

TURN EASTWARDS

Glimpses into Indian Life

By

PASCALINE MALLET

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PREFACE

THE notes which compose this book describe the author's varied Indian experiences and adventures during nine months' extensive travelling from Cape Comorin to Kashmir. The journey was entirely unexpected and was undertaken without previous forethought or preparation. The visit to India as it had originally been planned entailed only a month to be spent in Madras. It was eventually extended to the nine months, dating from December 1936 to September 1937.

The tourist usually visits the famous temples and palaces of India, and is perhaps the guest of a maharaja ; but his observations are based mainly on Indian life as it is encountered in the larger towns. Few European visitors, however, have as yet gone to the villages and lived the simple life of the people, mingling with them and sharing their customs and habits. It was the main interest of the author to do this, to make a living contact with the Indian people and to move amongst them in complete friendship and understanding. This meant cutting oneself entirely away from European contact.

The journey was accomplished by train (third class), bus, bullock-cart, and on foot, without the aid of a personal servant or translator, although no languages other than French and English were known. The various problems which beset the great continent of India have barely been touched upon, and no attempt has been made to give to them more than a passing reference as one was confronted with them

during the course of travelling. What is here put forward, then, is not the fruit of study and preconceived ideas, but of personal contact and observation, and makes no further claim. Appreciation is the keynote throughout this book. May it bear a humble testimony to the greatness and beauty of "the land of the gods".

PASCALINE MALLET.

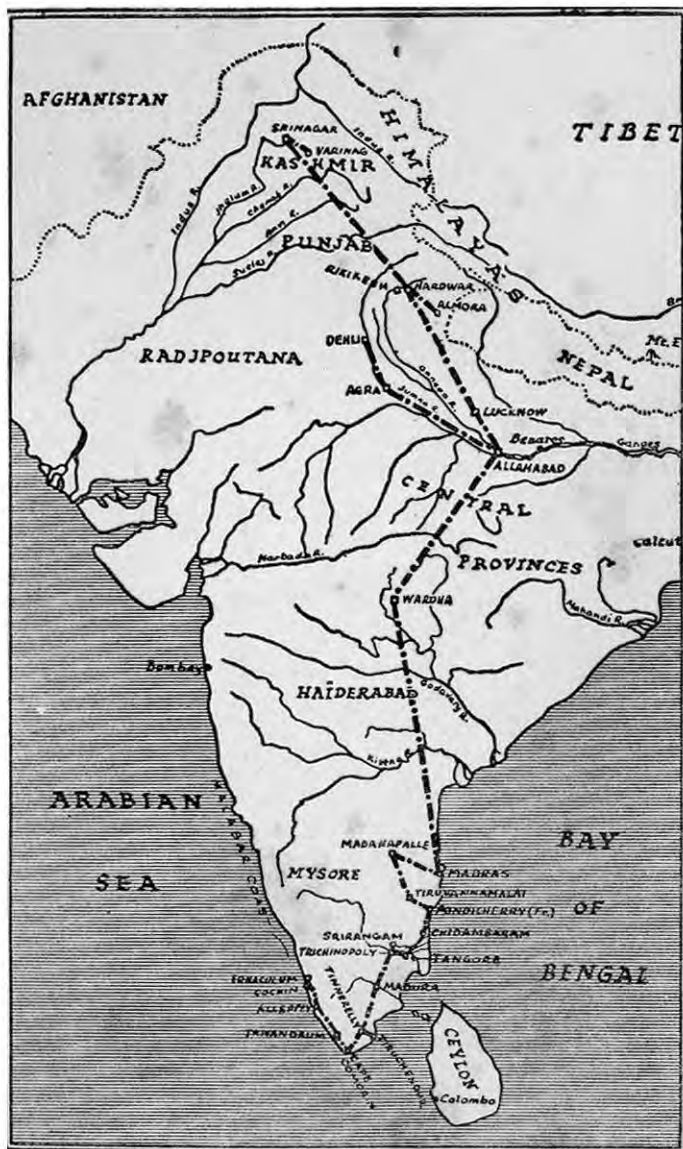
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France.

September 1937.

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VANDE MATARAM

I bow to thee, Mother,
richly watered, richly fruited,
cool with the winds of the south,
dark with the crops of the harvests,
the Mother !
Her strands rejoicing in the glory of the moonlight,
Her lands clothed beautifully with her trees in flowering bloom,
sweet of laughter, sweet of speech,
the Mother, giver of boons, giver of bliss.
Terrible with the clamorous shout of seventy million throats,
and the sharpness of swords raised in twice seventy million hands,
Who saith to thee, Mother, that thou art weak ?
Holder of multitudinous strength,
I bow to her that saves,
to her who drives from her the armies of her foemen,
the Mother !
Thou art knowledge, thou art conduct,
thou our heart, thou our soul,
in the arm thou art might, O Mother,
in the heart, O Mother, thou art love and faith.
It is thy image we raise in every temple.
For thou art Durga holding her ten weapons of war,
Kamala at play in the lotuses,
and speech, the goddess, giver of all lore.
To thee I bow !
I bow to thee, goddess of wealth, pure and peerless,
richly watered, richly fruited, the Mother.
I bow to thee, Mother,
dark-hued, candid,
sweetly smiling, jewelled and adorned,
the holder of wealth, the lady of plenty,
the Mother.

(Translation by SRI AUROBINDO.)

R e v i e w .

PASCALINE MALLET: 'Turn Eastwards'

Pascaline Mallet is one of the rare Frenchwomen who have adventured in India, not in the India of golf courses and polo grounds, nor under the direct and constant protection of a husband or a guru, but alone, in the heat of the country, with no other guide but her faith and her adventurous spirit. The story of some episodes in her travels is well calculated to give other women the wish to follow her example. In a pleasant and colourful style she tells us with the utmost candour what she has seen and understood 'from Cape Comerin to Kashmir'. And she must have had her eyes very open and her mind very wide awake, for she has certainly understood India better - in less than a year, I think - than numbers of men and women who have passed the greater part of their lives there. Let us congratulate her warmly on having given us this excellent book - but lament at the same time that the publishers of France should have allowed an English firm to profit by it first; doubtless our compatriots wait for public favour to assure a manuscript of success before they judge its worth, a thing which does them no honour. Numerous photographs, taken with discernment, but not always very well reproduced, enhance the pleasure of reading the book. Is it thorough excess of modesty that Pascaline Mallet has allowed the appearance, as frontispiece, of such an abominable 'portrait' (?) of herself?

From 'Action et Pensee'
September 1938.

J. H.

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THE AUTHOR

A RAPID glimpse of the city as we drove through the crowded streets to the harbour, a biting mistral wind tempered by warm sunshine, the familiar *marseillais* accent shedding its atmosphere of benevolence : there could be no doubt, we were in Marseilles.

It was with a kind of relief that we get on board ship and settled down in what would be our home for the next twenty-two days. The bustle was over and for the first time came the realization that we were actually on our way to India : the dream had at last come true.

The sun had already set when the *Angers* moved slowly out of the dark harbour, past great ships, to the open sea. A bright moon shone on the waves, making the foamy crests a silvery white. In the distance, along the coast, glittered the many lights of the fast-disappearing town. A strong wind blew and made the boat roll and pitch. Few people cared to come to the dining-room that night. The passengers mostly comprised tourists and officers with their families returning to Indo-China after their leave in France. Our table companions turned out to be two missionary priests, one of them an elderly man with a flowing white beard and a kindly face, and the other a younger man from Brazil, both bound for Pondicherry.

* * *

Peeping out of the porthole of our cabin in the early dawn, the coast of Corsica was clearly visible, with the picturesque town of Bonifacio perched like an eagles' nest on the top of a cliff overlooking the sea. As we neared the land, the mountain, at first

faint and misty, blending as it were with the sky, became walls of light-grey stone, making a lovely contrast with the red rocks, the deep-blue sea, and the brilliant white crest of the waves. Now followed the straits of Bonifacio, and Sardinia drew closer, while Corsica faded away in the distance. The sea calmed down suddenly and turned a leaden grey with strange metallic reflections. On the horizon spear-shaped clouds were a sure sign of a coming storm.

* * *

On awaking next morning after a windy night we looked out upon the Lipari Islands, suggesting mountain-tops protruding above the sea level. Over Stromboli fell great slanting rays piercing the clouds and illumining the white town of Strombolio with its square, flat-roofed houses. Thanks to the cruise organized on board, the captain went out of his way to pass as near as possible to the volcano. We were thus able to note the scant vegetation, and on one side a sheer wall of grey-blue lava veined with red, polished by ages of continuous eruptions.

On the horizon a blue line now appeared : it was Sicily and the Italian coast. As we went through the Straits of Messina, to our disappointment Etna remained invisible, hidden behind a curtain of low clouds.

* * *

At 9.30 a.m. we come in sight of Port Said. Innumerable little fishing-boats with white sails were scattered over the silvery calm waters. Overhead, the sky had become a luminous grey ; but the air was warm notwithstanding the absence of the sun, and all the crew had put on their white summer uniforms.

From the harbour passed out an English warship of the Queen Elizabeth type and an Italian cargo-boat returning empty after having taken troops to Abyssinia ; otherwise there was no sign of war or unrest of any kind.

As soon as the *Angers* had anchored, half a dozen small Arab boys swam round, diving after coins thrown to them by the passengers. They were extraordinarily clever and their dark, shiny bodies made an amusing contrast with the clear green water. A floating bridge enabled the passengers to land. As soon as we got into the streets we were literally assailed by shopkeepers and merchants trying in every tongue to entice us to buy their miscellaneous articles. Barefooted urchins in long cotton nightdresses, with funny round caps, tried their best to clean our shoes, catching hold of our unwilling feet, hoping to succeed by force where persuasion failed.

The European quarters were clean and pleasantly shady, the streets being planted with *filao*s, a curious tree whose trunk and leaves resemble the mimosa, but with big black seed-pods. In the public gardens a grand display of violet bougainvilleas, scarlet poinsettias, and a climbing convolvulus covered with sky-blue flowers made us realize that we were no more in a Northern clime.

The Arab quarters took us at last out of familiar scenes and afforded much interest and amusement. We met veiled Egyptian ladies dressed in black (amongst them some dark-eyed beauties, but mostly lacking in grace and dignity, their feet deformed by very high-heeled shoes) ; fine types of Egyptians ; natives of every kind and description, the colour of their skin varying from brown to dark mahogany ; old men with long white beards of incalculable age ; barefooted ragamuffins fighting for all they were worth, and men carrying on their heads long wooden trays heaped with round loaves. The shops and stalls

projected far out over the pavement, and the streets were further encumbered by two-wheeled carts covered with goods. Cats, dogs, and sheep ran in and out of the throng, not to mention donkeys and bicycles, all accompanied by the most appalling noise.

A Muslim burial procession slowly made its way through the crowd. The bearers were carrying a coffin covered with a white cloth and were followed by the relatives and friends holding flags. There seemed to be no sign of grief or mourning, but only peaceful resignation. The will of Allah be done.

Suddenly we came upon a most curious performance in a small side-street. Two dirty ragged natives, each holding a long stick, were playing a game in which fencing and dancing were the main characteristics. They crouched, turned, lifted their sticks simultaneously so as to bring them parallel to each other, and hit them together with many strange gestures.

As we returned to the harbour we found the whole atmosphere filled with coal-dust, and we might well have been looking at a ghastly scene out of Dante's *Inferno*. Innumerable pinnacles were joined to the *Angers* by wide boards forming bridges, on which long lines of natives went to and fro, carrying on their heads baskets of coal which they flung into the hold. Black from head to foot, they looked more like devils than human beings, and as they laboured they sang a wild chant, whose strange unending rhythm accompanied their movements. Was it possible that we had witnessed such a scene when machinery has reached so great a perfection in the domain of manual labour?

While waiting on deck for the departure, I gazed at the setting sun. A great cloud, fringed with silver, towered above the town. In the gathering dusk the flat-roofed houses and a solitary palm tree were silhouetted in black against the sky, and in the harbour the calm water reflected the glories of the

sunset. Something had changed: the light was different, the colours had an unknown quality, the atmosphere itself was not the same. My heart was full of wonder and expectancy, for indeed we were standing now on the threshold of a new world, and as our ship slowly glided into the Suez Canal in silence I felt and knew that before us lay the Sacred East.

The moon shone on the surrounding country, disclosing right and left a narrow strip of land along which ran a road and railway lines, lit up occasionally by the headlights of a car or a train. Farther afield the eye met nothing but wide expanses of water which continued inland for many miles. Shortly after entering the Canal we were obliged to stop and let two ships pass by. They were seen coming from a long distance away by reason of their strong projectors. The light was at first like a star reflected in the water, then it grew stronger and stronger, until, after perhaps an hour or more, it became so intense that our eyes could no longer bear the strain. Suddenly the Canal was lit up by the approaching ship, and slowly out of the darkness appeared the great towering form, and silently it went by . . . "ships that pass in the night".



We were greeted at dawn by an unforgettable sight. On either side of the Canal stretched the golden desert dotted with dark-green palm groves. A low flat mountain range, pink and mauve in the morning light, appeared above a thick mass of fog lying at its feet. The vivid yellow of the sandy banks and the emerald green of the Canal were indeed wonderful to behold. As we drank in the beauty of it all, from afar came the mysterious call of the desert, and a secret longing was born in our hearts one day to penetrate

beyond the outer fringe into those vast expanses of solitude and silence.

A large English ship returning to Port Said passed and we exchanged greetings at close quarters. The white city of Suez now came into sight, and leaving the narrow Canal we entered the blue-green waters of the bay. The sun was getting hotter and hotter and the shade proved delightful. How far we already felt from Europe and its cold grey wintry skies !

It seemed pleasant to be once more on a wide expanse of water. On either side the mountains ranged themselves, assuming sometimes surprising shapes. Mount Agrib, with its many peaks, resembled some strange cipher of a forgotten script. At sunset, standing out clearly against a cloudless sky of gold, the mountain turned a deep intense blue such as is only to be found in the East. On the opposite side, the coast, lit up by the last rays of the sun, from rose turned to mauve and blue, while overhead the full moon was already shining in the pale sky.

Next morning we rose to find that the coast had disappeared and that we were in the Red Sea. Bands of playful dolphins followed in our wake making big leaps into the air. Great patches of bright orange seaweed floated in the clear green water, giving a reddish tinge to the whole sea and well explaining the origin of its name. Each day the sun grew more powerful and even the nights were oppressively hot. We lay out on a deserted part of the deck and looked at the moon rising and the stars emerging. Everything was so peaceful and serene. It seemed incredible to think we were passing so near to Abyssinia without any outer sign of war.

* * *

The sunsets in the Red Sea are well known for their beauty, and the traveller who has been fortunate

enough to witness one of them will treasure the memory throughout his life. That night such happiness was ours. The whole scene was aflame with the setting sun, filling us with awe and silent admiration. No tongue can express the intensity and harmony of the colours as they blended into each other. On the perfectly smooth metallic surface of the sea the crest of the wave formed by the advancing ship appeared as a serpent of fire.

* * *

During the afternoon the captain pointed out to the passengers the Djebel Tair and the Zebair Islands, all of which are extinct volcanoes. Innumerable birds flew away at our approach, disturbed in their solitude. In the hazy distance appeared the blue mountains on the coast of Eritrea, and on the morrow we arrived at Djibouti.

* * *

In the early hours of dawn we passed beside the fortified island of Perim, now in British possession, and along the French Somali coast. A few scattered houses on the edge of the sea attracted our notice. It was the small French town of Obok, consisting mainly of the Governor's residence, a penitentiary, and a solitary lighthouse at the end of a rocky ledge. A dreary place to have to live in, with no sign of trees or vegetation of any kind, in a barren sun-baked land. A few children were to be seen on the beach, but otherwise everything looked deserted and lifeless.

Having reached the bay of Tajurah, in a short while the *Angers* anchored in front of Djibouti. The passengers were taken ashore in motor-boats manned by Somali natives. Their magnificent dark bodies,

perfectly proportioned, were a delight to behold ; their every movement was full of grace and they reminded one of bronze statues come to life. It is deeply to be regretted that we of the white race, while acquiring keen brains and mental capacities, have lost that priceless beauty and dignity which we see so splendidly portrayed in our dark-skinned brothers. Why is it that civilization should thus have deprived us of a natural heritage ? Surely it is because we have turned away from Nature and her laws, forgetting the ways of simple, healthy living.

We took refuge from our noisy fellow-passengers and from the burning rays of the sun in a small shady square, and sat down on the ground at the foot of the trees. Immediately we were surrounded by natives whose curiosity needed to be satisfied at close quarters. One of them, knowing a few words of French, took advantage of the fact to make himself our bodyguard and displayed great vigour in his self-appointed task. Behind the low wall surrounding the square, rows of horse carriages and noisy drivers waited for customers. Close by, other natives were asleep on the ground, enveloped from head to foot in large white cotton cloths to protect them from the sun and flies. The shade of the trees was pleasant, and as we rested and got accustomed to the unfamiliar atmosphere I tried to sense something of the African "note". Each continent, as well as each country, seems, as it were, to sound out a unique chord in the great symphony of the world. It is somewhat like tuning-in on the wireless. But to hear aright prejudices of race and colour must needs entirely be put aside, and love and true sympathy be felt. On this depends the understanding of peoples and races amongst whom one happens to be living.

As if to illustrate the trend of my thoughts by a living example, a magnificent Somali native, whose duty was to look after the square, walked slowly

through the trees ; over six foot high, naked to the waist, he was the picture of health and harmony. One felt that he was here in his own kingdom, being both the ruler and the protector of his people. Order and cleanliness were maintained, but that which struck me most was the extraordinary tenderness and respect he showed to the trees and plants. With infinite care and love he bent over the newly planted shrubs, straightening here and there a young shoot or untangling some twisted branches, revealing unconsciously to us some beautiful and touching traits of the black race—an intimate contact with Nature, strong emotions, and a spontaneous child-like simplicity unspoilt as yet by pride of a mind still in its infancy.

Leaving our shady retreat, we walked through the crowded streets to the market-place, mingling with the natives and admiring the bright-coloured dresses of the women. A very rickety old carriage took us out of the town to an oasis, where a few forlorn-looking palm trees gave but scanty shelter. Notwithstanding the heat we decided to walk back and enjoy the view of Djibouti from a distance, the white cone-like heaps of salt, the bay of Tajurah, where the dark silhouette of the *Angers* stood out against the blue sea and mountains, while the flat sandy land stretched to the far-off desert. We met camels led by natives, herds of goats, and women bearing children on their backs and leather bottles filled with milk and water. These people had an intense fear of the camera and ran past, hiding their faces. Twice we were nearly attacked by the men, who believed that to be photographed was to come under an evil spell. For the same reason, they will not permit a picture to be taken of a well or a mosque.

It was a relief to get back on board, after the hottest day we had yet known. Leaving the harbour behind, a wonderful sunset lit up the sky and a

moment later the tropical night set in—a deep-blue night filled with stars. Soon we would see the Southern Cross.

* * *

In the early morning, from the upper deck, for the last time we viewed the African coast. The smooth yellow sands alternating with the rough cliffs of golden brown stone made a pleasing contrast to the intense blue of the sea. A strip of land appeared in the shape of an elephant, and soon afterwards Cape Guardafui came into sight, resembling a lion with its head stretched between its paws. We had now reached the extreme point of Africa and, turning aside from the route to Madagascar, entered upon the last part of our journey. On every side innumerable flying-fish, like silver arrows, skimmed the surface of the waters, making delicate patterns as they shot out at various angles and in different directions.

* * *

The weeks had been slipping by, and we had strangely lost all count of time. How many months ago had we started and in how many more should we arrive? *Qu'importe?* The present alone had a meaning, and there was no greater happiness than to live fully each precious moment.

For days and days we had been in mid-ocean. One evening a faint blue line of peculiar-shaped mountains appeared on the horizon. No doubt some far-off island. Yet something stirred my heart and whispered, "India." Yes, Cape Comorin; and next day we reached Colombo.

* * *

What pictures rise up in the mind when thinking of Ceylon ! The artist and lover of Nature, hailing it as an earthly paradise, a place of beauty unspoilt by man, will describe the sacred Buddhist temples made holy by centuries of worship, the great mountains, the impenetrable jungles filled with birds and wild beasts, the treacherous marshes where no man may venture, the palm and coconut forests growing down to the edge of the sea, and the wide sandy beaches swept by the warm waves of the ocean.

In one short day, alas, it was only possible to have a fleeting though unforgettable vision of some of the beauties of Colombo and its neighbourhood. In the Botanical Gardens the most striking impression was perhaps that of the tropical shrubs and trees which grow in splendid profusion. Great clumps of giant bamboos raise skywards their massive trunks, which reminded me of innumerable organ pipes, and as the wind rocked them to and fro a strange music was heard, as if played by some invisible hands.

From Mount Lavinia, a rocky ledge overlooking the sea, we gazed down the palm-bordered beach. The waves dashed wildly against the rocks and a strong warm wind blew from the sea. Walking along the sands and taking in the beauty of it all, we were filled with an intense delight and a sense of unlimited freedom and happiness. Countless sea-gulls flew above our heads, filling the air with their shrill cries. A small native boy climbed up to the top of a tall coconut tree and brought us down a nut, the cool milk of which proved deliciously refreshing.

As we regretfully returned to the harbour, a fiery sunset made a vivid background to the dark palm groves through which we drove, and in a few hours our ship had left Colombo. Two days later we arrived in Madras and for the first time set foot on the sacred soil of India.

Part Two
SOUTH INDIA

ON the outskirts of Madras, along the bank of the River Adyar, lies the beautiful domain belonging to the Theosophical Society. It is here that we stayed for a few days during the International Congress which was about to open.

The large hostel of European style in which we lived is situated amongst graceful palm and coconut groves, beside a wood of blue-grey casuarina trees. Our rooms opened out on a wide balcony overlooking the calm waters of the river which flows to join the ocean, of whose near presence one is constantly reminded by the sound of the waves beating upon the shore.

Hundreds of delegates had already arrived, coming from all parts of the world. The Indian element naturally predominated, bringing the specific note to the international gathering. A crowd in Europe is rarely a beautiful sight, but in India one is immediately struck by the fact that everything is harmonious and nothing vulgar or ugly. Whether one looks at the bright-coloured *sarees*¹ of the Indian ladies or at the poorest *shudras*² wearing only a turban and loin-cloth, there is this element of beauty. It was a delight, for instance, to note the shape and colour of the humble earthenware vessels to be found in every Indian home and of the simple mud pots used for watering the flowers and shrubs.

One of the features of such a gathering was to stress the fact that although of different views, nationalities, temperaments, and outlooks we are all essentially one ; and the slogan "together differently"

¹ Indian dress.

² The lowest caste.

could appropriately help us to work towards a better individual and collective understanding.

* * *

It was Christmas Day, but somehow it was difficult to get into the spirit of our Christian festival, chiefly on account of the warm summer weather. The damp heat proved somewhat oppressive, but we knew we should no doubt get used to it ; besides, the rainy season would soon be over. The early morning immediately before and after sunrise was the best part of the day, and we learned to make the most of it, thanks to hundreds of crows in the neighbouring woods who woke us by their loud, impudent cawings between 5 and 6 a.m. When the dawn broke, the river was like a clear mirror, reflecting the delicate shades of the sky. On a small island, innumerable white vultures were perched on the trees or flew overhead, while the fishermen, like bronze statues, standing in their flat boats, flung out their blue nets into the calm waters.

* * *

The main feature of the Congress meetings was the element of friendship and unity which prevailed. For at least a few days everyone had put aside personal likes and dislikes and petty narrow feelings. There are times in the life of every individual when he is lifted up into the realization of a truer and nobler life, itself but a glimpse of the future, when brotherhood will be other than an empty word and peace the outcome not of treaties or pacts, no sooner made than destroyed, but of individual hearts full of love and real understanding. It has been truly said that the world problem is the individual problem, and so long as we are not able to solve satisfactorily our own inner difficulties

how can we ever hope or expect to bring harmony into the larger sphere of the human family?

Perhaps the most impressive sight was the early-morning gathering in the Headquarters' great hall, bearing on its walls the symbols of all the religions and decorated with the various national flags. A representative of each faith read or chanted a prayer or *mantram*¹ to the One to whom all aspirations are directed, in whatever form or language they may be expressed. Thus were heard successively in reverent silence the invocations of the Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jain, Buddhist, Parsee, and Jewish faiths, ending finally by the following prayer which all alike could say :

O hidden Life, vibrant in every atom,
O hidden Light, shining in every creature,
O hidden Love, embracing all in oneness,
May he who knows himself to be one with Thee,
Know that he is therefore one with every other.

The meetings were sometimes held beneath a great banyan² tree, under whose shelter hundreds of people could sit, as if in a vast leafy cathedral. Grey long-tailed squirrels ran along the branches, and one was aware of the intense life of bird and insect amongst the spreading trunks and thick foliage.

* * *

We have just enjoyed a most interesting entertainment, consisting of a series of tableaux from *The Light of Asia*. The theatre had a good-sized stage, but the rest of the building where the people were seated had no walls and was only protected by a kind of thatched

¹ A sacred chant.

² This tree is considered as sacred by the Hindus. It never dies and continues to spread itself out by means of a certain number of its branches rooting themselves again in the ground.

roof. It was admirable from the point of view of letting in the air, but not so convenient when heavy showers came down unexpectedly and pierced the roof. Most of the Europeans sat on chairs placed in the background, but we preferred to take our places on straw mats on the floor amongst our Indian brothers.

The acting, music, and dancing created the right atmosphere for the noble and inspiring legend of Prince Siddartha : the happy care-free life of the young lad brought up amongst the beauties of his father's palace ; the heart-rending discovery of the existence of pain, old age, and death ; the ties of love and marriage with sweet Queen Yasodhara ; then the starting forth of the Prince on the great quest, leaving behind all that was most dear for the sake of the sorrowing world ; the long life of the ascetic, ending in the triumph of Buddhahood and the preaching of the noble eightfold Path, leading to the final liberation from the wheel of birth and death.

As we walked back through the palm groves with the stars shining overhead, the night was full of peace and the feeling of eternity.



A number of eminent Parsees, attending the Congress, arranged to give a religious ceremony, which all interested in Zoroastrianism could attend. A reform movement has sprung up of late to simplify the long and complicated rites, but preserving with care all that is essential. The great feature of the teachings of Zarathustra is the worship of the Supreme in His aspect of Fire, both immanent and transcendent—in nature as well as in the heart of every man. The note sounded is that of Purity—purity in thought and word and deed.

Seated cross-legged on the floor we faced a low altar covered with flowers and on which burned a fire constantly fed with sandalwood and incense. Two Parsee priests, in spotless white garments, on either side of the altar, facing each other, chanted alternately the sacred verses, going through the simple but dignified worship of all the grades of lesser deities to the One Supreme, Ahura Mazda. Although we were not able to catch the meaning of the words, the whole ceremony was very impressive and created gradually an atmosphere of the most fiery purity. When all was over we each in turn went to the altar and placed a stick of sandalwood on the embers, symbolizing the offering of ourselves to the Almighty ever burning in our hearts, so that in our lives we may show forth His purity.



Leaving Adyar with the intention of returning shortly, after the rush of the Congress was over, we were on our way to visit a great Indian saint living in North Arcot, some twelve hours' journey from Madras. We knew practically nothing about him, but felt that this was a unique occasion of coming perhaps into contact with an Eastern sage or yogi, some descendant—who knows?—of the great Rishis of old who trod the sacred soil of India, spreading the spiritual wisdom and expounding the eternal truths.

We were full of the spirit of adventure, with a keen sense of interest and appreciation of all we saw and heard. Not that we had put aside altogether the faculty of judgment and discrimination, but that we endeavoured so to attune ourselves to the Indian life that we should not let any preconceived ideas or European habits and customs colour our perceptions and reactions to unfamiliar surroundings and events. The first thing to remember when travelling in

in a *bandy*, a two-wheeled bullock carriage, in which people and luggage can be piled up in the narrow space comprised between the wooden bottom and the oval-shaped hood. The driver squatted on his heels in front, or, with amazing equilibrium, stood erect on the shafts, using freely his tongue and whip. Tamil was unknown to us, but at the mere mention of the *asram*¹ he nodded, and off we trotted through the growing dusk, passing along the outskirts of the town, by tanks and small temples and wayside shrines. Europeans are seldom seen in such out-of-the-way places, and our arrival created quite a sensation amongst the people when they caught sight of our Western clothes.

Suddenly we turned off the main road and stopped under a giant mango at the entrance to the *asram*. A few steps brought us in front of two or three low buildings hidden behind the trees. We were not expected, but all who come are welcome, whoever they may be, and after a few words of explanation we were led to the hall where Sri Ramana Maharishi is always to be found. Two lamps, suspended from the ceiling, shed their light on the assembled Indians sitting cross-legged on the tiled floor. At one end of the room and immediately facing the door was a low couch or wooden bed, where a silent, motionless figure was reclining, lost in deep meditation, oblivious, it would seem, of everybody and everything.

We slipped in quietly, after having saluted in Indian fashion, and seated ourselves on the ground amongst the crowd. I took in slowly the strange unforgettable scene, my whole attention fixed on that central figure, whose calm majesty, serene strength, and perfect poise seemed to fill the whole place with

¹ An *asram* is a place where a certain number of people live together grouped around a central figure for the purposes of either spiritual training or social, educational, and political activities. In the present instance the *asram* is of a religious character.

unutterable peace. To look into his eyes, shining like stars, was perhaps for the first time to know the meaning of Eternity and to be caught up into a bliss that passed understanding. Who was this Great One? On what rung of the ladder of human or super-human evolution did he stand? Such questions have but little value. When the sun shines, does one need to know why and how it shines? Will the thirsty man hesitate to drink the cool water which is offered him till he be told whence it comes? Stilling the turbulent mind, ever seeking intellectual explanations, I opened my heart to the spiritual life which radiated so intensely in the silence.

A few Brahmins now entered, wearing freshly washed *doties*,¹ the sacred thread of their caste visible on their bare chests, and on their foreheads the three white horizontal stripes indicating the worshippers of Siva. They prostrated themselves before the Maharishi and took their seats beside his couch. First one, then the others, intoned the sacred *mantrams*, chanting in Sanscrit the verses of the ancient Vedas. At the end, all stood for the final praise, and I had the impression of being as it were surrounded by a sea of fiery power, welding all present into a great flame rising heavenwards. Then once more all prostrated themselves and resumed their places. Not once did that silent figure turn or move, or show any sign of interest in the proceedings. It was as if he had been living in a sphere beyond the limitations of time and space.

The trend of my thoughts was broken by the metallic sound of a gong, after which people began to leave the hall. Maharishi, having come out of *samadhi*,² spoke for the first time and exchanged a few words in

¹ Indian male attire worn instead of trousers.

² *Samadhi* is a high form of trance, of which there are many kinds. In some, bodily consciousness is entirely lost, while in others union with God is constant and unbroken in spite of physical contacts and activities.

Tamil with some of the *Swamis*.¹ Arrangements for our stay were immediately made, and Mr. Paul Brunton (author of *A Search in Secret India*), who was living in town, very kindly offered us his hospitality, which we gratefully accepted. We were asked to come in to supper and were taught the rudiments of good behaviour according to Indian customs. Before entering the dining-hall shoes have to be taken off and hands and feet washed under running water. The guests then sit down cross-legged on the floor all round a long empty room, before a freshly cut banana leaf. Brahmins bearing rice, *dahl*,² vegetables, plantains, curds, etc., deposit on these natural plates the required amount. The etiquette demands that the left hand shall touch nothing, the right alone being used to mix and carry the food to the mouth.

All waited till Maharishi had begun before starting their own meal. We found ourselves beside a few Europeans : our host, a Pole, and a young Dutchman recently arrived.

Our noble but clumsy efforts at eating properly created some amusement, and Maharishi, whom we found possessed a strong sense of humour, smiled kindly at us. Supper passed practically in silence, and was over in barely ten minutes. As soon as it ended the leaves were taken outside and disposed of in the garden, after which the washing of hands and mouth was duly performed. After our journey and our many experiences, we felt glad to follow our kind host back to town and retire early to rest.



