough to exact freedom as a price of some military help? Must have changed much if they can do that.

England has to be trapped in her own den. We can't depend upon her generosity to give us freedom for the asking.

How you arrange things! If it were so easy as that!

I have become awfully irritated these last two days. Is it due to your exposition of the "chubby chap"?

Maybe. Ego irritated at its own chubbiness? Wants to be rough, rude and bossy, —a true he-man?

October 8, 1935

D. R. is all right. No temperature. He wants to come to Pranam

I suppose he can, *Doctor volente* (Doctor willing).

Please have a look at Calcutta Review for a criticism by Adhar Das. I don't know if you have seen it already.

Yes, I have read all these sweet things from the sweet *adhar*¹.

I gather that he is favourably disposed to your philosophy, so much so that he has written a book on it.

He was, without understanding much, before A.B. butted in and gored him into bitterness.

He doesn't seem to have grasped well the thing, has he?

"Methinks" he hasn't. Grasp of things is not his forte.

His remark about the divinisation of the individual and the emergence of the new race does not seem to be correct.

He seems to think that D.I.=E.N.R. or C.S.R. (divinisation of the individual= emergence of new race or creation of supramental race.) So if D.I. is possible, C.S.R. is superfluous or out of the question. Why, I don't know, for it takes individuals to make a race and if a certain number of individuals are not divinised, I don't see how you are going to get a divinised race. As for it being out of the question, the great Panjandrum alone knows why if an individual is divinised (one obviously is not

¹ lips.

enough), it should be out of the question to go on divinising others until you have a new race. But I suppose, unless you create unnecessary quibbles, there can be no “intellectual” philosophy.

I thought there was quite a difference between divinisation, i.e. spiritualisation, and supramentalisation, the one being a step to the other.

Yes, of course, but as I have never explained in these letters what I meant by supermind, these critics are necessarily all at sea. They think, pardonably enough, that anything above human mind must be supramental.

I suppose it will be a presumption on my part to criticise a philosopher like him from whom, you wrote to T, you learnt your philosophy!

No, no! Not learnt, — say that I am slowly learning from him. For he is kindly teaching me what I meant.

People are longing to see the first batch of the supramental species from your great laboratory, Sir.

Go forward, go forward and show yourself.

Then the critic writes: “An extravagant claim in as much as it gives a lie to logic and also to the lives and experiences of past seers.” Well, Sir?

Well, I don't suppose the new race can be created by or according to logic or that any race has been. But why should the idea of the creation of a new race be illogical? It is not only my ideas that baffle reason, but X's also! As for the past seers, they don't trouble me. If going beyond the experiences of past seers and sages is so shocking, each new seer or sage in turn has done that shocking thing — Buddha, Shankara, Chaitanya, etc all did that wicked act. If not, what was the necessity of their starting new philosophies, religions, schools of Yoga? If they were merely verifying and meekly repeating the lives and experiences of past seers and sages without bringing the world some new things, why all that stir and pother? Of course, you may say, they were simply explaining the old truth but in the right way—but this would mean that nobody had explained or understood it rightly before—which is again “giving the lie etc.” Or you may say that all the new sages (they were not among X's cherished past ones in their day), e.g. Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhava were each merely repeating the same blessed thing as all the past seers and sages had repeated with an unwearied monotony before them. Well, well, but why repeat it in such a way that each “gives the lie” to the others? Truly, this shocked reverence for the past is a wonderful and fearful thing! After all, the Divine is infinite and the unrolling of the

Truth may be an infinite process or at least, if not quite so much, yet with some room for new discovery and new statement, even perhaps new achievement, not a thing in a nutshell cracked and its contents exhausted once for all by the first seer or sage, while the others must religiously crack the same nutshell all over again, each trembling fearful not to give the lie to the "past" seers and sages.

Adhar Das says, "Divinisation of the individual will be instrumental in the emergence of a new race." Is that what you mean by "Our yoga is not for our sake but for the Divine" ?

Not exactly.

October 9, 1935

Dr. B is going home tomorrow for a month. Please see that Messrs. H. F. [Hostile Forces] may not entangle me into trouble.

For one month you may make yourself like iron and look fierce.

A worker from Cycle House—Cassell (?) has conjunctivitis.

Another of the dictionary? I suppose you mean Keshavalu?

Apropos of our discussion yesterday about Adhar Das. If "not exactly", what exactly then do you mean by "Our Yoga is not for our sake but for the Divine" ?

Well, I once wrote in my callow days, "Our Yoga is not for ourselves but for humanity"; that was in the Bande Mataram days. To get out of the hole self-created I had to explain that it was no longer for humanity, but for the Divine. The "not for ourselves" remained intact.

Is it something like the Vaishnava idea of absolute surrender, without even desiring to see Him, have milan with Him; only give, give and give ? A very sublime conception, but is it possible and practical ?

Quite possible and practical and a very rapturous thing as anyone who has done it can tell you. It is also the easiest and most powerful way of "getting" the Divine. So it is the best policy also. The phrase, however, means that the object of the Yoga is to enter into and be possessed by the Divine Presence and Consciousness, to love the Divine for the Divine's sake alone, to be tuned in our nature into the nature of the Divine and in our will and works and life to be the instrument of the Divine. Its object is not to be a great Yogi or a Superman (although that may come) or to grab

at the Divine for the sake of the ego's power, pride or pleasure. It is not for Moksha, though liberation comes by it and all else comes; but these must not be our objects. The Divine alone is our object.

Why not write something about the Supermind which these people find so difficult to understand?

What's the use? How much would anybody understand? Besides the present business is to bring down and establish the Supermind, not to explain it. If it establishes itself, it will explain itself—if it does not, there is no use in explaining it. I have said something about it in past writings, but without success in enlightening anybody. So why repeat the endeavour?

(To be continued)

A GLIMPSE OF THE INFINITE

I SOMETIMES glimpse the Infinite and my heart is thrilled with delight
 But my being shivers and shudders when I try to merge in Its height.
 As my mind is not ready yet to hold the Felicity Divine,
 It lasts for some magic moments and then goes back to Its source to shine.

For, It finds no stable basis and because of that grievous lack
 It waits far off—at my call again in my heart to come back...
 Then a prayer rises from the core of my aspirant being:
 "Make Thou the whole of my self one readiness, Oh Mother All-seeing!"

Let me clasp firmly Thy ecstasy and Thy Power of Heaven,
 Grant me a poise ever-steady—may my nature no more be riven.
 Fill me with the wealth unending of Knowledge Supreme.
 Can earthly riches allure my soul, once it has had Thy Dream?

Oh Mother Divine, since Fount of all Mercy and Might Thou art,
 Give me but that which Thou thinkest best for my blindly worshipping heart!

RAGHUNANDAN

THE REVISED EDITION OF *THE FUTURE POETRY*

NEWLY-WRITTEN OR CORRECTED MATTER

(Continued from the issue of April 24, 1981)

(In the revised text the last eight chapters have been grouped together to form "Part II". These chapters, originally unnumbered, and numbered XXV-XXXII in the Centenary Edition, have been renumbered by the editors as Chapters I-VIII of the second part.

Four of these eight chapters received revision during either the earlier or the later period.

With one exception, the changes in the first chapter of "Part II" occur in one connected passage, consisting of the first paragraph and the first sentences of the second. This passage (SABCL Vol. 9, p. 199) is reproduced below. The exception is the word "secretly", added to the fifth sentence of the third paragraph: "the spiritual reality of that which we and all things secretly are.")

PART II

CHAPTER I

The Ideal Spirit of Poetry

To attempt to presage the future turn or development of mind or life in any of its fields must always be a hazardous venture. For life and mind are not like physical Nature; the processes of physical Nature run in precise mechanical grooves, but these are more mobile and freer powers. The gods of life and still more the gods of mind are so incalculably self-creative that even where we can distinguish the main lines on which the working runs or has so far run, we are still unable to foresee with any certainty what turn they will yet take or of what new thing they are in labour. It is therefore impossible to predict what the poetry of the future will actually be like. We can see where we stand today, but we cannot tell where we shall stand a quarter of a century hence. All that one can do is to distinguish for oneself some possibilities that lie before the poetic mind of the race and to figure what it can achieve if it chooses to follow out certain great openings which the genius of recent and contemporary poets has made free to us; but what path it will actually choose to tread or what new heights attempt, waits still for its own yet unformed decision.

What would be the ideal spirit of poetry in an age of the increasingly intuitive mind: that is the question which arises from all that has gone before and to which we may attempt some kind of answer. I have spoken in the beginning of the Mantra as the highest and intensest revealing form of poetic thought and expression.

CHAPTER II

The Sun of Poetic Truth

(This chapter, old Chapter XXVI, contains only one change. In the first sentence of the second paragraph, the word "to" was altered to "into": "transferred without any real change into rhythmic form [...]".)

CHAPTER III

The Breath of Greater Life

(The revision of this chapter, old Chapter XXVII, is confined to the seventh paragraph, which is given here in full (cf. SABCL Vol. 9, pp. 229-30).)

This need is the sufficient reason for attaching the greatest importance to those poets in whom there is the double seeking of this twofold power, the truth and reality of the eternal self and spirit in man and things and the insistence on life. All the most significant and vital work in recent poetry has borne this stamp; the rest is of the hour, but this is of the future. It is the highest note of Whitman; in him, as in one who seeks and sees much but has not fully found, it widens the sweep of a great pioneer poetry, but is an opening of a new view rather than a living in its accomplished fullness; it is constantly repeated from the earth side in Meredith, comes down from the spiritual side in all A.E.'s work, moves between earth and the life of the worlds behind in Yeats, subtle rhythmic voices of vision and beauty, echoes with a large fullness in Carpenter. The poetry of Tagore owes its sudden and universal success to this advantage that he gives us more of this discovery and fusion for which the mind of our age is in quest than any other creative writer of the time. His work is a constant music of the overpassing of the borders, a chant-filled realm in which the subtle sounds and lights of the truth of the spirit give new meanings to the finer subtleties of life. The objection has been made that this poetry is too subtle, too remote, goes too far away from the broad, near, present and vital actualities of terrestrial existence. Yeats is considered by some a poet of Celtic romance and nothing more, Tagore accused in his own country of an unsubstantial poetic philosophising, a lack of actuality, of reality of touch and force of vital insistence. But this is to mistake the work of this poetry and to mistake too in a great measure the sense of life as it must reveal itself to the greatening mind of humanity now that that mind is growing in world-knowledge and towards self-knowledge. These poets have not indeed done all that has to be done or given the complete poetic synthesis and fusion. Their work has been to create a new and deeper manner of seeing life, to build bridges of visioned light and rhythm between the infinite and eternal and the limited mind and soul and embodied life of man. The future poetry has not to stay in their achievement; it has yet to step from these first fields into new

and yet greater ranges, to fathom all the depths yet unplumbed, to complete what has been left half done or not yet done, to bring all it can of the power of man's greater self and the universal spirit into a broader and even the broadest possible all of life. That cannot and will not be achieved in its fullness at once, but to make a foundation of this new infinite range of poetic vision and creation is work enough to give greatness to a whole age.

(There are no changes in Chapters IV-VII, old Chapters XXVIII-XXXI. Chapter VIII, old Chapter XXXII, the last chapter, has a few changes in the first part of the second paragraph. The affected paragraph is reproduced below.)

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion

The first condition of the complete emergence of this new poetic inspiration and his vaster and deeper significance of poetic speech must be the completion of an as yet only initial spiritualised turn of our general human feeling and intelligence. At present the human mind is occupied in passing the borders of two kingdoms. It is emerging out of a period of active and mostly materialistic intellectualism towards a primary intuitive seeking to which the straining of the intellect after truth has been brought in the very drive of its own impulse by a sort of slipping over unexpected borders. There is therefore an uncertain groping in many directions some of which are only valuable as a transitional effort and, if they could be the end and final movement, might land us only in a brilliant corruption and decadence. There is a vitalistic intuitivism sometimes taking a more subjective, sometimes a more objective form, that lingers amid dubious lights on the border and cannot get through its own rather thick and often violent lustres and colours to a finer and truer spiritual vision. There is an emotional and sensational psychical intuitivism half emerging from and half entangled in the vitalistic motive that has often a strange beauty and brilliance, sometimes stained with morbid hues, sometimes floating in a vague mist, sometimes—and this is a common tendency—strained to an exaggeration or half-vital, half-psychic motive. There is a purer and more delicate psychic intuition with a spiritual issue, that which has been brought by the Irish poets into English literature. The poetry of Whitman and his successors has been that of life, but of life broadened, raised and illumined by a strong intellectual intuition of the self of man and the large soul of humanity. And at the subtlest elevation of all that has yet been reached stands or rather wings and floats in a high intermediate region the poetry of Tagore, not in the complete spiritual light, but amid an air shot with its seekings and glimpses, a sight and cadence found in a psycho-spiritual heaven of subtle and delicate soul experience transmuting the earth tones by the touch of its radiance. The wide success and appeal of his poetry is indeed one of the most significant signs of the tendency

of the mind of the age. At the same time one feels that none of these things are at all the whole of what we are seeking or the definite outcome and issue. That can only be assured when a supreme light of the spirit, a perfect joy and satisfaction of the subtlety and complexity of a finer psychic experience and a wide strength and amplitude of the life-soul sure of the earth and open to the heavens have met, found each other and fused together in the sovereign unity of some great poetic discovery and utterance.

(Concluded)

SRI AUROBINDO

ONLY THE BLIND SHALL SEE

*When you speak, It is silent.
When you are silent, It speaks.*

*Renounce all desires, even the
desire for Nirvana.*

Zen Sayings

THE formless image in the uncarved stone
Seeps through the interstices of our thought.
We only gain what never can be sought,
Grow intimate with that which is Unknown.

These words, self-naughting, yet are living words,
In Stupefaction where all motions cease
The Power and its glory find release.
The skies grow native to the flightless birds.

Knock and the door is slammed upon your face,
Seek and the Prize slips through the clutching fingers;
But close your eyes and lo! the Presence lingers,
Step back and find yourself in Its embrace.

