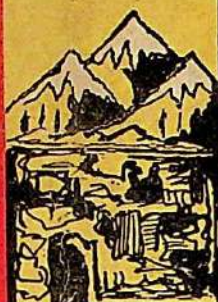
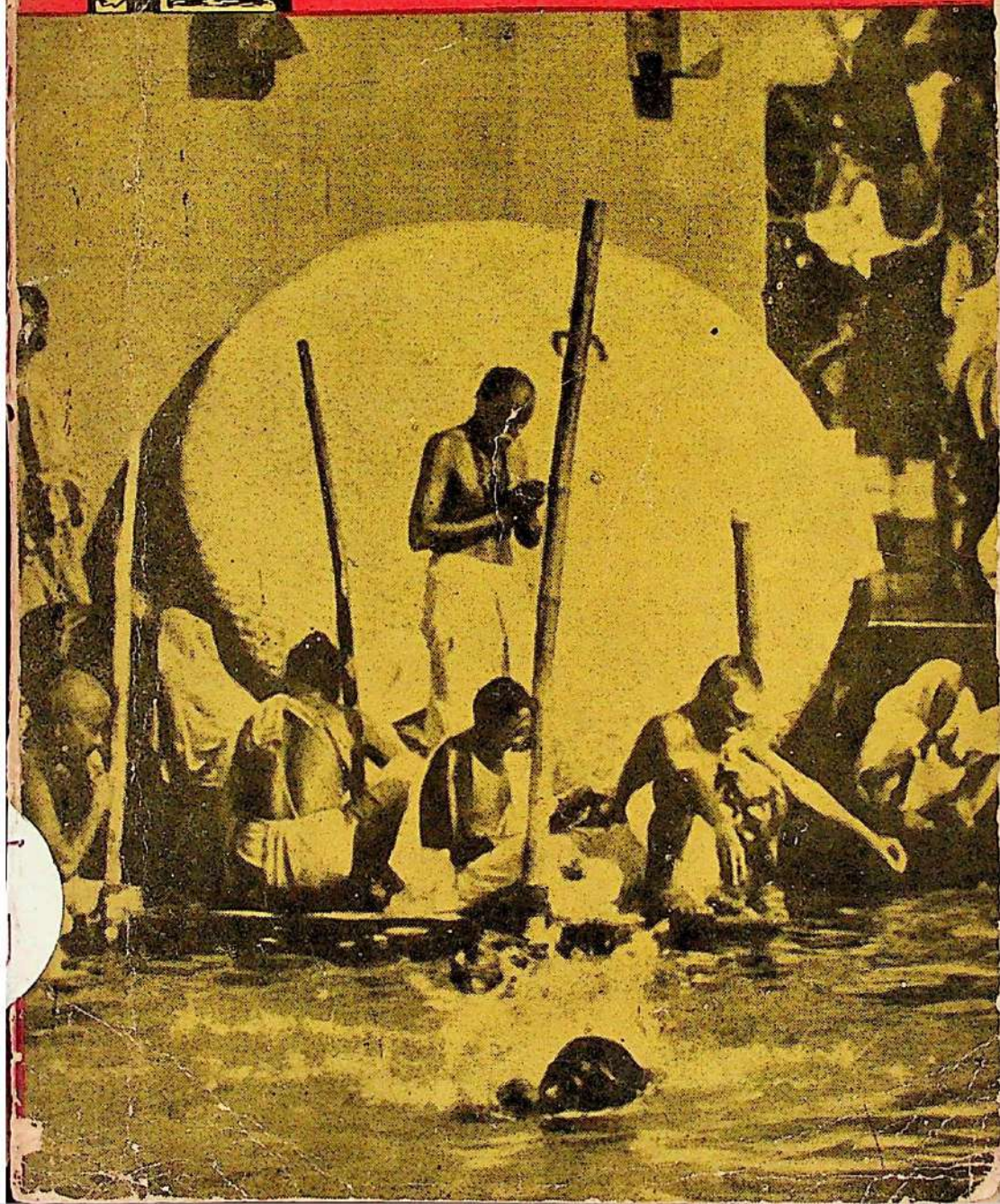
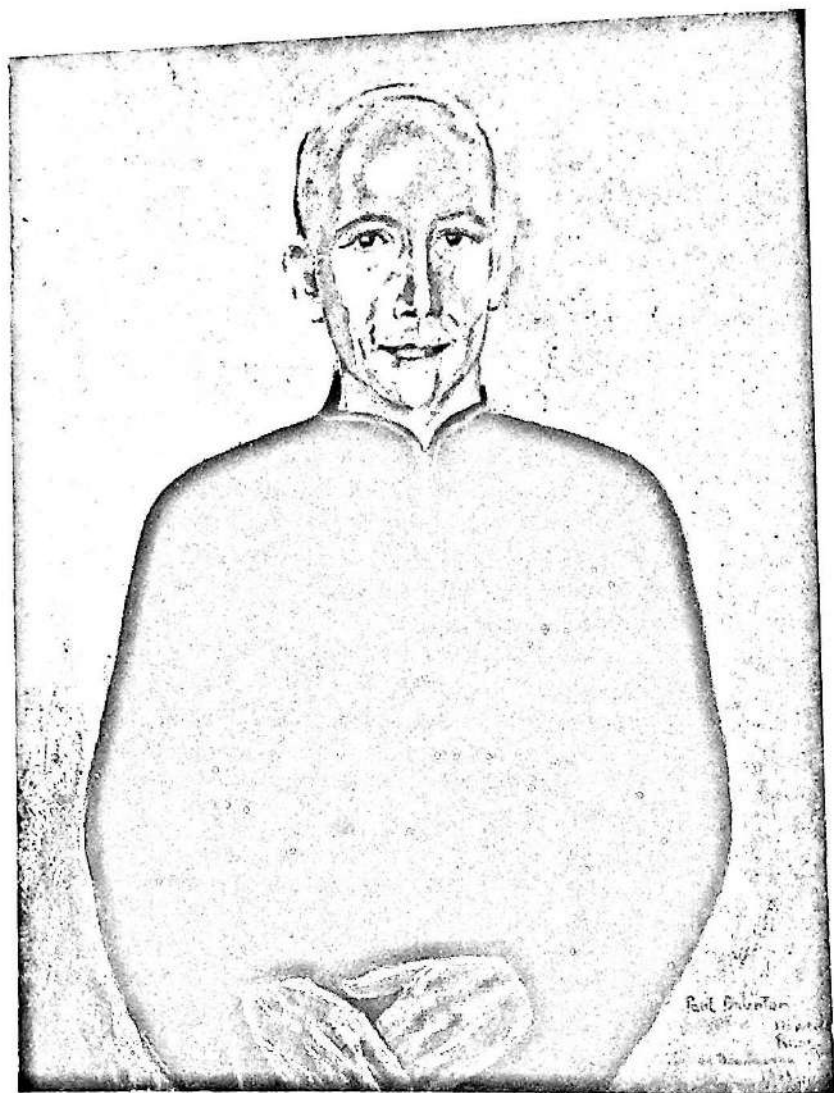