¹ *Swami* means Teacher, God. A woman calls her husband *Swami*, because in India the wife considers her husband as God. A disciple will call his teacher *Swami*, as he really represents God, the Divine Teacher. All religious men in India are named in the same way.

² A sort of lentils.

Preparations were in full swing for the great annual festival on Maharishi's birthday. It is an occasion for thousands of people, from all over the country, to get his *darshan*¹ and receive his blessing, and all who come find food and shelter. A wide flat space in front of the *asram* was being made into a vast hall by means of a simple wooden trellis-work, the walls consisting of straw mats which made a very effective protection against the hot sun. As we entered Maharishi was busy writing, and reading letters and newspapers. He seemed to take a keen interest in everything that happened in the world, but somehow I had the feeling that all the while he was living in a state where time and space do not exist, neither relative knowledge nor ignorance, above the "pairs of opposites",² in the region of the Absolute, at the very heart of the universe. This can hardly be described, much less proved, and only dimly sensed, but even so constituted a never-to-be-forgotten experience. His utter impersonality and supreme detachment did not in the very least exclude an all-embracing compassion, sympathy, and understanding of the many problems and difficulties which were continually being submitted to him by all the weary sorrow-stricken people who came to him in the hope of finding comfort and help. Rich and poor, men, women, and children, Brahmins or outcasts, he looked upon all alike.

In India, the caste system is still very rigid, and Brahmins will not usually sit with outcasts or be touched by them. But for one who has reached the highest spiritual realization life is seen and known as one, and such distinctions have no longer any meaning or value. Thus, though Maharishi is of a Brahmin family, he is now no longer subjected to rules of caste

¹ Sight.

² A duality runs through the whole of a manifested universe: spirit and matter, light and shade, right and wrong, great and small, many and few, high and low, and so on *ad infinitum*.—

and in his *asram* all are welcome. Indeed, his personal attendant was an outcast, showing that in his eyes all are equal. Moreover, this is not limited to human beings, but includes the animal kingdom as well.

There are many beautiful and touching stories testifying to his love and compassion for our younger brothers. In his presence wild animals forget to fight or kill each other and do no harm to man. A cobra used to come into the hall without ever attacking anyone and even stayed peacefully beside its most bitter enemy, a peacock, another inmate of the *asram*. Maharishi forbids ill-treatment or killing of any living thing, and all unconsciously feel that here they are perfectly safe. The little black-striped squirrels run in and out, birds build their nests under the rafters, and monkeys peep in occasionally to steal some food. One day the people were complaining to Maharishi about these last visitors and declared that soon, if they were not frightened away, there would be so many that nobody would be able to remain in the *asram*. Maharishi then remarked with his usual humour that in that case the monkeys would have him all to themselves.

Maharishi's favourite cow, Lakshmi, is a most beautiful creature, with delicate horns and almond-shaped eyes. The love she showed for her master was very touching. As we were sitting in the *asram*, we heard a noise outside, and to our amazement up the steps came Lakshmi, as if it was the most natural thing in the world for a cow to enter a room, and went straight up to Maharishi's couch. He at once greeted her most affectionately and ordered that she should be given some plantains to eat. Lakshmi, then quite satisfied, turned round and began to make her way through the crowd, heedless of the people seated on the floor; she was eventually guided out amid general laughter. She it is who gives Maharishi a calf each year on his very birthday. Let science offer an

explanation if it can. When an animal, inmate of the *asram*, is about to die, Maharishi will attend to it in the same manner as he does to a human being, sitting beside it to the end with a hand on its head. He sees the same life in all, although he recognizes differences in the outer forms. His vision of equality is based on the realization of the One behind the many.

Twice a day, in the morning and evening before sunset, he goes out for a short walk by himself, up the sacred mountain of Arunachala which rises immediately behind the *asram*, bearing his only possessions, a stick and a black coconut pot. His tall, well-proportioned figure is seen climbing slowly up the steep rocky path, like some mountain god returning to his heavenly abode.

Many legends are told about Arunachala, the Hill of the Holy Beacon, the Pillar of Fire, the dwelling-place of Siva. It is said that one day in their Himalayan home Parvati, Siva's wife, in playfulness, put her hand in front of her lord's eyes. At once the earth was plunged into darkness for many weeks and months. Great discontent broke out amongst the mortals, and complaints soon reached the ears of Siva. Hearing that this calamity was due to his wife's carelessness, he condemned her to roam in penance, from one sacred shrine to another, till she won forgiveness. It is told, as she knelt in the great temple of Tiruvannamalai, Siva appeared to her on Arunachala Hill in the shape of a column of fire, in sign that her trial was over. Ever since, during the Kirtai Festival, in November and December of each year, when the Deity of the Saivite temple is adored, a fire is lit on the top of the mountain, which may be seen from a great distance burning day and night. All who catch sight of it prostrate themselves in adoration, worshipping the visible and outward fire, symbolizing the inner divine flame which ever burns in each man's heart.

Thousands of people flock to this place of pilgrimage, made doubly sacred by the presence of Maharishi. It is said that Arunachala is older even geologically than the Himalayas and belongs to the ancient continent of Lemuria. No trees are to be seen amongst the great boulders of red granite ; only high grass, bushes, and prickly cactus. Towards the evening the whole mountain seems to be on fire as the last rays of the sun intensify the natural colour of the rock. Brown vultures are poised motionless in the clear sky, the call of the goat-herds alone breaks the silence, and as far as the eye can reach the plain, dotted with palm groves and innumerable lakes, stretches to the distant mountains.

* * *

A striking characteristic of the *asram* consists in all the offerings brought to Maharishi by the various devotees and visitors being immediately shared by all present. Thus, when plantains, oranges, fried pastry rich with pepper and spices, sugar-cane or other delicacies are presented, a small part is at once handed back to the donor as *prasad*,¹ and after Maharishi has taken a minute portion, the rest is equally distributed to all. When a personal gift is offered which he is unable to share, it is invariably refused, and he gives it back to the person with the injunction to use it with his benediction.

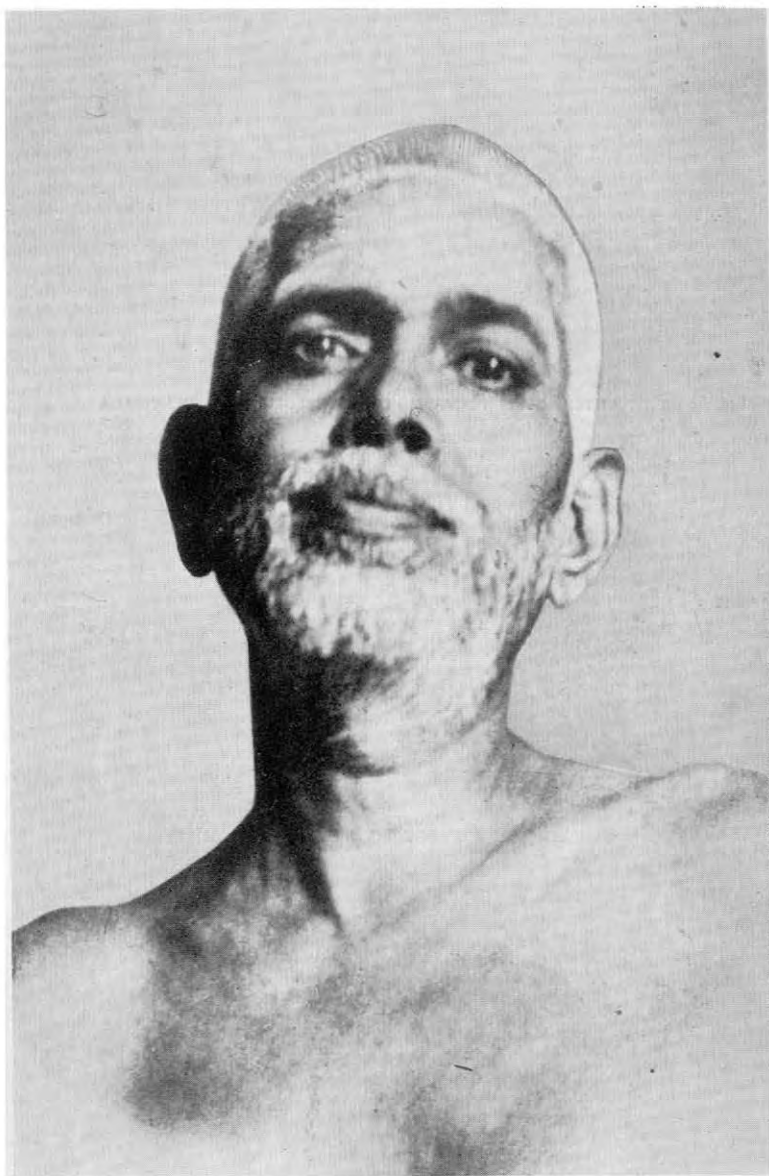
Perfect freedom, we found, is also maintained at the *asram*. All are allowed to come and go at any time and do whatever they feel like doing. The only strict rule we noticed is that of non-smoking in the hall. There is never the slightest feeling of compulsion and no attempt is made to impose on the visitors any special religious belief. Those who wish to read

¹ Gift with blessing.

Maharishi's books are welcome to do so, but there is no obligation. Some people ask questions, and Maharishi always answers in the most illuminating fashion, sometimes by questioning the questioner. Others prefer to meditate and keep silent, often finding that their mental doubts and personal problems have been solved without the help of spoken words.

"Know thyself" is the fundamental note of the Maharishi's teaching, and the quest of Self is continually stressed and described as the one essential prerequisite to spiritual attainment. All religions are but various ways leading ultimately to this one point, when inner personal experience and first-hand knowledge begin to replace blind faith in religious or ethical precepts. And what indeed are books, however sacred and beautiful, when under our very eyes we can look upon one who has realized in himself the highest spiritual state? Undoubtedly, merely to live in his presence is the greatest help that one could possibly receive. It is a fact that no one who comes to the *asram*, whether for consolation, spiritual enlightenment, or even out of mere curiosity, goes away empty-handed. Each receives to his utmost capacity, be that capacity great or small, and many people get inner experiences which have changed their whole lives.

There are many things one learns in India, and one of them is to be able to concentrate in whatever circumstances. This faculty is very common among Indians, who do not seem to mind or notice ordinary disturbance. In the *asram*, for instance, there is a continual coming and going; some people sing devotional songs, others talk, and babies cry. In the midst of all this meditation is carried on. It proves easy near Maharishi, because the whole atmosphere is one of high concentration and inner stillness. A room in a neighbouring hut had been put at our disposal, so that we might take some rest during the hottest hours of the day without having to go back to town.



SRI RAMANA MAHARISHI



THE AUTHOR WITH SWAMIS ON THE TOP OF ARUNACHALA



THE BIG TEMPLE AT TIRUVANNAMALAI



SRI RAMANA MAHARISHI WITH LAKSHMI AND HER CALF

There was a mat on the floor and we were able to lie down and sleep. An Indian can go off to sleep at any time, even in the middle of a crowd, and would, no doubt, be very surprised if a European complained of the noise. In the room next door several people were also "resting", but talking to each other at the top of their voices, oblivious of any neighbours—a splendid opportunity of acquiring the above-mentioned faculty.

We followed the suggestion of some friends at the *asram*, and purchased *sarees* ; we should have dressed sooner as Indian ladies but were somewhat shy in doing so, not knowing how it would be considered. How much more beautiful and dignified than our fashionable European clothes are these simple garments, requiring neither to be cut nor sewed. We learnt how to handle the stuff in the proper South Indian manner, making numerous pleats in front for the skirt, the last piece coming up across the front to the left shoulder and hanging loosely over the right one. It was also much more convenient for sitting down on the ground, cross-legged, and proved a good protection against the mosquitoes, as it was easy to envelop oneself entirely in the wide folds. We also adopted the Indian fashion of covering our heads with a part of the *saree* and using a sort of black umbrella against the sun, as everybody does in the South, discarding once for all the objectionable topee. We wore nothing on our feet but sandals, and whenever possible, when the ground was not too hot, preferred going barefoot.

This year Maharishi's birthday fell on the full moon of January. When we got to the *asram* hundreds of people had already arrived. We found the usual room deserted, and following the direction of the crowd we entered a larger hall near by, opposite to a small shrine built over the place where Maharishi's mother is buried. The walls were decorated with garlands of bright-yellow flowers, giving a very festive air. We were shown to a corner immediately behind

Maharishi's couch, from whence we could take in the whole scene without being in the bustle of the crowd. For several hours there was a steady flow of people. They entered silently in single file, bowed or prostrated before Maharishi and left at his feet some simple offering of fruit or sugar. All the while he sat motionless, lost in *samadhi*, at other times glancing at a passing pilgrim, perhaps at a little child, or at some poor woman pouring out before him her deep devotion or sorrow-laden heart. Upon all alike rested an infinite peace and blessing never to be forgotten.

The midday meal was served in the newly erected hall, as well as out of doors. It was no easy matter to fill ten thousand hungry mouths. When one set of meals was over, the people quickly made room for others waiting their turn, and so on till all were satisfied. It was a striking sight : the hundreds of outcasts of distinct Dravidian type ; the men bare except for a loincloth, the women clad in mauve *sarees*, and the children naked, all crouching on the ground in long rows, in front of banana leaves heaped with rice and vegetables. Once a year they are thus able to satisfy their hunger and eat as much as they like. In the evening a second repast was served, after which the crowds began to leave.

It was a magic night. The full moon shone brightly ; not a breath of air stirred the leaves. We walked back to town in a kind of dream wherein the perfect beauty of Nature blended with an inner feeling of utmost happiness. The night was too wonderful to think of sleeping indoors, so we took our bedding up on to the flat roof of the house. Close by, the great temple, with its six *gopurams* reminding one of pyramids, rose above the town, and immediately behind, Arunachala, the Hill of the Holy Beacon, stood out impressively against the starry sky. It was hot and the mosquitoes were troublesome ; but, after all, these were minor considerations. At 5 a.m., before sunrise, we were

wakened by hundreds of crows flying at dawn towards the mountain, to an unknown meeting-place. They passed so close over the tops of the houses that they nearly touched our heads. A little later the monkeys appeared on the scene and peeped at us on the terrace ; in fact, they got rather too bold for our liking and we hastily retreated into the house, carrying our bedding with us.

We made friends with an Indian family who lived next door. There was an old grandfather, most paternal, who sang devotional songs all day and was a devotee, as well as the rest of the family, of Sri Ramana Maharishi. He gave us Indian names and treated us with cordiality and touching affection. The father, a good-looking middle-aged man, was an inspector of schools and promised to take me one day to visit some educational institutions in the neighbouring district. His wife not only cared for their three children and superintended all connected with the home, but spent much time in painting pictures of a religious character. Their one-storeyed house was typically Indian, built round an inner courtyard, with rooms and pillared passages opening into it. A small tree covered with large jasmin-like flowers made the air fragrant with their sweet smell. At any time we were welcome to come in and were always received with the greatest hospitality.

Today we have had Maharishi's permission to go and visit the various caves and *asrams* on Arunachala. It is the custom always to ask leave before attempting the climb, as it is said that if he knows, nothing ill can befall one. It has happened, so we are told, that several times people asked to go up, but for some reason Maharishi did not approve. Notwithstanding, they left with the firm intention of carrying out their plan. However, they never reached the top, they lost their way completely, wandered about all night and, tired out, were obliged to return.

Permission having been granted to go only half way, I gave up the idea of going to the summit this time, and set out in the early morning, with some *Swamis* from the *asram*, so as to return before it became hot. As we climbed up the narrow path amongst the boulders I was aware of a strange sensation. We had left Maharishi sitting as usual in the hall, and yet in some mysterious manner as I went forward each step seemed to bring me nearer to him. It was as though he and Arunachala were one and the physical climbing corresponded to an inner spiritual ascent into his consciousness. (Mountains and lofty places have always been connected with some kind of spiritual enlightenment. In Christianity we have the Sermon on the Mount, the Transfiguration which took place on a high summit ; in Hinduism the Himalayas are the sacred abodes of the gods, from whence come down their light and blessing.) This experience was all the more noteworthy because so utterly unexpected. It was in fact so real and vivid that to avoid having to talk I let my companions walk ahead, so as to be able fully to concentrate.

After about an hour's climb we came all at once across a small *asram* on the edge of a torrent, surrounded by flowering oleanders, palm, and mango trees, whose delightful shade was welcome after the hot sun. This was one of the numerous places where Maharishi used to live during the many years he spent in complete silence on Arunachala. Farther up we reached a cave, hewn out of the rock, which is still frequented by holy men. Cheetahs (a kind of small leopard) are very common in these parts and sometimes approach the ascetics at night, but never do them any harm. At another small *asram* we were received by a Brahmin. After a few minutes' conversation, seeing no doubt that we were worthy of his confidence, he opened a door and, one after another, we were told to bend down and crawl in, on hands

and knees, through a passage hardly big enough for a man.

We finally emerged into a tiny cell walled in on all sides, with no light or air or even enough space to stand. By means of a lighted match we saw the place where many a searcher after truth had spent years in penance and meditation. To be thus voluntarily half buried alive no doubt deprives the senses of all outward objects of attraction, but assuredly self-realization can and has been obtained in God's pure air and sunshine. It was good, coming out of that suffocating hole, to breathe once more in the open and to look down upon the marvellous view that stretched at our feet. We returned by a short cut, and soon reached the bottom of Arunachala by means of a steep flight of steps hewn out of the rock by the pilgrims.

Just as we got to the road sounds of drums and various shrill instruments were heard in the distance, and a procession was seen advancing followed by a large crowd. In front came a richly decked elephant walking with slow, dignified step. Immediately behind the god of the temple, wearing bright-coloured garments, was seated on a kind of platform, surmounted by a huge parasol and carried aloft by twenty-four strong men. The goddess followed in a similar manner. Every few yards the bearers had to put down their crushing burden for a short rest, then proceeded further amidst the religious fervour of the people.

During this great festival of Sīva the passing of the sun into the northern hemisphere is celebrated, so we are told. The god and goddess have to be carried right round the foot of the hill, a distance of over seven miles, the whole night being often spent on the way. As we walked home after dinner the same day, we saw from a distance the procession leaving the temple. A dozen men, holding above their heads great lamps,

shed on the advancing crowd a brilliant light. Although it was quite dark every detail was clearly visible. Now and then the bearers made their deities "dance", by shaking them from right to left in spite of their stupendous weight.

For an ignorant onlooker it would be only an amazing display of idol-worship. But it must be remembered, however, that these sometimes grotesque-looking deities are but child-like representations, intended for the simple-minded folk, of various aspects of the great Hindu Trimurti—Brahma, Visnu, and Sīva. The more cultured people know well that their countless gods of stone or metal are not idols but useful symbols, representing in visible form some deep inner realities. In the ancient scriptures of the Vedas, in the various schools of Hindu philosophy, there was ever taught to those who were capable of understanding the ultimate truth of the One above the many, the Unmanifest above the Manifest, from whence all things proceed ; a truth naturally far beyond the comprehension of the mass.



Our friend the inspector of schools having to go on a tour, I eagerly accepted his proposed invitation to accompany him. We had soon left Tiruvannamalai behind and were driving along a road planted with mango and tamarind trees, with here and there temples and wayside shrines hidden amongst the thick vegetation. We met herds of buffalo which in spite of repeated hootings hardly deigned move out of the way. They were the picture of stolid stupidity, and Nature has certainly not favoured them with a pleasing countenance. The road passed through a long stretch of jungle, with trees, bushes, and prickly plants growing so closely together that they formed an im-

penetrable barrier ; no doubt an excellent hiding-place for the wild beasts who only venture out at night.

Turning off the main road we got on to a small track leading to a neighbouring village. The ground was so rough that several times the car was on the verge of turning over ; but we eventually reached our destination and stopped before a small shed, which turned out to be the school. The teacher came out to greet us, while the inhabitants, attracted by the sound of the car, appeared on all sides and stared at us with great interest. It was the poorest village I had yet seen. About fifty mud huts with thatched roofs were clustered together, each containing a single room per family. Peeping into one of the rooms, a few cooking-vessels and an earthen stove appeared to be their only belongings. Sanitation was unheard of, but fortunately the purifying heat of the sun does much to prevent epidemics from spreading. In the school twenty-five boys and girls, from six to ten years old, naked to the waist, were sitting cross-legged on the floor.

Once more I was struck by the power of concentration which even the children possess in a remarkable degree ; oblivious of our presence, their attention (not merely an outward one) was fully taken up by their lessons and they only looked up when spoken to. While the inspector was busy with the teacher I sat down near some little boys at the far end of the room and tried to make friends with them. Very soon their shyness dropped away, and I was able to coax some to show me their reading-books and say the Tamil names of various pictures, which I duly repeated, giving them also the French equivalent. This game afforded them great delight, and more and more children presently wanted to join in. Some disturbance was thus created in our corner, and I had rather a bad conscience when the teacher asked for silence. The inspector then made them pass a small examination in different subjects.

The school was too poor to afford slates, so instead there were long narrow tables, a few inches high and slightly hollowed out, containing sand. On this the children wrote simultaneously with their right forefinger, smoothing out the sand with the left hand before making a fresh letter. It was fascinating to watch them drawing the strange-looking Tamil characters with incredible rapidity in this primitive fashion. I lost my heart to one of the little boys, a child of seven or eight, with keen, intelligent eyes, black wavy hair falling on to his shoulders, and a beautiful dark refined little body, of kingly bearing—yet but a poor village lad.

* * *

We nearly always imagine in the West that without talking it is impossible for two people to exchange any thoughts or to make their meeting profitable. In fact, we Westerners rarely feel happy when a silence happens in the middle of a conversation or a meal, especially when strangers are present. We, somehow, unconsciously want to hide our real personality behind a flow of words, too often superficial and unnecessary. Silence reveals much more of one's real nature and permits a subtle interchange of thoughts and feelings. In India silence is not only frequently resorted to, but is considered a common necessity. Relaxation from the strain of unceasing talk proves of great value.

Indeed, the *saddhus*,¹ intent on spiritual achievement, often spend ten or twelve years in complete *mounam*,² so as to preserve all their vital energy for their inward quest. We found it extremely agreeable thus to be able to live amongst our Indian brothers

¹ General term applied to all searchers after Truth (whether still leading a family life or having given up worldly possessions) and to those who aspire to scale the heights of spirituality.

² Silence.

without any obligation of speaking and yet feel perfectly at ease. This proves all the more useful when contacting people who do not understand English, and we learnt little by little the art of using the language of the heart, a language which in India most can comprehend whatever their mother tongue.

This morning, after calling upon an Indian gentleman for business purposes, as I was about to leave I was called back and told that the lady of the house desired to see me. I was ushered into a darkened room where a small boy lay feverish on a couch. A lady came forward and greeted me, bringing her folded hands to her forehead and pronouncing the beautiful *Namaste*.¹ She led me to a seat near the window and we took places opposite each other. I did not know Tamil, neither did she know English, so we remained silent, both using the language of the heart. During ten minutes we thus inwardly conversed, after which we got up, bowed to each other again in Indian fashion, and parted, better friends perhaps than if years of usual intercourse had brought us together.



A young lady of rich family from Ahmedabad was expected at the *asram* to visit Maharishi. As we now lived alone in town we were asked if we could put her up for a couple of nights, and of course we were only too happy to do so. Our guest turned out to be a most charming girl whom we had met at Adyar. In fact, we were excellent friends, although we did not remember each other's names, and were most happy to meet again in so unexpected a fashion. She was accompanied by a tutor, an old *ayah*,² and several

¹ *Namaste* or *Namascar*, meaning "I salute you". The interpretation of this varies: it may mean "Peace be with you", "You and I are one", or "I salute the God in you".

² Nurse.

attendants and mountains of luggage, including iron chests, large water-vessels, and bedding.

After staying some time at the *asram*, we went off together to visit the temple, which is one of the great Sivaite centres of South India. One can wander for hours amongst the various shrines and sit on the steps looking down at the sacred tank, where men and women bathe before going into the sanctuary. There is, in particular, a thousand-pillared temple whose severe and simple architecture, reminding one of ancient Greece, contrasts with the heavily laden *gopurams* where every inch of space is occupied by deities in amazing profusion. On entering we came upon a huge elephant tethered to a pillar by iron chains and being fed with cart-loads of banana leaves and branches. We learnt that he was only five years old and had been given by a maharaja for the service of the temple. We remembered having seen this elephant during the procession the other day accompanied by a Brahmin, going from house to house collecting offerings of rice and *ghee*.¹ A bell suspended from his neck announces his arrival and one can hear him coming from some distance. He has an excellent memory, and if a person once offers him a plantain fruit he will never forget it. He will always be on the look-out at that particular house for a similar gift next time he comes round.

As we went to and fro to the *asram* each day, the people began to know us well by sight. Particularly the children in the early morning were on the alert, and as soon as they saw us they shouted to each other and came running along to beg for an anna. If anyone is unwise enough to give them something, they will expect more each time and not be put off or discouraged in any way. We wisely made up our minds not to get annoyed with the children any more,

¹ Clarified butter.

but to try and be really friendly and imagine how it would feel to be one of them. It is always a good policy to make the best of everything ; moreover, if one gets down to the roots of any annoyance, one is sure to find that the trouble lies in reality in one's own nature. A perfectly controlled person will never, for instance, get put out by anything or be the slave of outer circumstances. So when fifteen little naked ragamuffins appeared with triumphal shouts and clustered round, standing in the way, we tried to catch hold of them playfully and ran after them, giving them terrible frights before they realized it was only in fun. Soon they got so confident that they hung on to our arms and tugged at our *sarees*, and we all had a good time.

One day I heard a loud clapping behind me (Indians never call to attract attention), and I was beckoned to come into one of the poorer houses. The whole family was grouped together, eager to see a European at close quarters. They at once set before me some milk and fruit. One of the women looked terribly ill and I suddenly realized that they were all expecting me to prescribe a remedy. I felt they had a blind confidence in me, but alas was helpless to give them any advice, knowing neither the nature of the complaint nor the drugs available.

In front of each house, however poor, the ground is neatly swept, so as to obtain a smooth surface on which the women draw with great skill all sorts of intricate figures and geometrical designs in white chalk. It is a religious custom, and the symbols have always a profound meaning, although unknown to the ignorant mass.



The end of our stay was fast approaching. But before we left we made up our minds to go once to

the top of Arunachala. This time nothing prevented us from carrying out our plan, and soon after dawn we took leave of Maharishi, whose repeated injunction was not to hurry and to go slowly. After three hours of steady climbing, with an occasional rest beside the numerous springs gushing out of the rocks where we were able to slake our thirst and pour cooling water on our heads, we at last neared the summit. As we approached we were gradually enveloped by a thick fog, and the last steep ascent was performed in the midst of low-hanging clouds. We now took off our sandals, since no one was supposed to walk otherwise than barefoot on the spot where the sacred fire has burnt. A cold wind was blowing and the damp atmosphere penetrated us through and through.

We found ourselves on a flat rocky ledge, a few steps bringing us to the edge of a precipice. The dense fog shut out the view and hedged us in on all sides. We did not talk, but stood apart from one another, while our companions, who were very religious, meditated or chanted *mantrams*. Then came a most startling experience—one of utter loneliness, the impression of being entirely cut off from the world below, alone as it were on an uninhabited planet and withal a deathless, timeless sensation of Being impossible to describe in words. Suddenly, as if by magic, the clouds lifted and in a few minutes the whole country appeared in the glorious sun, like a rich Persian carpet, with the blue lakes, the many-coloured rice fields passing from bright green to orange, and at our feet the great temple looking like a small, insignificant toy.

* * *

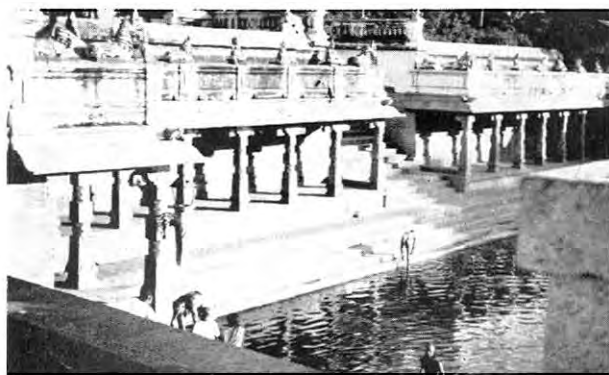
As we proceeded further on our adventurous travels and watched the holy mountain of Arunachala



ARUNACHALA—THE HILL OF THE HOLY BEACON



LOTUSES NEAR PONDICHERY



SACRED TANK OF ARUNACHALA TEMPLE



STUDENTS WITH VINA AT MADANA-
PALLE COLLEGE



MADURA TEMPLE. THE GOLDEN
WATERLILY TANK



SOUTH INDIAN VILLAGE

gradually disappearing in the distance, the certainty of returning soon to Tiruvannamalai on our way back from the South took away all regret, and we joyfully resumed our wanderings. It was incredible to think we had only been a month in India, and felt already so utterly at home, in spite of the difficulties of climate, language, and customs. In some inexplicable way, Europe seemed to recede into a remote past, like a dream which is forgotten on awakening. Other people noticed how familiar we appeared to be with Indian customs and would not believe us when we mentioned the date of our arrival.

A few days were spent at Adyar, after which we boarded a steamer from Madras to Pondicherry. At dawn we found ourselves lying some little distance off the coast. There is no harbour and the passengers are taken ashore by small rowing-boats to a primitive-looking jetty. In stormy weather it is extremely difficult to jump on to the steps leading to the platform, there being always the risk of missing one's footing and falling into the sea, where the presence of sharks is by no means reassuring. However, the landing proved comparatively easy as there were hardly any waves. We noticed some curious boats made out of strips of bark sewn together and used by the natives to take the goods to or from the steamers. They run their craft into shallow water and unload them, carrying the heavy loads on their backs.

Pondicherry proved a disappointment and should never be considered in any way as characteristic of South India. The people are quite degenerate, because, no doubt, of the free trade in alcohol, sold at low price. In spite of the clean-looking white houses and quiet streets, reminding one of an old French provincial town, the atmosphere was most unpleasant. The only haven of refuge, like an island of peace and purity, was Sri Aurobindo's *asram*, consisting of a few low buildings amongst shady gardens and sweetly

scented flowers and shrubs. Here lives a great Indian saint, well known for his political work in bygone days and now entirely given over to spiritual pursuits. His numerous books on Yoga are of profound interest to the student and he is undoubtedly a very remarkable personality. Unfortunately, he can only be seen three times a year, and only then after permission has been granted. Even "the Mother", a French lady who is in close touch with him and who runs the *asram*, is not easily approachable.

As we had not taken the necessary steps to secure a possible interview we contented ourselves with a rapid glimpse of the cool, spacious rooms and library where the disciples were resting or studying, and walked through the garden to the hall where the daily evening meditations are held, but which are strictly private and limited to the accepted few attached to the *asram*. This sort of exclusiveness is all the more noticeable after the freedom enjoyed at Tiruvannamalai, where at any time visitors are welcome to see and speak to Maharishi.

A car took us away from the town to the village of Villenour, five or six miles away and still in French territory. There is a small temple with the usual sacred tank, but the most beautiful and unexpected sight is a near-by lake, surrounded by palm trees and covered with pink lotuses. We climbed over a fence and sat on the edge of the water admiring the strength and beauty of the flowers rising above the sturdy leaves. Suddenly an Indian appeared carrying some freshly picked buds, still covered with drops of water. Their exquisite colour and shape are amongst Nature's most perfect creations and filled me with delight. To hold a lotus in my hands had been one of the dreams of my childhood, and its realization, though outwardly a small, insignificant event, was infinitely precious and a source of deep joy.