Truth whispers to the hearts that still their fires;
One word—and in the tumult It expires.

J. N. CHUBB

OVERHEAD POETRY

SOME UNPUBLISHED ANSWERS BY SRI AUROBINDO TO NIRODBARAN

Q: You said¹ that to write overhead poetry in a rush, one must 'be very, very'—and left the sentence unfinished. Is it 'very, very Sri Aurobindo-like'?

A: But I am not aware that I write overhead poetry with a rush.

Q: Everybody is aspiring to write from the overhead plane, so why not I? Possible?

A: Maybe.

Q: If one can write all from the highest overmind plane and supermind plane—as you have done in Savitri—is it evidently going to be greater poetry than any other poetry?

A: Nobody ever spoke of supermind plane poetry.

Is *Savitri* all from overhead plane? I don't know.

Obviously if properly done it would have a deeper and rarer substance, but would not be necessarily greater in poetic excellence.

Q: You say that for overhead poetry technique, it must be the right word and no other in the right place, right sounds and no others in a design of sound that cannot be changed even a little. Well, is that not what is called sheer inevitability which is the sole criterion of the highest poetry?

A: Yes but mental and vital poetry can be inevitable also. Only in O.P there must be a rightness throughout which is not the case elsewhere—for without this inevitability it is no longer fully O.P, while without this sustained inevitability there can be fine mental and vital poetry. But practically that means O.P comes usually by bits only, not in a mass.

Q: You may say that in overhead poetry expression of spiritual vision is more important. True, but why can't it be clothed in as fine poetry as in the case of Shakespeare?

A: It can, but it is more difficult to get. It can be as fine poetry as Shakespeare's if there is the equal genius, but it need not by the fact of being O.P become finer.

Q: Your Bird of Fire, which I take as overhead poetry, is full of excellent poetry.

¹ In the correspondence dated 9.5.1937.

A: Is it? Nobody said that O.P could not be excellent poetry.

Q: If one could write like that, is there not going to be a greater creation in all respects?

A: Maybe; it has to be seen.

Q: Does all spiritual poetry come from overhead planes?

A: No, it may come from the spiritualised mind or vital.

Q: I don't see really why overhead poetry will only excel in expressing spiritual things and not also excel in a superior form than the lower plane poetry.

A: It may perhaps if the flood gates are fully opened.

Q: Can you enlighten me on your overhead and underhead poetry?

A: In what way?

*

Q: About a poem you said that the original inspiration was intuitive but the expression became rather mentalised. Can you say how it happens?

A: This mentalisation is a subtle process which takes place unobserved. The inspiration as soon as it strikes the mental layer (where it first becomes visible) is met by a less intense receptivity of the mind which passes the inspired substance through but substitutes its own expression stressed by the force of inspiration into a special felicity but not reproducing or transmitting the inspired text itself.

6.4.1938

AT THE FEET OF THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO

RECOLLECTION BY SAHANA

(Continued from the issue of April 24, 1981)

3

I HAD a bent towards meditation. I was not attracted by the gospel of work nor did I understand its place or need in Sadhana. But gradually the necessity of work made itself felt and I came to see that the radical change and transformation of Nature which was the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's primary aim could not be achieved except through work. What I found on my arrival was that everyone was busy with his appointed work. I too took my plunge and the spiritual result, I perceived, was no less from work than from meditation. Of course the work had to be the Gita's dedicated work. As I proceeded with quite an inner joy, a trouble surfaced. It brought a mood of meditation which interrupted the course of the work and I could not but meditate. Not only so, I dived so deep inside that the work was forgotten. But that was not a true attitude, I felt. So I wrote to the Mother to clear my doubt. She wrote: "...when you are at work, it is always better to remain fully aware of your body and its action. With my love and blessings".

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo say that all depends on the attitude. I understood my mistake. Afterwards they made me feel in various ways what is the attitude with which I should do work. Even while working, every moment should be an act of worship, a meditation on the Mother, and from it will come knowledge — fine, flawless, well-organised and desirable work dedicated to the Mother should be our sadhana of self-offering. This was the object of work.

I remember an instance. I had brought a sewing machine with me; whatever little sewing-work was done I did on it. The Mother wanted occasionally the machine to be used for some special work. I had a mental fear that perhaps I would be asked to take charge of sewing in the Ashram. And that was what actually happened. A new department to deal with the dress of women-disciples was opened and I was given charge of it. What a joke! I knew nothing of cutting, measuring, etc. I somehow had managed to get through odd jobs at home and that too purely for fun. When now the work had seriously fallen upon me, I began to ponder how to do it. Well, in spite of my lack of skill, the work proceeded smoothly. A few young sadhikas joined the department. As the work began to multiply so did the workers. And not only did I find a *rasa* (joy) in it, but I also developed gradually an attraction to it. When the work I did not fancy came from the Mother herself, it changed its aspect. Now it was no longer a question of like or dislike and it grew into a thing after my own heart.

Since 1931 I had quite often written letters to Sri Aurobindo. The correspon-

dence started from 1930 and became regular from 1932 till 1938, the year of his accident. I expressed in these letters in detail all about my inner condition and movement of Sadhana, since he wanted it so. He wrote, "It is absolutely necessary to write everything freely and write daily." So everything good and bad had to be written. The mind was not always willing to do so, it looked for many pretexts and means by which it could avoid telling the whole truth and let him know just what was convenient to me: in short, only a partial truth. I wondered at the way the mind played no end of tricks and ruses with itself in my being. The letters were addressed to the Mother in both Bengali and English. But it was Sri Aurobindo who replied to them in English. Very rarely he wrote a few lines in Bengali. Most interesting it was to observe that, though the mind was reluctant to write, yet when I finished, whatever I had to write had come through, nothing was kept back. It was as if someone had propelled me from behind. One day, I was extremely unwilling to write and I knew that I should not encourage this reluctance, still I simply wrote: "Today I feel no inclination to write." Sri Aurobindo sent back not a word in reply except simply three big signs of exclamation (! ! !) in the margin of my letter. I did not know what to make of it—to laugh or to weep. Another amusing incident: I had a strong desire to eat one or two things—it was uncontrollable. The mind was actively working as to how to satisfy the desire. Finally I wrote: "Mother, today I am feeling somewhat greedy. Do you know what it is about? Eggs, lobster and tin-sardine. Terribly greedy, Mother. Either remove this desire or give me permission to eat and protection at the same time." Next day, the reply came from Sri Aurobindo:

"Certainly not! You can eat up your desire—that is the only fish or flesh that can be given to you! It is simply an old samskara rising from the subconscious—these things have never to be indulged, they rise in order to be dismissed."

Satire, enlivened with laughter! But, strangely enough, I noticed that just after writing my letter, my desire had vanished and in its place reigned a pure joy and contentment. I got the first taste of joy that comes when one abstains from indulging a desire. I had read somewhere some lines written by Nolini to the same effect. They now glowed intensely in my mind: "When you grant me a vital desire I am not pleased, your granting shows that the vital is still unprepared to forgo its food. But when you withhold from me an earthly satisfaction, a secret ease and joy flow into me, by this sign I feel I am ready for the Delight that is yours."

While writing to Sri Aurobindo, I felt very often that I could not express myself precisely in English. I would then use Bengali terms at places and ask him their English equivalents. Sri Aurobindo would put their English renderings on the top of the Bengali expressions. I give here some tokens of his exquisite translations—rather to demonstrate his love and grace flowing through these translations.

I wrote: "Let me grow into the true consciousness and the veil of darkness that still keeps you separate from me drop down and with your light let my temple become..." Then I continued in Bengali which Sri Aurobindo translated thus: "a-gleam with light and radiant and may the downpour of the rays of the Light

remove all veil of division in me and may I find you within me in your self-revelation.”

Another of Sri Aurobindo's English translations: “I feel now the inexpressible sweetness of that which is beyond description forming between you and me. It is such a satisfying experience.”

I wrote the following in English: except for the words which Sri Aurobindo translated by “hushed and solitary” and after which he continued with a further expression: “Today also I cherish the same feeling within myself. I am feeling as quiet inwardly as if the main gate of a passage which was always busy with a crowd of all sorts of demands and cravings, etc, is closed, or the passage has become hushed and solitary without the excited crowd, that is to say the footsteps of the crowd are heard no more.”

At one time the Mother climbed daily to the terrace and spent some time there. I wrote to her one day's incident :

“Recently I notice that before you go down from the terrace in the evenings you stand for a longer time and I feel just at the time that you give us something especially, so I also concentrate to receive and feel what you give, but this evening suddenly I saw your physical body had disappeared, there was no sign of it! Then again in a few seconds your figure reappeared.” The last portion of my letter was in Bengali. It began with “I felt at that moment...” Sri Aurobindo translated the rest: “You mixed with the sky (ether) and became one with all things.”

Appropos of a letter of mine on 28.8.1932, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

“The Mother makes an invocation or aspiration and stands till the movement is over. Yesterday she passed for some time beyond the sense of body and it is perhaps this that made you see in that way.”

When there were mistakes in English in my letters Sri Aurobindo used to correct them on my own insistence. Though he was so short of time, he yet did it without the least murmur of annoyance or unwillingness. In an unstinted measure he poured his grace. Now I cannot but repent for the unnecessary trouble people like me gave him just to get some selfish satisfaction.

In September 1930 my eldest sister Amiya came from Burma to visit the Ashram with her two sons Bula and Kunal. A house was hired for them for three months on the sea-shore. I recollect the Mother's going to see the house, walking by the sea-shore from Dilip's house. We were with her. When my other elder sister arrived, the Mother went there twice at their request. After three months, when she heard that they had to go back she said: “It is a pity that they are going.”

When the date for their departure was fixed, the Mother went one day to their house and, standing before a window, looked for a while towards the sea and said, “It is better not to be on the sea now.”

Amiya was in a fix. Then the Mother herself asked her to go back after 18th January, but on learning that their house's three months' lease was at an end, she arranged to shift them to an Ashram house. Amiya shared my room. I was then living

on the first floor of what is at the present 'Huta House'. Bula and Kunal were kept upstairs in the 'Guest House' (now called 'Dortoir').

I remember what a terribly stormy sea (in fact, due to a cyclone) it was on the day when, according to the previous decision, they should have been on the sea! And the Mother's prevision! It was a frightful experience: trees were crashing, houses were tumbling down, their roofs blown away, doors and windows flung open by the blast and we were struggling in vain to shut them. What a calamity! I had not seen such a wild storm before. When it stopped Nolini and Amrita came to Amiya's house on the sea-side (they were still there), wrapped up in blankets. I was at Dilip's house when the storm threatened. I had just come out into the street to reach home in time and was caught as I tried to advance, the fury of the air-currents swept and hurled me back towards the sea as if my body was a piece of straw. I narrowly escaped a watery grave. As I reached home, I felt I had passed through a crisis. Later on, we heard that during that fierce upheaval Sri Aurobindo's windows were all open and he was absorbed in doing his own work. Not a drop of rain had come inside!

Amiya and her children returned to Burma after receiving the Mother's blessings on 18th January, as had been suggested by her. They came back the next January along with my second sister Nolina. This time too the Mother accommodated them in an Ashram-rented house (next to our press) called "Budi House" by the sea-side. In April my third sister Aruna came with her sons Ashok and Deval and was put up in the same house. After a few months all of them were transferred to another rented house very near the Ashram, which is now the Jhunjhun Boarding. A very remarkable feature of this time was the occasional visits of Nolini and Amrita at the special request of my sisters. We used to hear from them stories of the early Ashram life, about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and about themselves, where they had stayed at first, how they had come to the Ashram and what relation was theirs with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and many anecdotes and humorous incidents.

It was Nolini who first told us about Sri Aurobindo's departure from the Ganges' ferry at Calcutta for Chandannagore. How we laughed when he narrated the story of how the pigtail of Amrita who was a Brahmin's son had been sheared off. Then the incident of the mischief caused by evil spirits in the Guest House (where Sri Aurobindo lived). Some stones were thrown into the courtyard, they fell even inside the rooms though all doors and windows were shut. So sensational were these stories that we listened with almost bated breath. At times Nolini would talk about the fiery old days—the historical event in the Muraripukur house, the search by the Police, the trial-episode in the court, the famous revolver episode, the assassination of the approver Noren Goswami in the jail, the jail-life in Sri Aurobindo's company and many stories connected with it. All these were new to us and we heard them as if they were extracts from a novel.

Another small incident is still fresh in my mind. I was sitting in my room: someone came and delivered an envelope. It was a tiny letter of a few lines from the Mother. Though small, the letter contained a treasure which could not be measured by any

human standard. I was lost in wonder: to think that amidst her thousand occupations she could remember my sister's children and find time to send a letter though they had come only for a temporary stay. She wrote:

“Sahana,

Pavitra is taking out the car this afternoon. I thought that Aruna and her two children might like to go for a drive. It seems to me that Kunal can go also; he is quite strong enough now for the drive to do him good.

Will you inform them that Pavitra will be at their house with the car at 4.30?”
(21.5.1932)

How happy the children were and the sisters were almost in tears. They had tasted a joy which was divine!

When I had arrived at the Ashram I had seen the Mother giving the New-Year blessings at midnight. It was a unique experience to go and see her during that hour. The quiet, still and meditative night created the same inner mood in us and our little human form would get merged in the limitless expanse of the living darkness. The Infinite, the Eternal would become a more and more vivid contact. In due time we climbed up the steps very slowly and softly, aware of the new birth the Mother would confer on us at our auspicious meeting. On the last step, as we turned to the right, the Mother's figure came into view sitting upright in a chair. Only the profile of her face could be seen in the light of the single dim reddish lamp and we felt as if we had stepped into a dream-world. The intense silence of the night had become more intense there and the Mother's face shone like the first glimmering of dawn. Words fail to express the extraordinary impression our souls received from the divine beauty of that inscrutable face and, when after receiving her blessings, we would get up, her victorious smile would fill our hearts with a joy beyond any comparison. Some fruit like an orange or a piece of chocolate she would put into our hands. Whatever she gave carried with it an inner means for going forward, and a touch that broke the spell of ignorance. Her look, her smile, her touch—everything brought to us our souls' nourishment. For three years we were blest with this New-Year gift.