DR PAUL BRUNTON



A Search in Secret India





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CONTENTS

Foreword	ix
I Wherein I Bow to the Reader	1
II A Prelude to the Quest	9
III A Magician out of Egypt	23
IV I Meet a Messiah	34
V The Anchorite of the Adyar River	55
VI The Yoga which Conquers Death	76
VII The Sage who Never Speaks	95
VIII With the Spiritual Head of South India	108
IX The Hill of The Holy Beacon	126
X Among the Magicians and Holy Men	158
XI The Wonder-Worker of Benares	184
XII Written in the Stars!	201
XIII The Garden of the Lord	224
XIV At the Parsee Messiah's Headquarters	252
XV A Strange Encounter	262
XVI In a Jungle Hermitage	277
XVII Tablets of Forgotten Truth	296

ILLUSTRATIONS

Paul Brunton	<i>frontispiece</i>
The Great Temple of Arunachala and the Hill of the Holy Beacon,	<i>facing page 22</i>
Yogis' Caves Hewn Out of Solid Mountain Rock	23
The Cave Home of Shri Sadguru Meher Baba	54
The "New Messiah"	54
Hazrat Babajan, the Woman Faqueer	55
Upasani Maharaj	55
Brama Sitting in his Favourite Yoga Posture	86
The Anchorite of the Adyar River	86
Shri Shankara, the Spiritual Head of South India	87
Interior of Dilwara Temple	118
In the Muhammedan Mosque	119
The Master Mahasaya	150
Sarada Devi "The Holy Mother"	150
Badreenath Sathu	151
Eeswara Swami	151
Wandering Snake Charmers	182
Common Faqueers of an Inferior Order at Benares	182
The River Bank at Benares	183
Vishudhananda the Magician	183
Twilight Over the Jumna	214
Sahabji Maharaj	215
The Gateway to Jehangir's Palace, Agra	215
Young Ramana, the Future Maharishee	246
The Maharishee or Great Sage	246
Yogi Ramiah	247
Ramiah's Quaint Abode	247

FOREWORD

by

SIR FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND, K.C.I.E., K.C.S.I., C.I.E.