The happiness which ever accompanies the per-

ception of the beautiful is but the vision of the Absolute lying in the heart of all things and which every human being must one day discover for himself. Perhaps no flower can better give out this silent message than the lotus, and that is why we find it constantly referred to by mystics to illustrate various stages in the growth of the soul. Born in the mud, rising through water into the pure air, it opens to the sun, a true symbol of the Divine in man rising through *matter into the realm of the spirit, where it blossoms forth in all its perfection.*



At Madanapalle we were the guests of the principal of the Theosophical College, Dr. Cousins, and his wife, both of Irish nationality. Our host is a poet and well known for his educational work, to which he adds a wide knowledge in the domain of art. He has done much to encourage artists and to organize exhibitions *of the best Indian paintings, in India as well as abroad.* His wife is a remarkable pianist and has a deep understanding of Indian music. We were indeed fortunate to be thus able to get much valuable information on many subjects of vital interest.

The College buildings stand in the midst of spacious grounds lying above the town. Co-education is here in favour and gives, it seems, excellent results. Every morning the pupils assemble for prayer and meditation. We were invited to join them in the large hall and we slipped in with the girls and sat down amongst them while the meeting was carried on. *Mantrams* were chanted, followed by various Indian songs. One of them was the national hymn to Mother India composed by Dr. Rabindranath Tagore. The *Vande Mataram*, as it is called, is sacred to all Indian hearts and is sung all over India at the opening of

practically every meeting, whatever its nature. The powerful rhythm was very impressive, although we did not understand the words, whose meaning was afterwards explained to us. It expresses in a most beautiful way the ardent love of the Motherland which lies at the bottom of all Indian hearts, whether they be Hindus, Buddhists, Muhammedans, Jains, or Parsees.

As soon as the students had gone out our host took us round the hall to admire a few large granite slabs placed against the walls and representing various deities. They were found lying in a field and probably belonged to some ancient temple. When a stone figure is in the least damaged it is considered unworthy for worship and put aside. Valuable carvings have thus been discarded, and yet it is only with extreme difficulty that permission is granted to save them from further deterioration. No doubt the priests prefer their disused deities to crumble to dust rather than fall into the hands of people who might misunderstand their real meaning and profane them by mere curiosity. Here, however, there is no danger of this happening, as everything is done to encourage the artistic as well as the religious spirit of the students, letting them follow their ancient traditions.

Later we were invited to visit the girls, who lived in a large hostel built round a garden. The white-washed rooms were cool and clean and the students looked lovely with their dark eyes, long black plaited hair, and light-coloured *sarees*. Nowadays it is becoming more usual for girls to be sent to college, instead of getting married before their education is finished. Their one aim, however, from what we could gather, is to find a husband as soon as they leave school. Amongst them we found a few young widows who, not content by stopping at home where their life would be spent in household duties, preferred to acquire knowledge so as to be able to devote themselves

to social work and village uplift. This was indeed a sign of the times and much to be encouraged.

The whole question of women in India seems to be a very complex one, and we Westerners are perhaps too apt to judge the habits and customs prevalent in the East without taking into account their *raison d'être*. For instance, the rightly criticized child-marriage was mainly due to the Muhammedan invasion and was to prevent the victors carrying off the helpless young girls. It must also be remembered that full development is reached much sooner than in the West, so that at twelve years old a girl is able to marry, though of course the race would be much stronger if this were not done. Small children are not married, as is commonly thought, but are merely betrothed and taken to their husband's home after the marriage ceremony and only when puberty is attained. The young people rarely meet or even see each other before the wedding, but is this much worse than the innumerable "arranged marriages" still so current in Europe for which the parents are entirely responsible, putting aside their daughters' wishes and opinions?

Moreover, the whole outlook on life in India is different from the one which prevails in the West. The girls are brought up to see in their future husband an ideal of man, to be loved and served as a god, this being their highest *Dharma*,¹ and when faithfully performed leading eventually to spiritual realization and enlightenment. The husband becomes also the *gurū* or teacher of his wife, but so interdependent are they that he cannot perform certain ceremonies without her help. The Indian woman is by no means a slave, as is so often put forward. She rules the household with authority and the children are entirely under

¹ Duty which is appropriate to each individual according to his particular stage of development and whose fulfilment will assure his greatest happiness and progress.

her supervision. The whole conception of marriage is based on religion and is intended to awaken spiritual love and the sense of duty, giving quite a secondary place to sensuous enjoyments. Thus the girl ever sees in her husband the Divine Lover, and, being brought up since childhood with the stories of the great Indian saints and heroes, portraying in their everyday lives the noble qualities which go to make up perfect men and women, she naturally strives to follow their high example.

I had an occasion in Madras to discuss this subject with young people of both sexes. The new generations are eager to enjoy greater liberty and are beginning to shake themselves free from their age-old traditions. An ever-growing number will not marry unless they know each other beforehand and feel real affinity for one another. However, they owned that these modern marriages were on the whole less successful, leading often to greater unhappiness and discontent, because the religious element having lost its true value and significance their happiness depended entirely on the unstable basis of intellectual and sensual attraction. We see here the insidious harm and poisoning effects of Western ideas taken up by Indians in the desire to be "modern". This craze to copy Western habits—of which we can be anything but proud—constitutes a most dangerous tendency. By all means let India be attracted by all that is praiseworthy, right activity and efficiency being amongst the most important and necessary qualities to be acquired ; but let us hope and pray that she may develop along her own individual lines without adopting our so-called "civilized" ways of living.

Much has been said about the fate of the poor widows who are not allowed to remarry. (The terrible custom of following their deceased husband to the funeral-pyre is, luckily, a thing of the past.) They should be allowed to make a new home—this is, in

fact, one of the important reforms which Gandhi has undertaken to accomplish ; but, above all, they must be free to decide for themselves what their future will be. At Tiruvannamalai, a young widow, a charming girl of about seventeen with two small children, had not the slightest wish to remarry, but only to bring up her babies, finding ample scope for happiness in a life of self-sacrifice and duty performed with motherly love and tenderness.

A different case was brought to our notice at the *asram*, where a childless widow had come to visit Maharishi. For her the death of her husband, though she loved him very much, had been a blessing in disguise and a sign of Providence that she was now free to devote herself entirely to the spiritual life, without the duty to husband and children. In this she found her happiness and peace. In many cases, even the tedious household duties which fall to the lot of most widows are considered useful and, joyfully performed, not being in any way antagonistic to spiritual endeavour.

Some distance from the College hostels is a small square building which our host has turned into a museum. We found, arranged with great taste, a very fine collection of pictures, mostly by modern painters. Here again in the domain of art the influence of religion is strongly felt. There is hardly any subject that has not some apparent or hidden spiritual significance. Most paintings represent deities or portray some event out of the lives of the gods or goddesses, saints or heroes. It is indeed impossible to comprehend fully their significance without knowing to some extent the Hindu teachings and symbolism. But nevertheless, with the limited information we possessed and thanks to the luminous explanations of our host, we began to explore this new field, like another open window from which we could look out upon Indian life.

Every picture has a message. To what extent that message can be discovered depends more on the capacity for intuition than on mere visual and intellectual comprehension. All beauty has the power of awakening this inner faculty, this direct knowledge, enabling man to contact the invisible. To unprepared eyes, Indian painting may seem strange at first, but very soon it will begin to speak to the heart and the spectator will find himself gradually penetrating into a wider range of vision. But it needs time, much time, so as to imbibe, as it were, the spirit and the mood in which the picture was painted.

The day before we left Madanapalle our host arranged for a demonstration of *Hatha Yoga* to be given for our benefit. *Hatha Yoga* is the science of disciplining the physical body so as to achieve not only the control of the muscles but even that of the unconscious functions, such as digestion, breathing, the beating of the heart, etc. This system is practised on a vast scale in India, and its followers can be classified under two main headings : those who seek a personal gain and those whose motive is purely a spiritual one.

In the first category are found all the various kinds of fakirs, those capable of performing "miracles" and feats of magic (such as walking on live coals, swallowing glass and poison, etc.) with which they astound their audiences. They have no desire to develop spirituality and are content in possessing powers which they can show off, enabling them to earn their living comfortably. These fakirs and the *saddhus* who spend years in torturing their bodies for the purpose of training their will-power and dominating their senses (for instance, piercing their flesh with nails, keeping one arm in the air till it withers, etc.) are perhaps best known to Westerners, whereas the men of real spiritual knowledge are less easily found, as they do not display their powers or work for personal gain.

Under the second heading come all the aspirants to the higher life, who consider *Hatha Yoga* as only a means to an end and not an end in itself—an end which should enable them, when their body is under perfect control, to proceed to the practice of *Raja Yoga*, the Royal Science leading to union with the Divine. They consider that, just as a house cannot be built without first laying solid foundations, in the same way is it necessary to have a strong healthy body, obedient and responsive to the behests of the will, before attempting to scale the heights of spirituality. They do not care to work miracles or to show off the powers which come naturally to them during their training ; they keep their mind always fixed on the ultimate goal, which is the realization of God and the union of the individual soul with the Universal Soul.

Hatha Yoga consists of a large number of exercises, and years of hard practice are required to carry them out correctly. It is a very complicated though precise science, and affords splendid training for the mind as well as for the will, each exercise implying intense concentration on the various centres of the body, coupled with control of breath. The ancient Aryans knew perfectly the constitution of the physical body and in fact had a far greater knowledge than that of our modern scientists. Official science is only now beginning to study and ascertain the reality of certain phenomena, demonstrating clearly the existence of laws hitherto ignored in the West and governing the so-called "miracles".

The College students who so desire can find here a competent teacher, and are permitted to follow a course adapted to their capacities. We were led to a room conspicuous by the absence of furniture, the floor being covered with mats, and the place only used for the purposes of *Hatha Yoga*. A teacher and one of his best pupils were ready to show us some of the many exercises, explaining to us in a few words their

general purpose. It was really astounding to see how every muscle was under perfect control and could separately be contracted at will. The whole body was seen to be like a piece of complicated machinery, whose numberless cogs and wheels could be supervised in minutest detail. Ill-health located in any organ is immediately detected and appropriate exercises invariably bring relief and hasten the recovery. In fact, such beneficent results are obtained in numberless cases of disease that an establishment has lately been opened near Bombay where patients are treated by *Hatha Yoga* exercises with, we are told, the greatest success.

In the last few years a number of books have been published, especially in America, dealing with this subject and describing the exercises, illustrated by photographs showing the various *asanas* or postures. People are thus tempted to perform these without the help of a competent teacher, relying on their own ability and heedless of the repeated warnings to refrain from experiments which may well prove dangerous. It is a fact not to be overlooked that the best descriptions, however detailed, can never replace the personal guidance of a really experienced and wise teacher, who is able to detect at once the slightest mistake and who can prevent errors which may otherwise lead to physical and mental disorders.

In Europe one occasionally meets so-called fakirs who pretend to be highly trained, but whose main aim is to extort as much money as possible from their hapless victims, who fall prey to all sorts of dangerous practices. A real Yogi will never impart occult knowledge for money and indeed will not even give out information on these subjects unless he be certain that the person is fit to understand and profit by it. This is no child's play and implies the handling of forces which can be compared to electricity, capable of destroying as well as procuring beneficial results.

Just as an inexperienced student will not be left alone in a laboratory to experiment with explosives without knowing the exact laws which govern them, so a neophyte in the science of occult knowledge will not be allowed to meddle with forces of whose nature he is unaware, before mastering all the information already available, and above all before leading the required life. Few Europeans would care to follow the strict rules laid down, including a severe diet, regulated habits, and the mastery of all the senses.

* * *

We rose early and, bidding good-bye to our kind hosts, we got into a bus which was to take us part of the way southwards to our next halting-place, between Madras and Pondicherry. The road was bordered by century-old tamarind and banyan trees, making a dome of foliage overhead and affording shelter from the burning rays of the sun. Suddenly the driver put on the brakes without any apparent reason and a few moments later we resumed our journey. The vigilant eye of the driver had apparently detected a large snake hanging from a bough right over the road, and he had stopped in order to make sure it was not going to drop on to the bus. The landscape was particularly interesting. It looked as if it might have been the playground of giants, who had spent their time in throwing huge boulders at one another and piling them up in the shape of mountains. At the small halting-places we were able to get some coffee, but the various eatables displayed did not look tempting, the Muhammedan shops being anything but clean. Nevertheless, fruit could be obtained everywhere; the bananas were very cheap and constituted, with rice, our main food.

Eventually Chidambaram was reached and we took a *bandy* from the station to the Annamalai

University, situated a couple of miles away. We were received with the usual cordiality and warm hospitality and invited to reside during our stay in the European guest-house, a small bungalow in the close vicinity of the University buildings. We brought a letter of introduction to the vice-chancellor, and an interview was granted to us on the morrow. In the meantime, after some refreshment and a short rest during the hot part of the day, we returned to town in order to visit the temple, one of the most ancient of South India. Chidambaram is the great centre of worship of *Natarāja* or dancing Śiva. The Third Person of the Hindu Trimurti, Śiva, is called *Natarāja* when he dances the Divine Dance, whose rhythm maintains the whole of creation. He is also called the Destroyer, but he destroys only to liberate the imprisoned life, so that it may express itself through ever better and more perfect forms. Thus he is seen to be as much the Liberator as the Slayer of the unreal. We find him worshipped under the aspect of fire in Tiruvannamalai, of earth in Kumbakonam, of water in Trichinopoly. In Chidambaram he is the Lord of the Air and the Divine Dancer.

We got to the temple just as the evening ceremony was about to begin. Leaving our sandals at the outer gate we walked through the various courtyards, past a gigantic *Nandi*,¹ and entered the hall preceding the sanctuary. On the stone pillars and metal doors were carved the innumerable attitudes and gestures of *Natarāja*, each one having a deep religious significance.

Mingling with the crowd we pressed forward with the hope of getting a glimpse of the proceedings. Standing in a doorway I suddenly got a tremendous push from behind as a sacred cow made its way regardless of obstacles. We eventually sat down on the stone pavement, in a dark corner so as not to attract

¹ Sacred bull, emblem of Śiva.

attention, and observed quietly the extraordinary scene. Endless passages and pillared halls met the eye on every side, and in the semi-darkness glittered the lights of the inner sanctuary. The air vibrated with the sound of drums, conches, and other strange instruments. Brahmins, naked to the waist, entered bearing large baskets of plantain fruit and coconuts to be offered to the god. Hundreds of men, women, and children came and went, and in the midst of all the noise and bustle innumerable cross-legged figures sat wrapped in silent meditation.

Never had I realized so clearly what a great power Hinduism represented. Previously we had seen something of its influence on the lives of the people in their common everyday activities. Now we contacted for the first time the life which exists in the temples. Hinduism, no doubt, needs to be reformed and the ceremonial worship purified by returning to the original teachings of the Vedas, for here, like everywhere else, human weakness and ignorance have led to much that is to be deplored. Be that as it may, I must bear testimony to the fact that the temples are still nowadays great centres of spiritual power, which inevitably help and uplift all who go in to worship. The priests in this place were more liberal-minded than elsewhere, and this accounts for the fact that we were able to approach so close to the sanctuary.

There are many beautiful legends showing that all men are equal before God, whether they be Brahmins or of low caste. A poor Sudra,¹ servant of a rich landowner, had a deep and burning devotion for Siva. The desire to go to Chidambaram and contemplate the sacred image was born in his heart, and as the weeks went by he could think of nothing else. At last he went to his master and requested a few days' leave in which to carry out his cherished plan. To his

¹ The lowest caste addicted to manual labour.

dismay he was told that he could not be spared before the harvest was over and that he must give up the idea of going. This meant he would have to wait several months, as the corn was not even ripe. Far from being disheartened, his ardour only grew in proportion to the apparently unsurmountable obstacles, and he prayed unceasingly to the Lord to grant him his desire. Siva was touched by such unshakable faith, and next day, lo and behold, the harvest was over and he was free to go. When the poor man reached the temple he found that he was expected, the priest having been informed in a dream of his coming. They had lit a great fire through which he was to pass so as to be purified. He entered the flames, came out unharmed, and went straight away to the inner sanctuary. When the priests sought him he had entirely disappeared. His whole being had merged into the Divine ; as the river flows into the sea so had he become one with his Lord.

Another legend tells the story of a Sudra, also an ardent devotee of Siva, who entered the temple although his caste did not permit of his going into the sacred precincts. He stood behind a pillar, worshipping, some little distance from the image of the god. Before the priests could expel him, to their amazement the pillar standing between the praying Sudra and the sacred image moved aside, so that he could contemplate the object of his worship. The priests, seeing the miracle, were filled with respect and granted him free entry to the temple.

Before returning home we walked round the outer courtyard leading to the sacred tank and to the thousand-pillared hall. Parts of the building appeared disused and falling to ruins. In an inner room the walls and ceiling were covered with paintings representing the lives of the deities, and at the further end was seen a beautifully carved wooden chariot used once a year to carry out the image of the God during

a great festival. A part of the temple was dedicated to Viśnū, and it is exceedingly rare, it seems, to find the two cults thus celebrated side by side. Long ago a dispute arose between the devotees as to which of them should have the upper hand. The affair came before the Court, and finally the judge, who was a cunning man, declared that the worshippers of Śiva had the greatest claims on the temple, but that the Vaisnavites were authorized to carry away their part of the building on condition that no damage should be done. This being, of course, a practical impossibility, the two cults have since remained together.

It was nearly dark when we returned, and the drive back in the cool of the evening proved most enjoyable. The manager of the guest-house informed us that we could not have chosen a better time to visit the University, since in a couple of days an important musical conference was to be held, during which performances by the best South Indian musicians would be given. Delighted at this unexpected news we decided to stay so as to make the most of so rare an opportunity.

We retired early to bed, but the heat was oppressive notwithstanding the electric fan. Moreover, for the first time we made close acquaintance with some Indian insects. Some fierce-looking beetles, black and very large, had made their home in the space between the wooden rafters of the ceiling and the walls. As soon as the light was out they sallied forth in large numbers with a most aggravating rasping noise. Part of the night was thus spent in preventing them from climbing on to my bedding, laid out on the floor. We were told the next morning that their bite was harmless. Be that as it may, their appearance was far from prepossessing. The night proved an excellent opportunity for learning the Indian virtues of detachment and indifference.

Next day at the appointed time we arrived at the

vice-chancellor's house and were ushered into a large drawing-room furnished in European fashion. After some moments a tall, elderly man entered. He was a striking figure, with a high forehead, deep far-seeing eyes and an air of dignity and strength, tempered only by age. Benevolence and serenity were written unmistakably on his Roman-like features. We had in front of us one of India's most noble sons and an ardent patriot. Pupil and keen admirer of Gokhale, his great political friend and leader, in years gone by the Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri distinguished himself in the educational as well as in the political field. Having acquired the culture of both East and West, and seeing on the one hand science and on the other the Oriental wisdom, his present ambition is to introduce into the universities the study and the synthesis of both. Indian philosophy must once more occupy a worthy position and not be ruled out of the programmes, as is the case nearly everywhere. He would also introduce the culture of the West in its most noble aspects, at the same time preserving with great care all that is valuable in the precious heritage of Hindu tradition.

Speaking of the present deplorable educational system, he was of opinion that things must inevitably, though only gradually, change for the better, and that patient and persevering efforts in the right direction would do more than methods of violence to hasten the desired reforms. Member of the Servants of India Society,¹ the vice-chancellor had indeed consecrated all his money, time, and energy to the service of his country. The Annamalai University was fortunate to have him at its head.

¹ The Servants of India Society was founded by the late Mr. G. K. Gokhale. The members devote their lives to the service of their country and receive a low honorarium, agreeing to serve the Society for about twenty years. Among its activities are to be found the Seva-Sadan of Poona and Bombay working for the service of women, various co-operative movements, trade unions, study circles, etc.

At dawn we were roused by the sound of musical instruments being tuned and concluded that the visitors who caused much perturbation by arriving at the guest-house late the previous night were no doubt the musicians preparing for the opening of the Conference. As the fixed time approached we followed the people all hurrying towards a large white building some little distance away, and soon found ourselves in a large airy hall among the ladies of the audience. The artists sat cross-legged on a raised platform. Immediately in front were the guests of honour. Another part of the building was reserved for men, and farther back seats were occupied by the teachers and students of the University. Our presence created some curiosity, as we happened to be the only Europeans. But we felt quite at home and soon made friends with a lady beside us, who during the intervals kindly explained the proceedings and, being a musician herself, was able to give us much valuable information.

A *mantram* was chanted to Sarasvati, the goddess of music ; the opening speeches followed and were succeeded by a vocal performance, the singers being accompanied by violin, *vīna*, and other instruments. Just as Indian painting cannot be immediately understood by Western eyes, so Indian music, to be appreciated, requires time, an open mind, and a willingness to explore unknown regions of sound. At first one is confused and bewildered, yet as the days pass by the ear becomes more accustomed and one listens more appreciatively, gradually discovering infinite varieties and subtleties of rhythm and melody which seem to take one right up into the highest regions of consciousness.

Dr. Rabindranath Tagore, India's world-known poet, expresses admirably the difference between Indian and Western music. He says :

It seems to me that Indian music concerns itself more with human experience as interpreted by religion than with human

experience in an everyday sense. For us, music has above all a transcendental significance. It disengages the spiritual from the happenings of life ; it sings of the relationship of the human soul with the soul of the things beyond. The world by day is like European music : a flowing concourse of vast harmony, composed of concord and discord and many disconnected fragments. And the night world is our Indian music ; one pure, deep, and tender *Rāga*. They both stir us, yet the two are contradictory in spirit. But that cannot be helped. At the very root, Nature is divided in two : day and night, unity and variety, finite and infinite. We men of India live in the realm of night ; we are overpowered by the sense of the One and Infinite. Our music draws the listener away beyond the limits of everyday human joys and sorrows, and takes us to that lonely region of renunciation which lies at the root of the Universe, while European music leads us a variegated dance through the endless rise and fall of human grief and joy.

The dominant factor in Indian music seems to be melody,¹ while that of Western music is harmony. *Rāga* is the basis of melody and the substitute for the Western scale. *Rāgas* are different series of notes within the octave which form the starting-point of all Indian melodies and are differentiated from one another by the prominence of certain fixed notes and by the sequence of certain others. The *Rāga* is a "melody type". According to the ancient musical theory there are three important notes in the *Rāga* : the *Graha* or starting note, the *Amsa* or predominate note, and the *Nyasa* or ending note. The *Amsa* is the most important and is called the *Jīva* or soul of the *Rāga*, and its position partly determines the nature of the *Rāga*. The *Rāga* can be traced to four main sources : to local tribal songs, to poetical creations, to devotional songs, and lastly to the compositions of scientific musicians.

The question of the systematic classification of the *Rāgas* presents considerable difficulty. For the last

¹ Music of this type is not altogether unknown in the West. The traditional music of the Christian Church called Plainchant, or popularly Gregorian music, is developed on similar lines, and depends for its effects largely on rhythm and the accentuation of certain notes.

three hundred and fifty years the South has had a more or less uniform system, although even here three or four theoretical teachings are still in vogue. One of the main objects of the Musical Conference was to endeavour to decide which method was most suitable and to adopt it. Each school of thought considering its own system best, a final solution will not be easy to achieve.

We were interested to meet a representative of the South Indian Music Institute in Ceylon, who is endeavouring to introduce elementary-school textbooks on music, so that children and simple people may be able to practise an art hitherto reserved for learned scholars and experts versed in mathematical knowledge, owing to the great difficulties and complexities of the musical theory.

South Indian music is essentially pure without any foreign admixture, whereas North Indian music has been influenced by Persian, Egyptian, and other extraneous elements. In the South the Carnatic System predominates, the *Rāgas* being divided into two main classes: the primary or *Janaka Rāgas* or "Lords of Melody" number seventy-two and are formed by combining in various ways five or more of the notes used in the primary *Rāga* in which they are grouped. There are about five hundred of these in use in the South today.

In the North, there are almost as many methods of classification as there are musicians, but the Hindustani System is adopted by the majority. There are supposed to be six principal *Rāgas*, each having a number of *Ragīnis* or wives and *Putras* or sons.

In Europe we listen for the tone, the quality or sweetness of voice or of instrument. In India people only pay attention to the tune, the melody, and rhythm. The Indian singer is first a musician and secondly a voice producer. This explains why so many artists, on condition that they are experts in the subtilities and

finesse of expression, are highly esteemed, though their voices may be quite below the ordinary. Moreover, they possess an extraordinary power of endurance. The concerts that we attended thrice daily lasted often three to four hours without interruption, the same artistes performing without apparent fatigue. In fact, we noticed that they sang or played sometimes better towards the end, having worked themselves up to the highest point which they were capable of reaching. The audience took a vivid part in the proceedings and answered in vibration like a sensitive instrument. When one of the musicians surpassed himself, not only his listeners but even his fellow artists while playing went off into fits of ecstasy and gave vent to their admiration by long-drawn sighs and exclamations of intense enjoyment.

Indian music is said to be three thousand years old, and has been traced back to the Mantra period (2000-1500 B.C.). Not only did it exist in those far-off times but it had attained a high degree of perfection. The Vedic Rishis themselves practised this science; the science, in fact, formed part of the teachings of the Vedas and was a means used by the worshippers for expressing their devotion. The present Northern and Southern schools are both based on the principles stated in the ancient Sanscrit treatise.

As to the origin of Indian music there are two principal traditions. The first relates that it was created by Brahma, brought into vogue by Śiva and the great sage Nārāda. The second speaks about a strange bird called *Musikar* or *Dipaklata* who lived in the Caucasian mountains. Its beak had seven orifices, through which it could blow seven different notes. Combining these, *Rāgas* were produced congenial to the season of the year and to the hour of the day. The bird grew to be a thousand years old and when death drew near it fell into a state of ecstasy. After piling up a heap of brushwood and dry leaves the *Musikar*

began dancing frantically around the pile, whistling through its beak the tune of the *Rāga Dipak*. Fire was ignited spontaneously as a result, the wood began to burn, and the bird finally plunged into the flames and perished. After some time an egg was created out of the warm ashes, which in due course became a *Dipaklata*. Thus from time immemorial one bird was born, lived its strange life, and in the end was turned to ashes. The bird is now supposed to be extinct.

When the *Rāgas* are sung in the proper season and at the correct time of day, with full knowledge of the science, they create an atmosphere of perfect harmony conducive to great inner peace and satisfaction. Furthermore, they are supposed to possess supernatural powers capable of curing diseases and charming the elements of Nature. Thus the *Rāga Dipak*, if played in May or June at dusk with the required skill and wisdom, has the magical capacity of creating fire, as is shown by the story of the *Musikar*. It is related that Tan Sen, the Court musician of the mighty Emperor Akbar, sang it in the royal presence. As he poured out his soul through the mystic tune, thrilling all present by his marvellous performance, fire broke out and the whole place was in flames. Ever since no one has dared to play it, and thus one of the six great *Rāgas* was lost to the world.

This is, briefly told, the theory of Indian music. During those days of intense artistic enjoyment we had the impression of living at a time when only demigods walked on earth. As in ancient Greece, we were surrounded by bards and poets, musicians and artists, all expressing in song and word the divine harmony. The whole setting, moreover, was in perfect accord, and no vulgarity or ugliness marred the scene. Beauty, dignity, and simplicity were revealed in every gesture, in the graceful pleats of the men's attire, in the exquisite *sarees* of the ladies, and in the rich colours of scarves and draperies.

Desirous of taking a photograph of one of the artists, we asked one of the students to act as interpreter and approached a celebrated South Indian flautist. He granted our request and invited us to come to his home in the afternoon. The sun was still painfully hot when we set out for Chidambaram. A smart *bandy* pulled by two beautiful white bullocks picked us up and after much difficulty we at last found the right house. The whole family was expecting us and it appeared that our visit was quite an important event. Fruit, milk, and sweetmeats were placed before us, while the women and children eagerly gathered round to look on. After a few moments' rest we explained by signs that we were quite prepared to take the pictures and were led on to a terrace, on the top of the house, looking out upon the town and neighbouring palm trees. After a very long time the musician appeared in full regalia, holding his flute and dressed with as much care as if he were just going to play at a concert. His tall, dignified figure and beautiful clothes would have rejoiced the heart of a painter. Just as we were about to leave, he beckoned to me and—supreme mark of confidence—showed me into his private meditation room, containing a tiny shrine, freshly picked flowers, and the figure of a deity whose identity I was not able to distinguish.

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Tanjore is a very pleasant town and gives the newcomer an impression of airiness and harmony all its own. We lived in a Hindu *chatram*,¹ and our large room gave on to a wide balcony running round the building and leading to a terrace. Below there were gardens with sweet-smelling shrubs and the sound of running water. The same evening we walked round a part of the town. Near the temple was a square with

¹Hotel.

some magnificent trees and a big tank. Just as we reached it women came up the steps carrying vessels filled with water and shining like gold in the sunlight.

Next day a meeting was arranged for us to meet the teachers of various schools, so that we might hear about some of the many difficult problems requiring to be solved if education in India is to fulfil its purpose. The first thing which strikes one is that all the teaching is given in English and that vernaculars, except in rare cases, are not used as the medium of instruction. The great poet and educationalist Tagore says with much truth that "learning loses its vitamins when forced through a foreign language". The whole system of education is based on that prevalent in England and is obviously not adapted to the needs of India. Western education itself is far from ideal, but its deficiencies are increased a hundred-fold when the mother-tongue is thus deliberately put aside. There is a wide gulf between the educated and the masses, who are plunged in illiteracy, though much is being done to bring about the necessary changes. As in Europe, students are forced through a course of studies entailing heavy strain on the memory but leaving little scope for individual research and originality of thought. After years of hard work and strenuous effort, often at the expense of health, the last examinations are passed, leaving the student quite unprepared for life and with only a fast disappearing load of unassimilated knowledge quite inadequate to help him along in his future career. He is often unable to find a job, and the absence of any special technical training leaves him more or less helpless.

An education which could be described as truly national is one of the most vital requirements for the ushering in of a new era of general prosperity and culture. English would serve its own purpose. Having brought to the East the very valuable knowledge of

science and scientific thought in various fields (it should be remembered that India has her own great scientists not in any way inferior to ours), English would be maintained as a useful medium of expression and necessary in the affairs of everyday life. The need of a common language, essentially Indian, is being felt as an ever-growing necessity. The problem of vernaculars is not easy to solve owing to the hundreds prevalent in India today.

Apart from Sanscrit, used mostly by pundits and philosophers and unfortunately not yet part of the usual college curriculum, Hindi is perhaps the most widely spoken, and efforts are being made to encourage its propagation, in the hope that one day it may become the common language and a powerful factor of national unity strengthening the ties that unite all the children of the Motherland. Any student of the subject is aware of the many difficulties and obstacles to be faced, but as one talked with the teachers one felt that their efforts, based on some measure of self-sacrifice and a clear vision of the ultimate goal, would sooner or later bear fruit.

Our visit was an instructive one. We were deeply touched by the trust and friendliness shown to us, and once again we had the impression that we were not amongst them as strangers. We were presented with garlands of flowers. This Indian custom is a very charming one. There are simple jasmin wreaths, fragrant and delicate ; others rich and heavy, made of red roses intertwined with silver threads ; all are sweet-scented and beautiful. They never look out of place, whether worn by men or women, and only add to the grace of the Indian dress.

Hearing that we took an interest in Indian music, one of our Tanjore friends was anxious that we should meet a man who was trying to harmonize Indian tunes to suit Western taste. We were taken to his house and received with much cordiality. Though we had strong

misgivings on the subject, we did not wish to harbour preconceived opinions and were curious to hear what his efforts had led to. Several records were put on the gramophone to which we listened with growing dismay. Trained as we had been of late to appreciate the best and purest of Indian music, we were able to judge in some measure the grievous wrong that was being done, no doubt with the best of motives.