Then in 1931 she fell ill, after which she started giving the New-Year blessing in another way. That was also a unique experience and it evokes a thrill in our being in the very cells even when we think of it. We used to gather before Nolini's courtyard at midnight to receive the Mother's blessings, all of us in a meditative mood which was then quite usual. We had gone deep within when suddenly the sound of her organ-music pealed through the dark night and reached us like a burst of sparkling light, awaking all senses. Along with it, came floating her own song. Words are mute before the enchanting spell created by her wonderful voice and its power. One felt as if the full-throated solemn voice was rising from a deep bass and its vibration carried aloft our consciousness somewhere and drew out the inner being to the

surface. Nothing can express the strange ecstasy of that experience. When the song and music had stopped, we went to her one by one and returned with her blessings and some fruits or sweets. We saw her sitting in the same way as before in the dim light, keeping open the gates of another world.

We heard her sing once or twice, but several times her organ-music. Whoever heard this music played at night knows what it is. We used to wait on tiptoe for that night. She never played from music-books or other composers' pieces. She used to sit with closed eyes before the organ and played whatever came through. Nobody would believe that it was her own improvisation and not a copy from other musicians. There was never the slightest flaw in the harmony. After 1938, the year of Sri Aurobindo's accident, she used to play in Pavitra's room and the night-ceremony had stopped, for what reason I don't remember now except that at 6 a.m. she would stand in the small passage at the top of the main staircase and many of us would go to see her. She wished us "Bonne année" in French and we repeated the same in reply. She gave us some green leaves called 'New Birth' by way of blessings. This 'New Birth' and special blessings were also given by her on 24th December, for Christmas Day.

(To be continued)

(Translated by Nirodbaran from the Bengali)

OMNIPRESENT

THY Energy works as fire in the core of things,
 Thy Knowledge kindles as light in seeking minds,
 Thy Devotion blooms as flower in yearning hearts,
 Thy Love emerges as smile on the lips of the beloved,
 Thy Breath blows as life in mortal frames,
 Thy Ecstasy extends in all directions
 And Thou art OMNIPRESENT.
 Still Thou art beyond our material grasp.
 O sweet Lover, if Thou chooseth not to assume yet
 The beatific body of Thy integral splendour,
 At least grant that we may keep Thy Image
 Ever alive within us....

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Mother India is proud to announce that *The Story of a Soul* by Huta will be serialised in its pages from the Special Issue of 15 August this year.

The Story of a Soul was written with the approval and blessings of the Divine Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The very title was suggested by her and she has given a message about the book:

“This is the interesting Story of how a being discovers the Divine Life.”

Nolini Kanta Gupta went through the script and spontaneously wrote of it:

“It is a beautiful book well-written, elevating, illuminating, inspiring. To read the book is to come close to the Mother—into her arms.”

On receiving these words Huta asked Nolini if she could use them as an introduction. He said she certainly could if the Mother consented. The Mother gave her consent.

Naturally, the most valuable part of the contents is all that has come from the hand of the Mother herself. First, there are her letters, most of them unpublished; then her sketches and the reports of her talks, corrected by her wherever necessary. She dealt mainly with spirituality and art but also, in fair measure, with various other subjects related to several spheres of life.

The book contains, too, extracts from the author’s spiritual diaries, frankly expressing weaknesses and difficulties no less than aspirations and visions and inner experiences. The reader can see how the Mother shapes and develops our consciousness by means both open and occult, sweet and severe.

From the way one soul has been guided, all can learn and be benefited on the long universal road towards the Divine Light, Life and Love.

SRI AUROBINDO IN POLITICS

HIGH NOON OF HINDU NATIONALISM

(We are glad to publish this short-perceptive paper by Dr. Paul Mundschenk, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Western Illinois University, Macomb, Illinois, 61455, U.S.A.)

SRI Aurobindo's political career is usually treated as an episode in his spiritual evolution, as a stepping-stone to greater achievements in yoga and philosophy. Nonetheless, while he was involved in the Indian Independence Movement during the first decade of this century, he was totally committed to working for the achievement of an entirely new political structure in India based upon the ideals of democracy, freedom, and social equality. This commitment was made manifest in a series of editorials and speeches embodying his views which are themselves worthy of our examination, independent of his later writings. It is our purpose here to take a look at Sri Aurobindo's particular vision of an independent Indian nation and to contrast it to other forms of nationalism current during the same period and afterward.

The most obvious obstacle to the realization of a free and just Indian society in Sri Aurobindo's mind was the presence of the English as rulers over the Indian people. It was clear to him that nothing could be accomplished until the British Raj was eliminated, one way or another. This common antipathy to foreign rule united many Indians in the Independence Movement, yet their individual motivations and conceptions of a free India were widely divergent. Because Sri Aurobindo's ideals for India came to be based upon his embodiment and expression of the Hindu religious tradition, the aggregate of these ideals may be called Hindu nationalism. He was not alone in accepting Hinduism as the basis for the new Indian nation, yet his writings and speeches during his politically active period expressed this concept with unusual eloquence, and it is for this reason we see his participation as marking the high noon of Hindu nationalism.

There were two other broad schools of nationalist thought that paralleled his in time. ~~First, there was the retrograde, xenophobic nationalism based upon antiquated tradition, and second, there was the liberal humanistic nationalism of those Western-educated Indians who favored an independent India modeled on British constitutionalism.~~ Sri Aurobindo had more in common with the latter group than with the former; their differences were more in degree than in kind, although on some points they were far apart—particularly in regard to the precedence of political independence over social reform. On this point, Sri Aurobindo was adamant, for his feelings against British imperial rule dominated his concern for all the other issues of the Indian social/political scene. To understand the overriding strength of Sri Aurobindo's feelings against the Raj, a brief look at his background experiences is in order.

The Development of Sri Aurobindo's Nationalism

The foundation of Sri Aurobindo's feelings can be traced back to his school days in England. When he was only eleven years old, his father began to send him articles from a Calcutta newspaper in which stories of British mistreatment of Indians were underlined. Letters from his father also complained about conditions in India under British rule. These articles and letters contained virtually all the information Sri Aurobindo had in regard to his homeland, for his father had taken him to England when he was only seven, and had given strict instructions to his guardian that he should learn nothing more than he already knew about the Indian way of life, nor should he be allowed to associate with other Indians. It is no wonder, then, that Sri Aurobindo's earliest thoughts about India can best be characterized as revolutionary fantasies. Writing about himself in the third person, as was occasionally his custom he said that at that time "he had already received a strong impression that a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary changes was coming in the world and he himself was destined to play a part in it. His attention was now drawn to India and this feeling was soon canalized into the idea of the liberation of his own country."¹

While at St. Paul's School in London, and later at King's College, Cambridge, Sri Aurobindo's negative feelings toward British paramountcy in India continued to grow. An organization of Indian students at Cambridge called "Indian Majlis" provided a forum for him to express these feelings, for during some of their meetings he is said to have delivered fiery speeches in support of revolution in India. Later on, a few like-minded fellows joined him in forming a secret society they called the "Lotus and Dagger." Each member vowed to engage in direct action toward the expulsion of the English from Indian soil, but none except Sri Aurobindo kept the vow. The organization itself never got beyond its first meeting.

While his participation in the "Indian Majlis" and "Lotus and Dagger" allowed him to express his dislike of the British in India, his candidacy for the Indian Civil Service (I.C.S.) brought him into contact with people who reinforced his antagonism. At that time, the zeal amongst Englishmen to effect humanitarian reform in India had waned considerably, which meant that there were those who were attracted to the I.C.S. for reasons of personal gain or, at best, a dedicated paternalism. In any case, Sri Aurobindo characterized them generally as Philistines, and resented their being sent to India in positions of authority. When he departed from England in early 1893, he carried with him an intense dislike of the Englishmen who ruled his native land. On the other hand, he was not opposed to the ideals that formed the basis of English constitutionalism—*i.e.*, the ideals that made English society function as it did. If he thought the English somewhat materialistic, he admired their vitality, their sense of fairness and equality amongst themselves, their efficiency, and their literary tradition and heritage. It was not the West or Western ways in general that offended him, but the fact of imperialism, especially the fact that Imperial England controlled

his homeland. He went home the product of a Western education, and he accepted the ideals of democracy and social equality. He never lost those ideals, but instead he sought to reinterpret and integrate them into a society which was also to be based upon the highest spiritual principles of Hinduism. Years after he left the political arena, he devoted himself to what he called Integral Yoga. In politics, as well, his thought was syncretic, and we would do well to speak of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Political Thought. We now turn to the essence of that thought.

The Political Vision

Sri Aurobindo's political views were first published in the English language section of a bilingual Bombay newspaper, the *Indu Prakash*. He wrote a series of eleven articles under the heading "New Lamps for Old" which appeared between August 7, 1893, and March 6, 1894. The articles were written in a resplendent style which reflected his command of the English language and his polemical skill, but the mood and message expressed an acrid denunciation of English rule. He described the men of the Raj as "types of the middle class or Philistines, with the narrow hearts and commercial habit of mind peculiar to that sort of people."² He therefore could countenance no cooperation with them, and he sharply criticized the leaders of the Indian National Congress who sought to improve India through petition to the British government.³

After the publication of the "New Lamps for Old" series, Sri Aurobindo was outwardly silent for over a decade. During this period, he was employed in the service of the Maharaja of Baroda, one of the more progressive Princely States. He moved up to a position on the faculty of Baroda College in 1899, and he was made Vice Principal in 1904. He spent much of his free time in reading and study, gaining a first-hand acquaintance with the traditions of India, yet it is a mistake to conclude that he strongly identified himself with the literal content of those traditions. His self-identity as an Indian *per se* was unshakable, but he accepted little if any of the immense corpus of legalities that regulate and define traditional Hindu society. For example, he was married in 1901 to Mrinalini Bose, a fourteen-year-old girl whose family was associated with the Brahmo Samaj. The marriage was performed according to Hindu rites, but when Sri Aurobindo flatly refused to go through the *Prayaschitta* ceremony (purificatory rites for having crossed the ocean) or to shave his head, "an obliging Brahmin priest satisfied the requirements of the *Shashtra* for a monetary consideration."⁴ Sri Aurobindo was not interested in religious legalism, but he was greatly attracted to philosophical Hinduism and to the mystical aspects of the Hindu tradition. Thus, when he became involved with the Hindu religion, it touched him at the innermost of his spiritual being. The result was a re-entry into active politics with greatly expanded vision and with ideals that drove him to work *for* India as a spiritual entity, as a manifestation of the Divine Mother, rather than simply *against* the British Raj.

The element of spiritual conviction was combined with Sri Aurobindo's modern views on what a democratic society should be like to yield his unique brand of Hindu Nationalism. To a large degree, his plan to expel the British by force was little altered. His spiritual exercises, begun in 1904, did not lead him to adopt non-violence as an article of Truth as Gandhi did later on. In fact, they had just the reverse effect, for he saw the need for increased physical strength and activity in India's struggle to be free. Years later, again writing of himself in the third person, he said:

In some quarters there is the idea that Sri Aurobindo's political standpoint was entirely pacifist, that he was opposed in principle and in practice to all violence and that he denounced terrorism, insurrection, etc., as entirely forbidden by the spirit and letter of the Hindu religion. It is even suggested that he was a forerunner of the gospel of Ahimsa. This is quite incorrect. Sri Aurobindo is neither an impotent moralist nor a weak pacifist.⁵

His use of "impotent" and "weak" in this context reflects the contempt he felt for non-violence as a principle. In fact, his concept of the proper course of revolution bore very little resemblance to what Gandhi's non-violent non-cooperation movement would later become. Sri Aurobindo described his own vision of the ideal procedure as follows:

The idea was to establish revolutionary propaganda and recruiting throughout Bengal.... Young men were to be trained in activities which might be helpful for ultimate military action.... Sympathy and support and financial and other assistance were to be obtained from the older men.⁶

Sri Aurobindo conceived the outlines of this program sometime in 1901, and they remained essentially unaltered until his imprisonment in 1908.

The effect of his plunge into yoga during his period of political activity was twofold. First, it provided him with renewed motivation to work for India's independence, for his religious experiences convinced him that India was destined to become the symbol of national spiritual sovereignty for all the world to see and to follow. The second factor was a direct outcome of the first: because India had to be free in order to realize her spiritual destiny, the Independence Movement itself was in the hands of the Divine. These convictions then became pre-eminent in determining the form and character of many of his plans for the independence struggle. In early 1905, he described in a document entitled *Bhawani Mandir* ("Temple of Bhawani") the kind of training and mentality revolutionary workers should have. Here, the essence of spiritual work and political work are united in a comprehensive vision of what needed to be done. Acknowledging India's own responsibility for her subjection to alien rule, he outlined a specific program designed to restore India's dormant capacity for self-rule, to reawaken her latent power. Using the language of

indigenous tradition, he gave a vivid account of the then-current situation:

A temple is to be erected and consecrated to Bhawani, the Mother, among the hills.... Bhawani is the Infinite Energy, She is Durga, She is Radha the Beloved, She is Lakshmi, She is our Mother and the Creatrix of us all. In the present age, the Mother is manifested as the Mother of Strength. She is pure Shakti.