(British Political Minister to the State of Kashmir; Brigadier General of the British Army in India; Commander of the British Military Expedition in Tibet; President of the Royal Geographic Society of England.)

"SACRED INDIA" would be as apt a title for this book. For it is a quest for that India which is only secret because it is so sacred. The holiest things in life are not bruited abroad in public. The sure instinct of the human soul is to keep them withdrawn in the inmost recesses accessible to few—perhaps to none. Certainly only to those who care for spiritual things.

And with a country as with an individual. The most sacred things a country keeps secret. It would not be easy for a stranger to discover what England holds most sacred. And it is the same with India. The most sacred part of India is the most secret.

Now secret things require much searching for; but those who seek will find. Those who seek with their whole heart and with the real determination to find will at last discover the secret.

Mr. Brunton had that determination, and he did in the end find. The difficulties were very great though. For in India, as everywhere else, there is much spurious spirituality through which a way must be forced before the true can be found. There is an innumerable crowd of mental acrobats and contortionists through which the seeker after pure spirituality must elbow his way. These men have trained their mental as well as bodily muscles till they are extraordinarily efficient. They have exercised powers of concentration till they have nearly complete control over their mental processes. Many of them have developed what we call occult powers.

These are all interesting enough in their way and are well worth study by scientific men interested in psychic phenomena. But they are not the real thing. They are not the

FOREWORD

springs whence spirituality comes gushing.

They do not form the secret sacred India that Mr. Brunton was seeking. He saw them. He noted them. He describes them. But he pushed through them. Spirituality at its finest and purest is what he wanted. And this he found at last

Remote from the haunts of men, deep in the jungles to which—or to the Himalayas—the holiest men in India always return, Mr. Brunton found the very embodiment of all that India holds most sacred. The Maharishee—the Great Sage—was the man who made most appeal to Mr. Brunton. He is not the only one of his kind. Up and down India others—not many, but a very, very few—may be found. They represent the true genius of India, and it is through them that the mighty Genius of the Universe manifests Himself in peculiar degree.

They, therefore, are among the objects most worth searching for on this earth. And in this book we have the results of one such quest.

FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND

NOTE BY AUTHOR

Since the first edition of this book was published, the following men written about in its pages have died:

Sir Francis Younghusband.

The Maharishee, Sage of Arunachala.

The Magician Vishudhananda of Benares.

The Master Mahasaya of Calcutta.

The Supreme Chief Sahabji Maharaj of Dayalbagh.

The Astrologer-Yogi Sudhei Babu of Benares.

I

Wherein I Bow to the Reader

There is an obscure passage in the yellowed book of Indian life which I have endeavoured to elucidate for the benefit of Western readers. Early travellers returned home to Europe with weird tales of the Indian faqueers and even modern travellers occasionally bring similar stories.

What is the truth behind those legends which come ever and anon to our ears, concerning a mysterious class of men called Yogis¹ by some and faqueers by others? What is the truth behind the fitful hints which reach us intimating that there exists in India an old wisdom that promises the most extraordinary development of mental powers to those who practise it? I set out on a long journey to find it and the following pages summarize my report.

"Summarize" I say, because the inexorable exigencies of space and time required me to write of one Yogi where I had met more. Therefore I have selected a few who interested me most, and who seemed likely to interest the Western world. One heard much of certain so-called holy men who possessed repute of having acquired deep wisdom and strange powers; so one travelled through scorching days and sleepless nights to find them—only to find scriptural slaves, venerable know-nothings, money-seeking conjurers, jugglers with a few tricks, and to fill my pages with the records of such people would be worthless to the reader and is a distasteful task to me. Therefore I omit the tale of time wasted upon them.