We made no attempt to hide our feelings and expressed our opinions frankly. As Europeans we felt entitled to speak against such desecration of the true Indian music, which Western ears should learn to appreciate in all its purity. Thus to harmonize the *Rāgas* is to cut the wings of a skylark and expect to hear it sing as though it were soaring in the heavens. The inspiration is gone. Instead of the spirit being uplifted and losing itself in the divine, it is dragged down to earth and kept prisoner amongst harmonies which bind and cramp the higher aspirations. Unfortunately this Westernizing of the music is much in favour with Christian missionaries, who are beginning to adapt it to their hymns, which thus retain a familiar tune appreciated by Indian Christians. One can only hope that the harm done will be noticed in due time and measures taken to prevent it.

Before taking leave, our host, who is not only a musician but an excellent photographer, showed us some beautiful views. We were glad to be able to admire and appreciate his pictures. Indeed, he was kind enough to present us with some of them, showing he in no way resented our somewhat severe judgment of his musical efforts.



A few hours' journey brought us to Trichinopoly, clustered at the foot of a high solitary rock which

towers above the town. Rising thus from the vast plain, it is not surprising that this strange peak should have been attributed to a supernatural cause. It is said to be part of a sacred mountain in the Himalayas, whose summit was torn asunder and hurled through space during a battle twixt the gods. A temple dedicated to Siva, in his Mother aspect, has been built on the summit and is a very sacred place of worship and of pilgrimage.

The house placed at our disposal was surrounded by a pleasant garden on the outskirts of the town. It was used only for occasional meetings, and as we were the only occupants we were free to make our own arrangements. Vegetables and fruit were brought to us, and we cooked our own food over a small kerosene stove. There was a good supply of drinking-water and above all sufficient for washing purposes. Nothing is more refreshing in the heat than the Indian way of bathing, which is by pouring water over oneself. Hindus, far from being less clean than Europeans, have a far more rigid conception of cleanliness than that prevailing in the West. It is in fact a religious duty to be carried out with the greatest care, and Brahmins will even refuse to take food without having previously bathed and put on freshly washed clothes.

We were invited to partake of a meal at the house of one of our new friends and were introduced to his numerous family, whose members seemed to appear suddenly from all sides. Besides his wife and children we met his father, an orthodox old Brahmin who did not altogether approve of our presence, a married brother and sister with their own offspring, and various other people whose relationship we did not gather. They all seemed to live very happily together and the household appeared to run smoothly, each member having his own duty to perform and doing it with serene contentment. It is the Hindu custom that the men have their meals before the women, and

so we found ourselves alone sitting cross-legged on the floor opposite our host, and waited upon by his wife and elder daughters. The rice, vegetables, and all sorts of Indian delicacies were placed before each person in little bowls on a large round tray shining like gold. Knowing that we were not used to the chillies and red pepper which abundantly flavour all Indian cooking, especially in the South, care had been taken to omit these to some extent, and we were able to get over the function with comparative ease and without disgracing ourselves. The young people peeped at us behind the door and seemed greatly amused by the awkward manner in which we handled our food.

Walking back to our house we were obliged to cross a wide, open space. The neighbouring children had learnt of our arrival and closely watched our comings and goings. Do what we might, their sharp eyes detected us from a long way off; they came rushing along and we were quickly surrounded by twenty or thirty curious little urchins. We had even to give up the prospect of taking photographs or painting because of our tyrannical bodyguard. The more intrepid of the crowd managed to climb over the hedge and invade the garden, so as to look through the windows and satisfy their inquisitiveness.

Srirangam, a few miles from Trichinopoly, is famous for the great temple dedicated to Viśṇu, which is one of the oldest and largest in South India. Seven walls encircle the town, leading finally through successive sculptured doorways to the temple. The sun was so hot that it was painful to walk bare-foot on the burning pavements, but we reluctantly parted with our sandals so as to go round the vast courtyards to the thousand-pillared hall. The distances and proportions were so bewildering that in the semi-darkness it seemed as if we had entered a forest of closely growing trees. We sought in vain to approach

the sanctuary. The rules are exceedingly strict and non-Hindus may only perceive the golden dome from the top of a flat roof, surrounded by more walls and inner courtyards. The feeling was quite different from that of the temples dedicated to Sīva, though the difference is not easy to express in words.

On the way back we stopped on the banks of a river. Groves of graceful palm trees reached to the edge of the water. In mid-stream patient bullocks were being scrubbed with brushes, naked children played and swam about, while women washed their *sarees* and laid them out to dry on the sandy banks, where they made bright patches of colour. The adjoining Sīva temple, though small and unobtrusive, proved interesting. Here Sīva is worshipped in his aspect of Water, and the Sīva lingam is so arranged as to be always surrounded by running water.



Night had already set in when we reached Madura. Leaving our luggage at the station, and before ascertaining the whereabouts of our lodgings, we went straight to the temple. It was a Friday evening, which is a day of special religious festivities. Walking through the crowded streets we passed under the great *gopurams* of the main entrance, whose dark pyramid-like form stood out impressively against the starry sky. The lit-up doorway bore the well-known symbol of the six-pointed star, formed by two interlaced triangles. In the outer precincts a vast hall was used as a sort of market-place, where hundreds of Indians squatting on the stone slabs were busy selling their miscellaneous goods : coconut and plantain fruit, red powder for the caste mark, carved sandalwood statuettes of Minakshi, the goddess of the temple, of Sīva, Krishna, and other deities ; and above all an abundance of

freshly picked flowers, made into fragrant wreaths with taste and skill.

After wandering about for some time and losing ourselves in endless passages, we finally emerged in a pillared gallery running round the Golden Water-lily tank, to which steps descended on every side. Following the crowd we attained that part of the temple immediately preceding the sanctuary. Standing behind a pillar we caught a glimpse of the inner shrine. The noise was deafening and there was an incessant stream of people going in and out. Drawing our *sarees* over our heads so as to attract less attention, we sat down and tried as usual to contact the particular atmosphere of the place through a tuning-in with its vibrations. The spiritual power was almost physically tangible, and in spite of all the disturbing factors which would seem to have prevented any kind of concentration there was no difficulty in establishing the inward stillness, untroubled by the working of the outer senses.

As I opened my eyes, to my astonishment I found one of the Brahmin priests standing before me with an offering of small pieces of coconut and sugarcane from the shrine of the goddess, holy ashes for throat and forehead, and a wonderful garland made of jasmin and red roses. It was such a startling and unexpected sight that for a few moments I remained speechless while joyfully accepting the gifts. This was indeed a proof that our Hindu brothers considered us not as strangers but as of their own kith and kin, even though outwardly we were not of their race or religion. They felt instinctively our state of mind and recognized that we were fellow travellers on the upward path ; they knew that we loved and tried to understand them.

We were received with much kindness and hospitality by an Indian family with whom we immediately felt at home. Our host was a most learned

man, combining the finest qualities of heart and intellect. His splendid work in the educational field and tireless efforts to promote the right sort of education in the schools and colleges of Madura are a fine example of what a single individual may do in his immediate sphere of life. His married son is as remarkable along his own lines. He reminded us somewhat of an Italian, having Roman-like features. His young wife was rarely seen except at meal-times, but her invisible hand efficiently ran the household. Several little boys, full of energy and merriment, often made their existence heard and occupied an important place in the family life.

Many times during our week's stay we returned to the temple and were never tired of watching the crowd and looking at the wonderful carved pillars and innumerable stone figures, whose symbolism our host explained to us in a most fascinating manner, revealing its inner and spiritual meaning.

Visits to the various schools had been arranged for us, and here again we were able to meet both teachers and pupils. What information we gained but confirmed what we had learnt in Tanjore, and stressed the necessity of a truly national education. In one of the girls' schools we were charmingly received by the headmaster. The smaller children, for our benefit, went through a sort of complicated dance. Each child held on to a coloured string attached to the top of a flagstaff, around which they turned in a certain order, so that their combined threads twisted according to a definite pattern, making up one great cord. The movements were slow and rhythmical and the children sang as they danced. It struck us that this was a wonderful game for teaching young people co-operation with one another. Although each child acted differently, all were conscious of their function in the whole. The final result might be spoilt by one individual mistake, pointing to the fact that harmony

in society can only be brought about by the right co-operation of all its members.

The singing-class was held in the garden, in a small open-air shed giving the necessary protection from sun and rain. The girls were at first a little shy, but soon they plucked up courage and, forgetting our presence, sang their old Indian songs of love and devotion to the gods and to the Motherland.

One night we went to the cinema with some of our young friends to see a purely Indian film. We were curious to know what kind of play appealed to them. Here again the dominant element was a religious one, the lives of the gods and goddesses being the favourite theme, offering endless material for dramas in which the superhuman Intelligences mixed freely with the people. In *Krishna Lilla* we were shown the story of the divine childhood marked by many miraculous happenings. It is told how one day while the babe was sitting on his mother's knee and she was scolding him for some childish prank, as he opened his mouth to cry, lo and behold the whole universe appeared before her gaze, and she saw God's teeming life in all His myriad forms till the veil of illusion was once more mercifully drawn across her eyes.

Most dear perhaps to the Indian heart is Krishna as the divine cow-herd playing the flute and stealing the hearts of the youthful maidens. Then come his victorious battles against the powers of darkness, in the shape of demons, monsters, and cruel tyrants. Although some parts were very childish, and showed that the cinema in India is still in its infancy, one could not help feeling that a great future awaits it. Indian films have something unique to give to the world, but they will only find their true expression when they cease trying to imitate the West. Learning to use the modern technique, may they keep precious the Indian spirit, the Indian outlook on life, the Indian conception of the world in its eternal aspects.

The incomparable beauty of natural scenery should be used whenever possible, instead of resorting, as is too often the case, to artificial contrivances. Funds permitting, what wonderful scenes could be turned in the jungles, on the banks of the Ganges, in the Himalayas and in the ancient palaces ! Perhaps the greatest mistake that Indian film-stars can make is to "make-up" as though they have a fair complexion. Their dark skin is in perfect harmony with their particular type of beauty, and it seems a pity that they are not aware of the fact.

A young Indian had become our faithful companion and was ready to accompany us wherever we wished. He was desirous of taking us to see various of his friends and acquaintances both well-to-do and very poor. In one of the houses we were received by an artist who most kindly offered us on leaving a water-colour sketch of Madura temple, while a photographer presented us with some excellent reproductions of Indian sculpture. There seem to be two indispensable ways in the South of showing hospitality to passing guests ; the one is to offer them coffee and the other consists in entertaining them with songs accompanied by harmonium or *vīna*. Both customs were very pleasant, save that after five or six calls on successive people one was tempted to refuse further refreshment had it not been a matter of strict politeness to receive it.

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After several weeks of town life we aspired to get out into the real country, away from the noise and bustle. Our regret was therefore mitigated when the time came to say good-bye to our hosts, who had spared no effort to make our stay pleasant and profitable. Our route lay southward, and we chose Tinnevely as our next headquarters, not so much for its

particular interest as for the fact that its central position made it a stable point around which we could travel without the encumbrance of luggage.

One morning at dawn, leaving our belonging at the Hindu *chatram*, we started out with no very definite plan except that of reaching a range of mountains which we had noticed in the far distance when coming from Madura and whose peculiar shape and colour had appealed to our imagination. Several hours of bus journey under a blazing sun through scattered villages and stretches of parched land brought us to a small town. Here we tried to gain information as to the means of getting to the hills, which looked so near and yet seemed ever to elude us. In the Hindu coffee-shop, where we took a scanty meal and made friends with the owner, we were told of a very holy place some ten miles distant well worth seeing, but which could only be reached on foot or by *bandy*. Our minds were quickly made up, and a few moments later we were seated on the hard wooden floor of one of these primitive but delightful vehicles and jogging along as fast as our bullocks could trot. Century-old tamarisk and banyan trees bordered the road. In open spaces under the shade of the leafy boughs great heaps of unthrashed rice were being trampled underfoot by bullocks and buffaloes driven round and round by the men, while the women, standing erect and holding aloft flat baskets, let the precious grain fall to the ground in showers, the wind carrying off the straw and dust. As we looked upon the scene, so grand in its simplicity and so perfect in its beauty, we were carried back in thought through the ages to the remotest times of ancient India. Ind

We finally reached our destination, paid the driver, and let him return from whence he came, without troubling ourselves how and when we should get back. It was delightful to make no plans and to follow the thread of our destiny as it guided us from place to

place. We had the feeling of living a splendid adventure, in complete freedom, learning to cease being slaves to our old habits and desires of comfort, and not to worry about the way circumstances were going to turn out. The craving for the luxuries and facilities of life to which we are accustomed in the West often prevents travellers from seeing much that can only be found in remote parts of the country, where so-called civilization has not made itself felt, thus missing endless joys, experiences, and precious opportunities.

The village of Coutallam, where we now found ourselves, was situated in a sheltered valley. A waterfall dropping from a sheer wall of granite ran past a small temple, where the worshippers bathed in the sacred stream. Palm and coconut trees encircled this secluded spot and immediately above the mountain rose covered with a luxuriant vegetation. The atmosphere was intolerably hot, and after a while we were tempted to follow the example of the Hindus before us. Standing under the waterfall, clad in our usual Indian clothes, we received the most invigorating shower-bath, much to the amusement of the Hindus, who were not used to seeing Europeans. Our *sarees* were soon dry, and we set out with the intention of climbing to the summit of the mountain. A shady path wound up under magnificent trees of unknown species, covered with flowers, filling the air with an intoxicating fragrance.

To all appearances it was spring-time, yet the heat reminded one of summer, and falling leaves of russet gold made a thick carpet at our feet, giving the impression of autumn. The jungle was being thinned out in various places and the underbrush cleared away. Approaching the summit, we continually met men and women running down the slope and carrying heavy bundles of wood cleverly balanced on their heads. Their type struck us as being different from that prevalent in the South, and we learnt that they

are what correspond to our gypsies, recognizable by their distinctive dress of reddish material on which are sewn what look like small pieces of glass mirror.

Here and there under the trees appeared cone-shaped structures of dry mud, riddled with holes. These were the homes of the cobras, but though we looked attentively none were visible, and their curious-looking dwellings alone testified to their existence. Serpent or *naga* worship still lingers on to the present day, and is the last remnant of the ancient Dravidian cult which the Aryans found established when they invaded and conquered the country. At certain times of the year, it would seem, people come to place offerings near the holes, it being considered auspicious to feed the sacred animal. At the foot of the peepal (*Ficus religiosa*) and other holy trees one frequently comes across stones on which are depicted two intertwined serpents, a symbol well known in the West.

We followed a rough track and suddenly came out of the dense forest to find ourselves on a tableland of bare rock. An immense panorama met our gaze. Groves of green palm and coconut trees stood out on the red background of ploughed fields, while the near-by mountains turned a deep blue as the sun sank to the horizon below. It was a magic hour, filling the soul with inner peace and stillness, while heaven and earth seemed to blend into a perfect whole. On our way back we were tempted to rest for a while on the side of the path, but no sooner had we sat down than we fell asleep. When we woke night had set in and we had still a good way to go before reaching the bottom of the mountain. We had no torch and the trees made an impenetrable dome overhead, depriving us of the moonlight. The path was faintly visible and there was not much risk of losing our way ; however, we could not help thinking of the cobras, not to mention the small leopards (cheetahs) which are frequently to be met with in all hilly districts.

It was high time now to consider where we would spend the night, but it proved no easy task to find somebody who understood English. We finally learnt that there were no hotels in the village and that the only forest bungalow, several miles away, for various reasons was not open. After some hesitation we were taken to a house and told that we might avail ourselves of the first floor. Three or four empty rooms led out on to a wide balcony. Judging from the appearance of the place it had not been lived in for many years. Not having brought our bedding, we simply stretched ourselves on the stone floor, from whence we could look up at the moonlit mountain, and soon fell into a sound sleep, lulled by the hum of a distant waterfall.

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Reaching Tinnevely once more, we decided to spend a day on the South coast, at Tiruchendur, where a great annual festival was likely to attract many thousands of pilgrims. A convenient bus, which afforded us plenty of opportunity of seeing the country, deposited us a few hours later at our destination. Overjoyed at finding ourselves once more by the Indian Ocean we immediately made for the shore. A wide sandy beach ran along the coast and from where we sat, in the shade of a tiny shrine built on the very edge of the sea, we looked out upon the vast expanse of moving waters. Great cumuli towered above the horizon, and in the distance, behind a palm-covered strip of land, appeared the *gopurams* of the temple. The call of the waves was irresistible, and notwithstanding the ruthless midday heat, or possible sunstroke, we went in for a swim. It did not prove, however, as refreshing as might have been expected, and, owing to the high temperature, we were hardly aware of being

in the water at all. Nevertheless, feeling clean and rested, we were now anxious to join the pilgrims and directed our steps towards the temple.

There is something unique and wonderful in a place of worship thus situated where land and ocean meet. Between the sculptured columns of the halls and outer galleries appeared only sky, sand, and sea, while the sound of the waves ever beating upon the shore spoke of a timeless Eternity. From the top of a long flight of steps we looked down towards the entrance to the sanctuary. Surrounded by hundreds of people, who were intensely curious as to our presence amongst them, we sat down, and all silently followed our example. We felt so utterly one with the crowd that we had the strange impression of living amongst them and yet being in complete solitude, alone, as it were, in the privacy of our own rooms and free therefore from any trace of self-consciousness.

A yellow-robed *sanyasin* approached and, after the usual salutations, turned on us a silent, steady gaze, as if to search our hearts and minds, desirous of penetrating beneath the outer appearances. Satisfied no doubt as to our sincerity and purpose he tried to convey in Tamil that he proposed to accompany us and be our guide during the coming ceremony. We mentioned Tiruvannamalai and the name of Maharishi ; his face immediately lit up and he showed signs of the most evident satisfaction. Leading us to the other side of the building, he placed us in the front row of the huge crowd, from where we could get an excellent view of the proceedings. Over ten thousand pilgrims were gathered, and we found ourselves in a sea of dark, half-naked figures, controlled with great difficulty by the police and the local Scouts. As the time approached for the procession to come out of the temple the atmosphere became more and more charged with a high voltage of repressed excitement. The god and goddess now appeared. They were carried aloft

on the sturdy shoulders of forty strong men and passed slowly along the central passage accompanied by the beating of drums and cymbals, the religious fervour now reaching its climax. It was altogether a most extraordinary sight and one not easily forgotten.

Exhausted by all we had seen and done we went down to the shore and lay in the sand at the foot of a half-dead tree-trunk twisted by the wind into fantastic shapes. Wrapping our *sarees* round us and guarded by our friendly *sanyasin* we soon fell asleep, in spite of the innumerable onlookers. The sun had nearly sunk to the horizon when we returned to the town. In the neighbouring fields, carts, *bandies*, and other vehicles stood waiting for their owners, while the horses and bullocks patiently grazed near by. The religious festival being also the occasion of a fair the market was covered with goods, amongst which we noticed earthenware pots and vessels of every kind and description, but all beautiful in shape and colour. Fires were now lit in the open air, the families sitting round cooking and eating their supper and warming themselves, the nights being still somewhat cool. Many a picture worthy of an artist's brush delighted our eyes as the leaping flames made the unfamiliar faces glow and stand out amidst the encircling darkness. After three hours' waiting the bus eventually arrived and took us back to Tinnevely after what seemed to us a whole lifetime of experience compressed into a single day.

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We had now reached the most southern point of India and stood on Cape Comorin. In front stretched the immensity of the ocean, behind reaching nearly to the coast appeared a range of mountains so unique in their shape and colour that they seemed altogether

unreal. The beach was deserted and the surf dashed against the rocks, on which boats had frequently come to grief. The temple was strictly guarded and we were not even allowed into the outer precincts.¹ Walking round the building, we came across a ruined wall on the sea-front composed of stones, pillars, and broken fragments from the temple which many a museum would have been proud to possess, but which was here left to the mercy of the waves.

It is told that in the olden days a goddess came to Cape Comorin to wed the god. Fate, however, decreed otherwise, for she arrived a day late and the marriage could not be performed, the *Kaliyuga*² having begun and the gods no longer being permitted to marry. Great quantities of rice had been prepared for the wedding-feast, and this was miraculously turned into stone and strewn upon the shore, while the bridal rubies appeared as countless gems upon the sand. Be this only a beautiful legend, the substance of it remains. For here, at our very feet, the beach was covered with tiny stones, each one polished and of equal size, a perfect replica of a grain of rice ; and the ruby-red sand glittered in the sun as if it were made of precious jewels. As the waves dashed over the beach a pure-white surface appeared, making an exquisite harmony of silver and red.

To reach Trivundrum, on the Malabar coast, the road wound through the mountains before descending to the plain. One had the impression of a prosperous land. On all sides well-cultivated fields and luxuriant vegetation greeted the eye. Poverty was here

¹ Since this was written the Maharaja of the Free State of Travancore, on whose territory stands Cape Comorin, has ordained that all the temples shall be thrown open to the outcasts, an event due largely to the campaign started by Gandhi and of paramount importance, as will be shown later.

² Name given to the Dark Age, which succeeded the Golden Age. During this period of obscurity—in which we are still living in the present day—the gods and goddesses are supposed to have withdrawn from the world of men, inducing the mortals to turn inwards and seek within their own hearts the Divine Light.

less evident and a general feeling of contentment seemed to prevail in this Free State of Travancore. Owing to some misunderstanding, on arriving late at night we came upon a closed house, our host having gone to the country. However, we had grown accustomed to fending for ourselves, and enjoyed camping on the stone verandah, a few steps from the moonlit garden, fragrant with jasmin flowers and where a well under the waving coconut trees provided us with cool and refreshing water.

Bringing with us a letter of introduction to the Maharaja, we hoped to be granted an interview and to meet this great ruler whose wise and patient efforts had done wonders and placed this State among the most advanced in India. Unfortunately he was away travelling in the northern districts.

Our stay in Trivundrum brought us into close touch with a difficult problem and one which had confronted us several times already during our journey through the South, namely that of the missionaries and the spread of Christianity in India. We had visited missionary schools, talked with Christian teachers, observed the pupils, listened to the stories of many young students, and seen the result of conversion on the Hindu temperament. When in the West we talk of missions (whether Protestant or Catholic), scenes rise up in the minds of most people depicting poor heathens brought to the one true religion, snatched away from the worshipping of idols. An unprejudiced study of the whole situation opens up new vistas of thought and leads to deeper understanding of the many questions at issue. In the first place, Hinduism is one of the finest religions of the world, even though, like many others, it may need reforming and purifying. This work is actually being carried out by various religious bodies such as the Bharat Samaj, the Arya Samaj, and the Brahmo Samaj. So great a scholar as Prof. Max Müller wrote :

“In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death.’ If these words of Schopenhauer’s required any endorsement, I should willingly give it as the result of my own experience during a long life devoted to the study of many philosophies and many religions.”¹

A serious and unbiased research into Hinduism shows that it is worthy of the closest attention and study. Indeed, it contains a never-ending store of the highest wisdom and transcendental knowledge, tracing out in a marvellous manner the various stages leading to union with God, the One all-pervading Life, “in whom we live and move and have our being”.²

At one time the religions other than Christianity used to be spoken of as heathen, and the expression is by no means obsolete. It is now stated by men of science that man, as we know him, has been in the world for at least one million years, and the view is fast gaining ground that in the Divine Providence other great teachers were sent into the world at one period or another of history to help forward the work of God upon earth. There is a large school of Christian thinkers who hold that man is potentially divine,³ that Christ was the “first fruit amongst many brethren”.⁴

It is only a step forward from this idea to the teaching that those divine qualities were also richly developed and manifest in the founders of the other great religions of the world. It seems incredibly narrow-minded to declare that any one religion should

¹ *Three Lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy*, by Max Müller: Longmans, Green and Co., 1894, p. 8.

² Acts of the Apostles, xvii, 28.

³ Those who would be interested to study further this phase of Christian thought would find the following books useful and informative: *Personal Idealism and Mysticism*, chapters II and III, by William Ralph Inge: Longmans, Green and Co., 39 Paternoster Row, London, 1924; *English Modernism, Its Origin, Methods, Aim*, chapter II, by the Rev. H. D. Major 1927; *The Church's Creeds and the Modern Man*, chapter VI, by the Rev. H. D. Major: Skeffington and Sons, Ltd., Paternoster House, London, 1933.

⁴ Romans viii, 23, 29; 1 Corinthians xv, 20, 23.

exclusively contain the truth and to class the others as "heathen". Is it not showing a wise discrimination to recognize that all faiths contain valuable spiritual guidance, emphasizing but different facets of the One Eternal Truth, and are therefore equally to be respected? Certain elements of this divine Truth were stressed according to the age and people to whom the religion was given.

Apart from this, all religions have been subjected to change and development, some of the original teachings having been lost or distorted. God is above all religions and can only be known and realized when the individual soul, doctrines, and dogmas, having served their purpose, enter into the region of spiritual experience, alone the beginning of true knowledge. This stage can be reached and has been reached, whether a man believes and worships the Christian Trinity or the Hindu Trimurti, Brahma, Viśnū, and Śiva. A visitor to India will be struck by the fact that Hindus, recognizing this to be so, never seek to convert anyone to their faith. When questioned they invariably reply: "Why should we desire to convert you to Hinduism? Your own religion, if properly understood, will give you all the help you require, but if you find teaching which appeals to you in our great spiritual heritage, you are welcome to avail yourselves of it."

That is surely the best way of understanding and practising true tolerance, in which feelings of superiority have no place. It is noteworthy that many deeply religious Hindus respect and love Christianity and feel great devotion for the Christ, though they have no desire to change their faith. Indeed, their lives often show a far truer Christian spirit than many so-called followers of Christianity. What greater example can we find of this than the life of Gandhi?¹

¹ Gandhi's *Autobiography* shows clearly how much he felt attracted and was influenced by Christianity, whose doctrine of love and non-violence has been the keynote of his whole life.

Let us now turn for a moment to see what happens when young Hindus are brought up in missionary schools. Here education is not given solely for the sake of educating the masses and relieving the terrible illiteracy in India. It is also a means to an end, conversion being the main object in view. Hence naturally everything is done to christianize the pupils and gradually to change their outlook. The children begin to get dissatisfied with their homes and families, refuse to dress in the Indian way, and are gradually cut off from all their true, simple ways of living. When grown of age, gratitude towards their teachers is often sufficient to assure the cherished result. Are they any happier? Has their conversion, whether sincere or external, enriched and uplifted them? From all we personally saw, and after many frank talks with Christian Hindus, we must reply in the negative.

What then has been the result? They have not only lost the benefit of the spiritual Wisdom handed down through the ages by the great Rishis of ancient India, but they have been separated from the very life of their country. With their religion they have rejected the traditions and customs and the understanding of their own Motherland. No longer do sculpture, painting, music, singing, and dancing find a deep response in their hearts, for all these forms of Indian art are permeated by the faith which they have been taught to regard as inferior and largely false. Feeling themselves separate from their Hindu brothers, yet not utterly at home with Europeans whose Western outlook can never be quite their own, they are doomed to suffer from such isolation. Whilst travelling by train or bus we were nearly always able to distinguish converted Indians simply by observing their manners and attitudes. Strange to say, they were often conspicuous by a certain aggressiveness towards their fellow passengers and had an air of superiority and self-esteem that we had never noticed amongst Hindus.

Indians as a rule show great respect towards all religious teachers, but are quick to judge if the actions of one who preaches a spiritual message are in conformity with his belief. If Christians came to India leading a life of utter renunciation, teaching and feeding the poor, impelled only by an all-embracing compassion and love and, above all, demanding nothing in return, they would do more to awaken admiration and respect for Christianity than do all the missionaries.

The opening of the temples to the outcasts is enabling these unfortunate people to come back into the folds of Hinduism, where they find spiritual guidance adapted to their needs and comprehension without being tempted to embrace the Christian creed out of sheer physical and moral misery.

Was it surprising, as we wandered through the town of Trivundrum, that we should have entertained a feeling of regret each time we came across one of the innumerable churches whose bells, sounding strangely out of place, chimed the hours, continually reminding one of their presence ?



In the night train which took us northward to Quillon we found ourselves in a compartment reserved for women. They happened to be all Muhammedans observing strict *purdah*, closely veiled from head to foot and only disclosing their features when certain of not being observed. We wondered how they could possibly breathe under the tight-fitting cap and cloak, with only a few holes to let in the air. This outgrown custom is fortunately beginning to disappear, and this was the first occasion during our Southern tour that we could observe it at close quarters. The children, with eyes rimmed with a black substance to prevent

a common disease, crawled about the floor and were rather a pitiable sight. At the stations the husbands came round to see their respective wives and handed in food and water through the windows. They were fine-looking men, distinguishable from the Hindus by their tawny beards.

From Quillon to Aleppi a canal runs along the Malabar coast through immense forests of coconut trees. Lying on the third-class upper deck, the only women amongst crowds of men of every type and description, we wondered if we were not living in some strange and enchanted dream. All through the warm night we glided silently on the moonlit waters, hemmed in on every side by the impenetrable blackness of the trees. As the canal grew narrower the low-hanging boughs brushed over our heads. Now and then we met other boats, involving careful manœuvring, as there was barely enough space for them to pass each other. Lithe, dark figures run along the projecting ledge of the boats and after much pushing on both sides once more we moved freely on again. The first faint streaks of dawn heralding the coming day woke us from a light sleep. Our fellow passengers were already beginning to roll up their bedding and adjust their turbans. While the Muhammedans knelt facing Mecca and in loud tones addressed their prayer to Allah, their Hindu brothers sat in silent meditation.

Another boat was to take us along the back-waters past Cochin to Ernakulum, affording a general view of the Malabar coast. Small thatched huts were grouped under the trees that constitute the main richness of north Travancore and Cochin State. The inhabitants live mostly on the trade of coconuts and products derived therefrom, the coir industry being extensively carried on, as well as the making of ivory objects. Precious wood, such as mahogany and sandalwood, is also exported to various parts of the world. On

the banks of the canal immense heaps of logs and coconuts were waiting to be shipped. The sea offers an additional way of livelihood. The fishing-nets, of a lovely blue, are hung up on a sort of wooden framework every few hundred yards or so along the beach, their delicate tracery and graceful shapes standing out against the dark background of the forest.

* * *

On the eve of saying good-bye to South India we found ourselves once more in Adyar sitting amongst a numerous audience about to witness the first public dance recital by Srimati Rukmini Devi. Indian women are often strikingly beautiful and possess a grace and charm that are rarely equalled in the West; but Rukmini Devi adds to these an indefinable quality of radiance and spiritual loveliness that are a source of constant delight to those who approach her. How wonderful to see a human being whose every gesture expresses harmony and whose whole life is a picture, a song, a creation of art. Her message to India and to the world is one of beauty, culture, and refinement, shown out not only through the various forms of artistic self-expression but in the everyday life of the individual. She has chosen dancing as the best medium for conveying spiritual truths in an outward and visible form. This may appear strange at first sight, owing to the fact that in the West we do not generally associate dancing with any form of spirituality. In India, however, it has always been considered as one of the highest means of depicting the eternal concepts in a way comprehensible to the masses. The classical Indian dancing as we see it today has been handed down through the centuries with practically no change.

Yet this great art has fallen low, the outer forms no longer expressing real spiritual knowledge and higher emotion. A revival was necessary in order to restore it to its rightful place and to its ancient splendour, making it once more a sacred performance for the upliftment and spiritualizing of humanity. Srimati Rukmini Devi has undertaken this noble task in spite of opposition due to narrow conservatism. Her passionate love for the Motherland, her selfless dedication to this cultural revival, and her marvellous artistic ability place her foremost among those who are bringing about a great renaissance movement in South India. In the following lines she points out how deeply dancing and religion are linked in the Indian mind :

In India you find the ideal of the temple dancer is that God Himself should be worshipped through the arts. In India you may worship Him not only through music but through all the arts. There they have combined the religious spirit with the idea of beauty and great art, and you find in the Hindu religion *that the Lord of the Dance has His manifestation as the Divine Dancer.*

We are told that the Lord of the Dance was asked by a very great man to explain to him something of the philosophy of the four Vedas, the great scriptures of the Hindus. The Lord tried to explain the philosophy to him, but the man said : "I cannot understand it in those forms ; they are too difficult. Can you not show them to me in some simpler form, so that I can appreciate them ?" Then the Lord created the fifth Veda, the Veda of the Dance, and He showed that all the philosophy of life, all the science of life, can be expressed through the moving form and music.