Everywhere the Mother is at work; from Her mighty and shaping hands enormous forms of Rakshasas, Asuras, Devas are leaping forth in the arena of the world.; But in India the breath moves slowly. India, the ancient Mother, is indeed striving to be reborn, but she strives in vain. We have abandoned Shakti and are therefore abandoned by Shakti. The Mother is not in our hearts, in our brains, in our arms.⁷

The thing most needful, then, was to tap that inert well of strength and to make it permeate every corner of the life of the Indian polity:

✓ ...the one thing wanting, which we must strive to acquire before all others, is strength—strength physical, strength mental, strength moral, but above all strength spiritual which is the one inexhaustible and imperishable source of all the others.⁸

Lest the reader of his words drift to thoughts of ordinary revolutionary objectives, Sri Aurobindo then reinforced the image of India's spiritual essence which all revolutionaries were to strive to make manifest:

India cannot perish because among all the divisions of mankind it is to India that is reserved the highest and most splendid destiny. It is she who must send forth from herself the future religion of the entire world, the Eternal religion which is...to make mankind one soul.⁹

The goal clearly in mind, Sri Aurobindo brought his readers back to the immediate task at hand, to the appropriate specific manner of proceeding:

But if it is strength we desire, how shall we gain it if we do not adore the Mother of Strength? She demands worship not for her own sake, but in order that she may help us and give herself to us. This is no fantastic idea, no superstition but the ordinary law of the universe.

We will therefore build a temple to the White Bhawani, the Mother of Strength, the Mother of India.... We will have a new order of Karma Yogins attached to the temple, men who have renounced all to work for the Mother

.... These, having the fire of Bhawani in their hearts and brains, will go forth and carry the flame to every nook and cranny of our land.¹⁰

(To be continued)

PAUL MUNDSCHENK

NOTES

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (Pondicherry. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1953), p. 13.

² Aurobindo Ghose, "New Lamps for Old, II," *Indu Prakash*, August 21, 1893. In Haridas Mukherjee, and Uma Mukherjee, *Sri Aurobindo's Political Thought* (Calcutta Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1958), p. 72.

³ Those Indians who favored change by constitutional means in co-operation with the British government were later called Moderate Nationalists or just Moderates. They were by and large educated middle class Hindus and Muslims who were attracted to Western ideals and who sought the establishment of a democratic society in India and based on the English constitutional model. The gulf between them and Sri Aurobindo centered on their attitude toward the continued British presence. The Moderate leader, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, founded the "Servants of India Society" in 1905 in order to facilitate the general betterment of the country. One statement in the Charter of the Society presents a clear summary of the Moderate attitude. Gokhale wrote of the Society that "Its members frankly accept the British connection, as ordained, in the inscrutable dispensation of Providence, for India's good. Self-government on the lines of English colonies is their goal." See "Charter to the Servants of India Society" in G. K. Gokhale, *Speeches of the Honorable Mr. G. K. Gokhale* (Madras Natesan, 1908), Appendix, p. 182.

⁴ A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* (Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1958), p. 60.

⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, vol. 26 of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (30 vols, Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1972), p. 22.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 23.

⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Bhawani Mandir*, in A. B. Purani, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 80, 83.

LACK

We seek for what we lack.
The emptiness environs.
The minutes close like irons
And we cannot turn back.

We seek, but what we seek
We do not know or care,
Rushing from here to there
Flushed, feverish and weak.

We seek love, we believe,
But will not pay his price,
Refuse to sacrifice
And so do not receive.

Instead we try to take—
To rotate everyone
Around ourselves as sun—
Making them bend or break,

But do not have the force,
And only make our life
A field of constant strife;
Letting it run its course,

Content if little joys
Can be enjoyed sometimes,
Like unexpected rhymes,
Till dissonance destroys
Our little stanzaed track
And leaves us with our lack.

PETER HEEHS

LONELINESS

WHAT appeared as Siren turned out to be a Goddess. The first total experience when I was smothered in Your embrace of loneliness brought me the perception of You as my all.

Increasing contact, fleeting icy kisses, sips of rare fiery wine, and soon initial aversion turned into friendship. Recurrent familiarity with loneliness continued as it changed its dress from a gaudy one, studded with jewels of agony, to that of silk and feathery twill—and fondness grew.

Lonely when by myself, I graduated to feel alone in a crowd. Alone because alien—the alienness increased as, surrounded by the undivine and teased by spicy undelight, something within rebelled and desired ascent. You pulled me up, slowly, out of the quagmire of life—life as lived by the minions amongst whom I was born. The downward pull of sweet sickly mud was resisted by growing aspiration. Out of that tussle—like ‘Parijat’ coming out of the churning ocean, frail though strong in its purity of colour, beauty and delicate heavenly scent—arose loneliness in all its splendour.

Its protective enfoldment was burning anguish at first—my skin having been used to the coarse mush and mud. Being alone with myself has cleansed the mud from the navel above, as, holding the thongs of aspiration, You pull me up. Now I can see Your face, smell Your scent, perceive Your beauty, soak my clean heart in Your love and let my will partake of Your power. My feet still struggle now and then to go deeper, but then leave the struggle to my delivered heart, knowing that what looked before like wisps of cloud high above are the solid firmament of Your love and what felt like firm ground below is the quicksand of nescience.

Thank you, loneliness, lead me to Your perpetual intimacy.

DINKAR

THE HISTORICITY OF CHRIST

A LETTER OF JANUARY 6, 1981

Today is Epiphany Day on which, according to the New-Testament legend, the Magi, the Wise Men of the East—perhaps “Parsis” like me, since “Magi” originally meant Persian highpriests—brought gifts to the infant Jesus. The occasion is appropriate for me to reply to your many-faceted letter, expressing doubt about the historicity of Christ.

I am surprised that my article in the *Mother India* of last December—“Augustus Caesar and the Birth of Jesus”—has revived your scepticism. It accepts the historicity of Christ as much as that of Augustus Caesar. And it would not have done so if Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had anywhere been uncertain. In that very issue you will find on the opening page the Mother’s sentence: “Jesus is one of the many forms which the Divine has assumed to enter into relationship with the earth.”

In *Mother India*’s issue of December 1977 (p. 842) I have collected some words of the Mother to make a feature, “What Christ was and taught”, from which I may quote a few points. “When Christ came upon earth, he brought a message of brotherhood...”—“I heard Sri Aurobindo himself say that Christ was an emanation of the Lord’s aspect of love.”—“...the death of Christ was the starting-point of a new stage in the evolution of human civilisation. That is why Sri Aurobindo tells us that the death of Christ was of greater historical consequences than the death of [Julius] Caesar. The story of Christ, as it has been told, is the concrete and dramatic enactment of the divine sacrifice: the Supreme Lord, who is All-Light, All-Knowledge, All-Power, All-Beauty, All-Love, All-Bliss, accepting to assume human ignorance and suffering in matter, in order to help men to emerge from the falsehood in which they live and because of which they die.”

What you quote about Vivekananda’s dream during his voyage back from America to India is not determinative. According to you, a man appeared to him one night mentioning Crete as the land where Christianity had begun and going on to say: “I am one of the Therapeutae who used to live here. The truths and ideals preached by us have been given out by the Christians as having been taught by Jesus; but, for the matter of that, there was no such personality of the name of Jesus ever born. Various evidences testifying to this fact will be brought to light by excavating here.” You say that Vivekananda woke up, rushed to the deck and asked the captain their whereabouts just then. The answer was: “Fifty miles off Crete.” I may comment that the writers of Vivekananda’s biography record: “Whatever doubts the Swami may have had on the matter, the dream did not make him yield a whit in his love and adoration of the Son of Mary.”¹ How could it when the dream went against the experience of his master

¹ *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western Disciples (Advaita Ashram, Almora, 1949), p. 458.

Ramakrishna? Once Ramakrishna had a most vivid vision of Jesus, a figure of great beauty and holiness who embraced him and disappeared into his body, causing an ecstatic trance. Later he asked his disciples what the Bible had to say about the physical features of Jesus. They replied: "Sir, we have not seen it written in the Bible anywhere; but born a Jew, he must have been very fair in complexion with long eyes and aquiline nose to be sure." Ramakrishna answered: "But I saw that the tip of his nose was a little flat; I don't know why I saw him like that."¹ If we have trust in so great a Yogi as Ramakrishna, we cannot ever be sceptical about Jesus' historicity. That small unusual touch about the nose seems to render the vision all the more authentic.

I may add that the mention of Crete in Vivekananda's dream is rather odd. The Therapeutae are historically known to have been a religious group of Jews akin to the Qumran Essenes. The authoritative account of them in ancient times is *The Contemplative Life* (I.2, cp. II.10-11) by the famous Philo of Alexandria (a contemporary of Christ). He locates them not in Crete but in Egypt. However, there is some truth in another part of the dream-man's declaration to Vivekananda. A later authority on the Therapeutae is the Church historian Eusebius (third and fourth century). His *Ecclesiastical History* (II.xvii, 3-23) shows how struck he was by the likeness of the Therapeutae to Christian monks of his own day. He even thought they might have been Christians and that their founders' writings to which Philo had referred might be the Epistles and Gospels of the New Testament.

The Telugu book to which you refer was obviously penned by someone who was very much of an ignoramus. In contradiction of his statements as numerically tabulated by you, let me make the following points:

(1) The author says that the Roman Governor who ordered the crucifixion of Christ sent no report of the same to his superiors. If this is true, how is it that Tacitus, the Roman historian who wrote his famous *Annals* in about 115-120 A.D., deals with Nero's persecution of the Christians in 64 thus: "Christ, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate; and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular" (XV, 44)?

(2) Your author asserts: "No historian of the time made any mention of the phenomenon of Christ, except in one case where there is a line about Christ, which line is a clear interpolation." The only first-century historian whose works are in our hands is the Jew Josephus. He has left two books: *The Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities*. The former recounts Jewish history from 170 B.C. to A.D. 73, the latter extends from the creation of the world to A.D. 66. *The Jewish War* has nothing to say on our subject. *Jewish Antiquities* has two passages. One in Book XVIII, 6, 4 is a long

¹ *Sri Ramakrishna ihe Great Master* by Swami Saradananda, translated by Swami Jagadananda (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, 1956), p 296.

paragraph in the section concerned with the procuratorship of Pilate. It is highly favourable to Jesus and his followers. But we first meet it in a quotation by Eusebius who flourished in the fourth century, whereas Origen who wrote in the third century refers to Josephus as "not believing in Jesus as the Christ". This shows that the paragraph was not in his copy and was clearly an interpolated forgery made after his time. However, there is in *Antiquities* (XX, 9, 1) another reference. Here Josephus, relating the events of A.D. 62, says that the high priest Ananus or Ananias caused "the brother of Jesus who was called Christ, James by name, and some others" to be stoned as breakers of the law. If, as seems certain, Book XVIII did carry an account of Jesus, an originally hostile one which was later displaced, the mention in Book XX which is merely factual is very likely to be genuine. So a historian of the period can be taken to have mentioned "the phenomenon of Christ".

(3) We are told by your author: "When Christ was crucified, it is said, it became all dark for a number of hours. Such a natural calamity was nowhere noted by any scientist". A hypothesis has been put forward by the scholars Robert Eisler (*The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*, pp. 297-99) and Maurice Goguel (*Life of Jesus*, pp. 91-93, 185, 540) on the strength of a quotation made by the ninth-century Byzantine chronicler, George Syncellus, from a third-century Christian historian Julius Africanus, that the darkness at the crucifixion was due to an eclipse of the sun: Syncellus alludes to a possibly first-century historian named Thallus for the report. But this Thallus is a very elusive and uncertain quantity. A Thallus seems to be mentioned by Josephus as a money-lender to Herod Agrippa in A.D. 35: there is not even a hint that this financier was also a historian. So it is dangerous to build upon him. And there is no need to do so. For, the Gospels contain, as is now admitted by all scholars, a lot of fiction or else symbolic matter. But this does not make the whole of them false. History and myth are combined in them. The trial and crucifixion of Jesus are undoubtedly historical. Some other events have also the stamp of reality: e.g., the baptism and a few details of the ministry. Then there are the sayings. The Mother has held that "the writers of the Gospels have tried to reproduce exactly what Christ taught and they have in a certain measure succeeded in transmitting his message" (*Mother India*, December 1977, p. 842).

(4) "Two of the Gospels make no mention of the crucifixion and the resurrection, although they should be the outstanding events of Jesus' life." The man who said this does not know his New Testament at all. The crucifixion is common to all the four Gospels. The resurrection is recounted in three—Matthew, Luke and John. Only Mark stops short of it. His own identifiable ending does not go beyond 16:8. The present "long ending" of verses 9-20 was tagged on some time in the second century A.D.

What the writer should have listed was not the crucifixion but the virgin birth, about which you have expressed reservations in the closing part of your letter. The virgin birth of Jesus is neither in the first Gospel—Mark's—nor in the last—John's. It occurs only in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels. I may add that the earliest

Christian documents, the several Epistles of Paul, do not breathe a word of it and the rest of the New Testament too has no sign of it. Hence it is only two documents out of the twenty-seven constituting the New Testament that speak of a miraculous nativity. Sri Aurobindo regards it as a symbol of the Avatar's direct derivation from the Higher Spiritual Nature—*Parā-Prakṛiti*, *Parā-Māyā*, the Supernature that is the Divine Shakti, the creative Goddess-Power which is ever pure, the Virgin Mother of all beings and things. He says: "In the Buddhist legend the name of the mother of Buddha [Māyā-Devī Mahā-Māyā] makes the symbolism clear; in the Christian the symbol seems to have been attached by a familiar mythopoeic process to the actual human mother of Jesus of Nazareth" (*Essays on the Gita*, American Edition, p. 145, fn. 1). A growing number of Christian theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, believe that the story of the virgin birth is an "historicising" of the theological concept that Jesus was the Son of God in a unique sense, on whom the fact of human paternity has no bearing, even though he had a human father. They also declare that the virgin birth is not in the least necessary for Jesus in order to be the Son of God. According to them, Mark's, Matthew's and Luke's accounts of the baptism and the transfiguration plus the Pauline and Johannine doctrine of the pre-existent Christ are enough to substantiate the idea of Divine Sonship.¹

(5) If Herod's order to massacre the "innocents" is not historical, we should not be upset and start casting doubt on all that the Gospels relate. Most of the incidents connected with the alleged virgin birth are folkloric legends.² As to Herod living in B.C., historians say that he died in 4 B.C. and that if Jesus was born before Herod died the birth-date of Jesus must be at the latest 4 B.C. The present Christian calendar was made by a sixth century Scythian monk who committed a number of mistakes in calculation. Jesus' birth-date was most probably 7 or 6 B.C.