I feel quite humbly that I have been privileged to see a remote aspect of India seldom seen and less understood by ordinary travellers. Among the English residents in that vast land only an infinitesimal fraction has cared to study this aspect, and of this fraction very few were free enough to examine it more deeply and give their report, for official dignity must needs be respected. Therefore, English writers who have touched on this subject swing over to a hearty scepticism which, by its very nature, renders many sources of

native knowledge not readily available to them, and which causes the Indian who really knows something about the less superficial side of the matter to shrink from discussing it with them. The white man will, in most cases, possess but an imperfect acquaintance with the Yogis, if he knows them at all, and certainly not with the best of them. The latter are now but a mere handful in the very country of their origin. They are exceedingly rare, are fond of hiding their true attainment from the public, and prefer to pose as ignoramus. In India, in Tibet and in China, they get rid of the Western traveller who may happen to blunder in upon their privacy, by maintaining a studied appearance of insignificance and ignorance. Perhaps they would see some sense in Emerson's abrupt phrase: "To be great is to be misunderstood"; I do not know. Anyway, they are mostly recluses who do not care to mingle with mankind. Even when met with they are unlikely to break their reserve except after some period of acquaintance. Hence little has been written in Western continents about the strange life of these Yogis and even that little remains vague.

The reports of Indian writers are indeed available, but they must be read with care. It is an unfortunate fact that the Orientals often mix hearsay with fact quite indiscriminately. Therefore such reports diminish in value as documentary records. When I verified this through chastening experience, I thanked Heaven for such scientific training as the West has given me and for the common-sense attitude which journalistic experience had instilled in me. There is a basis of genuine fact underlying much Oriental superstition, but profound vigilance is needed to discover it. I was compelled to keep a critical but not hostile eye widely open wherever I went. Not a few of those who learned that I was interested in the mystical and miraculous, apart from my philosophical concerns, applied liberal paint and plentiful varnish to their few facts. I might have spent my time trying to teach them that Truth is so strong she can stand upon her own legs without falling to the ground, but I had other things to do. I felt glad, however, that I had preferred to gain my knowledge of Oriental wonders at first hand, just as I prefer Christ's wisdom to His commentators' ignorance. I searched through a welter of crass superstitions and ancient pretensions for those things which are true, which will stand the acid test of thorough investigation. I flatter

myself that I could never have done this did I not contain within my complex nature the two elements of scientific scepticism and spiritual sensitivity, elements which usually range themselves in sharp conflict and flagrant opposition.

I have titled this book *Secret India* because it tells of an India which has been hidden from prying eyes for thousands of years, which has kept itself so exclusive that to-day only its rapidly disappearing remnants are left. The manner in which the Yogis kept their knowledge so esoteric may appear selfish to us in these democratic days, but it helps to account for their gradual disappearance from visible history. Thousands of Englishmen live in India and hundreds visit it each year. Yet few know anything of what may one day prove more worthy to the world than even the prized pearls and valuable stones which ships bring us from India. Fewer still have taken the trouble to go out of their way to find the adepts in Yoga², while not one Englishman in a thousand is prepared to prostrate himself before a brown, half-naked figure in some lonely cave or in a disciple-filled room. Such is the inevitable barrier imposed by this form of caste that even men of generous character and developed intellect, if suddenly taken from their habitations in the British quarters and set down in such a cave, would find a Yogi's company uncongenial and his ideas unintelligible.

Yet the Englishman in India, whether soldier, civil servant, business man or traveller, is not to be blamed because he is too proud to squat on the mat of the Yogi. Quite apart from the business of upholding British prestige, doubtless an important and necessary procedure, the kind of holy man he usually encounters is more likely to repel than attract. It is certainly no loss to avoid such a man. Nevertheless it is a pity that after a sojourn of many years the English resident will often leave the country in blameless ignorance of what lies behind the frontal brain of an Indian sage.

I plainly remember my interview with a Cockney under the shadow of Trichinopoly's gigantic rock fort. For over twenty years he had held a responsible post on the Indian railways. It was inevitable that I should ply him with many questions about his life in this sunburnt land. Finally I trotted out my pet interrogation, "Have you met any Yogis?"

He looked at me somewhat blankly and then replied:

"Yogis? What are they? Some kind of animal?"

Such ignorance would have been perfectly pardonable had he stayed at home within the sound of Bow Bells; now, after twenty-six years' residence in the country, it was perfectly blissful. I permitted it to remain undisturbed.