Trained as we had been to a certain extent in Chidambaram to listen and to appreciate Indian classical music, we were the better able to follow the dancing than would otherwise have been the case. Still, there was much we could not as yet understand. Each movement, each gesture and each act of self-

expression constitutes an intricate language, conveying a definite meaning and corresponding to the successive emotions and states of mind of the dancer. These should be shared as far as possible by the spectators, so that by identifying themselves with the truths thus physically expressed they may be led to spiritual enlightenment.

Part Three
NORTH INDIA

TRAVELLING in India, when rightly understood, affords a unique occasion of making new friendships and getting in touch with the masses. Anyone sincerely wishing to make personal contacts with all classes and castes must not be content to rush from one place to another by car, or to enjoy the quiet seclusion of a first-class compartment.

There are two things which go straight to an Indian heart, more eloquent perhaps than any words. The first is the wearing by Europeans of the national dress, especially if made of *kadhar*.¹ The second is the use of third-class carriages in preference to first. The discomfort of hard wooden seats will be amply compensated for by the breaking down of the barriers which unfortunately exist between white and coloured races.

An Indian crowd is never ugly or vulgar, as is nearly always a crowd in the West. The poorest people have a natural refinement and even when ragged and dirty are never repulsive. Their first instinct when confronted by Europeans is, as a rule, one of exaggerated respect, but tinged with fear. They are conscious of what amounts to an inferiority complex. The white race has long treated them as inferior and they realize their lack of liberty and independence. When, however, their quick intuition tells them that only sympathy, appreciation, and the desire of understanding animate their foreign fellow travellers they are ready and happy to lift for a few moments the mask which hides their true personality. This can only happen when mutual confidence prevails on both sides, based on a sincere feeling of fellowship which naturally finds expression as soon as one is

¹ Hand-spun and -woven material.

convinced of the essential brotherhood of man, by reason of their common divine origin, to whatever class or nationality the individual may happen to belong. There may be differences in degree of development and in station in life, but that need in no way impair the sense of respect which one feels for a fellow-pilgrim in the divine quest. Rather should it impel us to reach out in terms of kindness and understanding and even affection to those who may be struggling at a lower level of existence. It is not sufficient to know this intellectually in terms of theory, it should be felt and experienced as a living reality.

While waiting for the departure of our train I purchased a newspaper from an Indian, and was about to turn away when to my astonishment he said to me with a quiet smile, as if it were the most natural thing in the world: "I will take you for my goddess." Rather staggered at this unexpected news, I ventured to ask the reason and received the reply: "Because you are wearing our national dress." The man was evidently so sincere, simply expressing in his own way a feeling of gladness for what my *saree* stood for, that I could not help realizing how much can be done for mutual understanding, and that without the medium of words.

Owing to the heat, the windows of the carriages are always open, not to speak of the doors, but wooden shutters enable one to ward off the sun during the hot part of the day. A written notice had some weeks ago attracted our attention, which warned travellers not to lean any part of their person outside the carriage. We had wondered at the all-inclusiveness of the term "any part", but were now quite enlightened as to its meaning. Indians do not appreciate sitting with feet reposing on the floor in the usual European fashion. As soon as they get into a train, for instance, they invariably slip off their shoes or sandals and adopt the cross-legged sitting posture. Their favourite posi-

tion, however, is that of lying down with their feet higher up than their heads. Naturally, in a train the best place is to put the feet out of the window, ensuring for them a maximum degree of coolness. This habit may be due to an unconscious need of the body in a tropical climate to relieve the lower limbs of blood pressure.

As we left behind us the Madras Presidency and entered the Central Provinces the scenery changed. The lakes, green palms, and coconut groves and rich red earth disappeared and a colourless plain stretched for miles upon miles without sign of life. Half-dried-up river beds wound through the desolate landscape, while the sun blazed down with increasing ardour. Already the parched earth cried out for water, yet two months would still elapse before the rainy season set in.

At the various stations we went to fill our *lotahs*,¹ or waited till the men came round with *Hindu Pani*² and learnt to drink by making a cup with both hands. The system of pouring water, from a distance, straight down the throat, needs practise and skill, but is worth adopting and learning for the sake of cleanliness, on condition one does not mind being laughed at.

Distances in India are so enormous that nobody considers three or four days as constituting a long journey. However, we decided to stay a night *en route* at Wardha and from there would proceed to Allahabad. The sun was nearing the horizon and the stifling air had become cooler. A young woman squatting on the seat opposite us suddenly began to sing. Clad in a very simple *saree*, with a few bangles on wrists and ankles, her smooth black hair carefully tied into a low knot, she gave an impression of grace and simplicity. With closed eyes she sang an old

¹ Vessels of brass or other metal used to hold water.

² Hindu water; Hindus and Muhammedans always have separate water supplies, in accordance with their religious customs.

Indian song of worship to Krishna, the Lord, the Divine Lover, as naturally as a skylark at dawn mounts heavenwards to greet the rising sun. So great was her devotion that she seemed to pour out her very soul in adoration, her face reflecting her inner aspiration as the calm waters of a lake mirror the mountain-top. Oblivious of her surroundings, heedless of the noise, her song of praise went forth, and when finally she ceased the night had set in, people had stopped talking, and under the starry heavens the train slowly pursued its journey northwards.

* * *

Wardha seems outwardly to be an insignificant little town, known as a mere junction station by the Europeans on their way to or from the South; in reality it is a centre of supreme importance and the heart of a great movement of reconstruction which is gradually spreading all over the country. In the first place, Gandhi has his headquarters here, where he stays whenever he is not travelling about. (By "headquarters" let us not imagine a large comfortable building. India's greatest man lives in extreme simplicity, not to say poverty, with no luxury or comfort whatsoever.) In the second place, Wardha is the headquarters of the All India Village Industries Association, founded by Gandhi in December 1934 as the outcome of a resolution passed by the Indian National Congress in October of the same year stressing the necessity of village uplift and reconstruction. Unaffected by and independent of the political activities of the Congress, the A.I.V.I.A. forms an all-inclusive organization where, irrespective of sex, faith, and opinions, all who desire to serve the Motherland may find a splendid opportunity of working actively to relieve the untold misery of the masses.

Unfortunately Gandhi happened to be away, but we had the good luck to meet the organizer and secretary of the Association, both prominent workers embodying the essential characteristics of the Indian temperament and outlook combined with the efficiency and organizing capacities of the West. Experiments carried out in one part of the world may well benefit the whole of humanity in its efforts to establish an ideal society. It may therefore be of interest to summarize briefly the economic scheme of Gandhi which forms the basis of the A.I.V.I.A., and to see how it will gradually improve the whole life of the people. The plan of reconstruction put forward is of great moment and importance for India.

Unlike Western countries, India is, and always has been, essentially a land of villages. Actually nearly ninety per cent of the population is rural. The principles that directed this village organization in the olden times are still found to hold good today, and the A.I.V.I.A. has established its whole programme in conformity with the plans laid out by the original founders of the scheme, expressing, however, those great principles in a manner best suited to the circumstances of our modern times.¹

What were these basic ideas regulating the whole life of the village? Firstly to assure a minimum means of livelihood to every individual; secondly, to avoid competition and undue profit-making; thirdly, to make the village self-contained, depending on no outside agency for its primary needs; and lastly, to give spiritual things the first place. No plan could have been more wisely thought out for the ultimate good of every member of the society, no plan more conducive to greater harmony, both spiritual and material. Why then do we see today the heart-rending plight of the

¹ See *Why the Village Movement?*, a plea for a new economic order in India, by J. C. Kumarappa; and *Village Industries and Reconstruction*, by Bharatan Kumarappa.

Indian village? Why in a country where there should be ample sufficiency for all are the masses half starving and hardly able to "keep body and soul together"? The methods of the West which have been introduced by authority have proved fatal and have brought wreck and ruin in their wake. They are ill adapted to India. In the past the villagers had, in addition to agriculture, flourishing local industries producing all that was required for their daily use. The advent of the large factories and machine-made goods deprived the people of this means of livelihood, the cultivation of the land proving quite insufficient to ensure a minimum income.

Congress workers began by studying both Capitalism and Communism to see how far they could put forward a satisfactory solution of this great problem and to what extent each gave a free scope for the harmonious development of the personality, this being regarded as the touchstone whereby the true value of a system is to be judged. Capitalism was seen to give free vent to profiteering; it is accompanied by greed and selfishness, depriving the worker of his independence and going hand in hand with imperialism, war, and the exploitation of weaker peoples. Communism was also rejected; while trying to do away with financial magnates and the lust for profit, it suppresses entirely individual initiative, making man a mere cog in the wheel of a system.

In both cases the masses are denied self-expression and scope for creative work, which are absolutely essential for the happiness of the individual and hence of society as a whole. The right solution was therefore not found in either system, but in an economic plan based, as in the olden times, on making the Indian village self-sufficing. Decentralization and *Swadeshi*, the main guiding principles, include both a minimum profit-making as well as a certain amount of social control, but never to the extent of either exploiting

the masses or hampering individual enterprise.

Decentralization means refusing to dictate from the centre how things are to be produced and what kind they are to be, but leaving that always to the good sense and initiative of the producer. In this way alone can there be any scope for free expression and development of personality.¹

What is understood by *Swadeshi*? Gandhi expresses its meaning as follows :

Swadeshi is the only doctrine consistent with the law of humanity and love. It is arrogance to think of launching out to serve the whole of India when I am hardly able to serve even my own family. It were better to concentrate my efforts upon the family, and consider that through them I was serving the whole nation and, if you will, the whole of humanity. This is true humility and it is love. The motive will determine the quality of the act. For instance, I may wrongly serve my family, regardless of the suffering I may cause to others ; as, for example, I may accept employment which enables me to extort money from people, I may enrich myself thereby and then satisfy many unlawful demands of my family. Here I am neither serving the family nor the State. Or I may recognize that God has given me hands and feet only to work for my sustenance and for those who may be dependent upon me. I would then at once simplify my life and that of those whom I can directly reach. In this instance I would have served the family without causing injury to anyone else.

Supposing that everyone followed this mode of life, we should have at once an ideal State. All will not reach that condition at the same time. But those of us who enforce it in practice will clearly accelerate the coming of that happy day. Under this plan of life, in seeming to serve India to the exclusion of every other country, I do not harm any other country. My patriotism is both exclusive and inclusive. It is exclusive in the sense that my service is not of a competitive nature. "Use your own property in such a way that you hurt no one else's" is not merely a good legal maxim but a grand doctrine of life. It is the key to a proper practice of *Ahimsa*, of love. It is for us, who are the custodians of a great Faith, to show that patriotism based on hatred "killeth", but that patriotism based on love "giveth life".²

¹ *Village Industries and Reconstruction*, by Bharatan Kumarappa, p. 10.

² Quoted in *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, by C. F. Andrews, p. 126.

The A.I.V.I.A. in its great work of reconstruction is endeavouring to inculcate this ideal of *Swadeshi* in the masses. Thus, duty is seen to begin in the sphere of the family and of the village, then slowly widening out to include the Motherland and the rest of humanity. By degrees the villages will become once more the real centres of Indian life, self-sufficing, thanks to the revival of lost or dying industries, the even distribution of production and profit slowly helping to banish starvation and replacing abject poverty by prosperity. Machines are seen to be useful if used only on a small scale and simply as a help for individual workers ; then only does man cease to be their slave and the danger of monopoly of production need not be feared.

The task is stupendous, and volunteers are needed to become experts in all the various methods pertaining to the material and moral welfare of the villagers. After a period of training these volunteers are then sent out to change the existing conditions. Sanitation is taught and demonstrated in practical ways ; cleanliness is enforced as regards water supplies, ventilation, clothes, etc. Food reforms point to the necessity for preserving the vitamins and the using, for instance, of unpolished rice, hand-ground wholemeal, and unrefined sugar. Under the scheme of reviving local industries the people are not encouraged to compete with machine-made goods, but primarily to satisfy their own needs. Seventy-five per cent of the population being producers of raw material, they are shown the importance of utilizing it directly, instead of sending it out to be manufactured, a method entailing both loss of employment and added expense in the purchase of the finished product.

Little over a year has elapsed since Gandhi launched this Association, and already much work has been accomplished. Wardha is not intended to become a production centre ; but experiments will be carried out there, information and technical

advice being sent to all parts of India, enabling the peasants to improve their ways and means of livelihood. Walking round the compound we visited a few cottage industries, such as those of paper-making and bee-keeping, which have just been started for experimental purposes. We were shown a species of dwarf bees, of incredibly small size, whose honey is highly prized because of its remarkable medicinal properties. The Indian bee seems of a very mild disposition in comparison with its Western brother, and rarely stings if treated gently, even though smoke is avoided when opening the hives. It might seem that they also were following the doctrine of *Ahimsa*. Plans were on foot to build a museum of village industries and a training-school for social workers.¹ At the time all efforts were being directed towards the organizing of the Khadi and Village Industries Exhibition, where people will have the chance of seeing much that otherwise could only be studied in villages scattered about in remote parts of the country.

For the first time during our travels we got a foretaste of real heat, accompanied by a dry, scorching wind which filled the air with dense clouds of dust. Our thoughts turned instinctively and longingly to the cool heights of the Himalayas, which would be comparatively close at hand and of easy access when we found ourselves in the North.

After Wardha, the monotony of the plain was relieved by a hilly district covered with dense jungle. The trees were still leafless, but great clusters of orange flowers² hung from the grey boughs, putting a vivid note of colour into the bleak landscape.

During the few hours we were compelled to spend at a junction before catching the next train to Allahabad we happened to make the acquaintance of a young Indian working on the station, who insisted

¹ The school has since been built and is serving a useful purpose.

² The *tasoo* tree, used, it seems, for dyeing purposes.

on taking us back to his home for supper. We were only too glad to get away from the noise and bustle of the waiting-room and, moreover, welcomed the opportunity of responding to such genuine friendliness and spontaneous hospitality, always so characteristic of the Indian temperament. While our host went off in search of his wife we awaited their return in their small bungalow. There were only two poorly furnished rooms, but they were neatly kept and clean. On the walls were hung a few Indian pictures of a religious nature, as well as a number of Sanscrit and Persian verses pertaining to the spiritual life. Here we saw once more the expression of a natural culture and refinement commonly found even amongst the uneducated people.

As soon as the young wife returned with her husband she retired to prepare the meal, and after a while we were invited to go out into their tiny garden, which contained a few trees and shrubs. It was now quite dark, but the stars were shining brightly and the cool air was wonderfully soothing. We sat down and watched our hostess squatting before a primitive clay stove, deftly mixing and preparing a batter for the *chappattis*¹ and frying them over the open fire. She looked a mere girl and appeared very shy ; moreover, she did not understand English. For the present her whole attention was directed to her duties and waiting on her husband and her husband's guests. She would no doubt have been very surprised to know that we thought her beautiful, unspoilt as she was by modern civilization and the hankering after unnecessary luxuries. By the dim light of a lantern we partook of an abundant supper—the best available, prepared and offered with love and therefore worthy to set before a king. Now and then, when so inclined, we exchanged some words with our host with the same

¹ A sort of thick pancake made of flour and water and eaten by Indians instead of bread, especially in the North.

freedom as if we had found ourselves in the company of old friends, instead of with strangers under whose roof Fate had destined us to spend a few brief moments. When the time came to regain the station we left thoroughly refreshed and rested.



We were sitting in a delightful garden on the outskirts of Allahabad, where kind friends had put us up in one of the school buildings. Thanks to the presence of water, which was here in abundance, flowers grew in profusion and the whole town looked like a vast garden city, with shady streets and beautiful houses surrounded by green lawns and trees. The holidays had already begun and no children's voices broke the silence of the afternoon ; moreover, during the midday heat none ventured forth from the darkened rooms, cooled by electric fans and thick grass door-curtains, and frequently watered and giving rise to a pleasant evaporation.

As we tried to locate our surroundings we found that in front of us the garden ended abruptly and with it all trace of vegetation. We seemed to be on the edge of an immense plain which stretched away under the dazzling sunlight. Winding in and out of this plain and at no great distance appeared a narrow line of shimmering blue, and we suddenly realized that we must be looking at the Ganges. Our first impulse was to start immediately to reach the water's edge, but the sun was far too hot and we had perforce to wait till evening. Night had fallen ere we found ourselves standing on one of the bridges peering down into the darkness. A faint sound of water flowing unseen far below alone revealed the presence of the sacred river. Sacred it is indeed, for as we tried to enter its spirit we were caught up into a tremendously powerful

magnetic current of spiritual influence which appeared to follow the visible stream. The sensation was quite unexpected and altogether out of proportion to the present insignificant volume of water ; but it was so impressive and soul-thrilling that we were loth to depart. Long we leant in silence against the railings of the bridge and communed with the glorious life that flowed so abundantly past us, and we rejoiced at having contacted something of the greatness of this mighty and sacred river, which would be treasured in our hearts amongst the never-to-be-forgotten experiences of India.

One morning before sunrise, in the marvellous coolness of the dawn (which perhaps can never be so fully appreciated as in the East), we set out with some young students who were keen to show us one of the characteristic sights of their town. Allahabad, being situated at the junction of two holy rivers, the Ganges and the Jumna, is looked upon as an important place of pilgrimage. Millions of spiritually minded people flock here from all parts of the country during the great festivals, but even in ordinary times it is a centre of much religious worship. A *tonga*¹ took us quickly out of town and deposited us on the banks of the Jumna. A steep path led down to the river, where a number of small boats were waiting for customers. We were soon rowing down-stream past the massive walls of the fort to where the blue-green Jumna meets the golden Ganges. The difference of colour was very striking indeed and, strange to say, the waters do not mingle at once, but continue for some time to flow separately, keeping their distinctive colourings. The scene was one of extraordinary animation. Hundreds of boats were moored side by side in mid-stream, and a dense crowd of men, women, and children were bathing in the shallow water, praising the name of the

¹ Hindi name for "carriage". replacing the Southern *bandy*.

Lord, immersing themselves repeatedly, and chanting the sacred hymns and *mantrams*, while Brahmins waded about selling milk, flowers, sandalwood paste, and holy ashes. The place was charged with the most intense devotion, bringing as it were the idea of God down from the sphere of speculation into the everyday lives of the people.

We had been remarking how strong was the influence of the place, as it is also in certain other spiritual centres in the country; but it is also true to say that this indefinable spiritual quality is stamped on the whole atmosphere of India and affects consciously or unconsciously all who come under its influence. Our companions having finished their ablutions and changed into spotless white clothes, we slowly regained the shore. Other boats were also returning before the heat got unpleasant, and as the worshippers wound their way home across the calm water their songs to Rama and Krishna still filled the air with the magic of their rhythm and melody.

It is generally a source of surprise to Europeans that Indians are able to drink the water of the Ganges and Jumna without immediately falling a prey to cholera, for do they not wash, clean their clothes, bathe their cattle, and above all throw therein the half-consumed corpses of their dead? Behind the ingrained "superstition" that holy water can never harm but only wash away sins and renew health there must be some truth, or ere now the whole population would be extinct. At the end of the last century a scientific examination of the waters of the above-named rivers revealed the presence of an unknown element preventing this terrible germ from propagating and ensuring its ultimate destruction. A series of experiments have proved that the microbe of cholera can neither develop in these rivers nor, when an epidemic breaks out, be carried down-stream to other towns; the pilgrims going from place to place alone spread

the disease. The wells are found to be the most dangerous sources of infection, whereas the use of river water, owing to its peculiar properties, is strongly recommended, giving thus a scientific basis to the popular belief.¹

* * *

The element of uncertainty continued to be conspicuous in our travelling, but experience proved that the best policy was to let our plans be fashioned by events and opportunities.

It so happened that we found ourselves unexpectedly in Agra, driving through the quaint narrow streets of the ancient town to the house of some Indians whose Allahabad relatives had wired our arrival. New friends thus sprang up at every stage of our journey, smoothing out difficulties and rendering those little acts of service which are of such invaluable assistance when the tongue of the country is not understood.

The same evening we were taken out by car to see the main object of our visit, the Taj Mahal. This world-famous tomb, erected by the great Mogul Emperor in memory of his beloved wife, stands as one of the most perfect examples of divine beauty mirrored in earthly form. So much has been written on this marvellous place that in order to avoid a possible disappointment we made a point of trying to forget entirely all that we had ever heard or read about it. Reality is always different from what one imagines or expects, and just as a sensitive plate can only reproduce a clear picture if it has not yet been exposed, so the mind must be rid of all previous

¹ See the report of M. E. Hankin of the Government Laboratory of Agra on *The Bacteriological Action of the Waters of the Jumna and Ganges on the Microbe of Cholera*. (To be found in the *Annales* of the Pasteur Institute of 1896.)

impressions and ready-made ideas if the light of intuition is to bring down the direct knowledge of the true and the beautiful.

The Taj Mahal is situated some distance from the town on the banks of the Jumna. By the time we reached the spot the last shades of the sunset had faded from the sky, and one by one the stars began to shine. Above the immaculate dome and minarets standing out amidst the gathering dusk the exquisite crescent of the new moon appeared overhead like a silver thread. The gardens were deserted, and perfect silence and a sort of solemn hush brooded over the whole place. No details were visible, and the attention, not being taken up by the perception of line and colour, was free to concentrate on that indefinable yet tangible stillness, which gave one the impression of standing on holy ground.

Descriptions must inevitably fall short of the reality they endeavour to express, because words can merely hint at the nature of that which the soul has experienced. Yet the reader may seek to penetrate behind the words and so contact for himself in some measure the boundless life behind the imperfect and limited form.

Early next morning we returned to admire the outward aspect of the Taj as it appeared in the brilliant sunshine. The central cupola is reflected in the clear water of a long, narrow tank, bordered on either side by rows of dark cypress trees which form a sharp contrast to the pure-white edifice. Even in full daylight, bereft of mystery, the place had kept that magic atmosphere of which we had been so conscious the night before. One could not help feeling that all who come here must be more or less affected by the beauty of the place, whether they realize it consciously or not, and go forth better than they came. The main building, in which the tombs of the Emperor Shah Jahan and his wife are to be seen, is entirely in white

marble, excluding any possibility of gloom or depression. The walls are decorated with floral designs in *basso relievo* or by means of inlaid precious stones, such as lapis-lazuli, agate, and cornelian, revealing the marvellous skill of the Mogul artists and their love of Nature. Never, perhaps, have flowers been rendered in the cold, hard medium of stone with such grace and perfection.

From the wide marble terrace we looked down upon the Jumna flowing lazily at our feet. A thin wreath of smoke rose in the still air from a near-by funeral pyre, while large black carrion crows hovered above the burning ground. One is thus ever being confronted by death, and at every step its presence is revealed. Indeed, it becomes such a familiar sight that what at first may strike one as gruesome and terrible is felt to be a part of the great Law and therefore neither to be feared nor looked upon as undesirable.

Nowhere can the deathless nature of the spirit be so easily realized as in India, and one is constantly being reminded of that wonderful and well-known passage in the *Bhagavad-Gita* in which, on the eve of the great battle of Kurukshetra, Sri Krishna thus addresses the mighty warrior Arjuna, down-hearted at the impending doom :

The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead. Nor at any time was I not, nor thou, nor these princes of men, nor verily shall we ever cease to be hereafter.

As the dweller in the body experienceth in the body childhood, youth, old age, so passeth he on to another body ; the steadfast one grieveth not thereat.

He is not born, nor doth he die ; nor having been, ceaseth he any more to be ; unborn, perpetual, eternal and ancient, he is not slain when the body is slaughtered.

As a man, casting off worn-out garments, taketh new ones, so the dweller in the body, casting off worn-out bodies, entereth into others that are new. Weapons cleave him not, nor fire burneth him, nor waters wet him, nor wind drieth him away.

Uncleavable he, incombustible he, and indeed neither to be

wetted nor dried away ; perpetual, all-pervasive, stable, immovable, ancient.

Unmanifest, unthinkable, immutable, he is called ; therefore, knowing him as such, thou shouldst not grieve.

For certain is death for the born, and certain is birth for the dead ; therefore over the inevitable thou shouldst not grieve.



Outside the walls of the old town, New Delhi spreads its white buildings amidst shady avenues and green parks. Though in close proximity to each other they are yet two worlds apart, representing the present and the past, the modern and the ancient. The luxurious mansions and hotels of New Delhi, conspicuous by their comfort and cleanliness, reminded us of a modern Occidental town, and even the atmosphere was distinctly Westernized. This was perhaps all the more apparent after coming from Agra, where European influence is practically non-existent. However, as soon as we passed through the walls of the old city we found ourselves once more in the familiar Indian setting.

Delhi Fort, erected in the seventeenth century, as was the Taj Mahal, takes one back again to the time of the Mogul Emperors. Surrounded by well-kept lawns, flowering shrubs and cypress trees, the various palace buildings in white marble and of perfect proportion bear witness to the great artists who conceived them. Here in a large pillared hall the Emperor received his ministers and attended to public affairs. He used to speak to the people from an exquisite little loggia in marble inlaid with precious stones depicting flowers, birds, and butterflies. From thence steps led down to the inner gardens where in peaceful seclusion dwelt the Empress and the ladies of the Court. Hall upon hall open out into one another, with here and there a glimpse of green trees or blue sky between

the arched pillars. We came upon a resting-room in which a bath, in the shape of a lotus, decorates the centre of the floor. A river used to run right through the gardens and palaces, in a shallow open water-way cut out in the marble pavement and filling the various baths with an ever-flowing stream. What wonder that poets sang the beauty of this place ! Their admiration is recorded on one of the walls, where a Persian inscription runs as follows : "If there be a heaven on earth, it is here, it is here, it is here."

We found ourselves the same evening in a packed theatre where a play by Rabindranath Tagore was to be performed by his pupils. They happened to be travelling round North India giving entertainments in various towns, and we had been fortunate enough to secure tickets for their last performance at Delhi. As the curtain rose all eyes were turned upon a figure seated on one side of the platform. It was Rabindranath Tagore himself, who was to read short passages explaining the various scenes while they were being enacted. Clad in a plain white woollen robe falling to his feet, his white hair and beard framing features imprint with nobility, he appeared to us as a hierophant of old, a high-priest of the Beautiful. From his piercing eyes the eternal light of the deathless spirit shone out undimmed by age and his deep melodious voice rang out as he half chanted the Bengali words of the text.

The lyric drama we were to witness was based on a story which appears in the *Mahabharata*. The central figure was a princess named Chitra, brought up like a boy by her father, who had wished in vain to beget a son. One day, in the forest, she came upon Arjuna, the great warrior chief, who at that time was living the life of a hermit in fulfilment of a vow. He had long been the hero of her dreams and many times she had wished to meet him in her male disguise and measure her strength with his. But as soon as she saw him she

fell in love and let him pass by without so much as a greeting. Hurriedly she changed into womanly attire and went in search of Arjuna, whom she eventually found in the temple of Siva. He reminded her of his vow, and in despair of ever gaining his affections she turned to Madana, the god of love, who granted her perfect beauty for a single year. Having achieved her aim, her happiness was nevertheless marred by the thought that Arjuna had only wed her because of a beauty that was not hers and which would disappear in due course. So she resolved to tell her husband the whole truth. Arjuna was, however, undismayed, for true love ever goes to the spirit behind the outer garb of flesh, and appearances may change, but love remains.

If one has never seen an Indian lyrical drama it is difficult to convey in words the extraordinary completeness of such a performance, in which music, dancing, and singing express all the gamut of thought and emotions, reaching often to sublime heights. Unfamiliar though we were as yet with all the subtleties conveyed in Oriental sound and movement, it proved a profound spiritual experience. The audience listened spellbound as the climax approached. It was lifted into a strong realization of the inner spiritual truths expressed through the outer drama. Instead of clapping their hands, the people all stood up and sang one of Tagore's most splendid songs, in which recurs the triumphal cry of "*Jai, Jai!*"—"Victory, Victory!" As the curtain fell the venerable figure in white, radiating serenity and that inner poise which is the sign of true greatness, seemed to give us a last benediction.

There had been much talk of late concerning a nine-year-old Delhi girl who was said to remember a past life. The idea of reincarnation is accepted by all Hindus, and not infrequently one hears of people for whom this is not merely a theory but a fact based on personal experience. Because this doctrine is so deeply

ingrained in the Hindu outlook on life many cases of past recollections remain unheeded and are more or less taken for granted. In this instance a committee of investigators decided to look into the matter scientifically and to ascertain whether the case was genuine with a view to putting the facts before the public. The *Leader* from Allahabad published an account of the case and the International Aryan League of Delhi issued a detailed report. The story of Shanti Devi is as follows :

As soon as she was able to talk she used to refer continually to things that she had done or seen at Muttra, where she claimed to have lived before. At the age of five she began to beg her parents to take her there, describing her late home and, moreover, giving the name and address of her husband. She spoke also of her son, who was only ten days old when she died. Mr. Kishan Chand, a retired Principal of the United Provinces and a friend of Rang Bahadur Mathur, the child's father, got interested in the case and began to make inquiries, these revealing the truth of Shanti's surprising statements and the existence of her alleged husband, Pandit Kedar Nath Chaubey, at Muttra. It was found that he had lost his first wife shortly after the birth of the son and had subsequently remarried. An interview was arranged, and he came to Delhi on November 13, 1935, with his second wife and son, to visit the little girl and to ascertain by questions of an intimate nature whether she was truly the reincarnation of his deceased wife. Shanti was not told of his arrival, but as soon as she entered the room where the party was assembled she recognized Pandit Kedar Nath Chaubey as her husband and the ten-year-old boy as her son. So overcome was she to see them again that she wept for a long time. All the questions put to her received the most convincing replies, astonishing those present with their correctness. Further proof was available when she was taken

to Muttra. She seemed perfectly at ease and familiar with the town and, in spite of recent changes which she noted, had no difficulty in leading the way to her former house. By following her instructions a place where she used to hide her money was duly discovered, as also a well in the garden which since had been covered up by a stone, masking it from view. The most moving sight appeared to have been the recognition of her late father and mother as well as her father-in-law, the last-named now an aged Brahmin.

One cannot help giving serious thought to such a story corroborated with scientific accuracy and excluding all possibility of fraud or deception. One is reminded of the words of Longfellow, in which he hints at the pilgrimage of the human soul bound on the wheel of life and death :

Thus the seer with vision clear,
Sees forms appear and disappear
In the perpetual round of a strange
Mysterious change
From birth to death, from death to birth,
From earth to heaven, from heaven to earth.

* * *

As we were about to leave Delhi by the night train for Lucknow our notice was attracted by a large crowd on the platform, evidently assembled to greet somebody of importance. Curious to see who it could be, we joined the people who were standing round a third-class carriage and glanced in with the hope of catching sight of the occupants. There, on the further side of the compartment and sitting cross-legged on the hard wooden seat, was a small, practically naked man with a bald egg-shaped head, a toothless mouth, and remarkable eyes twinkling with humour. We suddenly realized that we were looking at one of India's greatest

men, loved and revered by millions all over the country, Mahatma Gandhi. The extraordinary influence of Gandhiji or "Babbu" (Father), as he is familiarly called, can perhaps best be understood if one considers his passionate love for the Motherland, his deep insight into Indian problems, and above all his life of ceaseless service for the upliftment of the masses, including the *Harijans*.¹ A survey of his life shows the dominant characteristic which asserts itself again and again—that of an unwavering adherence to truth as far as he sees it.

In whatever light one may consider his line of action in the political and social fields, it is impossible not to admire the tireless energy, far-sightedness, and moderation he has shown throughout his career of service. It may be said of him that he has always had faith in the best in people, has given the credit instead of the doubt (an attitude which has entailed many disappointments for which he has inevitably been criticized and held responsible), and above all that he has ever been ready to carry out by his own example what he has put forward as precept. It is striking for a Western mind to note how leadership (though unofficial, yet very real) and the ability to exercise a vast influence can thus be closely allied with the highest philosophical outlook, renunciation, asceticism, and detachment.