(6) Why does your author declare that the manuscripts of the Gospels should have been in Hebrew? The mother-tongue of Jesus having been Hebrew or rather Aramaic does not necessitate the Gospels getting written in the same language. They were written from thirty-five to fifty or sixty years after Jesus' death and at that time and even before it the general language of the Roman Empire was Greek. If the Gospels were meant to be widely read, Greek was the right tongue to be written in. Their composition in Greek does not at all "point to the suspicion that they might have been made up".

(7) Yes, there were "other Gospels" than the ones we have. Parts of them still exist. All of them were later writings and are called "apocryphal". They were adjudged unreliable and fantastic and therefore omitted from the official canon. You have only to read them to see the wisdom of omitting them. Some of them, like the *Protevangelium of James*, were influential in spite of their dubious nature and have

¹ For recent Catholic and Protestant opinion, see the Roman Catholic priest Raymond E. Brown's book, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1973), p. 24 with fn. 26 and p. 42 with fn. 52.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55

coloured quite an amount of popular belief.

(8) The statement—"It was only centuries later that the Gospels were given the present form"—is not quite accurate. In the time of Irenaeus, *c.* 180 A.D., the four canonical Gospels were in existence, for he cites them all by name. Evidence for individual Gospels is found even before. Thus Ignatius of Antioch (*c.* 110 A.D.) knew the Matthaean tradition. So, even if the present manuscripts are of a later date, the existence of the original versions is surely much earlier. Some changes, however, may have occurred in the course of time. For instance, in the major manuscripts in our hands today Mark 6:3 reads: "Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary?" Origen, who lived in *c.* 185-253 A.D., records that the original reading was: "Is this not the son of the carpenter and of Mary?", which is practically the same as Matthew 12:46.

(9) The "utterly diabolical methods" used in the propagation of what may be dubbed "Churchianity" rather than "Christianity" make no odds to the historicity of Jesus and his teachings or to the value of the latter.

(10) The proposition that "a sect, known as Christians, was there in Egypt long before Jesus and this sect assumed the present proportions by their machinations and manipulations" is utterly foundationless. Apart from Josephus and Tacitus, we have only the early testimony of Pliny the Younger and of Suetonius about the existence of Christians—that is, testimony independent of the New Testament. Pliny was governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor from 111 or 113 A.D. His correspondence with the Emperor Trajan includes a report on the proceedings against the Christians. It describes the Christians as in the habit of meeting on a fixed day before dawn and singing a hymn to Christ as to a god, after doing which they separate and meet once more for a common meal. In about 120, Suetonius, secretary to the Emperor Hadrian, wrote *Lives of the Caesars*, ranging from the great Julius to the infamous Domitian. In the section "Claudius", XXV. 4, he tells us that the Jews were expelled from Rome by the Emperor Claudius because they "constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestos". Claudius reigned from A.D. 41 to 54. Orosius, a later writer, informs us that the expulsion of Christian Jews by Claudius took place in the ninth year of that emperor's reign, *i.e.*, A.D. 49. The fact of this expulsion is corroborated by the New Testament's Acts of the Apostles (18:2) in which Paul finds, when he comes to Corinth from Athens, "a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome." Suetonius, in the section "Nero", XVI. 2, also mentions Nero's punishment in about 64 A.D. of the Christians, "a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition." Note the word "new". Suetonius's "Chrestos" (the Greek for "good") is merely the Greek-speaking world's easy alteration of the unfamiliar "Christos" (the Greek for "anointed"). Indeed the latter's derivative "Christiani" was frequently spelled "Chrestiani".

There is no evidence of Christians before Jesus. The Mother's saying that what is known as Christmas was really "the festival of lights" which had been observed before Christ does not mean that before the birth of Jesus it was already called "Christ-

mas" and that therefore there must have been Christians before Jesus. The fact is simply that Christianity in 354 A.D. or a little earlier fixed 25 December as Christmas Day—that is, the day of Christ's birth—in order to coincide a Christian religious holiday with an old Roman festival and thereby both placate the converted Pagans and wean them from old associations to those of their new religion. The term "Christian" came into vogue in about 41 A.D. when Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch in Syria. Acts 11:26 runs: "For a whole year they were guests of the Church there and they instructed a very considerable number of people. And it was at Antioch that the disciples first received the name of Christians." "Christian" was a nickname and means "belonging to the party of Christ". The Antiocheans took the title "Christ" ("anointed") for a proper name.

I think the author from whom you have drawn arguments was misled by a term applied to the Christians in very early days. From Acts 24:5 we learn that a Jew employed the word "Nazoraean" or "Nazarenes" to designate the religious group to which Paul belonged and which at that time was looked upon as a sect of Judaism. The later part of the Talmud, which developed between 220 and 500 A.D., refers to Jesus—almost always pejoratively—as "ha-Nozri" (the Nazarene). The popular notion is that "Nazarene" comes from the description "Jesus of Nazareth". Not that the etymology is quite at fault. Philologists like Albright, Moore and Schaeder vouch for its possibility. But actually there appears to have been no "city" such as Matthew (2:23) and Luke (1:26; 2:39; 4:29), writing in *c.* 80-100 A.D., speak of. Neither the Old Testament nor the Talmud nor Josephus mentions any city of that name. Josephus was especially in a position to know of it if it existed. In A.D. 66, when war broke out between Rome and the Jews, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the whole Galilee area by the Roman emperor Trajan. He fortified all the important cities and named each of them in his history. If in his day a city called Nazareth had stood at the location where it later came to be, he would inevitably have referred to it, particularly as he reported several skirmishes in the immediate vicinity of present-day Nazareth. Unfamiliar with Hebrew-Aramaic and with the topography of Palestine, Greek-speaking Christians of Matthew's and Luke's time traced to an imaginary city the word "Nazarene". In passing, it is worth remarking that no other instance is known of a sect being called after the home of its founder. The place where a sect is founded may dictate the sect's name: *e.g.*, "Plymouth Brethren." But nobody, for instance, dreams of identifying Mohammedans by designating them "Meccans" from Mohammed's birth-place Mecca.

Outside of the Gospels, only a fifth-century Jewish love-poem yields for the first time the name "Nazareth" for a city. Most probably the word "Nazarene" derives from the Hebrew "nazar" meaning to "keep" or "observe" and labelling the observers of certain religious usages. From a late tradition maintained by the Mandaeans of Syria who relate themselves to John the Baptist and call themselves *nasorayya*, "Observants", we may conjecture that the early followers of John the Baptist who announced the coming of a Saviour and whose baptising of Jesus started the lat-

ter on his ministry were also known as "Nazarenes". Since passages like Acts 1:21-22 and John 1:35-43 suggest that some of Jesus' Twelve Apostles were formerly disciples of the Baptist, it is quite on the cards that their transition was made easier because Jesus himself belonged to the same sect as the Baptist. John 3:20, 26 even gives one to think that Jesus imitated the Baptist's mode of ministry and that he did so because he identified himself with the latter's movement so far as to become temporarily his disciple. The sect of Nazarenes, to which Jesus no less than the Baptist seems to have adhered, had—according to Epiphanius, the fourth-century Christian writer against heresies—flourished in the pre-Christian period under that very name. No wonder, then, that some scholar should imagine this sect to be Christian before the age allotted commonly to Christianity and look upon the followers of Christ as a continuation from the past. But here is a mistake and, although Christianity may have and does have affinities with religious beliefs and practices which are pre-Christian, particularly with the Dead-Sea denomination of ascetics named Essenes, Jesus started a distinctive movement. He was a real historical personage and his movement alone can be termed Christianity.

Those who try to prove Jesus to be a myth overlook an objection which seems final and unanswerable. The opponents of the early Christians never raised the issue of his existence. They only questioned whether he was the Son of God and they criticised the practices of his followers. If it had been true that he did not exist, the denial of his historicity would have been an obvious and immediate rejoinder to their private ardours and their public propaganda. Celsus the Platonic philosopher, Tacitus the pagan historian, the Jewish rabbis—all of them had harsh things to say about him and his religion but none called him a mythical figure—as they certainly would have if there had been any plausibility of it.

Then there is the fact that all the three synoptic evangelists—Matthew (10:23; 16:28; 24:34), Mark (9:1; 13:30), Luke (9:27; 21:32)—report Jesus prophesying the advent of the Messianic kingdom before the generation which he addressed would pass away. The first Christians believed in the prophecy implicitly. Evidently, it was originally communicated by those who belonged to the generation addressed—the generation of Jesus himself. These people must have been alive at the time they quoted Jesus and, to be able to quote, they must have known him. Under no other circumstances could they have circulated so specific and so curious a prediction and assurance. None except still living men who could remember a real Jesus could have supplied the matter for the relevant texts in the synoptic Gospels. The prophecy was falsified, but only those who were directly acquainted with Jesus could have reported it with the natural certitude of its fulfilment.

Archibald Robertson was the first to draw attention to these texts in *The Rationalist Annual*, 1928 ("The Historical Jesus: Some Suggestions" under the pseudonym "Robert Arch"). He has yet to be genuinely answered. We may confidently close with some words written by him 24 years later: "It may reasonably be urged that no Christian in his senses would have fabricated a prophecy that Jesus would return

in the lifetime of people who had seen him if Jesus had never lived and nobody had seen him, or if he had lived so long ago that nobody who had seen him could possibly be alive.”¹

K. D. SETHNA

¹ *Jesus: Myth or History?* (London: The Thinker's Library, Watts Co., 1946), p. 101. For some of the points made in my letter this book has been of substantial help

THE SECRET OF THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

AN AUROBINDONIAN APPROACH

(Continued from the issue of April 24, 1981)

THE objects which emerged during the churning of the ocean constitute a symbolic representation of the various levels of consciousness and their presiding powers through which the yajamāna rises as he ascends from the base of Mandāra/Meru towards its summit by means of the *yajña*. In the *Mahābhārata* these are, in the order of their appearance, the moon, Lakṣmī, wine, Uccaiṣhravas, Kaustubha, Pārijāta, Surabhi, Dhanvantarī with amṛita, Airāvata, and finally poison. The Viṣṇu Purāna lists eight products with some differences: Surabhi, Varuṇi (wine), Pārijāta, Apsarās, the moon, poison (taken by the nāgas), Dhanvantarī with amṛita and ultimately Lakṣmī. This account omits the horse, the elephant and the Kaustubha jewel, and adds the Apsarās. The other Purānas and the Rāmāyaṇa follow this by and large with minor variations.³¹

We have already analysed what the moon stands for (the god both of Ānanda and of the Mind with its thousand rays of perception). Lakṣmī, seated on a white lotus, is that attribute or power of Adīti, the Infinite Consciousness of the Vedas, known as Mahālakṣmī, “vivid and sweet and wonderful with her deep secret of beauty and harmony and fine rhythm, her intricate and subtle opulence, her compelling attraction and captivating grace.”³² The white lotus symbolises the resplendent purity of her force.

Lakṣmī is followed by Surādevī (goddess of wine), another Soma-symbol. Soma is frequently described as pouring into the jar like wine from a strainer (Rig-veda X. 83.2). So long as it has not been purified by being passed through the strainer, it remains a strong and fiery liquor, but thereafter it turns into an ecstatic fosterer of the mental and physical being of the man who receives it. The purification is done by the pure mental and emotional consciousness whose thoughts and emotions are the fibres of the strainer “happily extended to receive and turn into divine ecstasy all possible contacts of universal existence. Thus received and purified these keen and violent juices, these swift and intoxicating powers of the Wine no longer disturb the mind or hurt the body, are no longer spilled and lost but foster and increase, *avanti*, mind and body of their purifier, *avantyasya pavitāram āśavaḥ*. So increasing him in all delight of his mental, emotional, sensational and physical being they rise with him through the purified and blissful heart to the highest level of surface of heaven, that is, to the luminous world of Swar where the mind capable of intuition, inspiration, revelation is bathed in the splendours of the Truth (*ṛitam*), liberated into the infinity of the Vast (*bṛihat*).³³

This process is indicated in greater detail through the subsequent products of the churning. After Wine rises the white steed, whose springing forth from the

ocean parallels the Ṛigveda I.163.1:

What time, first springing into life, thou neighedst, proceeding from the sea or upper waters....

while in the Taittirīya Saṁhitā (VII.5.25.2) and the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (X.6.4.1) and Vajasaneyī Saṁhitā (XIII. 42) *samudra* is said to be the *yoni*, the birthplace, of the horse.³⁴ The purport of this symbol is brought out clearly in Sri Aurobindo's commentary on Viśvāmitra's first hymn to Agni (Third Maṇḍala).³⁵ In the third ṛik of that sukta the ṛiṣi writes:

Full of intellect, purified in discernment, the perfect friend (or, perfect builder) from his birth of Heaven and of Earth, he establishes the Bliss; the gods discovered Agni visible in the Waters, in the working of the sisters.

Vyāsa, too, has the gods discover the horse-Agni in the ocean. What are these Waters? They are "the seven rivers of the luminous world that descend from heaven when Indra, the God-Mind, has slain the enveloping Python; they descend full of the light and the heavenly abundance, instinct with the clarity and the sweetness, the sweet milk and the butter and the honey."³⁶ Here, too, the white steed is described by Vyāsa as rising out of the ghee (clarity) produced as the milky ocean is churned. Again, in the second ṛik Viśvāmitra says:

The seven Mighty Ones increased him who utterly enjoys felicity, white in his birth, ruddy when he has grown. They moved and laboured about him, the Mares around the new-born child; the gods gave body to Agni in his birth.