Because I put pride underfoot in moving among the varied peoples who inhabit Hindustan; because I gave them a ready understanding and an intellectual sympathy, a freedom from finicky prejudice and a regard for character irrespective of colour; and because I had sought Truth all my life and was prepared to accept whatsoever Truth brought in its train, I am able to write this record. I picked my way through a crowd of superstitious fools and self-styled faqueers in order to sit at the feet of true sages, there to learn at first hand the real teachings of Indian Yoga. I squatted on the floor in many a secluded hermitage, surrounded by faces and hearing strange dialects. I sought out those reserved and reclusive men, the best Yogis, and listened humbly to their oracular instruction. I talked for hours with the Brahmin pundits of Benares, discussing the age-old questions of philosophy and belief which have tormented the mind and troubled the heart of man since he first began to think. I stopped now and then to divert myself with the magician and wonder-worker, and strange incidents crossed my trails.

I wanted to gather the real facts about the Yogis of to-day by the method of first-hand investigation. I prided myself that experience as a journalist fitted me to draw out, with the least possible delay, much of the information which I sought; that sitting at the editorial desk and curtly wielding the blue pencil had trained me to become ruthlessly critical in separating wheat from chaff; and that the contact with men and women in every grade of life which the profession generally gives, with ragged mendicants as well as well-fed millionaires, would help me move just a little more smoothly through the variegated masses of India, among whom I searched for those strange men, the Yogis.

On the other side of the sheet I had lived an inner life totally detached from my outward circumstance. I spent much of my spare time in the study of recondite books and in little-known bypaths of psychological experiment. I delved into subjects which always have been wrapped in Cimmerian mystery. To these items must be added an inborn attraction

towards things Oriental. The East, before my first visit, threw out vast tentacles that gripped my soul; ultimately they drew me to study the sacred books of Asia, the learned commentaries of her pundits and the inscribed thoughts of her sages, so far as English translations could be procured.

This dual experience proved of great value. It taught me never to permit my sympathy with Oriental methods of probing life's mysteries, to subvert my scientific desire of critically and impartially finding the facts. Without that sympathy I could never have gone among people and into places where the average Englishman in India may disdain to tread. Without that strict, scientific attitude I might have been led away into the wilderness of superstition, as so many Indians seem to have been led away. It is not easy to conjoin qualities which are usually held to be contradictory, but I sincerely tried to hold them in sane balance.



That the West has little to learn from present-day India, I shall not trouble to deny, but that we have much to learn from Indian sages of the past and from the few who live to-day, I unhesitatingly assert. The white tourist who "does" the chief cities and historical sights and then steams away with disgust at the backward civilization of India is doubtless justified in his depreciation of it. Yet a wiser kind of tourist shall one day arise who will seek out, not the crumbling ruins of useless temples, nor the marbled palaces of dissipated kings long dead, but the living sages who can reveal a wisdom untaught by our universities.

Are these Indians mere idlers sprawling in the fierce tropic sun? Have they done nothing, thought nothing that is of worth to the rest of the world? The traveller who can see only their material degeneration and mental flabbiness has not seen far. Let him substitute consideration for his contempt and he may open sealed lips and hidden doors.

Grant that India has nodded and snored for centuries; grant that even to-day there exist millions of peasants in this land who suffer the same illiteracy, share the same outlook blended of puerile superstition and kindergarten religion as did English peasants of the fourteenth century. Grant further that the

Brahmin pundits in native centres of learning waste their useless years splitting sacerdotal hairs and drawing metaphysical wire as subtly as our medieval scholastics ever did. Yet there still remains a small but priceless residue of culture classified under the generic term Yoga, which proffers benefits to mankind as valuable in their own way as any proffered by the Western sciences. It can bring our bodies nearer the healthy condition which Nature intended them to possess; it can bestow one of modern civilization's most urgent needs—a flawless serenity of mind; and it can open the way to enduring treasures of the spirit to those who will labour for them. I admit that this great wisdom hardly belongs to India's present, but to her past; that this guarded knowledge of Yoga flourishes little to-day when once it must have had worthy professors and faithful students. It may be that the secrecy in which it was carefully enshrouded succeeded in killing all spread of this ancient science; I do not know.