Various ways are depicted as leading to union with God though all merge in the end. Some take the path of wisdom, others that of love. A third path lies through detached action. "Without attachment, constantly perform action which is duty, for by performing action without attachment man verily reacheth the Supreme."²

In Gandhiji we see a wonderful example of one who follows this last path, that of the active saint,

¹ This is the name given by Gandhiji to the outcasts. The word means "brother".

² *Bhagavad-Gita*, vol iii, p. 19.

which perhaps may appeal more to our Western understanding and temperament than that of the mystic who turns away from the world and lives in seclusion. To be able to pursue one's career and yet follow the spiritual life, to act to the best of one's capacity in the service of family and country, yet not be attached to the results and hence to remain "balanced in success and failure", such are some of the inspiring features standing out as great landmarks on the road that all men must tread to the Eternal.

Spirituality is seen to permeate all the fields of human endeavour, instead of being considered unpractical in the battle for daily bread and to be little adapted to the requirements of the business man or the politician. We had already noted during our travels how, in spite of the imperfections and human weaknesses that are found in India as in every part of the world, the keynote of spirituality is sounded unmistakably in every sphere of life for those who have ears to hear. It runs like a silver thread through the music and painting, the dancing and singing, the drama and literature of this great land and is woven into the various phases of its people's existence. Perhaps the most surprising discovery is to find it at work also in the political field, where Gandhiji, for instance, is seen carrying out his doctrine of love, of *Ahimsa*, or harmlessness, rejecting methods of violence and ever working to awaken the spiritual nature of the people, side by side with the bettering of their social conditions.

The following lines are taken from a speech by Mr. M. Shankarrao Dev, chairman of the reception committee at the Indian National Congress held at Fazzpur, December 1936. They show how intimately the sphere of politics is thus coloured by the ethical and religious outlook :

Every individual must be taught to realize that the fulfilment of individual existence can only be sought through the increasing

pursuit of social well-being. The social whole is the ultimate basis of all true spirituality. It is not right that individual excellence, whether intellectual or physical, should be turned to selfish ends alone. The real enrichment of individual existence can only come when every faculty is turned to promote the well-being of all. This precept of spiritual wisdom must especially be realized by the powerful groups in every society. Power must go hand in hand with a determination to serve the social ends, else the powerful will be a curse to society. It is the duty of all who feel the urgency of the preservation of cultural values and spiritual standards ever to strive that the strong do not abuse their power ; that the defenceless are assured of their due protection ; it is their job to struggle for the establishment of a social order that gives every individual the largest freedom to develop his potential faculties. Such men alone should control the organized life of society. Then social institutions will foster a proper sense of duty. When the social system conforms to the needs of *Dharma*¹, then alone does *Dharma* preserve that system. . . . The world is full of organized power and lust and violence. If we would steer clear of these rocks, we must necessarily turn to our ancient heritage of wisdom in order to find a solution to our specific problems. The place of honour in this new technique of revolution is taken by a genuine spirit of non-violence, self-purification, and the insistence to adopt righteous means alone. It is a token of our past grandeur that we have hit upon non-violent mass resistance as the peculiar technique of our struggle. We can only steadily march towards our goal of *Swaraj*² when there is no room for oppression or inequality and if we are struggling to change ourselves from within and without, social reorganization and individual transformation thus moving hand in hand.

* * *

We arrived in Lucknow in time for the opening of the Khadi and Village Industries Exhibition, which had been arranged to coincide with the Congress sessions. A wide expanse of bare land situated at some distance from the town was the scene of the most intense activity. Hundreds of tents of all sizes had been erected, both in the enclosure reserved for

¹ Duty.

² Independence.

the Exhibition and in an adjoining compound where the Congress members were put up and the meetings held. At the appointed hour we joined the people gathered round the entrance gate, waiting for Gandhiji to appear and address them before officially opening the Exhibition. We were struck by the great number of young women volunteers, conspicuous by their special-coloured *sarees*. They showed characteristics which we had as yet rarely met with, adding ordered activity and efficiency to feminine charm. The young men assembled from all parts of the country, clad in khaki shorts and shirts and wearing the Gandhi cap, also impressed us by their alertness and discipline.

In the course of our stay at Lucknow we had the opportunity of getting to know a number of these youthful workers, and we noted that a new generation seemed to be springing up, free from class prejudice and wholly inspired by an ideal of service. Indeed, even amongst the older people many have not only discarded worn-out customs but have even ceased to observe their religious traditions. Though differing in outer form their ideal is nevertheless a very beautiful and noble one. It might be called the religion of patriotism, expressed in the fiery devotion and self-sacrifice which they pour out unceasingly on the altar of the Motherland. Among those who follow this new spiritual ideal there is perhaps no more arresting figure than Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who has just been elected President of the Indian National Congress and whose whole life is one-pointedly dedicated to his country's service.

We were allowed to help at the Exhibition, and our work consisted in getting together detailed information concerning the sixty different industries here represented, including a description of the various demonstrations of work to be seen. This was to form the basis of a kind of guide-book for the visitors.

Perhaps one of the most fascinating exhibits was

the spinning department, where the visitor could learn all about sericulture and watch the women reel and spin the various kinds of silk, such as the species known as Muga, Tusser, and Endi. This last is produced by worms fed on castor-oil leaves and is the only case in which the insect is allowed to eat its way out of the cocoon instead of being steamed and killed.

Cotton-spinning was demonstrated by a woman from Behar, at the amazing speed of 250 yards an hour. Farther on, weaving of the famous woollen Pashmina shawls could be examined ; these can only be done by hand, not by machine, each thread being worked separately to bring out the design. We marvelled at the beauty of the *sarees* peculiar to the various parts of India, some made of silk, some of cotton, some wool. Amongst these the silk Benares *sarees* are perhaps the most exquisite. We watched the process of fashioning the material of which they were to be woven. Silver wires were drawn through ever-decreasing holes ; eleven of these threads of gossamer fineness were then flattened out and spun with the silk, till the latter was covered by a fine coating of metal, through which the colour of the silk appeared.

In the stall of the Masulipatam prints cloths were being printed by means of wood blocks, and we called to mind the fact that the art was of Persian origin and came to India with Alexander. The Persian influence is still very apparent in the designs. Chemical dyes are now unfortunately used in preference to vegetable dyes, owing to the time required for the preparation of the latter.

In the arts and crafts department we spent days at the numerous stalls, where wood and ivory objects were on sale, looking at the skill and artistic ability of the workmen turning out in a few hours finely carved ivory elephants, small sandalwood figures of deities, beautifully shaped stone vessels, produced on a lathe with hand-made hammer and

chisel, coloured glass bangles, made in a furnace by heating the glass and when in a semi-liquid state drawing it out to the required thickness.

Spectacle-making is an industry which, though unable to compete with artificially made glass lenses, is still flourishing in most towns such as Agra, Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, etc. The crystals, both colourless and tea-coloured, come from the Himalayas, Tibet, and Burma. We sat and watched the demonstrator cutting these crystal stones into thin discs with a wire bow, and then rubbing them on primitive stone moulds to obtain the required concavity or convexity. A pair of lenses can thus be made in two days and are incomparably superior to what we are used to in the West.

The Moradabad brassware industry, in which fifty per cent of the population of this town is engaged, occupied one of the most attractive stalls of the exhibition, with its display of bright vases of every size and description. The brass is either engraved and the depression filled with locally made lacquer¹ or the design is left bare and the other parts are coloured. By a process peculiar to Moradabad the vases have a metal-plated appearance and are still sometimes hand-polished, though nowadays this is also done by machine.

A fine art gallery had been organized in one of the large tents by the well-known painter Sjt. Nandlal Bose of Shantiniketan. It was the first historic review of Indian art placed before the public on so large a scale. There were admirable paintings and miniatures, like those of the Rajput school, and amongst those of the present day were pictures by a number of extremely talented young artists, who expressed the true spirit of Indian painting and kept faithfully to their ancient traditions.

A violent storm suddenly burst over Lucknow

¹ The refuse of an insect found on the branches of certain trees and used extensively for industrial and artistic purposes.

one night. Driven by a strong gale sheets of rain descended, flooding the whole place and causing considerable damage. Our first thought was for the art gallery, and we dashed across to find the water pouring through various parts of the roof and beginning to stream down the walls on which were hung the precious pictures. We were happy to join the little band of volunteers who were busy taking them down and conveying them to a safe place. Fortunately the storm did not last long and order was quickly restored. The sandy soil immediately absorbed the rain and next day the compound had regained its normal appearance.

Lucknow could be well named the paradise of dust. The feet of the people and the slightest breath of air filled the atmosphere with dense clouds, the dust contriving also to enter the tents and houses. The sweepers went about with a handkerchief tied over nose and mouth, and we used our sunshades as shields when we happened to be caught in the stifling whirlwinds. Coughing and severe throat trouble gradually assailed everybody, this naturally being particularly inconvenient in the case of the speakers. In addition to the dust, the heat was getting unbearable and the temperature rose to over 114° F. Fortunately we had been given a cool ground-floor room, close to the entrance of the Exhibition, in a building occupied by workers and some Bengal volunteers. Our next-door neighbours were the women we had seen doing the spinning demonstrations. The language difficulty alone prevented us from exchanging more than daily smiles and greetings. A small room with a single tap served as both bathroom and for washing clothes ; even though the workers were astir before 5 a.m. there was considerable difficulty in getting in, as there happened to be at least a dozen people to make use of it.

We were not the only occupants of our spacious

living-room. Birds were making their nests in a corner of the ceiling and flew in and out with bits of straw, a good deal of which fell during their painstaking efforts. Mice ran to and fro even in broad daylight ; flies swarmed about till evening, when thousands of mosquitoes appeared on the scene, filling the air with a melodious hum, and did their best to get inside our nets. To our uninvited visitors' list must be added an old mangy dog who invariably came in and lay in a corner in a half-dazed condition. In spite of these slight inconveniences we had a most happy and enjoyable time, working hard and making new friends among the English-speaking Indians. However, as the closing date of the exhibition approached we began to long for a cooler climate in which to recover from the rather serious effects of the heat, and decided to respond at last to the call of the Himalayas.

* * *

Hardwar is a town situated northward on the banks of the Ganges. To all religiously minded Hindus Hardwar is a name nearly as familiar and dear to their hearts as that of Benares. Thousands of pilgrims come here to bathe in the sacred waters and from thence start out to visit holy places and shrines up in the Himalayas. A few miles from the town, in an open space surrounded by mango trees and woods bordering the Ganges canal, stand the Gurukul University buildings, where we were put up with the usual kindness and hospitality. The country appeared to be still very flat, but in the near distance low hills announced the outer fringe of the mighty Himalayan range. We were indeed very close to the end of the monotonous plain, and had it not been for the exceptional interest afforded by Hardwar and the life at the University we should not have hesitated to pursue our way

further, inasmuch as the heat was comparable to that we had just left.

We lived on the outskirts of the compound, in a whitewashed room opening out into a walled-in courtyard. A number of families occupied the rest of the building. Between ten in the morning and five in the afternoon there was no other alternative than to lie still, with doors and windows closed to keep out the sun and scorching wind, and to flood the stone floor with buckets of water. At night, however, it was far too hot to sleep indoors, so we followed the prevailing custom and dragged out our bedsteads, the courtyard being thus converted till dawn into a convenient dormitory.

The Gurukul Kangri, run by the Arya Samaj,¹ came into existence at the beginning of the present century and is one of the three national universities actually in existence in India neither affiliated to nor controlled by the Government. Boys of eight to twenty-two are here given a sound education, combining Eastern and Western science and culture. Hindi is used as the medium of instruction and English is taught as a secondary tongue. The pupils are well versed in Sanscrit and have the inestimable advantage of studying the sacred books of their spiritual heritage as part of the general curriculum. The standard is really high, and many of the students have already attained a prominent position in the literary field. Unfortunately they are much handicapped as far as their future careers are concerned owing to the fact that the Arya Samaj, in order to preserve its complete independence, neither seeks nor desires official recognition of its university degrees; hence many difficulties have to be faced on leaving the institution.

¹ A reform movement in Hinduism which seeks to return to the original teachings of the Vedas, eliminating dogmas, superstitions, and outworn rites and ceremonies, as well as class prejudices. The members of this sect are also very active in education.

The head of the University was a very saintly man who spent many months at a time in solitude and meditation in some far-away jungle retreat, returning periodically to share with the boys something of the abundant spiritual life which seemed to radiate from his presence. The pupils were never afraid of going to him in their difficulties, sure of finding understanding, sympathy, and help. A school directed by a man with spiritual wisdom as well as intellectual knowledge is indeed an ideal place for training children to become true and noble citizens, well equipped to face life and to serve the Motherland.

The proximity of the canal afforded an excellent swimming-pool for the boys, who were permitted to bathe two or three times daily. The elder ones derived much pleasure in diving from a bridge and swimming down-stream to the landing-place.

One day, as we were just about to return from a refreshing dip, we noticed fast-gathering clouds advancing at great speed. In a few moments the sky became alarmingly black and we had only time to rush to the nearest building before a terrific gale and dust-storm swept down with extreme violence. It suddenly became pitch dark, as if the sun had been blotted out of existence. We had to shout to make ourselves heard, and the electric lights went out, leaving us in complete darkness. Had we been living in the Europe of the Middle Ages we should certainly have thought the world was coming to an end and awaited the Last Judgment in fear and trembling. The full moon not infrequently brings about such atmospheric upheavals, and the Indians appear to be quite used to them. When the daylight began to reappear with the subsiding of the wind we walked back on a leaf-littered ground, past uprooted trees and broken branches. Curiously enough, no rain had fallen, and the parched earth was as dry as ever ; the time had not yet come for the opening of the celestial water-supplies.

Half an hour's drive by *tonga* takes one into Hardwar. The town was full of pilgrims, yellow-robed *Swamis*, half-naked *sannyasins*,¹ their foreheads smeared with ashes and wearing strings of holy *ruddra*² beads around their necks. All the streets appeared to lead eventually down to the one point around which the whole life and interest of the people seemed to converge, namely the river. A steep flight of steps bordered on either side by houses and temples descended to the water's edge.

Before following the crowd our companions enjoined us to remove our sandals and, also, to leave behind our leather bags and purses.³ The Indian custom of tying up money in one end of the *saree*, then tucking it around the waist, proved useful in a case such as this. A curious sight awaited us. In the clear water hundreds of enormous green fish were swimming about on the look-out for morsels thrown to them by the pilgrims; these fish being held sacred, nobody dreams of catching them for food, and hence they thrive and multiply and live peacefully, unharmed by man.

This was my first chance of bathing in the Ganges, and in the absence of a proper bathing-costume I decided to wear a *saree* as do the Indian women, this having also the advantage of attracting less attention. To enter the river was rather like going into an aquarium, but after pushing my way through the fish I got out into deep water and began to swim. My enjoyment, however, was quickly turned into dismay when my *saree* began to cling round my legs, impeding freedom of movement. It was no small matter to struggle back to land, hampered all the

¹ Those who have given up all possessions.

² Dark-brown seeds of a certain tree, having the appearance of finely chiselled and polished wooden beads. They are worn by the worshippers of Siva, whereas the devotees of Viśṇu wear another kind, smooth and light-coloured.

³ All leather objects, being considered impure, are forbidden in sacred places, even outside the precincts of the temples.

while by my unfortunate attire and fighting against a considerable sweep of current. I had overlooked one important fact—namely, that Indian women very rarely swim or go out of their depth, and I resolved never again to be unfaithful to Western habits, as far as bathing fashion was concerned. In spite of this tragi-comic adventure I was struck by the extraordinary magnetism and life-giving properties of the water. It literally radiated energy, vivifying both mind and body.

We walked back through the bazaar, stopping to look at the quaint shops and miscellaneous articles, such as stone vessels, wooden sandals, carved walking-sticks, sweetmeats made from milk, and unfamiliar fruit and vegetables. Cows are often seen walking about towns, but here we all at once came face to face with an enormous bull. The street was so narrow that the animal took up most of the room and could advantageously be observed at close quarters. It was a magnificent coffee-coloured creature, meek as a lamb, yet with a supreme dignity that forbade familiarity. Making its way slowly through the crowd, it looked neither to right nor left, perhaps instinctively feeling that no obstacles would remain in its path. Fodder is scarce before the rainy season, and many a time we observed cattle picking up on the roadside the most unexpected things, such as orange- and banana-peel and even newspaper, though as far as the latter is concerned one might doubt its food value.

Every evening religious festivals were held on the banks of the Ganges, and one day, as night fell, we took up our stand immediately opposite the flight of steps previously mentioned, on a small artificial island joined to the mainland by several bridges. In the semi-darkness the houses rising along the riverside took on the appearance of palaces, and the whole setting was strangely reminiscent of Venice. Thousands of people

were walking about waiting for the *arte*¹ to begin. We slipped into the first row of the crowd and sat with our feet in the water watching the strange scene. The sound of gongs and bells which had been issuing for some time from the opposite temple suddenly increased, and amidst the intense devotion and concentrated attention of the worshippers a number of priests issued forth, holding burning torches, and stood on the steps immediately above the river. The incessant rhythmic beating that accompanied the whole ceremony helped to create a powerful atmosphere. The climax was reached when three flaming torches were lifted high into the air, where they were made to describe various figures and symbols. It all appeared as a wonderful and impressive festival of the elements of earth, air, fire, and water, in recognition of the Divine indwelling Life.

The Ganges now became the scene of an age-old custom. Countless little boats, made out of twigs and leaves and containing flowers and pieces of burning camphor or miniature fireworks, were set afloat, and soon the river was covered with tiny lights slowly being carried down-stream. We joined heartily in this beautiful Nature worship and watched our frail offerings sail out of sight.

Our companions now invited us to join them in their evening meal at one of the numerous little stalls where eatables of every kind and description could be found. The favourite delicacy seemed to be a sort of vanilla ice-cream mixed with vermicelli, called *mulfi*. It proved excellent and was a meal in itself. However, it appeared to be a mere *hors-d'œuvre* for our lady companions, who retired by and by to enjoy a substantial supper of *chappattis* and spiced vegetables.

While waiting for them to join us we strolled along the riverside and were soon surrounded by the usual

¹ An evening religious festival.

crowd of onlookers, who did not hesitate to ply us with questions of whence, how, and whither. They always managed to find an interpreter when not happening to know English. We entered into conversation with a yellow-robed *sannyasin* and were soon deeply discussing spiritual matters, the one topic of vital interest in India and to which we naturally turned on every possible occasion. Our new friend was intent on making us understand that Hardwar was one of those sacred places where philosophical theories must be put aside entirely and the search for Self¹ resorted to, with one-pointed aim. Wherever we went, "Know Thyself" was thus repeated in different ways by the spiritually-minded people and seekers after Truth, at whatever stage they might happen to be. Mere conforming to rites and ceremonies is repeatedly shown as having no value, unless personal experience can illumine the understanding and turn theory into practice.



Leaving our belongings at the Gurukul and taking only our bedding and small handbag, we started out one day for Rikikesh,² a couple of hours' journey from Hardwar. The land began to rise and our train puffed slowly uphill through tracts of grey jungle, stopping frequently at every little station. Innumerable pilgrims were waiting to climb in, though they often could not afford to pay for a ticket. We felt somehow that as they did not possess anything they should have been allowed to travel free, and I was always delighted whenever the kind-hearted conductor suffered from occasional fits of blindness. The railway line ended abruptly at Rikikesh and we had the impression of

¹ The search for the Divine Self in each man.

² Also known as Rishikesh : literally, the place of the *Rishis* or spiritual teachers.

turning our backs on the last trace of civilization. We found ourselves at the foot of the mountains, at the entrance of a narrow valley leading up into the Himalayas.

As at Hardwar, the small town was built on the banks of the Ganges, but here the river appeared less wide and swift ; moreover, this being the driest season of the year, the water was at its lowest level. Apart from a few huts the only houses to be seen were a number of very large buildings called *darmshalas*. These had been built by rich and pious people for the purpose of giving shelter to the countless pilgrims who come here every year, and to help them on their way. All are welcome, whatever their condition, and receive free hospitality, including a fixed ration of grain and flour for the journey, as well as blankets and shoes. Charitable rest-houses of this sort have also been built now in the remoter parts of the Himalayas, giving much valuable aid and assistance to the sore-footed travellers. We directed our steps towards the nearest of these *darmshalas*, and after much difficulty in finding anyone who could understand our request, were finally shown up to a couple of empty, stiflingly hot rooms on the first floor, opening out upon a wide terrace. Here a string camp-bed and a vessel of water were brought up and completed our requirements.

Before turning in, or more precisely turning out, for the night, we walked down through the bazaar towards the Ganges. The streets were full of people making ready for an early departure next morning. It reminded one of a beehive before the swarm flies away ; but in spite of the intense activity there was no rush or agitation. A bright moon shone down, suffusing the scene with its silvery radiance. Hundreds of pilgrims were camping on the flat sandy banks of the river and were busy cooking and eating their simple meal around innumerable fires. After our journey the call of the Ganges was inviting, and finding up-stream

a solitary place we plunged into the moonlit waters, experiencing a deep delight in harmony with the magic perfection of the moment. When we got back to our terrace the night was already far spent. In the silent streets a few motionless figures were to be seen huddled together on the pavement, lost in slumber. The distant sound of the flowing Ganges alone filled the air with its never-ending song, while the dark mountains stood like great sentinels over the sleeping town.

Long before sunrise, from the flat roof immediately above us, a Rajput Brahmin, whom we had met the night before and who had taken us under his fatherly protection, called to us with an imperative "Get up". Indians are very early risers as a rule, and wherever we went we found they could not understand why anybody should sleep, and worse still lie awake in bed, after daybreak. So we obeyed the friendly injunction and sat and watched the scene from above. The pilgrims were already astir, tying their bundles together and conversing in animated groups. Stick in hand, their few possessions carried on their heads or strapped on their backs, they set out with never a look behind. Men and women, young and old, are ready to face long weeks of hardship in order to reach the holy places of worship, such as Badrinath, Gangotri, and Jumnotri.¹ Some old women looked as if they could scarcely walk, and as though faith alone sustained their strength and courage. Hundreds die on the way from exhaustion or some kind of epidemic; but death is not unwelcome, and none will grieve if their last gaze may rest on the sacred Himalayas.

There are other means of conveyance for the impotent. Besides the horses and mules for the more active, there are sedan-chairs carried by two or more bearers for the aged and decrepit, the most quaint

¹ Gangotri and Jumnotri are the sources of the Ganges and Jumna respectively.

and primitive way of travelling being a sort of basket fixed on the back of a man and in which one sits upright. As long as there is no necessity to move one's legs it is, it seems, quite comfortable. We made up our minds to explore up the valley before the heat of the day and were soon walking along the Ganges, till we came to an island in mid-stream, easily reached owing to the scarcity of water in the half-dried-up river bed. New tender leaves were beginning to throw a veil over the brown stretches of wood and jungle, reminding us that spring had come at last.

Hidden amongst the trees countless little huts made out of logs and branches have been built by the holy men who have taken up their abode here and live in seclusion and meditation, only leaving their retreat to beg for food or to receive it daily at the *darmshalas*. In the distance some yellow-robed figures sat in front of their primitive abodes or performed their morning religious ablutions. Thanks to our kind Rajput friend, we had the opportunity of meeting the same evening several *sadhous*¹ and *sannyasins*. It was really remarkable for us Westerners to find that there were thus actually living at the present time thousands of people whose one aim and goal in life was spiritual attainment and self-realization by means of the science of Yoga.² Amongst these modern saints and ascetics are found many highly cultivated men, men who have had a brilliant career and enjoyed fame and wealth and yet have given up all and become penniless, homeless wanderers, addicted to a strenuous life of self-restraint and discipline.

We shall never forget the visit we paid to one of these in his tiny cell overlooking the river. He received us with that simple dignity denoting the true spiritual aristocracy ; his flowing ochre-coloured garments fell

¹ Men who are seeking to live the spiritual life, though they may still be householders.

² Literally meaning "union".



WAITING TO CROSS THE GANGES



"GYPSIES" WITH LOADS
OF WOOD



THE BANKS OF THE
GANGES



SRINAGAR. KASHMIR



TYPICAL TYPES OF KASHMIR MAHOMMEDANS

in harmonious pleats about his strong and perfectly healthy body, while his every gesture was instinct with a calm nobility. Few words were spoken, but attentive silence in the presence of wise men yields greater benefit than talk.

Some two miles from Rikikesh, on the opposite side of the valley, are found a number of small *cooties*¹ known under the name of Swarg Asram, and inhabited by more *sadhous* and ascetics. Removed from the incessant coming and going of the pilgrims, it is a perfect place for quiet study and rest. We happened to meet the proprietor of one of these *cooties*, and although he was about to leave on a lengthy pilgrimage he invited us to stay at his house as long as we chose. We shared four spacious rooms and the kitchen with another Indian guest, of shy and reserved disposition, whom we seldom saw except at meal-times. The part of the valley in which we found ourselves was exceedingly pretty; mountains rose on either side covered with thick jungle, and along the banks of the Ganges masses of laburnum trees, covered with flowers, hung in golden glory. Stretches of silver-white sand, alternating with rough boulders, made small secluded beaches ideal for bathing purposes.

In spite of the high temperature of the air, the water, coming directly from the snowy heights, was bitterly cold and made it impossible to stay in for more than a few minutes. For some time clouds had appeared in the sky and thunderstorms had threatened from every side, but without effect. Would the rain never come? The parched earth waited and a cry for water went up from every living thing. At last the urgent prayer was answered and the monsoon broke amidst the rejoicing of all Nature. We felt the joyous thrill as the first drops touched the ground and, remaining outside, received with thanksgiving the long-wished-

¹ Flat-roofed houses, built on a very reduced scale, often consisting of a single room.

for gift from heaven. In a short while the garden was flooded, the puddles had become pools and the rivulets streams, and we had to wade ankle deep to reach the kitchen. The Ganges, instead of flowing lazily, had become a swiftly rising river of a rich golden brown, increasing daily in volume, rushing over the great boulders, reducing the size of the sandy beaches and carrying down in its turbulent course hundreds of tree-trunks committed to its care. The small rowing-boat which takes people to and fro had to fight its way against the current and needed to aim far up-stream in order to reach the opposite landing-place. Each time the pilgrims are carried across songs of praise to holy Gaṅgā escape their lips, and leaning over they drink of the water and pour some over their heads.

One may wonder from whence came this cult and why the Ganges has thus been regarded as sacred throughout the ages with such fervent devotion. India without its great rivers would assuredly be a desolate land, and hence quite naturally the people have come to look upon these rivers as of divine origin. Of the seven holy rivers¹ whose names are repeated daily the Ganges is perhaps the most sacred of all. Hinduism is full of beautiful deeply symbolical legends which have been handed down from generation to generation. In spite of the widespread illiteracy the sacred scriptures, religious precepts and teachings in the form of epics, songs, and stories were spread far and wide by the *sannyasins* and spiritual men, who wandered about like our troubadours of old telling the wonderful tales and inculcating the ancient truths in simple form. Among the legends dear to Indian hearts the following one, entitled *Gaṅgā, the River Maid*,² may help us better to understand the extraordinary love and reverence with which the Ganges is looked upon in India.

¹ These are the Ganges, Jumna, Godavery, Sarasvati, Nerbudda, Indus, and Kavery.

² This appeared in *Legends and Tales*, by Annie Besant : Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1913.



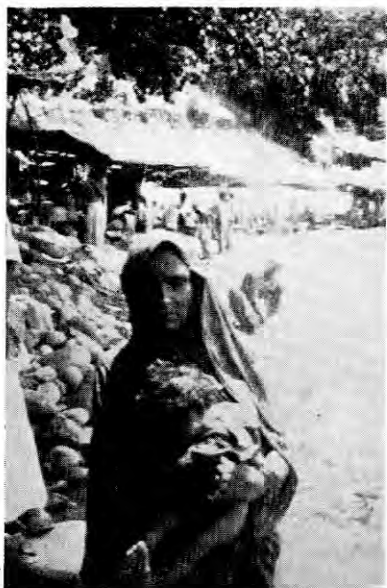
CAPE COMORIN



UNLOADING THE NATIVE BOATS AT PONDICHERY



HOLY MEN AT HARWAR



A HINDU MADONNA



PILGRIMS: "WITH NEVER A LOOK BEHIND"

Far away, in the vast range of the mountains that guards Aryavarta against invasions from the North, the great god Shiva lay asleep. Around Him rose the sky-piercing, snow-capped peaks of the mighty Himalayas ; and as He slept, His tangled hair, storm-tossed, wind-driven, was played with by King Frost, and the snow maidens and ice maidens of His court hung ice-drops on the hairs of head and face. And Shiva slept for many a hundred years, for He was weary ; and while He slept, the sun blazed down on the vast plains and slopes and valleys of His land and burned up cruelly the green herbs and glorious trees, for there were at that time no rivers to water the arid soil ; and the people cried aloud to Shiva for water, and Shiva slept.

Now, in the mountains there lived a great king, Himavat, with his fair wife Menā, mother of winged Maināka, and of a lovely maiden, whom they named Gaṅgā. As Gaṅgā one day wandered through her father's snowy realm, she came to a beautiful ice-cavern that she had never seen before. Long icicles hung from the glittering walls ; pillars of ice held up the lofty roof ; and as she stood at the mouth, peeping in timidly, a ray of sunlight flashed past her into the cavern, and painted its seven colours on point, and arch, and shaft. Gaṅgā clapped her white hands with delight, and ran into the cavern ; and there she stayed, while they searched for her high and low, and never dreamed of looking in the tangles of Shiva's hair, wherein the exquisite ice-cavern had been formed. At last Himavat and Menā went to look for her, and chid her gently for her mischief when they found her ; but when she showed them the fairy cavern they forgave her, and the three made their home there for many a year.

But one day Himavat returned from a journey, and his heart was heavy and his face sad. "What ails you, King and husband ?" whispered Menā quietly, and Gaṅgā nestled on her father's knee, and wound her soft arms round his neck. And the King spoke :

"The land suffers grievously for want of water ; the crops are shrivelled, the cattle are wasting, men and women try in vain to still the moaning of their little ones. Shiva sleeps and heeds not the misery and there is no help in gods for men."

He paused and no word broke the silence ; yet hush ! surely a soft breeze whispered through the ice-cavern. From Gaṅgā's golden hair dropped sweet water, as the ice-wreath wherewith she had crowned herself slowly melted round her head. Himavat looked at her and covered his face, and she whispered in his ear : "Is there no help for men ?"

Then he raised his heavy eyes, tear-laden, and looked upon

his child : "Ay, Gaṅgā, there is help, but it is hard to win. If a maiden pure as ice and white as snow would leave her home and go and dwell for ever in the sultry plains, then from her life freely given would flow life for the perishing people and her name would be sacred and beloved by all in Aryavarta."

And Gaṅgā knew that her great father bade her take this work on her fair shoulders ; but she turned away and hid herself in the recesses of her ice-cavern, and would not go forth. And ever the cry of the dying people went up to a sky like burnished brass, and their wail reached Gaṅgā in her cavern ; but still she would not move.

And her father bade her go ; and her mother, weeping, prayed her to give her life for men. Still Gaṅgā would not move. But one day Himavat came in, with a child dying in his arms ; the soft skin was blistered with the heat, the little lips black and parched, the mouth open, the eyes fixed and glassy ; and Himavat laid the child on Gaṅgā's lap, and said : "It dies of thirst." As Gaṅgā bent over the little face, a drop of water fell from her hair on the parched lips, and the rose-red colour flashed back into them, and the babe opened its eyes and laughed for joy. Gaṅgā sprang to her feet :

"Ay, I will go, Father, Mother, I will go to save the perishing people, and to bring joy to the little ones who die for lack of water."

And the beauty of a great sacrifice came into her face as she turned to the mouth of the ice-cavern, where she had lived in her innocent but selfish joy. And as she left the cavern there was a change, and the fair form melted away, and the golden-bright hair and white hands vanished, and a stream of pure soft water, with white flecks of foam, danced over a bed of golden-bright sand, and the water whispered as it ran : "I am Gaṅgā, Gaṅgā, and I go to bless the thirsty plains, and to carry life to those dying for my stream."