"Aśva, the Horse," explains Sri Aurobindo, "is the dynamic force of Life, and the rivers labouring over Agni on the earth become the waters of Life, of the vital dynamis or kinesis, the Prāṇa, which moves and acts and desires and enjoys."³⁷

This image of the white steed occurs as Dadhikravan in the Ṛigvedic hymns, becoming Uccaiḥśravas in the Purāṇas. IV.40 is a highly significant hymn in this respect as it provides the basis for the Purāṇic accounts of the divine steed Uccaiḥśravas flying through the heavens:

Dadhikravan who is the truth in his running,—yea, he gallops and he flies,—brings into being the impulsion, the abundant force, the heavenly light. (ṛik 2)

He dwells in the Man, he dwells in the Truth, he dwells in the wide Ether; he is born of the Waters, he is born of the Light, he is born of the Law, he is born of the Hill of Substance, he is the Law of the Truth. (ṛik 5)³⁸

Dadhukravan, therefore, is born both of the Hill (*adri* in the original) and of the Waters, just as Uccaiḥśravas is produced from the interaction of Mandāra and the ocean of milk.

V.1.4. provides yet another helpful analogue:³⁹

The minds of men who seek the godhead converge towards the flame even as their seeings converge in the sun: when two dawns of different forms give birth to this Fire the white Horse is born in the front of the days (or, at the head of our forces).

It is the same horse-image which is used in the opening of the Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. In this form of the Horse, Agni's function is "to give as the child of the Waters its full form and extension and purity to the middle world, the vital or dynamic plane, *raja ātatanvān*. He purifies the nervous life in man pervading it with his own pure bright limbs, lifting upward its impulsions and desires, its purified will in works (*kratum*) by the pure powers of the superconscious Truth and Wisdom, *kavibhūḥ pavitrarāḥ*."⁴⁰ The white steed is "the horse of Being generally, Being manifested in substance whether of mind, life, body or idea or the three higher streams (*sat-cit-ānanda*) proper to our spiritual being Agni therefore manifests as the fullness, the infinity, the *bṛihat* of all this sevenfold substantial being that is the world we are, but white, the colour of illumined purity. He manifests therefore at this stage primarily as that mighty wideness, purity and illumination of our being which is the true basis of the complete and unassailable *siddhi* in the yoga, the only basis on which right knowledge, right thinking, right living, right enjoyment can be firmly, vastly and perpetually seated. He appears therefore in the van of the days, the great increasing states of illumined force and being—for that is the image of *ahan*—which are the eternal future of the mortal when he has attained immortality."⁴¹

The Horse image dovetails with that of Surabhi, the wish-fulfilling Cow, standing for consciousness in the form of knowledge just as Agni-Horse is consciousness in the form of force. Surabhi's coming indicates the harmonious union of knowledge, will and action in the entire being. The cow is also closely associated with the ocean and the hill, for in II.23.18, addressed to Bṛihaspati it is stated:⁴²

For the glory of thee the hill parted asunder when thou didst release upward the pen of the cows; with Indra for ally thou didst force out, O Bṛihaspati, the flood of the waters which was environed by the darkness.

The cows are also linked to the sun, and described as the rays of the Sun of Truth. Significantly, Vyāsa has Lakṣmī, Wine, Moon and Horse all come to the gods guided by Āditya (Sūrya) for "It is he who delivers the individual human mind from the circumscribed consciousness of self and environment and enlarges the limited movement which is imposed on it by its preoccupations with its own individuality... the

result is a right and happy creation—for all our existence is a constant creation—of the universe of man's whole being (V.81.1).⁴³ The Kaustubha gem which follows next, residing on the chest of Nārāyaṇa, is a Sūrya-emblem reinforcing this concept. The Pārijāta flowers symbolise the opening of the centres of consciousness at various levels, to the divine light.⁴⁴

The advent of Dhanvantarī with the nectar is the culminating point of this gigantic churning. In the Purāṇas, Dhanvantarī is the physician of the gods, the divine healer, analogous to the Aśvins who, as we have seen, are the lords of Ānanda. The word itself signifies "moving in a curve": *dhanvan* means "a bow, a curve" and *tarī* means "boat", coming from *tara* which signifies "carrying across, or beyond, saving, surpassing, conquering."⁴⁵ One of the derivative meanings from this is "the sun",⁴⁶ moving across the heavens in a curve. The link between the sun's course and a boat is not peculiar to Hindu myth. We find it figuring prominently in Egyptian mythology as well, where Re, the sun god, travels through the underworld in his sun-boat, fighting Apophis the dragon of darkness with the help of Seth to be reborn again the next morning. As far as the Ṛigveda is concerned, the sun "figures prominently in the central Aṅgīrasa myth and is explicitly compared to a ship: "it is said that the Sun, 'that Truth', was the thing found by Indra and the Aṅgīrasas in the cave of the Paṇis. By the rending of that cave the herds of the divine dawn which are the rays of the Sun of Truth ascend the hill of being and the Sun itself ascends to the luminous upper ocean of the divine existence, led over it by the thinkers like a ship over the waters, till it reaches its farther shore."⁴⁷ Curiously enough, Mayan mythology also has this tale of the Sun hidden for long in darkness and recovered by the incantations of savants.

Why is amṛita brought by Dhanvantarī, the Sun-symbol? The Ṛigveda V.81 again offers a clue, in the fourth ṛik:⁴⁸

And thou reachest, O Savitṛi, to the three luminous heavens; and thou art utterly expressed by the rays of the Sun; and thou encompassest the Night upon either side; and thou becomest by the law of thy actions the lord of Love, O God.

The Sun, that is the divine Truth, transforms not merely the physical consciousness but brings all the potentialities of the mental being to their complete fruition, including the emotions, the intellect and the intuitive reason. It is then that the world of Sachchidānanda, of Immortality, is revealed: "This higher kingdom stands confessed in the principle of Beatitude which is for us the principle of Love and Light, represented by the god Mitra. The Lord of Truth, when he reveals himself in the full godhead, becomes the Lord of Bliss."⁴⁹ It is this ultimate stage of Ānanda which is symbolised in Dhanvantarī (Sun) carrying the amṛita.

What are we to make of Airāvata, who is the next product of the churning? He is described as mahānāga, with four white tusks and a huge body, and is appropriated by the *vajra*-wielder (Indra). *Nāga*, of course, signifies both elephant and serpent, and

both are closely associated with water, clouds, Indra and nectar (the serpent king Vāsuki is the churning rope, it is the serpents who guard the pot of amṛita which Garuda seizes later, and the very account of the amṛita-manthana arises out of the rivalry between Kadru, the serpent-mother, and her co-wife Vinatā. *Airāvata*, by itself, denotes the progeny of Irāvata, a Nāga, but also “produced from the ocean; a particular portion of the moon’s path; a form of the sun.”⁵⁰ *Irāvata* means “possessing food, full of food; granting drink or refreshment, satiating, giving enjoyment;... the ocean; a cloud.”⁵¹ The linkages with the Sun, the Moon and the Ocean apparent from this show that, like Kaustubha, Airāvata is also part of the *samudra-kalasa-Soma-Surya* structure of symbols. Further, the four tusks and the gigantic body recall the huge Bull in Uttanka’s episode and its original version in the Ṛgveda IV.58.3:⁵²

With four horns, his three feet, two heads and his seven hands, the Bull, triply tied, roars aloud—a Great God has entered in the mortal.

The four white tusks/horns are the three highest states, i.e. *sat-chit-ānanda-ṛitam* (Existence, Consciousness, Bliss, Truth). As in the Uttanka episode it is Indra who rides the *vṛiṣabha*, so also here it is he who seizes Airāvata as his own. The identification of the two is not difficult, the only difference being the stress on the Bliss aspect here because that is the theme of this particular myth. It is significant that the root of *Irāvata* is *irā* which means a draught of milk. The ocean being churned is also one of milk, and Airāvata is born of this sea of sweet-milk as a Soma-analogue. Indra, the avid Soma-drinker, appropriately seizes this Soma-like product of the churning. If we prefer to concentrate on the *hastin* aspect of Airāvata, this also leads to a revelation of another aspect of the symbol because the sense of “elephant” is only a secondary and a derivative connotation of the word. The primary sense is “having hands, clever or dextrous with the hands.”⁵³ This relates it to *dakṣa*, and its derivative *dakṣiṇa*. We have already seen that the latter stands for intuitive discrimination.⁵⁴ *Dakṣa*, in turn, signifies “discernment, judgement, discriminative thought-power.”⁵⁵ This power or force is described as Indra’s *vāhana* (vehicle) because it is this faculty which is the very basis for the working of the mental consciousness whose deity is Indra. Linking this up with the fact that *Airāvata* also means “a form of the sun”, the symbol appears to represent an emanation of the Sun which descends “into the human mentality and forms at its summit the world of luminous intelligence, Swar, of which Indra is the lord.”⁵⁶ Appropriately, therefore, it adjoins the *Dhanvantari* sun-symbol.

(To be continued)

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

NOTES

- ³¹ See V.M. Bedekar's essay on this in *Purāna*, Jan. 1967
³² Sri Aurobindo *The Mother* (Centenary Edn.), p. 26
³³ *The Secret of the Veda*, p. 345.
³⁴ Dange, *op cit*, p. 274.
³⁵ *op cit*, p. 110. ³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 362. ³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 115.
³⁸ *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, p. 197-8
³⁹ *ibid* p. 201. ⁴⁰ See n. 37 ante.
⁴¹ *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, p. 499
⁴² *The Secret of the Veda*, p. 161.
⁴³ *ibid* pp., 276, 277
⁴⁴ *On Yoga (II)*, pp. 88, 94.
⁴⁵ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 438
⁴⁶ *ibid*, p. 509.
⁴⁷ *The Secret of the Veda*, p. 236.
⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 272. ⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 279.
⁵⁰ Monier-Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 234.
⁵¹ *ibid*, p. 168.
⁵² Purani, *Studies in Vedic Interpretation*, *op. cit.*, p. 252.
⁵³ Monier-Williams *op. cit*, p. 1295.
⁵⁴ P. 684, Nov. 80 issue *M.I.*
⁵⁵ Purani, *Vedic Glossary*, *op. cit*, p. 45.
⁵⁶ *The Secret of the Veda*, p. 274.

THE SECRET OF THE ALLIES' SUCCESS IN WORLD WAR II

Few realise that the age-old adage, "Man proposes and God disposes", is the quint-essence of wisdom distilled by the sages. The truth of the adage can never be questioned because it bears the testimony of countless generations of men. Human will is always impotent before the Will of the Divine who has always the final decision in all matters terrestrial and supra-terrestrial.

If in spite of the glaring impotency of human will, men still believe that they are all-mighty and all-knowing, it only betrays their folly, ignorance and arrogance. Instances of such movements of the human ego are not rare. They are common to men placed at the helm of the governance of their countries whether chosen democratically or come to power dictatorially. To overlook the existence of a Power which is infinitely greater than any human power, single or combined, is to invite danger and disaster. This we have seen in the case of Napoleon, Hitler and Tojo.

We do not really know the source of their defeat but attribute it to adverse circumstances and a combination of forces against them. This is only a superficial and therefore misleading knowledge of the true causes of their downfall. Men in pride of power, authority and governance will always claim that it is they and their superior intelligence and strategy that have brought their victories but the real and unquestionable source of their victory is certainly not their superiority but the intervention of some higher Power, sometimes the highest, that we can conceive of in our sober and detached assessment of the Truth. Or, who could have conceived of the disastrous defeat of the victorious Nazis after their resounding success at Narvik and Dunkirk?

It is said that whom God wants to destroy, He first makes mad. Is it not true in the case of the ill-fated invasion of Russia by Napoleon and Hitler and of the bombing of Pearl Harbour by Tojo's air-arm, a bombing which was but a brilliant passage to a terrible doom? To deny this is to evince lack of the most elementary knowledge of human affairs.

So long as human beings, even the most mentally developed ones, are involved in the life of the ego which is a deformation of our true Being which is the self, soul or the divine reality in us, this higher knowledge is denied to us. Yet, a foreknowledge might be ours if we could always take the Spirit's stand. As Sri Aurobindo says:

"An inspired Knowledge sits enthroned within
Whose seconds illumine more than reason's years" (*Savitri*)

Sri Aurobindo has envisaged the possibility of human beings, the elites, transcending the mental ignorance and rising to the truth of the spirit which is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. If by spiritual self-discipline and self-surrender to the divine Power, we eliminate the ego and identify ourselves with the Divine, then

we also become omniscient and omnipotent. This is not an impossible ideal; this identification has been achieved by all spiritual Masters who have appeared on the human scene from time to time in order to lift the veil of ignorance and darkness from men's eyes. Sri Aurobindo has himself affirmed his role in defeating the Japanese and the Nazis. When they were victoriously progressing in their march to world-domination, he used his spiritual powers to stop their victories and turn them into defeat and disaster. This is the inner history of how the world was saved from domination by the Asuras. Likewise the Mother used her spiritual powers in making the Chinese withdraw from the Indian plains in the 1962 war.

To the ordinary unenlightened human mind entrenched in ego, ignorance and self-assertion, all these events may seem to be chimerical. Till we have raised ourselves above the limited horizon of our half-enlightened mental intelligence, the truth of spiritual living with its unity, peace and harmony, its knowledge, power, love and bliss will look like an impossible ideal, or, if possible, meant only for a few and not for humanity in general. But spiritual truth like all other truths is a fact of life and has been more or less generalised in human lives in the past. All we can do now is to surrender to the Divine, the Omnipotent Power which guides our destinies and be identified with Her in our knowledge, will and action. Then only the miracle will have been achieved and human life become life divine.

JIBENDRA

THE LORD OF HORSES

A NOVELLA

(Continued from the issue of April 24, 1981)

4

How staggering the break of dawn!

The sombre, transparent colours of night in the sky were fading away and the stars were paling out. The light of a new-born day glided over the sands. This metamorphosis of the sky was more than the mere coming of dawn. I was at once convinced that such must have been the moment when the world was created. And it is this that stirred me. Time had still not been cut into night and day, into the unmoving darkness and the deeply moving light of day. And then light triumphed. The day rose. It seemed like the coronation of the Desert, and all around me the soft rose-coloured sand-dunes royally woke to life and above me the clear sky solemnly stretched out. Oh, a maddening spectacle it was!