It is perhaps not amiss, then, if one asks one's Western fellows to look Eastward, not for a new faith, but for a few pebbles of knowledge to cast upon our present heap. When Orientalists like Burnouf, Colebrooke and Max Muller appeared upon learning's scene and brought us some of the literary treasures of India, the savants of Europe began to understand that the heathens who inhabited that country were not so stupid as our own ignorance had presumed. Those clever people who profess to find Asiatic learning empty of useful thoughts for the West thereby prove their own emptiness. Those practical persons who would fling the epithet "stupid" at its study, succeed only in flinging it at their own narrow-mindedness. If our ideas about life are to be wholly determined by a mere accident of space, by the chance that we were born in Bristol instead of Bombay, then we are not worthy the name of civilized man. Those who close their minds to the entrance of all Eastern ideas, close them also to fine thoughts, deep truths and worth-while psychological knowledge. Whoever will poke about among this musty lore of the Orient in the hope of finding some precious gems of strange fact and stranger wisdom, will find his quest no vain one.

I journeyed Eastwards in search of the Yogis and their hermetic knowledge. The thought of finding a spiritual light and diviner life was also entertained, though it was not my primary purpose. I wandered along the banks of India's holy rivers—the quiet, grey-green Ganges, the broad Jumna and the picturesque Godavari—in this quest. I circled the country. India took me to her heart and the vanishing remnant of her sages opened many a door for the unfamiliar Westerner.

Not so long ago I was among those who regard God as a hallucination of human fancy, spiritual truth as a mere nebula and providential justice as a confection for infantile idealists. I, too, was somewhat impatient of those who construct theological paradises and who then confidently show you round with an air of being God's estate agents. I had nothing but contempt for what seemed to be the futile, fanatical efforts of uncritical theorizers.

If, therefore, I have begun to think a little differently about these matters, rest assured that good cause has been given me. Yet I did not arrive at paying allegiance to any Eastern creed; indeed, those which matter I had already studied intellectually much earlier. I did arrive at a new acceptance of the Divine. This may seem quite an insignificant and personal thing to do, but as a child of this modern generation, which relies on hard facts and cold reason, and which lacks enthusiasm for things religious, I regard it as quite an achievement. This faith was restored in the only way a sceptic could have it restored; not by argument, but by the witness of an overwhelming experience. And it was a jungle sage, an unassuming hermit who had formerly lived for six years in a mountain cave, who promoted this vital change in my thinking. It is quite possible that he could not pass a matriculation examination, yet I am not ashamed to record in the closing chapters of this book my deep indebtedness to this man. The production of such sages provides India with sufficient credentials to warrant attention from intelligent Westerners. The secret India's spiritual life still exists, despite the storms of political agitation which now hide it, and I have tried to give authentic record of more than one adept who has attained a strength and serenity for which we lesser mortals wistfully yearn.

I have borne witness in the book to other things also, things marvellous and weird. They seem incredible now, as I sit and

type my narrative through the inked ribbon amid the matter-of-fact surroundings of English country-side; indeed, I wonder at my temerity in writing them down for a sceptical world to read. But I do not believe the present materialistic ideas which dominate the world will remain for all time; already one can perceive prophetic indications of a coming change of thought. Yet quite frankly I do not believe in miracles. Neither do most men of my generation. But I do believe that our knowledge of Nature's laws is incomplete, and that when the advance guard of scientists who are pushing forward into unexplored territory have found out a few more of those laws, we shall then be able to do things which are tantamount to miracles.

1 Pronounced *Yogees*.

2 Pronounced *Yohg*. Its spelling is unphonetic.

II

A Prelude to the Quest

The geography master takes a long, tapering pointer and moves over to the large, varnished linen map which hangs before a half-bored class. He indicates a triangular red patch which juts down to the Equator, and then makes a further attempt to stimulate the obviously lagging interest of his pupils. He begins in a thin, drawling voice and with the air of one about to make a hierophantic revelation:

"India has been called the brightest jewel in the British crown . . ."

At once a boy with moody brow, half wrapt in reverie, gives a sudden start and draws his far-flung imagination back into the stolid, brick-walled building which constitutes his school. The sound of this word INDIA falling on the tympanum of his ears, or the sight of it caught up by the optic nerve of his eyes from a printed page, carries thrilling and mysterious connotations of the unknown. Some inexplicable current of thought brings it repeatedly before him.