And wherever Gaṅgā turned, flowers sprang up to welcome her, and stately trees bowed over her waters, and fainting cattle grew strong as they stood knee-deep in her shallows, and children romped and played with her wavelets, and strong men bathed in her torrents, and fair women laved their bodies in her pools. And Gaṅgā the maiden became Gaṅgā the Mother, giver of life and joy and fertility to the broad plains of Aryavarta.

So the life that was given became the source of life throughout the great Hindu land ; and as she rolls ever towards the sea, Gaṅgā murmurs to herself : "To give oneself for others is duty ; to spread happiness around one's steps for others to gather up is truest joy."

And to this day, the Hindu dying afar off from the sacred

river prays that his ashes may be thrown into Gaṅgā's red-brown depths ; and dying lips cry with their last breath, "Gaṅgā, Gaṅgā" ; and dying eyes fix their last look on Gaṅgā's broad pure stream.



For the first time since leaving the South we came in contact with the religious life of the Northern temples. A few miles from Śwarg Asram the village of Lakshmanjula spreads itself on either side of the Ganges. A hanging bridge, recently built, sways over the turbulent waters and gives access to a winding path leading up the farther bank to the small temple. In spite of its humble appearance it is a well-known place of pilgrimage. Lakshman, brother of Rama, is supposed to have carried out his *tapas*¹ and finished his life here in saintly fashion. We were much impressed by the atmosphere of purity and devotion that radiated from the spot. The simple yet exquisitely harmonious lines of the architecture are a contrast after the often over-laden *gopurams* of the South. The single dome was in the shape of the holy mount Kailas, reposing on a many-petalled lotus. From an open doorway in the encircling wall we caught a glimpse of an inner courtyard, shaded by century-old trees, and of a flight of steps leading to the sanctuary. The rest of the building seemed to be sadly neglected and to be falling into ruins.

As we were about to retrace our footsteps a party of important-looking people, escorted by two policemen, came up the hill towards us. They turned out to be a maharaja, his family and servants, on their way to various places of worship in the Himalayas. The Maharanee smiled at us as she went by, and we were so attracted by her wonderfully kind face that we made up our minds to request an interview. They were stay-

¹ Penance, spiritual discipline.

ing at the travellers' bungalow which we had noticed on the way up, and the only thing to be done was to wait there patiently for their return. Night had fallen ere they reappeared, preceded by torch-bearers. The ladies quickly stepped out of their sedan chairs and, followed by their bodyguard, entered the house. A few moments later we were conducted into a large room and found ourselves in the presence of the gentle-faced Maharanee, who was wearing a plain white *saree* with no ornaments ; beside her were three young women dressed in vivid colours with golden bangles, while the Maharaja, of portly demeanour and covered with diamonds, was seated on a low divan. Unfortunately he appeared to be the only one able to speak English, and did not seem inclined to favour any conversation between ourselves and the ladies, who remained silent. We felt up against an invisible barrier, preventing us from exchanging more than a few commonplace remarks. Will the Maharanee ever know that her beautiful smile made a link of friendship between us, though no words were spoken and our paths, most likely, will never cross again ?

* * *

Friends had invited me to stay with them near Almora, and as this was probably my only chance of seeing something of the higher ranges of the Himalayas I was only too glad to accept their kind proposal.

I happened to travel with a young man who remembered meeting us at Lucknow Exhibition, and we were soon on the best of terms and talking as if we had known each other for a long time. He told me about his life at school and how, though a keen student, he had never given up reading and studying the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Lately, having failed in his B.A. examination in spite of almost certain success, he had come

to Rikikesh in the hope of finding release from a bitter feeling of revolt and injustice. He had walked for days, unarmed, through the jungle, sleeping in the open in spite of the wild animals, sustained by his faith in the lord Krishna, and had eventually arrived on the banks of the Ganges. Here quiet meditation and talks with the holy men had restored to him his serenity and his courage to face life again with the inner assurance that behind outer misfortune and disappointment always lies hidden some potential good, some lesson to be learned. I was very moved by his confidence, and still more so when, at the moment of parting, he went down on his knees, touched my feet with his folded hands and asked my blessing. He did it so simply, with such utter lack of self-consciousness, that it made me realize, perhaps better than anything else before had done, the place women hold in India, the men turning naturally to them for inspiration and strength. Furthermore, I recall this incident because it shows that the members of the young generation have not all turned away from religion, and that still for many it occupies a predominant place in their lives.

A long tedious journey, including a night at Bareilly station, brought us, exhausted with the heat, to Kathgodam, where the railway came to an end. From thence a bus service ran to Almora in five hours. As we gradually ascended the air became less suffocating and the scenery was such that it engaged our whole attention, making us forget our bodily fatigue. Range upon range of increasingly high summits lay on all sides, as if we had entered a sea whose mighty waves had all of a sudden become solid earth. No sooner had we reached the crest of one mountain than the road led down once more to the valley, passing by the side of foaming torrents and precipices and up again to a still higher summit, and running through thick woods of pine, eucalyptus, evergreen oak, cedar, and mango trees. We passed well-known summer

resorts, where both Europeans and Indians find refuge from the heat during the hot season. The pines gave the landscape a tone of bright green tinged with russet gold owing to the needles that were falling and covering the ground as a thick carpet, while on every branch new shoots appeared, blending autumn and spring into one. Some of the slopes were bereft of vegetation and produced a strange scaly effect. A closer observation disclosed the presence of countless little terraces of all shapes and sizes, carefully cultivated and giving a chequered appearance to the land.

On arriving I found a note from my friends offering me the alternative of spending the night in Almora or of proceeding immediately to their place. A nine miles' walk after nearly thirty hours' continuous travelling scarcely sounded tempting, but the sun had set, and after sitting still for so long the idea of climbing up the mountain proved, on the contrary, irresistibly attractive. Following my coolies, we had soon turned our backs on Almora and were climbing up the steep incline. The pine-needles made the path very slippery, but instead of sandals I had carefully provided myself with rubber-soled shoes. Very quickly, however, blisters developed and became so painful that the only alternative was to proceed barefoot, trusting to luck to avoid treading on anything harmful. Direct contact with the soil is a wonderful sensation that we have unfortunately been deprived of in the West by our over-civilized customs.

Night had set in and a slight breeze went sighing through the trees, then died away completely, leaving a profound silence. Suddenly the golden orb of the full moon appeared behind the mountains and, slowly rising into the sky, shone through the dark pines and shed a soft radiance over the vast expanse of hill and dale. Our muffled footsteps or an occasional remark from one of the coolies alone broke the breathless stillness that seemed to hold heaven and earth in a

magic spell. I walked in a kind of dream, feeling neither tired nor sleepy, but only conscious of the blissful beauty in which the heart found perfect rest. Up, ever up—a last steep ascent, and the goal was reached.

Next morning I awoke as the first rays of the sun struck the tall eucalyptus trees beside the house, and a few moments later stood in front of the verandah in the marvellous freshness of the dawn. On every side pine-covered slopes descended to the valley below, while other summits succeeded one another as far as the eye could reach. An isolated cedar tree stood out against the hazy background of the immense panorama, and, looking more attentively, I could not refrain from a cry of wonder. Ethereal, translucent, as pale as the sky behind, barely outlined by the faintest fringe of silver, appeared the great peaks of Nanda-Devi and the Five Pandavas. At that time of the year they are seldom visible and we were indeed fortunate to get a glimpse of them on the very first day. Later on, when I sought them again, they had vanished. The all-round exposure of the mountain-top was very favourable for cultivation, and my friends, who were keen on gardening, have taken advantage of the fact and planted hundreds of apple, pear, cherry, plum, and apricot trees on the warm, sunny slopes. The fruit was just beginning to ripen and promised an abundant crop.

Thanks to the presence of water and a system of irrigation the place was being gradually transformed into a veritable earthly paradise, where man and Nature co-operated in a constant work of creation and a source of delight to all who went there. At the entrance to the grounds a wooden poster requested new-comers to refrain from destruction and to respect both animals and plants, reminding one of a similar plea for *Ahimsa* put by Axel Munthe in his place at Capri with a view to protecting the birds and beasts. Bears and leopards are frequently met with in the

jungle, but do not attack men. Now and then they carry off small animals, and my hosts' little dog was not allowed to leave the house after dark for fear it should meet a similar fate. The most destructive creatures in these parts are certainly the monkeys, who travel in large numbers and do considerable damage. During my stay they invaded the place and, before they could be frightened away, had uprooted in a few minutes a whole crop of potatoes and broken innumerable branches of the fruit trees.

In the surrounding woods, women were busy with sickles scraping together and making big bundles of pine-needles, these being formed into naturally cohesive bundles which they cleverly balanced on their heads and took down to Almora to be sold in the farms. The women were strikingly handsome. Of medium size, they had beautiful black eyes and flashing white teeth. Their ample skirt, generally of a green material, was caught up in front at the waist, disclosing the knees and falling in pleats worthy of ancient Greece. A long scarf of vivid colour was used as a belt, the free end being fashioned into a sort of cushion and placed on the head when carrying heavy weights. Around their necks hung massive silver necklaces and others made of red seeds, while an occasional gold ring was inserted in one of their nostrils. They walked barefooted with a grace that queens might envy, and I enjoyed watching them as they passed us on their way down, their faces half hidden by their bulky loads.

Before leaving I made up my mind to see, if possible, a wider expanse of the Himalayas from the top of a neighbouring mountain. The day was cloudy and there was every likelihood of my returning disappointed, inasmuch as thunderstorms had repeatedly threatened and Nanda-Devi had remained invisible for the past week. However, the walk alone would be worth while, the path leading up through

pinces, live-oaks, and rhododendrons covered with ruby-red flowers. When the summit was reached, the view extended to the farthest point of the horizon. To my joy and unspeakable wonder, the low clouds which had hitherto veiled the higher peaks partially lifted, disclosing not only Nanda-Devi but a whole range of immaculate summits of incredible splendour. The silence of immensity enveloped them. Serene, aloof, unapproachable, they stood like an impenetrable wall of shining purity. The majesty of their presence was awe-inspiring, and one was conscious of an overwhelming power, established in eternal peace. The Divine was verily revealed here in Nature's most sublime creation.

* * *

The monsoon having started three weeks sooner than is usually the case, our plan of attempting the pilgrimage to Gangotri had to be given up. We decided to return to the Gurukul for a few days and from thence to follow our lucky star whither it might lead us.

In the train we chanced to sit beside a young railway official whose family lived in Mussooree. No sooner did he know that we were seeking to escape from the heat and desirous of finding some higher mountain resort for the summer months, than he suggested that we should begin by staying with his wife and parents, who would put us up for as long as we pleased, and give us all the help and information we should require. After handing us a note to his wife, he made us promise that if ever we were short of money we would send him a wire, on the receipt of which he would gladly forward the necessary amount. The extraordinary friendliness, trust, and readiness to give assistance which we were constantly meeting with showed us a

side of Indian nature which is not sufficiently known in the West. Another very typical characteristic of the Hindu temperament is their aversion to being thanked. Whether the service be great or small, they consider it a matter of course and not in any way remarkable or exceptional: "It is but our human duty." As one of our friends expressed it very beautifully, "If you are grateful and happy for anything we may have done for you it will shine in your face and we shall see and feel it."

One night, shortly after our return to the Gurukul, we were sitting out with one of the teachers on the flat roof of his house, discussing various alternatives concerning our future plans. In addition to rain and heat, cholera had broken out in Hardwar and the inmates of the Gurukul were requested not to go into town. We felt somehow that a definite section of our journey had come to an end and that we were about to enter upon quite a new period. Sometimes a decision springs from an apparently insignificant event or set of circumstances. Such was the case when, towards the close of the evening, the conversation chanced to turn on Kashmir and its incomparable beauty. Before our host's communicative enthusiasm our hesitations vanished and our minds were made up. Two days later we left for Kashmir.

Part Four
KASHMIR

THE two main ways of approach from India to Kashmir lie through Rawalpindi and Jammu. We chose the former, from which place the distance to Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, is covered in a day and a half. A few years ago bullock-carts were the only conveyance available and, though they must have been both extremely slow and uncomfortable, they certainly had more charm than our noisy, overcrowded bus. The most beautiful part of the road lies up the Jehlum valley amongst the graceful Himalayan pines and firs, which grow down to the river's edge. In a village on the frontier of Kashmir, while the car was being unloaded and the luggage examined at the police-station and customs (no small matter, considering the number of things that had been piled on the top of the car), we sat and watched an old man playing the most primitive-looking instrument imaginable, resembling a one-stringed fiddle, while a little boy danced and sang an ancient folk-song.

Emerging at last from a long, steep ascent and attaining level ground, we had the impression of having left India far behind and of entering quite another part of the world. Actually, the contrast was far greater than between two extremes such as Cape Comorin and Rikikesh. The vegetation was the same as that found in Europe, but the atmosphere and colouring were quite unique and could not be compared to anything we had seen hitherto. It was perhaps this familiar aspect of the country which at first proved most disconcerting. We had learnt to know and to love the Indian trees and had not expected to find here such strong reminiscences of our Western landscapes. And yet, what strange contrast at every step !

Driving down a road bordered by homely poplar trees suddenly a long procession of camels came into sight.

The proximity of Tibet was already felt, and in spite of the giant wall separating Kashmir from the mysterious land beyond, something intangible made one constantly aware of its near presence.

We stayed in one of the suburbs of Srinagar, where we were the guests of a small school run on similar lines to those of the Gurukul. A garden surrounded the house and most of the classes were given out of doors. From a distance we watched the boys sitting under the shady trees intent on their lessons or taking their meal of *chappattis* and vegetables before an open-air kitchen.

This ancient capital of Kashmir, dating from the sixth century, occupies a unique position at the foot of the mountains and on either side of the Jehlum. Two canals branch off, and, passing through the town, go to join the Dal lake immediately to the north. Seven bridges span the river and join together the numerous parts of the town thus divided by an intricate network of waterways. Above the slanting roofs appear the pointed steeples and domes of mosque or temple, reminding us that we were still in the land of Moslem and Hindu faith.

Only twenty per cent of the population are Hindus, and these constitute the most learned and cultivated portion of the people. Our first contact with these Kashmiri *pundits* occurred soon after our arrival in a rather unexpected manner. A young Brahmin, having seen us in town, had made up his mind to make our acquaintance, and, noting the number of the *tonga* in which we happened to be driving, eventually traced us down to our lodgings. No introduction is ever deemed necessary, and the mere desire to know anyone is sufficient reason for securing an interview. A few days later our new friend invited us to his

house. His family, it appeared, was very poor and he seemed rather uneasy at the thought that we should not appreciate his home ; he apologized in advance for the scanty meal we should receive, dictated by the miserable conditions under which they were living. We did our best to reassure him and were soon making our way through the older part of the town, amidst a labyrinth of streets so narrow that three people could hardly walk abreast, and eventually stopped in front of a four-storeyed house.

Like most of the buildings in Kashmir it was built of clay and wood. There were no window-panes, glass being very costly and difficult to obtain, but wooden shutters were used instead to keep out rain and snow and were very attractive to look at, being beautifully decorated with delicate openwork designs for which the Kashmiri carpenters have long been famous. We groped our way up a clay staircase in complete darkness and finally emerged into a sort of loft under the roof ; a wide opening, taking up the whole length of the room, between the floor and the rafters, let in the air and made the place pleasantly cool. The only furniture appeared to be a low couch, and a clay stove was half screened from view by a curtain. Two smaller rooms opened out into the former and completed the lodgings of a family of nine.

An elderly *pundit*, father of our young friend, came forward to greet us, and after the customary salutations expressed in a few words of broken English his pleasure in receiving us. While waiting for our arrival, he had been arranging in a bowl some freshly gathered flowers which he placed before us on a spotless white napkin spread on the floor. We observed that he wore a white turban and the typical Kashmir home-spun and -woven dress of white woollen material, with wide kimono sleeves and ample folds, such as is used both in summer and winter. His wife entered, carrying a tray of shining brass on which were placed a number

of small lotus-shaped cups of the same metal, and silently took her place on the floor beside us. Her dark-blue gown, resembling the male attire, was relieved by white cuffs and embroidered round the neck. A white veil, fixed to a stiff crown, hung down her back, and large ear-rings indicated that her husband was still alive.

Our host did not hesitate to broach at once a subject dear to his heart and was soon telling us about his spiritual teacher or *Guru*. He showed us the photograph of a woman *sannyasin* with very dark, piercing eyes, set strangely wide apart and giving the whole face a rather weird expression. We were impressed by the amazing reverence and devotion with which he spoke of her, as if she had been some super-human being, capable of leading him straight to God. His childlike faith seemed to leave no room in his mind for doubt, and his eyes shone with an inner radiance which lit up his countenance with a tranquil happiness.

The love of the old man for his five-year-old grandson was touching to watch. It seemed that the child was never content when away from his grandfather and the pair were inseparable. Taking the little chap on his knees and pressing him tenderly against his heart, he exclaimed: "How I love him! He is my Krishna. In him I adore Krishna—not his body, but his spirit." We shall long remember the beautiful picture, the small, dark head reposing on the old man's bosom, while through the opening beyond appeared the rugged mountain-peaks and the rooftops covered with dry waving grass. "Our little Jawaharlal will be a great man one day," added the proud grandfather, looking down at the child, who had fallen asleep in his arms. One by one the other members of the family dropped in and came to join our circle. There were two elder sons, one of them just going to be married and the other living also under

the same roof with his wife and two children, not to mention their youngest sister, a girl of eleven, who shyly kept in the background.

The daughter-in-law till now had remained invisible, for it was not deemed proper that she should sit or talk in the presence of her father-in-law. She now came forward bearing the ornamental Kashmir tea-pot, a sort of large jug of brightly polished metal containing live charcoal, like a Russian samovar, and in which the water was heated. The tea was unlike anything we know under that name. The leaves are put into the water with a certain amount of milk and sugar and left to boil for some time ; just before it is poured out, pieces of almond and a few cardamom seeds are crushed and thrown in to add their special flavour. Sometimes the milk is omitted, but in both cases the result proves excellent. The metal cups are exceedingly hot and have to be held in a cloth. The wide kimono sleeves were very practical for this purpose. We noted with what respect and veneration the young woman helped her father-in-law, and we felt behind her gesture and attitude the influence of an age-old tradition which still inspires and ordains the duties of all members of a family in relation to one another.

Though no attempt was made to maintain a conversation and the silence was only broken by a few occasional remarks, all were yet quite at ease. Wherever we went, this silence is, as it were, the background of Indian life and comes as naturally to them as speech does to us in the West. Once understood it is never oppressive, but, on the contrary, is found to be a great asset. As we looked round at all the people we realized the value of thus rejecting small-talk and exaggerated marks of politeness. So often this does not reflect a person's true feelings, and frequently it is a superficial veneer imposed by so-called civilized customs. The inner culture which shone unmistakably on the faces

of these humble people did not depend on either social status or the acquisition of much knowledge, rather on a certain refinement of thought and feeling, inspired by lofty ideals.

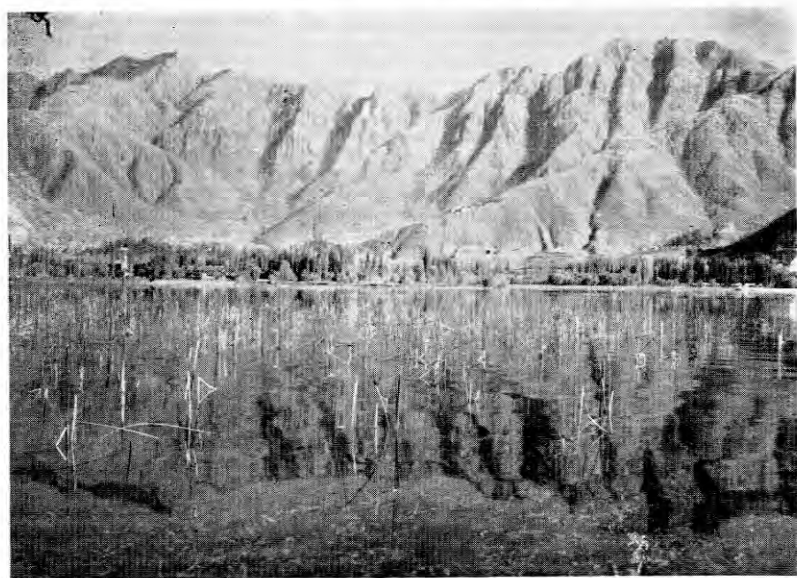
Their intellect, being still in its infancy, did not raise barriers of separation nor delight in destructive criticism. The intellect is truly a divine gift and has, no doubt, to blossom out sooner or later, but when it appears before these other faculties it generally begins by leaving no scope for motion and intuition. It is only at a later stage, when it becomes the servant instead of the master, that the higher principles of man can also manifest and bring about a harmonious relationship and development of mind and heart.



On the outskirts of Srinagar a steep hill, detached from the rest of the mountains, rises above the town. Named after the great religious teacher and reformer, Shankaracharya, the peak is regarded as sacred by the Hindus. The small temple which crowns the summit, said to have been erected originally in 2500 B.C., appears to be a part of the mountain itself and is scarcely distinguishable from the surrounding rocks. After dark a light is always kept burning above the dome and can be seen from a long distance. A flight of steps between two massive stone walls leads to the single entrance of the sanctuary, reminding one of a small fortified tower deprived of windows. The only person we caught sight of was a yellow-robed *sannyasin* sitting at the entrance to the temple. We sat on the edge of the tableland looking down upon the city spread out at our feet while our Hindu companion went in to worship. Our attention was less taken up by the natural beauty of the scenery than by the extraordinary atmosphere which forced itself upon



PINK LOTUSES ON DAL LAKE



DAL LAKE



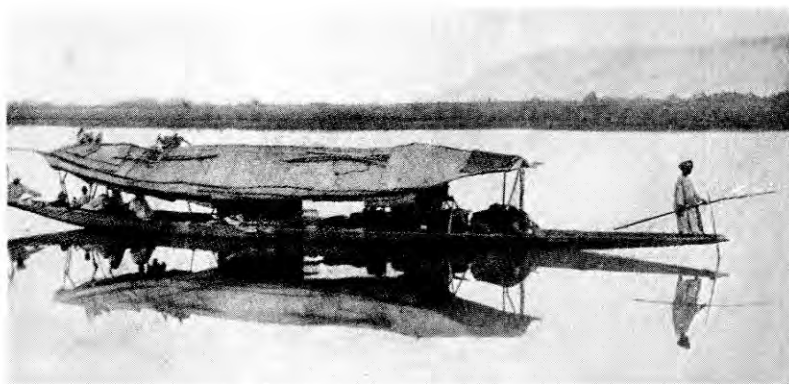
HOUSE-BOAT AND WOOD-LADEN BARGE ON DAL LAKE



MAHADEV (13,000 FT.)



MAHOMMEDANS IN A KASHMIR
VILLAGE FAIR



KASHMIRI DUNGA ON DAL LAKE

our notice. The place seemed to radiate and transmit spiritual energy as a power-house does electricity, and we were deeply struck by the similarity of vibration with the great S'aivite centres of South India.

It was only afterwards that we learned that the temple was dedicated to Sīva, which explains why its atmosphere should have been so familiar and should have reminded us of our Southern experiences. Furthermore, we were somehow aware of being in touch with Arunachala, the hill of the Holy Beacon at Tiruvannamalai, as if some invisible stream of influence linked up the various holy mountains and made possible contact with places many thousands of miles apart. Moreover, seen from the lake, the hill of Shankaracharya is nearly the exact replica of Arunachala—another strange coincidence. It was also interesting to note that practically all the sacred peaks have a triangular aspect, as though the invisible powers of Nature had fashioned them in the form of that great symbol hinting at the hidden truth behind.

Perhaps one of the greatest attractions of Srinagar resides in the proximity of the Dal lake and the possibility of spending a good deal of the time on the water. Houseboats have developed into a regular industry, because of the custom of both Indians and Europeans to come and pass the summer holidays in these boating houses. The only drawback to this way of living is a certain isolation which, though ideal from the standpoint of rest, prevents any real contact with the people. In addition to houseboats of modern invention and equipped with all possible comfort are to be found the ancient Kashmir *dungas*, a flat-bottomed boat with no partitions and the roof and sides of which are made of straw matting which can be rolled up at will. Barges serve for the transport of wood, and the men run to and fro on top of the logs, using long poles to push the barge onwards. Lighter craft are available in the form of *shikaras*, small canoes

decked with red embroidered hangings,* affording shelter from the sun. We hired one of these and paddled down the canal under overhanging trees, past broad steps leading down to the water, where children swam about and women came to fill their earthenware pitchers.

As soon as the town was left behind willow trees and rows of poplars covered the marshy land and we glided through floating gardens. These latter are something quite exceptional. Reeds grow plentifully in these parts ; a certain number are cut low down near the roots and allowed to float at the surface, where they are matted together. Mud and weeds are extracted from the lake and laid on the top of these reeds, so that gradually there is formed a layer of excellent soil. Water-melons and vegetables of all kinds thrive in abundance in these floating gardens.

The lake was one of the most beautiful we had seen, having a peculiar silvery transparence which was quite unique. On the present occasion it acted as a clear mirror, the slightest detail appearing with amazing distinctness, the reflection being actually more precise in line and colour than the reality. Nature gave us here a striking example of the way in which man, relying on his senses, is caught up in the great illusion, making the world appear as real, whereas a deeper insight reveals that it is but a reflection in time and space of That which is above. That the world is *Māya* or illusion in this sense is a familiar teaching of the Hindu philosophy.*

In the middle of the lake an island, known as Rupa Lank (the silver island), was conspicuous by its four great *chinnar*,¹ which are amongst the finest of the region. One of them was entirely hollow and able to give shelter to nine or ten people simultaneously. These *chinnar* are renowned for their splendid autumn colouring, but they are no less beautiful in their fresh spring

¹ Plane trees.

foliage. A family of herons had made its nest in one of them, and the strange long-necked birds were seen flying to and fro carrying food to their young.

When we returned from an expedition inland, our boatmen were anxiously waiting for us. Clouds had been gathering over the mountains and a storm was imminent. The two men were evidently uneasy and rowed for all they were worth. It seems that accidents often happen when *shikaras* are caught in bad weather, as they are easily overturned. However, being ignorant of any possible danger, we enjoyed the grand display of thunder and lightning above the craggy peaks overlooking the lake. Only when within reach of land did the boatmen cease their efforts. Night had fallen ere we passed once more through the narrow canals, and against the dark sky the small light on Shankaracharya hill burned like a star above the town.

On the outskirts of Srinagar the Kashmir branch of the All India Spinners' Association puts before the visitor a selection of hand-spun and hand-woven material for which the country has long been renowned. While the Hindus form, as has previously been pointed out, the more learned part of the population, the Muhammedans, on the other hand, are the artists *par excellence*. Curiously enough, it is the men and not the women who do the weaving and embroidery, displaying infinite skill and patience in the ancient industries. On the ground floor of the building a number of workers were sitting before their looms, and under their nimble fingers the yarn was woven into tweed, *patoos* (for heavy overcoats), shawls, rugs, and the gossamer-like *Shah-tush*, whose ample folds can easily be passed through a signet ring. This last material is made from the wool of the Tibetan sheep.

In the adjoining room half a dozen men were sitting on the floor, busy embroidering. They were wearing white turbans and kimono dresses and their beards and moustaches were dyed a vivid red, according to

Muhammedan custom. Two small windows barely let in sufficient light for ordinary purposes and we marvelled to see how they managed to work out the fine intricate designs with a perfection in composition and colouring which was truly an art in itself. "Painting with needle and silk" would be the best simile with which to describe their work. Nature is their constant source of inspiration, and many a leaf and flower of Kashmir can be recognized in the exquisite borders of shawl and *saree*.

Felt- or *Namda*-making is a very characteristic industry and deserves special mention. In olden times the manufacturers of *Namda* were far more numerous than at present ; they used to live together in a village which has still kept the name of Namdagar. Nowadays only about ten families have remained experts in the art, and all the members of those families help in the various processes. The wool is first carded, then spread out in thin layers on a grass mat to the required thickness. Water is sprinkled on the top and the mat is tightly wound and securely tied, after which two men roll it to and fro with their feet for a couple of hours in order to compress the fibres and obtain a cohesive material. Soap is then applied all over the felt, and when it is finally washed and dried it is ready for use. *Namdars* of all sizes are made and embroidered with charming designs of Persian inspiration.

"You should go to the villages and see the people at work in the various centres of the A.I.S.A.," suggested the secretary as we were about to leave. And he added : "We are going tomorrow for a five days' tour to buy a stock of blankets at the annual fairs, which are to be held some sixty miles from Srinagar. Why not come with us ?" This was indeed an unexpected proposal, and I eagerly accepted, delighted at the prospect of seeing more of Kashmir, and especially of coming in contact with the peasants.

Next morning two young Hindus belonging to the party called for me with a *tonga* and we set out on our expedition. The straight road bordered on either side by poplar trees ran southwards, parallel to the foot of the mountains. After the first few miles our horse suddenly began to show signs of obstinacy and finally came to a standstill. After much coaxing the animal started off again, but keeping so close to the side of the road that it was a wonder the carriage did not land in the ditch. Each tree-trunk seemed to have a special attraction for our four-footed friend, and we had to choose either to stop altogether or risk being overturned. Horses are curious creatures and have, like human beings, certain individual habits and weaknesses. The *tongawalla*¹ took things philosophically and calmly explained that when his animal behaved in this manner, the only thing to be done was to wait for another carriage to pass, going in the same direction. Meanwhile we stayed in the vicinity and ate mulberries, which grew plentifully in the neighbourhood. At last another *tonga* appeared, and as soon as it had passed us, our horse feeling disposed to follow, we pursued our way without further difficulty.

The small locality of Pampur, where we were to spend the night, was situated on the banks of the river Jehlum. The village was of the same colour as the soil, most of the houses being made of clay and surrounded by low walls of sun-baked earth. I could not help wondering how often these had been built and destroyed since A.D. 844, which is the date put forward for the foundation of Pampur. A three-storeyed house stood out amongst the poorer dwellings. It was built of stone and was occupied by the manager of the Pampur branch of the A.I.S.A. In the courtyard several sheds were the scene of much activity. Wool was being dyed in great cauldrons, while farther

¹ Driver.

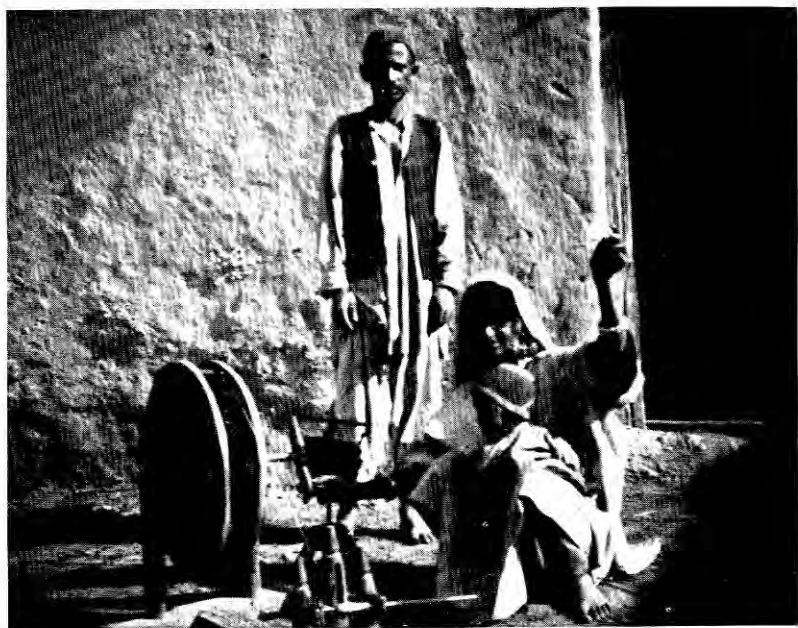
on two men were standing in a sort of trough filled with soapy water and treading for hours on newly woven material so as to tighten the fabric of the stuff.¹ "We have many workers in the village who spin and weave for us," said the manager; "if you care to watch them I will lead you to their homes."