I had no desire, neither to gallop nor to trot nor even to ride at a foot-pace. What need was there to move? All was so beautiful. And so I stood still and continued to watch the sun climb up into the sky. But I stared at it too long and my eyes started to ache.

When I wanted to see ahead of me. I could see nothing, not even the Great Desert. A simple dazzle, a sort of a very brilliant haze, a transparent column was all I saw, a luminous whirlpool sucking me in. I wanted to get up and go closer and see. But I could not move.

And then the haze was changed, the column vanished, the whirlpool disappeared. And in its place I saw the cupolas of a gigantic palace scintillate, the minarets scintillate and the very limpid waters of a lake girdled by palm-trees scintillate too. I understood, then, that I was thirsty and I blessed Allah for having built at the heart of the Great Desert this palace and these minarets on the lakeside. And once again I tried to get up and once more I failed in my attempt.

Just then, palace, minarets, lake and all disappeared. I understood that I had been duped by a mirage. But instead of lamenting I remembered what Ourida the Rose had told me: "The Great Desert must be won with great effort."

And I felt ready to make all the effort necessary to merit the Great Desert. The mirage was but a temptation and I had only to make the effort not to yield to its snare, not to believe that where there was light there could be palace, minarets and lake. To imagine this was to offend Allah and to lose forever the Great Desert.

I had hardly taken this resolution when I felt, simultaneously, better and yet more weak. In spite of me my legs were trembling and my flanks quivered. My entire body was drenched with sweat. I stretched on my side to sleep; but it was impossible.

Still I continued to look for sleep. And finally I plunged into a kind of wandering sleep and dreamt that the Great Desert had become a furnace and that under every grain of sand there lurked a wicked jinn and that all the jinns were pricking my skin, entering my blood to infect it with fever, were creeping between my eyelids to blind me and stop me from seeing the purest light of the Great Desert.

When I came back to myself, two large black eyes were regarding me fixedly. I thought it was another mirage and several times blinked to drive it away. But the mirage did not budge, maybe because I still had fever.

"Away," I said faintly. "Don't come to tempt me, mirage."

And a voice answered:

"I haven't come to tempt you. I have come to help you."

Can mirages speak? I was not quite sure. But, after all, it was very well possible. And once again I begged the mirage to go away.

"You must be the most awful of mirages to be able to talk to me," I said. "Or else you are a jinn."

"Look at me," the voice answered. "And you will see that I am neither a mirage nor a jinn. I am a Jerboa. And Soyola is my name."

I looked. It did resemble a Jerboa. I recognised it at once thanks to its size of a little mouse, to its long tail, to its hindlegs longer than the forelegs which enable it to jump.

"Salaam to you, then," I said. "Salaam to you. Soyola."

"Salaam to you, Saïd."

"How do you know my name?"

"I know who you are. For I am sent by two men who know everything."

"There are men in the Great Desert?" I enquired.

"Yes," Soyola answered. "There are these two men who know everything."

"Will you take me to them?" I asked. "I would like to see them."

Soyola smiled mischievously and with her forepaws stroked her fine whiskers.

"I came on their behalf," she answered. "Because they asked me to go and find you and to lead you to them."

"Now?" I enquired.

"Yes, now," Soyola answered.

"But I cannot. I cannot, still. I have too high a fever."

"You have no more fever, Saïd."

She placed one of her paws on my forehead. And my fever had disappeared. So I got up and in a very slow step I followed Soyola who was hopping away on the sands, saying: "Come, Saïd, come."

I do not know how long we walked, nor the distance we covered. The landscape was still the same and, to me, still as inebriating. The hot rosy sands stretched unendingly under a dazzling blaze. Sky and sand, sand and sky, that was all I saw. But it was enough for me, enough to fill my heart with joy. I placed my hoofs respectfully on the sand lest I should soil its purity. I was still walking slowly. I had the feeling

that I was accompanied by music. And the music was becoming clearer as Soyola and I moved. And the sun seemed to permeate all space and become all things.

I wanted to ask Soyola what this music was and from where it came and whether it flowed down from the sky or rose up from the sands. But I did not speak and continued following Soyola who went hopping in front of me like a little ball of light, a little sun in the heart of the sun.

After a while, I noticed a speck in the sky. And the speck was growing. And the speck became a bird: a huge eagle flying towards us.

"That's Farhaj, the King of Eagles," said Soyola. "He comes to offer his greetings on behalf of the two men."

And at that very moment Farhaj landed on the sand, just beside me.

"Salaam to you, O Farhaj," I said. "My name is Said."

"Salaam to you, O Said," Farhaj solemnly replied

And he stretched out his wings and was flying once again.

"Farhaj will go and inform the two men about our coming," Soyola explained to me.

And she started to hop again before me.

The music was growing in my ears. It was a very soft music which contained all the most harmonious sounds. I felt like asking Soyola once again about this music that enthralled me. But once again I did not say a word

And then the music became louder still, as if it were a supernal chorus. Thousands and thousands of very soft voices were singing in my ears. All these voices were but one golden voice. And although the song was wordless I had the feeling that the voices were telling me.

"Welcome, Said, welcome to the Domain of the Lords."

"You are at home here, O Said, in our midst."

"Here you are in the Heart of Light, O Said."

"Here you are at the centre of the universe, O Said."

"Here you are in the Land of Wisdom, O Said."

And all the voices would pick up the refrain:

"Welcome, O Said, welcome to the Domain of the Lords."

And all the voices were so soft that I shut my eyes to appreciate better their sound.

When I reopened my eyes, I saw that the two men were in front of me.

At once I witnessed the first marvel. The two men were floating above the sand. They were seated on air as if on a couch. And nothing seemed more natural. They were smiling at me. And I understood at that very moment a second marvel. It was neither from the sands nor from the sky that the music came. The music came from them.

Even before I could ask them how they could create music without an instrument, they told me together and with one voice:

"Don't be astonished by this song, Said. It is our heart that sings in joy."

And they smiled at me once again. I was looking at them one after the other to try to understand who they were. And that made them smile even more.

The one on the left had eyes whose colour was of gold. The one on the right had eyes whose colour was of rain. But for the rest they were perfectly alike. Both were of brown complexion and both wore a long robe made of white wool. Both were unworldly-young. I did not dare ask them to show their teeth to know their age, as is done for horses, first because they were not horses and secondly because the mere sight of them filled me with awe.

They let me regard them as long as I wanted to. Then, when I had finished, he whose eyes were the colour of gold said to me:

“We felicitate you, Saïd. For you have overcome the obstacles Destiny put in your way. You have conquered the sorrow in which the death of your Master had left you. And you have conquered the weariness of a long journey. The danger of the gorge in the orange mountains you have conquered and the mirage of the Great Desert. It is well, Saïd. We felicitate you.”

And he whose eyes were the colour of rain added.

“We have the power to give you the keys of your future. Do you wish to know what awaits you, Saïd?”

“No,” I answered. “I prefer not to know. Because I prefer to savour fully in each day what each day brings me.”

“You are wise,” retorted the man whose eyes were the colour of gold. “We will give you a gift then.”

He shut his eyes. And the man whose eyes were the colour of rain did the same. Then in the same voice, with which the music still mingled, they told me in a prophetic tone:

“None has been born to remain in the Great Desert. Whoever has conquered the Great Desert must needs return to the world and in the world seek and find purity, light and joy of the Great Desert. Presently you must go and seek the company of your own kind and since you are a free horse you must go towards the last of the free horses.”

I listened eagerly and my heart beat faster at the idea that somewhere in the world there still lived free horses.

“Listen,” continued the two men in the same prophetic tone. “Listen to us, Saïd. You will find in Mongolia the tarpans, your cousins and the last survivors who are born and live in freedom and who descend from a stock thought to be no more. They are not very beautiful but they love freedom and are good companions. But if you prefer meeting wild stallions who certainly are beautiful, then you must go west, to America, to a place called Nevada, where the mustangs live.”

I was repeating in my mind all these new words: “Mongolia, tarpans Nevada, mustangs.” They became like the words of a song. And I had a feeling that this song would go forth from me like the music emanating out of the two men.

Just then the two men vanished. I opened wide my eyes, yet saw nothing. And I

started thinking that I had once again been a victim of a mirage. But just at that moment I saw in the sky a black speck become a bird. And now I knew it was Farhaj. And Farhaj came and perched beside me and told me:

"I have come to guide you. Whose company will you seek? Of the tarpans? Or of the mustangs? Speak and I will show you the way."

"The tarpans," I answered unhesitatingly.

"Then follow me," said Farhaj. And he spread his wings and flew away. I followed him. Together we spanned the Great Desert. Together for days on days we went eastwards, traversing Libya and Egypt and Arabia. Then we moved up northwards till the Bosphorus. And there Farhaj and I parted.

"Fare thee well," he told me. "May Allah help you be forever the Lord of Horses."

(To be continued)

CHRISTINE & ARCHAKA

(Translated by Maurice from the original French)

EUROPE 1974

A TRAVELOGUE

(45)

WE were fascinated with Europe and its Christian civilisation, a great and imposing super-structure built on the ancient Greco-Roman civilisation.

Asiatic countries are full of things European. Automatically questions arise in our minds while travelling far and wide in Europe: "Has there been no contact of Europe with other civilisations, has there been no contribution to Europe by Asiatic culture or thought?" We are happily reminded of many invasions in various parts of Europe by Asiatic peoples. The contact was not always peaceful or harmonious, but it must be admitted that these intrusions brought colour and movement to the European scene when Europe was in the grip of the Dark Ages. The Greco-Roman civilisation had crumbled down and no stimulus could awake Europe from its lethargy for another bout of progress and achievements. We shall narrate here a few incidents that have been beneficial to Europe and not spelt the terror, devastation and annihilation that can go with invasion.

First came the Arabs, or the Saracens as they were otherwise called. Spurred by the new-found religion of Islam they conquered land after land and built an empire that extended from the Indus to Spain and Portugal. We shall not enumerate the glories of Baghdad and Damascus but only what the Arab invasion meant to Europe in general and Spain in particular. Incidentally the name "Spain" is not given to the country by the Spaniards. The Phoenician traders came to Spain even earlier than the Saracens. They found the land infested by swarms of rabbits. They called the land "Scephania" which meant the land of rabbits. As years went by Scephania became Spain.

In 711 A.D. Jebel-al-Tariq the Arab general crossed the narrow strait that separated Africa from Europe, defeated the Spanish Visigoth King and established a rule that was to last for the next eight hundred years. The promontory with the great rock soon came to be known as Gibraltar after the Arab general Jebel-al-Tariq. When the Suez Canal opened and all ships to and from the Orient passed through the strait, no voyager could forget the Arab invasion of Europe.

What did the Arabs bring to Europe? They were the heirs of antiquity and had enriched all knowledge they had acquired from the ancient civilisations. They brought to Europe the sciences of astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, algebra, medicine, botany and the other applied sciences. It was the Arabs who taught Europe the decimal system of notation and the use of Zero. For the Romans, efficient as they were, had not discovered the utility of Zero. Then, innumerable words can be found in the Oxford English Dictionary that have Arabic origin. Homer in his Odyssey had recorded the maritime activities of the ancient Greeks. The Arabs have left Europe the

marvellous stories of Sindbad the Sailor. And no library in Europe is complete without a copy of the Arabian Nights. The tales form part of the imperishable literature of the world.

The Arabs were the most refined and courteous people. Their manners were exquisite. They had a very high I.Q. and a keen desire to learn and know. Soon great Universities and cultural centres sprang up in Cordova, Seville, Toledo and Granada. Thousands of students flocked there from the rest of Europe and from the Arab world. Europe could then be termed the Dark Continent. It could boast only of a few monastic elementary schools at that time. Spain became half Arabic in language, manners and customs. It became customary to copy the Arabs, for they were the most civilised people of the then known world. We talk of religious toleration. In the Arab world the non-Muslims were taxed no doubt but there were no persecutions. Yet Europe failed to learn this lesson. When life in Europe was a dismal picture of rude barbarism, the Arabs kept the torch of knowledge burning and this was their greatest gift to Europe.

Chenghis Khan, the leader of the Golden Horde, needs no introduction. He and his son Oktai Khan created an empire that extended from Cathay to Poland. Born on the shores of Lake Baikal, one of the most beautiful lakes of central Asia, Chenghis Khan was a fearful spectre over Europe in 1206 A.D. When he moved, neither man's valour nor obstacles offered by nature could stop him. Half of Europe was ruthlessly ravaged and the other half was stunned with fear and awe. If his march over half the world was sanguinary it was not more so than the sentiment and the act behind "Christians to the Lions", or the story of the gladiatorial fights in the arena of the famous Roman Colosseum. The amazing thing about Chenghis Khan was that as soon as conquest was over, he brought peace and good government over the conquered country. And no matter where he was his runners would always bring him news from the farthest ends of his empire. So his subjects slept in peace.

Under the tutelage of the great Khans the Russians learnt the first rudiments of statecraft. For the next three centuries after 1206 A.D. when Chenghis came, the great Khans ruled Russia till Ivan the Terrible, prince of Moscow and a governor under the Khans, rose in revolt. He freed parts of Russia from the rule of the Khans. To realise how terrible Ivan was, one has to see Sergei Eisenstein's film of that name. The Russian nation was born.

Both the Arabs and the Khans of the north taught the world how to rule a heterogeneous Empire. It is a lesson for all time. If the conquered people detested the conquerors the bitterness was not more than that of any conquered people anywhere and at any time. The Khans were not hated because they were Asiatics. The Arabs were definitely admired by any European who came in contact with them, specially in the great universities, where the Arab genius was manifest.

The Ottoman Turks started their Westward Ho by the middle of the fourteenth century. By 1361 A.D. Thrace, Eoumelia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Hungary were nothing but Turkish provinces. In another fifty years ten other European nations or

principalities were conquered, plus Rhodes, Dalmatia and the islands in the Aegean sea. From the Danube to Bussora (modern Basra) on the Euphrates, from Kemenietz on the Polish frontier to Azoff and Aden and Syria and Egypt: such was the extent of the Turkish Empire.