When the mathematics master believes that this pupil is laboriously working at an algebraical problem, little does he know that the young rascal uses the school's desk for ulterior purposes. For under the cover of skilfully arrayed books he rapidly sketches turbaned hheads, dusky faces and spice-laden ships being loaded from flat junks.

The youthful years pass, but this interest in Hindustan remains undimmed. Nay, it spreads and embraces all Asia within its eager tentacles.

Ever and anon he makes wild projects to go there. He will run away to sea. Surely it would then be a mere matter of enterprise to get some brief glimpse of India? Even when these projects come to nought, he talks rhetorically to his schoolmates until one of them falls an easy victim to his immature enthusiasm.

Thereafter they conspire in silence and move in secret. They plan an adventurous tramp across the face of Europe; it is

then to continue into Asia Minor and Arabia until the port of Aden is reached. The reader, contemplating the innocent boldness of that long walk, will smile. They believe that a friendly ship's captain could be approached at Aden. He would undoubtedly prove a kindly, sympathetic man. He would take them aboard his steamer and week later they would begin to explore India.

Preparations for this protracted excursion go on apace. Money is thriftily collected, and what they naively imagine to be an explorer's outfit is secretly brought together. Maps and guide books are carefully consulted, the coloured pages and attractive photographs raising their wanderlust to fever heat. Finally they are able to fix the date when they intend to snap their fingers at destiny and leave the country. Who knows what lies around the corner?

They might have saved some of their youthful energy and conserved some of their early optimism. For on an unfortunate day the second boy's guardian discovers the preparations, elicits further details of the affair, and comes down with a stern hand. What they suffer as a result is not to be related! The enterprise is reluctantly abandoned.

The desire to view India never leaves the promoter of that unfortunate expedition. The dawn of manhood, however, brings bonds in the form of other interests and holds his feet with enchaining duties. That desire has to be put regretfully in the background.

Time turns page after page of the calendar of years until he meets unexpectedly with a man who gives a temporary but vivid life to the old ambition. For the stranger's face is dusky, his head is turbaned, and he comes from the sun-steeped land of Hindustan.



I fling out the fine net of remembrance to sweep the past years for pictures of that day when he steps into my life. The tide of autumn is fast ebbing, for the air is foggy and a bitter cold creeps through my clothing. Clammy fingers of depression strive hard to grip my failing heart.

I wander into a brightly-lit cafe and seek the borrowed comfort of its warmth. A cup of hot tea—so potent at other

times—fails to restore my serenity. I cannot banish the heavy atmosphere which surrounds me. Melancholy has determined to make me serve her dark ends. Black curtains cover the entrance to my heart.

This restlessness is difficult to endure and it ends by driving me from the cafe into the open street. I walk without aim and follow old tracks until I find myself in front of a small book-shop which I know well. It is an ancient building and harbours equally ancient books. The proprietor¹ is a quaint man, a human relic surviving from an earlier century. This hustling epoch has little use for him, but he has just as little use for this epoch. He deals only in rare tomes and early editions, while specializing in curious and recondite subjects. He possesses a remarkable knowledge—so far as books can give it—of learning's bypaths and out-of-the-way matters. From time to time, I like to wander into the old shop and discuss them with him.

I enter the place and greet him. For a while I finger the yellowed pages of calf-bound volumes or peer closely into faded folios. One ancient book engages my attention; It seems somewhat interesting and I examine it more carefully. The bespectacled bookseller notes my interest and, as is his wont, commences what he imagines to be an argument anent the book's subject—metempsychosis.

The old man follows habit and keeps the discussion to his own side. He talks at length, appearing to know the pros and cons of that strange doctrine better than my author, while the classic authorities who have written about it are at his finger-tips. In this way I glean much curious information.

Suddenly, I hear a man stirring at the far end of the shop and, turning, I behold a tall figure emerge from the shadows which hide a little inner room where the costlier books are kept.

The stranger is an Indian. He walks towards us with an aristocratic bearing and faces the bookseller.

"My friend," he says quietly, "pardon me for intruding. I could not help overhearing you, while the subject you discussed is of great interest to me. Now you quote the classical authors who first mention this idea of man's continual rebirth upon this earth. The deeper minds among those philosophic Greeks, wise Africans and early Christian Fathers understood

this doctrine well, I agree. But where, do you think, did it really originate?"

He pauses for a moment, but gives no time for a reply.