All the houses are very much alike. On the top storey, used in the summer season, the windows are more numerous and light and air are allowed to enter. When the cold weather comes the whole family descends to the ground or first floor, as the case may be. Here they live more or less in the dark, as there are no glass panes and the openwork shutters are generally closed to keep out the cold. The winters in Kashmir are severe; and the peasants, who are extremely poor, find it hard to keep warm. When the snow covers the ground, and all work in the fields is stopped, they sit on the clay floors of their dimly-lit rooms wearing home-spun and woven kimono dresses and coarse woollen blankets in which they drape themselves from head to foot.

Except for cooking purposes fires are not in use, since wood is expensive. Instead, they have a number of round earthenware pots, inserted in cane baskets, which they fill with live coal and carry about with them. In winter they even slip these primitive warming-pans underneath their ample clothing, the handle of the basket preventing the material from coming in contact with the embers and catching fire. In addition to this mode of heating, the peasants usually let their sheep crowd into the lower portion of the building, this adding also to the general warmth.

As our guide took us from one house to another, we invariably found the whole family at work. The husband was sitting at his loom, his wife was busy spinning, while the elder children sorted and combed

¹ This is known as "fulling".



MAHOMMEDAN FAMILY WITH SPINNING WHEEL



KASHMIR VILLAGE SHOP



ON THE DAL LAKE



MAHOMMEDAN YOGI



BRAHMIN LADIES



WOMAN GATHERING WATERWEEDS ON DAL LAKE

out the wool. Although they earn very little, this manual craft is invaluable, especially during the long winter months. On our way back we noticed a man who was walking up and down a flat open space. Coming nearer we saw that sticks had been driven into the ground at regular intervals for a length of about six or seven yards. Wool was being passed up and down between the sticks from one end to the other.¹ A gigantic skein was thus made which would form the warp of the stuff.

Supper was awaiting us when we returned. During the meal I asked our host if it would be possible to hear some of the peasants sing. Knowing that they were mostly Muhammedans I was particularly anxious to make a more intimate contact with the "children of Allah" than had hitherto been possible. And I have always found that one of the best ways of penetrating, so to speak, beneath the surface of a race or people is to listen to their folk-songs. "Your request is easily granted," was the reply, "for my men like nothing better than to sing." It was quite dark, but the moon had risen behind the mountains. Half a dozen figures silently gathered together some little distance away. They had brought their earthenware pots of live charcoal, for the night was cool, and for some time they spoke in low tones and blew on the embers. Suddenly quite a young boy began to sing, the others later joining in ; again and again the boyish voice was heard alone, followed by the choir of the elder men. The music was strangely pathetic and a strain of sadness ran through the melodies.

Gradually my former slight antipathy for Muhammedans seemed to fade away as I touched something of the greatness of their race and their unique contribution to human life. The men had entirely forgotten our presence, and it was quite evident they were not

¹ This method of warping is never seen in Europe nowadays, as it is done by machinery.

giving us an entertainment but merely singing for the happiness of singing. The evening was far spent and yet they showed no signs of stopping. We rose at length and followed our host to one of the sheds where a number of *charpies*¹ had been put side by side. In a few moments we had laid out our bedding, and when finally we fell asleep the silent night was still filled with song.

At breakfast next morning the manager turned to me and said : "I have spoken to one of my workmen and he is willing to let you go to his home to photograph his wife and daughter ; only you must go alone, because they are observing strict *purdah* and must not uncover their faces before any men except their husbands." The house was close by and my companions left me at a door which led into a courtyard. A couple of men were sitting on the window-sill of the first floor, evidently waiting for my arrival. One of them shouted something, and looking up I caught a glimpse of a female figure peeping at me from a loft under the thatched roof. But nobody appeared and I began to wonder if they had changed their minds. A second shout had no better result. Just as I was about to turn away, out of the poor house appeared three women clad in the most gorgeous dresses. The rich materials of vivid colours were beautifully embroidered round the neck and down the front.

The more striking of the three women was wearing a violet dress with gold embroidery. Like the Brahmin women, she had on a white veil, though it was not fixed on a rigid crown and her numerous chiselled ear-rings were far heavier and more cumbersome. These latter were suspended to the right and left of the face by means of a ribbon slipped over the head, the weight being thus taken off the ears. Hardly had I time to photograph them than they hurriedly dis-

¹ Wooden camp-beds. The mattress consists of an interlaced cotton ribbon or stout string.

appeared up the dark staircase, and I heard their smothered laughter as they regained their rooms.

Looking over the low wall of a neighbouring house my attention was attracted by a scene which must have been re-enacted throughout the centuries. A group of women and children were watching two young girls busy rice-husking. Small quantities of grain were put into a stone mortar and pounded with long wooden pestles. While one of the girls raised her pestle her companion had already lowered hers, and the "thud, thud" went on for hours in rhythmic succession. I approached and conveyed by signs that I wished to take the place of one of the workers. To my surprise I found the wooden implement so heavy that after a few minutes my arms began to ache, and I was amazed to think that mere children were able to carry on this strenuous work for any length of time.

The region of Pampur is well known for its saffron fields, and this is one of the only places in India where it is extensively cultivated. The manager took me aside and showed me a number of bags of saffron carefully stored away. It seemed that the plants bloom in October. What is known under the name of saffron is made from the pistils of the flowers ; the best quality, fetching a high price, is derived from the orange-red tips of three stigmas. Apart from its general use, the saffron, when diluted with water, affords a rich yellow colour used by the Hindus for making the caste mark in the middle of the forehead.



At the foot of pine-covered slopes lies the small village of Verinag. The houses are hidden amongst century-old walnut trees, and well-cultivated rice fields descend in terraces to the bottom of the valley. Here in the seventeenth century there stood a stately Mogul

palace, since destroyed by fire. A massive stone wall with twenty-four arches still encircles an octagonal tank of the most perfect proportions. The crystal-clear water is of a deep blue-green and hundreds of fish are to be seen swimming about. This is the source of the Jehlum river. After rising in the tank the water flows along a canal through the ancient palace gardens, after which, recovering its liberty, it rushes down in joyous cascades to the plain below. Leaving my companions to attend to supper, I strolled through the grounds. The slanting rays of the setting sun were casting a golden haze over the countryside. In the deserted avenues, where the Emperor Jahangir used to wander with the ladies of his Court, great *chinnar* trees were the only surviving witnesses of those bygone times.

Suddenly I came upon half a dozen Kashmiris in flowing white garments and turbans sitting on the grass and watching a game of chess. They did not seem surprised to see me, and a few moments later, having joined their group, I found myself sitting opposite one of the players. Chess had long been my favourite game, but little did I think I should one day find an opponent in a distant Kashmir village. The chessmen being somewhat different to those in Europe and my capacities inferior to those of my adversary, the game was soon ended in his favour. Without a word we smiled and parted, and when I looked round again the white figures had disappeared behind the trees. Hurrying back through the dusk I found a fire lit near the tank in front of a small wooden hut where we had arranged to spend the night. My companions were busy cooking rice ; this was to be our only fare, as nothing else could be obtained in the village.

Next morning we rose at dawn after an uncomfortable night, owing to the cold penetrating freely through the disjointed planks of the outer walls of our room. In spite of the extra blankets provided by the

owner, I was unpleasantly aware of the fact that six thousand feet above sea level entailed a temperature to which I was no longer accustomed. There was no time to lose if we wished to cover six miles before mid-day. We set off, carrying our bedding, and were soon climbing the opposite mountain by a narrow rocky path which wound through thickets of wild roses in full bloom. From the summit the slopes appeared covered with graceful Himalayan pine trees. We passed through these before reaching the charming village of Kokarnag. Right and left, streams and mountain torrents flowed through the verdant pastures. Six springs celebrated for their purity gushed forth from the hillside, filling the air with "the sound of many waters".

The very idea of poverty seemed absurd in a place so abundantly blessed by Nature, and it was therefore almost incredible when my companions returned from the village with only a handful of walnuts and a glass of milk and the news that only rice would be available presently. When a little later a passing Hindu family, who remembered seeing me at Lucknow Exhibition, invited us to a copious picnic lunch, we thanked kind Providence for this unexpected piece of luck. Furthermore, they happened to be going by car to Achhabal, where we were to meet the rest of our party the same evening, and only a few hours elapsed before we reached our destination.

* * *

On the two successive nights which we passed in Achhabal we were put up in a single room used for storing blankets. Piles of these latter reached from floor to ceiling and served as convenient rugs and carpets on which to spread our bedding. Thanks to the absence of furniture there was ample room for us

all, not to speak of innumerable insects of the flea species who made their presence felt in spite of the most cunning devices to prevent them becoming bed companions. However unpleasant this might be, I considered it a small price to pay for all I was able to see.

Let the reader imagine thirty thousand peasants assembled in the limited area of a village. They had come from all parts of Kashmir, leaving their remote Himalayan homes to attend this annual fair. On foot and horseback, by *tonga* or bus, they poured into Achhabal till the whole place was turned into a vast encampment. The fair was held under magnificent *chinnar* trees which formed a shady park of exceptional beauty, offering an ideal place for so great a gathering.

Under the dome of foliage stalls had been erected, conveniently sheltered from both rain and sun and displaying an infinite variety of goods. Dense crowds circulated, buying, selling, bargaining, or simply wandering idly about and enjoying the animated scene. All manner of peasants were here assembled. They afforded an interesting study of the various Kashmir types, including both Hindus and Muhammedans, though the latter formed the majority. The complexion of the Kashmiri is much fairer than that of other Indians. The men are lightly built, though strong and wiry. The tall, red-bearded Muhammedans were striking, with their white turbans and flowing white robes. The hillmen mostly wear ample trousers gathered in and tied at the waist by a piece of tape, the legs getting narrower towards the base. A white shirt is worn on the top, also a rough woollen waistcoat. A brown blanket slung over the shoulders and a tight-fitting skull-cap complete their outfit. I noted several fine types of Kashmiri Hindus. The face is oval and well proportioned : a fine, sensitive mouth, a thin, aquiline nose, keen black eyes, very regular

arched eyebrows, and a high forehead constitute the main characteristics.

While my companions were busy buying blankets I was left to my own devices, and I spent the day in exploring the various parts of the fair. Several brooks run through the grounds, making successive islands on which the people were camping. Large earthenware jugs containing curd had been placed in the shallow water so as to keep cool, and as customers drew near the curd was mixed with water from the stream and handed to them in earthenware cups. This drink, known as *lascie*, is both healthy and refreshing. Presently I came to a door in a wall and, entering, found myself in a most beautiful garden. In the middle of well-kept lawns and surrounded by bright-coloured flower-beds stood a charming pavilion dating from the Mogul period. Fountains played on either side of a canal and the air was musical with the sound of a near-by waterfall. Groups of people were walking about, for this was no private garden and the public was freely admitted.

Attracted by the shade of the trees I chose a quiet spot at the foot of an immense *chinnar*, glad to rest and to get away from the crowd. However, it was not long before a number of Muhammedan women, having caught sight of me and no doubt wishing to satisfy their curiosity, approached and sat down. A few moments later several more joined their circle, and soon I had become the centre of a large audience. The silent gaze of twenty pairs of eyes was turned upon me as if I had been some unusual object worth examining at close quarters.

Now was an occasion of experimenting whether the "language of the heart" could bridge the gulf between these people and myself. I glanced smilingly from one to another. They were shy, a trifle suspicious, perhaps, but not afraid. I tried to feel our common fellowship and to be aware of the deep link which

bound us all together. With love and understanding came the perception of inner unity beneath outer diversity. No longer was I a Frenchwoman surrounded by strangers, but simply one of their own kith and kin. How far this would go to make them share what I was feeling remained to be seen. I looked at a young woman sitting opposite, and by signs communicated I should like to be dressed as she was. To my astonishment she calmly took off her white veil and gave it to me ; another woman slipped off her massive silver necklace, while a third brought me her heavy ear-rings. An old Muhammedan who might have been my grandmother began to dress and adorn me as if indeed I had been her grandchild. When the finishing touch was given, and as I looked round at the delighted faces, I really believe the small miracle was achieved and the gulf between us effectively bridged.

As I wandered back in search of my companions Fate brought me in touch with a religious man, whose friendship was to have a profound influence on my life during the coming months. Thanks to his unfailing kindness I largely owed not only the recovery from an almost fatal accident which was to mark the end of my stay in Kashmir, but the enrichment of my whole outlook in the domain of ethics and philosophy.

* * *

Between the Dal lake and the mountains runs a narrow strip of land. Here are found in close proximity the celebrated Mogul gardens of Chashma Shai (the Splendid Spring), of Nishay Bag (the Garden of Gladness), of Shalamar Bag (the Abode of Love) which make this part of the Kashmir valley renowned for its beauty. Above one of the many villages, hidden here and there amongst the thick foliage, three tiny *cooties* had been put at our disposal. They were made



PUSHING THE BARGE ONWARDS



KASHMIR VILLAGE FAIR, KEEPING THE "LASCIE" COOL IN THE STREAM



SCENE IN A KASHMIR VILLAGE FAIR



ON THE DAL LAKE

of wood ; but the upper portion of the walls being of glass the view was extended on all sides simultaneously. The two large windows and two doors which were stationed on the four sides of the hut let in plenty of air, so that one had the impression of living practically in the open. In my own *cootie* there was only room for the bed, the mattress of which consisted of a wooden board covered by a felt *namda*. A primitive clay stove in the adjoining hut served for cooking and we prepared our own food. Besides the facilities for bathing in the mountain torrents, there was plenty of water at hand. In the garden a small fountain played day and night, adding its special charm to the quiet seclusion of the place.

Time did not lie heavily on our hands, for we had begun to study Sanscrit and received daily lessons. These included the translation of the *shlokas*¹ of Utpaladeva, a Kashmiri mystic of the eighth century whose writings reminded one of the mystical transports of our greatest Christian saints. It is not surprising that Kashmir should have given birth to so many religious teachers and yogis ; the very atmosphere seems to favour all attempts to scale the heights of spirituality and to help man to seek within himself union with the Divine.

To the south of the Kashmir valley rise the lofty peaks of Mahadev (13,000 feet). Owing to the difficulty of approach these are perhaps less known to the European visitor than the famous Amarnath cave situated on a high snow-capped summit and containing frozen images of Siva and Parvati, in the form of stalagmites, and to which thousands of pilgrims flock each year. In spite of repeated thunderstorms which characterized the season, the prospect of living for a few days in the exhilarating air of the high mountains proved inviting. A rough track wound up the valley

¹ Verses.

along the side of a torrent. My coolie walked ahead with my bedding strapped to his shoulders. He was wearing nail-shod leather sandals appropriate for climbing. These and "grass sandals", less resistant than the former, being made with a sort of coarse jute string, are extensively used by the peasants both in the plain and the hilly districts.

Our conversation was reduced to its minimum on account of his ignorance of English and my very limited knowledge of Hindi, but signs and gestures were sufficient for practical purposes. We had been climbing steadily with only an hour's rest since we started before daybreak. At first the moon had appeared over the summits, reflecting itself in the clear mirror of a lake ; then as the dawn broke the plain below had stretched like a blue-green sea to the high wall of mountains whose snowy heights were the first to catch the rays of the rising sun. Gradually as we had passed upwards, dark fir trees replaced the fresh green vegetation of the lower regions and craggy peaks of bare stone appeared between the steep slopes. Now the night quickly descended and we were enveloped by low-hanging clouds.

We must somehow have lost our way, and my coolie seemed perplexed. He sent out a long-drawn shout which echoed through the silent heights ; again and again he called, and at last a faint response came down from a region above us. Guided in the right direction we finally attained a number of huts lying under the shelter of the fir trees. This is Laydevas, where a few Muhammedan families live most of the year round until the snow drives them from their primitive abodes. I was soon sitting in one of these huts and warming myself before a blazing fire, surrounded by all the members of the family. The walls were made of logs and two rows of wooden buttresses supported the flat roof. There were no windows, but the whole front of the building was practically open

and in the absence of any chimney the smoke was allowed to find its way out as best it could. The only room was a large one and was divided off at the farther end by a low railing. Two cows with their calves, a bullock, and two goats came in presently from the pastures and found shelter here for the night.

While our own supper was being prepared I heard them munching their fodder of freshly cut branches. The air was cold, and it was only possible to keep warm by sitting as near as possible to the fire. I watched the women making the thick pancakes known as *chappattis* which, together with rice and maize, constituted their main food. To this simple fare must be added milk and the products derived therefrom. Vegetables were unobtainable and the people rarely went down to the nearest village some fifteen miles away. I noticed near the cooking-vessels an immense lump of hard salt in the middle of which was a curiously shaped depression, and I learnt with some amusement that it was due to the tongues of the cows and goats. Salt is used by poor people instead of sugar, which they cannot afford. Salty tea with milk is a common beverage very much in favour all over Kashmir. Worn out by the long climb, I was glad to stretch myself on my bedding in a corner of the hut. The fire was getting low and the only lantern suspended from the ceiling had been put out. Through my half-closed eyelids I perceived the men, women, and children wrapping themselves from head to foot in blankets and lying down side by side on the fern-strewn floor. How they could possibly breathe remained a mystery.

* * *

Rain had fallen all night long and in the grey, cold dawn the people were beginning to stir. The cattle had left the sheds and were slowly making their way

up to the higher pastures. The ground had been ploughed by their feet as they came and went and the holes were filled with water. It was not easy to wade through the mud to the near-by torrent, whose icy temperature was enough to discourage the most praiseworthy attempts at cleanliness.

After a while the clouds showed signs of lifting and we started out to climb the last few miles separating us from the top of Mahadev. Brooks babbled through the green meadows, which were dotted with wild flowers very similar to the alpine flora. The fir trees gave way to dwarf rhododendrons and silver-birches under which carpets of wild delphiniums grew over four feet high. Presently the trees disappeared and we found ourselves at the foot of a high summit. A wilderness of great boulders had to be crossed leading to grassy slopes where tall, prickly Himalayan poppies of a celestial blue opened their delicate flowers. At length we came to a sheer wall of granite where shoes and stick were more hindrances than helpful. Having discarded them we attained the highest peak. A rough stone indicated the place where Hindu pilgrims come to worship Siva and bring offerings of *ghee*, flowers, and camphor. For a moment the sun appeared, and through the drifting clouds far below stretched the sunny Kashmir valley hemmed in on all sides by the mighty Himalayan ranges : a land set apart, as it were, by Nature and adorned by her most precious gifts.

The ways of Providence are hidden and mysterious, but there can be little doubt that events cast their shadow before actually happening. The circumstances that are about to be related were foreseen and described several weeks in advance by a six-year-old Brahmin child. The feeling of inevitability here expressed is not fatalism in the sense usually given to the term and which is detrimental to individual effort, but more a calm assurance in the Divine Law of Retribution and Compensation, bringing to each man

the harvest of his own sowing and neither to be feared nor eluded. "Man proposes, but God disposes" may well be applied to the Divine justice governing the universe and which remains unaffected by personal plans, desires, or man-made laws.

In a few days the July full moon was to mark the annual pilgrimage to Amarnath and I was to join the pilgrims on a five days' journey on foot and horseback through the Himalayas. For the last time I prepared to go down to the village for my daily lesson. I lingered before my *cootie*, sad at the thought of the fast-approaching date which would bring my stay in Kashmir to an end. Behind a screen of clouds the sun sank slowly to the horizon. The far-off summits became translucent, while the nearer ranges stood out in varying tone and colour, passing from deepest blue to purple. The plain was already in the shade, whereas the bare granite peaks above the lake glowed with a fiery radiance.

It was quickly dark, and when a few hours later I returned up the hill the moon had risen and there was sufficient light whereby to see the path. Having reached the door which led through a wall into the garden beyond, and just as I stepped across the threshold, I felt a stinging bite above my shoe. A hissing sound warned me of the presence of a snake¹—later found to be a cobra—concealed in the shadow of the door, and I hurriedly limped round to another entrance and called to my companions. The pain was acute and the leg rapidly swelled. Without a moment's hesitation one of the Indians present tore off a piece of his *dhoti* and bound my leg tightly so as to intercept the circulation of blood. While I was made to drink a cup of melted butter a messenger was sent down to the village for help.

When at length the friend whom I had left so short

¹ It was seen next day in the garden hypnotizing a bird. Hindus never harming any animal, it was left in peace.

a while before arrived with four men and a stretcher, his voice rang out, bringing the calm assurance that all would be well. There was no doctor available in the vicinity, and to reach Srinagar in my present condition was out of the question. Some peasants having spoken of a Muhammedan bone-setter living some five miles away and who had the reputation of curing cobra bites, it was decided that I should be conveyed to his place. A strange incident here deserves to be mentioned. Only *tongas* were available in the village, but a car was ready waiting for me. It appeared that the owners of the car, who lived in Srinagar, had felt impelled to come here tonight to visit some mutual friends in spite of the late hour. Thanks to this fortunate coincidence no time was lost. During the many phases of that eventful night when the ebb of life sank to its lowest point I knew with absolute certainty that I should ultimately recover. As I came out of a swoon due to pain and the effects of the poison on the heart, for a few seconds I tasted the exhilarating sensation of blissful happiness and perfect health. It is a fact that during the next few days, in spite of acute suffering, neither fear nor doubt ever crossed my mind in this respect.

* * *

My Indian friend had brought me to a house which was occupied by a brother *sannyasin*. It was easier of access and less exposed to the heat than the *cootie* where I had been lodged. It is here that I was to spend a month nursed with the most touching solicitude by these religious men, as if I had been their mother or sister. The room in which I found myself was a large one on the second floor of a wooden building in the middle of the village. As in most of the Kashmir houses, the upper floor was practically open on all sides. Air circulated freely between the rafters and the roof, as

well as through the numerous windows. The *charpie* on which I had been laid occupied a corner of the room. A small three-legged stove of clay stood on a raised platform against the wall together with a few cooking-vessels of brightly polished metal. On the farther side a wooden board served as a bed. The other occupants of the room simply spread out their *namdas* and blankets on the mat-covered floor for the night. A box turned upside down was used both as table and drawer, and the only wicker chair had been made by one of the villagers.

The Muhammedan bone-setter, who spent most of the time by my side, was a simple peasant whose knowledge appeared strangely limited. His treatment consisted in reciting *mantrams* while passing a small rusty knife up and down the leg and applying certain herbs and leaves. During the first few days, however strange it may appear, the result proved efficacious, and the effect of the poison on the rest of the system seemed to have been arrested. Whether or not his enthusiasm and faith began to wane in proportion to growing anticipation of the promised reward remained a mystery, but further progress was not forthcoming. My friends who had undertaken the heavy task of nursing me, and in whose wisdom I had the greatest confidence, decided to take the case entirely into their own hands and the Muhammedan was sent away. In the course of the following weeks he returned periodically and assured me that owing to his treatment having been suspended and until he was allowed to pursue it there was not the slightest possibility of my ever being able to walk again.

The news of my accident had spread with incredible rapidity in spite of the absence of all modern means of communication. It had flown from mouth to mouth, and for the first two days I witnessed a most amazing sight. Men and women, Hindus and Muhammedans, rich and poor, flocked to see me from Srinagar

and the surrounding villages. From where I was lying I saw them emerge from the narrow stairway and reach the wooden balcony outside the room.

For a moment they tarried in order to remove their shoes or sandals ; they then entered and silently took up position on the floor. Sometimes as many as twelve people were in the room together. After an hour or so, having exchanged a few words with my friends, they got up, and as they passed out they turned towards me, the Muslims touching their forehead while the Hindus bowed with folded palms. A poor peasant woman silently pointed heavenward as if to say : "God alone can help you." On the faces of all I read a sympathy which went straight to my heart. Yet who was I for them but an unknown stranger, and how was it that they should thus go out of their way to bring me the expression of their sympathy ? Curiosity alone had not been the motive of their coming, but a spontaneous feeling of human solidarity which did not depend on similarity of race or religion. In me they simply saw a woman in pain, and that sufficed. More than two hundred people came during those two first days.

A most touching proof was soon brought to my notice of the way in which this sympathy sought a practical outlet. A Kashmiri *pundit*, whom I had met only once or twice before, turned up to inquire after my health. He had covered over fifteen miles on foot under the hot sun, but seemed to take this as a matter of course. After a couple of hours during which he remained practically silent, he suddenly turned to me and said : "Will you consider me as your brother and let me do something for you ?" I nodded in the affirmative, wondering what was to follow. "Then please may I wash your soiled clothes." (Owing to the accident I was badly off in this respect.) And as I remained silent, overcome by this extraordinary proposal coming from an almost total stranger, he

added : "I have not studied Sanscrit or philosophy, but I know what it is to feel for a sister. The service of one's neighbour is the first duty." Having secured the necessary implements he retired to the balcony to carry out his self-appointed task, leaving me to ponder over true brotherhood expressed in daily life.

During many sleepless nights I watched a bright patch of moonlight move across the floor of the room as the hours slipped by one by one. When the stars began to fade the profound silence preceding the dawn was broken by the song of the birds, while imperceptibly the light grew stronger above the mountains wrapped in mist. Through the open door, herds of cows and goats could be seen climbing the steep path leading to the pastures from which they would return at dusk. Then came the sound of the children's voices, the heavy thumping peculiar to rice-husking, and the daily cries of a Muhammedan simpleton calling his brethren to prayer. After the mid-day heat the coolness of the evening descended like a blessing, and as the sun sank in a cloudless sky of gold from all the neighbouring houses arose the familiar Muhammedan songs. One of them especially I was never tired of listening to, typifying, as it were, the mystical aspirations of the people. It spoke of the devotee's endless search for God, discovering finally that the Divine is all the time present, not far away but "closer than hands and feet".

In addition to the numerous visitors previously mentioned, religious men were constantly coming in. The house was open to them day and night and they could always find here free shelter and food. Their whole life is devoted to meditation and the realization of God, but whereas some wander from place to place others take upon themselves the task of serving their brother *sannyasins*, remaining in one locality to play the part of host. Although the majority have given up all possessions they never seem to lack a minimum

subsistence, for in India people consider it not only a duty, but a privilege to bring them gifts of money and food. "If one's whole life unreservedly is given over to God what need to fear the morrow? A father knows well the need of his children," was the invariable reply when they were questioned on the subject. It is a fact, to which I can personally testify, that Providence undoubtedly serves them in a most amazing manner.

Owing to some delay I was for a time without money and I had to rely entirely on my friends, who lived on what they themselves received. Not a day passed without somebody bringing vegetables or fruit. A box full of apples had been sent by a generous donor and when these gave out a fresh quantity was supplied although none had been asked for. The following true story, out of many others, illustrates still better perhaps the "miraculous" ways of Providence which are so commonly met with in India. A religious man arrived to settle in a village and open a resting-house for passing pilgrims. The Brahmin farmer who lived close by wondered with dismay how he could possibly supply sufficient milk to the *sannyasins*, his only cow giving barely enough milk for his own family. From that very day onwards the animal's milk became more abundant and amply covered the needs of all. Later, the *sannyasins* having decided momentarily to leave the place, on the eve of their departure the cow's milk diminished in the same proportion that it had increased at first.

One afternoon a child breathlessly ran up to say that an unexpected visitor would soon be here, and it turned out to be the teacher or *Guru* of one of my friends. Seldom leaving his jungle retreat and never staying more than three nights under the same roof, his arrival was regarded as a joyful event. A few minutes later this most arresting figure appeared.

Let the reader imagine a man over six feet high clad

in ochre-coloured robes and turban, with an unusually dark complexion and carrying for all possessions a stick and a black coconut water-pot. His features, massive but refined, seemed as if they had been carved out of ebony. More remarkable still than his outer physical appearance were the power and benign dignity emanating from his whole person and which compelled respect. Radiant health and vitality seemed to be his natural heritage, and none would have given him more than forty years of age. He was in reality seventy-five, which only tends to confirm what has often been asserted, namely, that yogis have the power to keep their bodies young though they may have reached an advanced age. He was kind enough to take an interest in my condition and, although I was still incapable of so much as moving my leg, predicted with perfect accuracy the day when I should begin to walk and the date of my complete recovery. I still see his majestic figure standing in the doorway as on the next evening he came back, holding like a sceptre six pink lotuses in the middle of an immense leaf, which he had picked for me on the edge of the lake.

* * *

Not more than three weeks had elapsed since I was brought here, and thanks to the sympathy and help so generously bestowed I had already begun to limp round the room and even went for short walks. The speed with which I had got better was nearly miraculous and can best be judged by comparing it with the normal progress of hospital patients. Only fifteen or twenty per cent of cobra bites are cured, and two to three months are required before one is able to walk again. Yet without either doctor or serum and in a record time I had recovered the use of my limb. This I attribute not only to the effect of the

medicinal herbs whose healing properties constitute an endless store of natural remedies extensively used in India, but to providential help of a different order pertaining to the use of super-physical laws. These cannot be denied when tangible results are forthcoming, though they may remain incomprehensible to those who are as yet unable to gain first-hand knowledge for themselves.

In the course of the treatment, which consisted mainly in fomenting my leg with boiling salt water, my friends pointed out that it was an excellent occasion for testing and developing the power of concentration. I was asked to direct my attention exclusively on a story which was being told at that time. The result, I fear, was not very satisfactory. Yogis have developed this faculty of focusing their consciousness at will to the extent of being unaware when in trance of all bodily sensations, which may even amount to severe physical injury.

While I had been laid up summer had come and was already far spent. The rice fields had turned from green to gold and in the orchards the trees, laden with fruit, bent under their heavy burden. Night and day the peasants had to defend their crops against the birds intent on securing a liberal share of the harvest. Small huts had been erected for the purpose, so that the men could keep a vigilant eye on the feathered thieves. All day long the air was filled with piercing shouts and pistol-like shots as the peasants went about cracking their whips under the fruit trees and in the fields. The Dal lake was at its best, and thousands of pink lotuses were in bloom, constituting one of the most beautiful sights of Kashmir. Gold-and-emerald kingfishers darted into the water, while flocks of wild ducks paddled through the reeds. In the gardens, pomegranate trees were covered with orange-red fruit and little birds of identical colour flew about, as if Nature had purposely created them to match.

During these last days, filled to the brim with beauty and inner serenity, I smiled to think how deceptive appearances may seem and how under apparent misfortune untold happiness often lies hid. Indeed, looking back on the whole of my journey through India, Kashmir stood out together with Tiruvannamalai amongst the most unforgettable moments of my life, and, far from regretting the cobra-bite, I saw it to have been a blessing in disguise, rich in experience and infinitely worth while.

What one has lived intensely, fully, remains ever a part of one's very being. It is not past, neither does it fade away as time goes on, for it is woven inextricably into the texture of one's life. What use therefore to grieve when the scene shifts to other climes? What has been is and banishes regret. When a few weeks later the ship which carried me back to France passed out of the harbour and the coast of India gradually faded out of sight, I turned away without a pang, the last words of Maharishi still ringing in my ears: "After all, it is only the train and the boat that are going."

THE END

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FI-MAL-1 -

TURN EASTWARDS

FEW Europeans travelling in India have forgone Western tradition in order to mingle with and live intimately among its peoples. Mlle Mallet has done exactly this, even to the extent of adopting their costume and manners, and making intimate acquaintances with peasants, saints, Brahmins and Yogis from Cape Comorin to Kashmir, for the purpose of learning their views on politics and religion. Among the temples and places famed for their spiritual and holy atmosphere which the author visited was Arunachala, the Hill of the Holy Beacon, where the Maharishee who has been made famous by Mr. Paul Brunton's writings has his Ashram, and of whom she gives a delightfully intimate picture. Her remarkable sensitiveness to atmosphere and quick sympathy with those whom she met, enabled her to see from the inside much more of India as it is today than do the majority of travellers. A book that brings the *real* India before the reader.