In 1453 A.D. Constantinople fell and the scholars fled to all parts of Europe with their books and scripts. Thus was started the Renaissance in Europe. This was the greatest gift of the Turks to Europe. If the Turks had not precipitated matters, Nature in her serpentine movement would have taken perhaps another three to four centuries to bring about Europe's Renaissance. The nations of Europe were too preoccupied with their own internal affairs to bother about the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire. A great military power, the Sultan of Turkey hypnotised the countries he conquered and made them obedient to his will. The Sultan assumed the title of "Ruler of three Continents and Lord of two Seas".

In 1529 A.D. Suleiman the Magnificent was at the gates of Vienna, seat of the Emperor in Europe. He did not take it, but got from the Emperor concessions that made him the undisputed master of Eastern Europe. A great heterogeneous empire was built where an Oriental power ruled not one but innumerable Occidental peoples. These nations were not more discontented than the nations living under Emperor Charles V. In fact it is recorded that the Greeks and other communities actually preferred to live under the Turkish Sultan rather than under the Emperor. The Sultan ruled by the ideal of religious tolerance. He treated his non-Muslim subjects far more mercifully than Charles V treated the Protestants. There was one European king who actually befriended Suleiman the Magnificent, and that was the French king Francis I. These two ruled the Mediterranean. A most admirable thing happened. A great lesson for all men, and for all time to come: that is, that the east and the west can live together amicably. It nullified the idea behind the line, "The East is East and the West is West and never the twain shall meet."

(To be continued)

CHAUNDONA & SANAT K. BANERJI

CROSSWORD

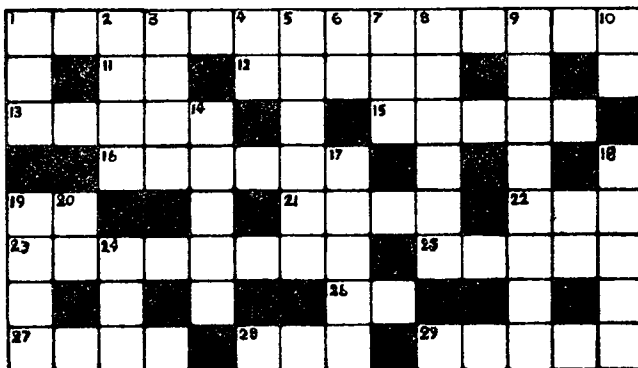
Clues Across

1. Unconsciousness is only an intermediate swoon of the conscious or its obscure sleep; pain and self-extinction are only running away from itself in order to find itself elsewhere or otherwise. (7,2,5)
11. Prep. (2)
12. There is no more benumbing than to mistake a stage for the goal or to linger too long in a resting place. (5)
13. Love is the key-note, Joy is the, Power is the strain, Knowledge is the performer, the infinite All is the composer and audience. (5)
15. If thou wouldst have humanity advance, buffet all preconceived ideas. Thought thus smitten awakes and becomes creative. Otherwise it in a mechanical repetition and mistakes that for its right activity. (5)
16. It is when freedom works in chains and servitude becomes a law of Force, not of Love, that the true nature of things is distorted and a falsehood governs the soul's dealings with existence. Nature with this distortion and plays with all the combinations to which it can lead before she will allow it to be righted. (6)
19. All that thought suggests to me, I can . . ; all that thought reveals in me, I can become. (2)
21. The restlessness and early exhaustion of our active being and its instruments are Nature's sign that calm is our true foundation and excitement a disease of the soul; the sterility and monotony of mere calm is her . . . that play of the activities on that firm foundation is what she requires of us (4)
22. In . . . nature of the world becomes again self-conscious so that it may take the greater leap towards its Enjoyer. (3).
23. The sense of impossibility is the beginning of all possibilities. Because this temporal was a paradox and an impossibility, therefore the Eternal created it out of His being. (8)
25. Man hungers after calm, but he thirsts also for the experiences of a restless mind and a troubled (5)
26. Distrust a perfect-seeming success, but when having succeeded thou findest still much to do, rejoice and . . forward, for the labour is long before the real perfection. (2)
27. The delight of victory is sometimes . . . than the attraction of struggle and suffering; nevertheless the laurel and not the cross should be the aim of the conquering human soul. (4)
28. Wherefore God hammers so fiercely at his world, tramples and kneads it like dough, casts its so often into the blood-bath and the red hell-heat of the furnace? Because humanity in the mass is still a hard, crude and vile . . . which will not otherwise be smelted and shaped; as is his material, so is his method. (3)
29. What then was the commencement of the whole matter? Existence that multiplied itself for delight of being and plunged into numberless trillions of forms so that it might find itself innumerably. (5)

Clues Down

1. In each pain and torture of our being is the secret of a flame of rapture compared with which our greatest pleasures are only as . . . flickerings. (3)

2. Possession in oneness and not in oneness is the secret. God and Man, World and Beyond-world become one when they know each other. (4)
3. All perfect perfection must have something of the stuff of the hero and even of the Titan. (2,2)
4. Pron. (2)
5. Abstractions give us the pure conception of God's ; images give us their living reality. (6)
6. Conj. (2)
7. Immortality, unity and freedom are in ourselves and await there our discovery; but . . . the joy of love God in us will still remain the Many. (3)
8. The side of thought is not enough; the side of delight too must be entirely grasped: Ideas, Forces, Existences, Principles are hollow moulds unless they are filled with the of God's delight. (6)
9. God cannot cease from leaning down towards Nature, nor man from aspiring towards the Godhead. It is the eternal relation of the finite to the infinite. When they seem to turn from each other, it is to recoil for a more meeting. (8)
10. Not to . . on for ever repeating what man has already done is our work, but to arrive at new realisations and undreamed-of masteries. (2)
14. God has all time before him and does not need to be always in a hurry. He is sure of his aim and success and not if he break his work a hundred times to bring it nearer perfection. (5)
17. Death is the question Nature puts continually to Life and her reminder to it that it has not yet found itself. If there were no of death, the creature would be bound for ever in the form of an imperfect living. (5)
18. Delight of being is not limited in Time; it is without end or beginning. God comes out from one form of things only to into another. (5)
19. Patience is our first great necessary lesson, but not the slowness to move of the timid, the sceptical, the weary, the slothful, the unambitious or the weakling; a patience full of a calm and gathering strength which watches and prepares itself for the hour of swift great strokes, few but enough to change destiny. (4)
20. Prep. (2)
24. Thought is not essential to existence nor . . . cause, but it is an instrument for becoming; I become what I see in myself. (3)



SOLUTION : Refer *Thoughts and Glimpse s.*

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Sri Aurobindo — The Perfect and the Good. By *Robert N. Minor*. Minerva Associates, Calcutta, hard covers, Rs.60/-

DR. MINOR is Assistant Professor of the History of Religions at the University of Kansas, and this book contains the substance of his Ph.D. thesis on Sri Aurobindo.

Its particular feature is that it applies the 'religio-historical method' to the study of Sri Aurobindo's thought on religion and ethics. This method is purely descriptive. It aims to display the development of Sri Aurobindo's ideas in relation to the stages of his life, according to the data available. It does not attempt to assess the truth or usefulness of anything Sri Aurobindo said or wrote, but simply to establish *what* was said or written by him, and *when*. The method, therefore, should and does present a sound chronological narrative, without leading to generalisations about Sri Aurobindo's thought as if it was at all periods the same. Dr. Minor offers this book as a preliminary study, leaving it to others, such as theologians or philosophers, to evaluate the worth of the material. He attempts, then, a religio-historical summary of the 30 volumes of the Centenary Edition of Sri Aurobindo's works, with special reference to religion and ethics

'Religion' he defines, for the purpose of his book, as 'that which is of ultimate concern' and the system built around it. 'Ethics', he stipulates, are 'those principles by which one may determine whether an act is good or valuable'. He contends that for Sri Aurobindo the two cannot be separated, since for him that is 'good' which promotes his ultimate concern—perfection (hence the subtitle of the book).

Dr. Minor divides the chronology of Sri Aurobindo's life into three major periods: that which includes his life in England and Baroda; the period as a nationalist leader; and finally the years at Pondicherry. This is a very broad division for showing the steps in the development of his thought—less precise than, say, the five phases chosen by J. Feys in his *Life of a Yogi*, but with Sri Aurobindo this is not of great importance since, in fact, there is considerable consistency throughout and, apart from his early writings in England, the changes are mostly ones of elaboration.

In 'The Harmony of Virtue', begun when he was 18, Sri Aurobindo argued that beauty was the ultimate concern, and that man could achieve this in his life by finding harmony in his own nature and harmony with the universe; the tone was humanistic and atheist (or at least agnostic).

Later, at Baroda, having studied the Indian scriptures, Sri Aurobindo saw as 'good' all that promoted the realization of Brahman as Truth, Love and Strength (Satyam, Prema and Shakti) in the individual, the nation and the race. A good action was consistent with the truths of a realistic Vedanta.

During his 'Bande Mataram' days, as a political leader, he came to stress nationalism as a penultimate concern, since only when India was free could she present the Vedantic Truth to all mankind. He argued that Liberty, Equality and Fraternity were to be promoted because they expressed the recognition that there was the same Self in all. He stressed that actions were good which promoted evolution by working

for humanity in love and selflessness.

At Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo's ethics were defined more and more in terms of the evolutionary process, and the integral yoga was elaborated as the means for attaining the goal of a progressively fuller manifestation of the Divine in the world.

Dr. Minor is careful to point out (p. 136) that Sri Aurobindo rejected the notion of general or binding rules of conduct, but urged, rather, that the individual must find out for himself, or be told by his guru, what actions are appropriate to his dharma. He quotes, also, that 'The value of our actions lies not so much in their apparent nature and result as in their help towards the growth of the Divine within us.' It is for these reasons that one hears so little about ethics in relation to Sri Aurobindo. But it is not until the stages of supermind and the gnostic being are reached that good and evil are transcended.

One may ask, after reading this book, the product of so much labour, how the religio-historical method has justified itself. How impartial and objective a picture of the growth of Sri Aurobindo's thought have we got? It seems the method works only partially, since it inevitably depends on selection; not much is included in this study for which there is no data—but much is left out for which there is data. For example, Dr. Minor hardly mentions the psychic being—a crucial omission, since it is the psychic element in man, according to Sri Aurobindo, that recognises the true, the good and the beautiful and responds to them. Again, the method is open to the subjective element and to distortion through the degree of emphasis the author may lay on one rather than on another part of the material he is presenting. In this instance, Dr. Minor tends to write as if in Sri Aurobindo's teaching evolution occurs mainly through the unfolding of what is involved; he plays down the mention of the action of the descending pressure from higher self-existent planes, or the dynamic of Grace.

It may seem ungentlemanly to suggest that Dr. Minor has not understood what Sri Aurobindo means by Supermind (who can be confident on this?) but his references to it on pages 4, 109-10, 116 and 167 are obscure. Supermind is certainly not a poise of consciousness containing the Transcendent, nor is Overmind one of its levels.

Notwithstanding all this, we can be grateful for Dr. Minor's book, which presents an immense amount of material in a relatively short space, and although one is sorry he never once expresses an opinion on his subject matter, one can congratulate him on finding a way of writing about Sri Aurobindo that has succeeded in passing through the sieve of the American academic process.

DICK BATSTONE

The Stupid Guru and His Foolish Disciples. A free translation of Veerama Munivar's Tamil story of Guru Paramartha. By P. Raja (Akaram, Sivagangai, 623560. 1981. Rs. 6/-).

My acquaintance with Paramartha Guru began when I was hardly five. Stories

like 'the horse's egg' and 'Pestle Puja' when recounted by my grandmother sent the children of the household into fits of laughter. As I grew up, the stories were delegated to the back of my mind till the time when my children were born and I had to amuse them. The stories will retain their freshness years hence when I go back to them as a grandmother surrounded by children with twinkling eyes.

I had always thought of these tales as pure prancy humour and had never attributed any special significance to them. Recently I was rather amused when I learnt that a full-scale thesis on these few tales had been submitted to the University of Madras for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. But I suppose there is a good deal to think over in the tales in terms of contemporary satire as Maggi Lidchi observes in her informative introduction. Father Beschi had come to proselytise and must have had varied experiences with the native population. Miss Lidchi writes:

"Guru Paramartha is not only a light-hearted account of human folly, but also a comment on it, for Father Beschi must no doubt have been a first-hand observer and probably a victim of the crude results of devotion exercised without discrimination. In a sense he himself was the guru of his catechists."

P. Raja deserves our congratulations for giving us such an easy-flowing translation of a bunch of tales that have stood the test of time. However, the real value of the book lies in his translation of Father Beschi's 'Vaman Charithram', a dialogue between St. Joseph and a soldier. Vaman asks the Saint to show him the way to conquer the lust for property, money and women. The Saint exhorts that "it's the strong will towards virtue that makes a man perfect". The young Vaman finds it almost impossible to conquer the lust for women. The Saint explains that in the battlefield of lust "only those who retreat and take to their heels at the very sight of their foe will be victorious". Words are easily said but this would only mean that one should live in a jungle cave and avoid all contact with women. Is this a practicable solution? The Saint says: "Unnecessary. Just go to the burial ground and have a close look at the human skulls that lie scattered there. That is the face which entices you." The description of the skull offered by Father Beschi shows that he was a close student of ancient Tamil literature, for it tallies with a passage in *Manimekhalai*, the epic of Sathanar written over 1500 years ago. In the sixth canto titled 'The Temple of the Wheel' the boy Sarngala is fatally frightened by the sight of a rotting female corpse. It is a terrible passage carrying an eternal truth.

P. Raja has done well to present this story of Father Beschi also in this volume which is at once rib-ticklingly boisterous and profoundly thought-provoking. Truly, a volume for all generations

PREMA NANDAKUMAR