"Permit me to tell you," he continues, smiling. "You must look to India for the first acceptance of metempsychosis in the Old World. It was a cardinal tenet among the people of my land, even in remote antiquity."

The speaker's face fascinates me. It is unusual; it would be distinguished-looking among a hundred Indians. Power kept in reserve—this is my reading of his character. Piercing eyes, a strong jaw and a lofty forehead make up the catalogue of his features. His skin is darker than that of the average Hindu. He wears a magnificent turban, the front of which is adorned with a sparkling jewel. For the rest, his clothes are European and finely tailored withal.

His slightly didactic statement does not appeal to the old gentleman behind the counter; in fact, vigorous opposition is offered to it.

"How can that be," comes the sceptical observation, "when the East Mediterranean cities were flourishing centres of culture and civilization in the pre-Christian era? Did not the greatest intellects of antiquity live in the area which embraced Athens and Alexandria? So, surely their ideas were carried Southward and Eastward until India was reached?"

The Indian smiles tolerantly.

"Not at all," is his immediate reply. "What really happened was quite the reverse of your assertion."

"Indeed! You seriously suggest that the progressive West had to receive its philosophy from the laggard East? No, sir!" expostulates the bookseller.

"Why not? Read your Apuleius again, my friend, and learn how Pythagoras came to India, where he was instructed by the Brahmins. Then notice how he began to teach the doctrine to metempsychosis after his return to Europe. This is but a single instance. I can find others. Your reference to the laggard East makes me smile. Thousands of years ago our sages were pondering over the deepest problems while your own countrymen were not even aware that such problems existed."

He stops curtly, looks intently at us, and waits for his words to sink into our minds. I fancy the old bookseller is a little perplexed. Never before have I seen him so struck into silence

or so obviously impressed by another man's intellectual authority.

I have listened quietly to the other customer's words and make no attempt to offer a remark. Now there arises a conversational lull which all of us seem to recognize and to respect. Soon the Indian turns abruptly and retires to the inner room, only to emerge a couple of minutes later with a costly folio which he has selected from the shelves. He pays for the book and prepares to leave the shop. He reaches the door, whilst I stare wonderingly at his departing figure.

Suddenly, he turns again and approaches me. He draws a wallet out of his pocket and selects a visiting card.

"Would you care to pursue this conversation with me?" he asks, half smiling. I am taken by surprise, but gladly agree. He offers me the card, adding an invitation to dinner.



I set out toward evening to find the stranger's house, a task not without its discomfort, for I am companioned by an unpleasant fog which has descended thickly upon the streets. An artist, I presume, would find a touch of romantic beauty in these fogs which sometimes brood over the town and dim its lights. My mind, however, is so intent upon the forthcoming meeting that I see no beauty and feel no unpleasantness in the surrounding atmosphere.

A terminus is set to my travels by a massive gateway which suddenly looms up. Two large lamps, as in greeting, are held out by iron brackets. My entry into the house is followed by a delightful surprise. For the Indian has given no hint of this unique interior, upon which he has obviously lavished a fine taste and free purse.

Let it suffice that I find myself in a great room, which might be part of some Asiatic palace for aught I know, so exotically is it furnished and so colourful are its gorgeous decorations. With the closing of the outer door I leave behind the grey, bleak Western world. The room has been decorated in a quaint combination of Indian and Chinese styles. Red, black and gold are the predominating colours. Resplendent tapestries, bearing sprawling Chinese dragons, stretched across the walls. Carved green dragon heads glare fiercely from all the

corners, where they support brackets which carry costly pieces of handicraft. Two silken mandarin coats adorn both sides of the doorway. Boldly patterned Indian rugs repose on the parquet floor, one's shoes sinking delightfully into their thick pile. A gigantic tiger skin stretches its full length in front of the hearth.

My eyes meet a small lacquered table which stands in one corner. Upon its rests a black ebony shrine with gilded folding doors. I glimpse the figure of some Indian god within the recess. It is probably a Buddha, for the face is calm and inscrutable and the two unwinking eyes gaze down at its nose.

My host greets me cordially. He is impeccably dressed in a black dinner suit. Such a man would look distinguished in any company in the world, I reflect. A few minutes later we both sit down to dinner. Some delightful dishes are brought to the table, and it is here that I receive my initiation into the pleasures of curry, thus acquiring a taste which is never to leave me. The servant who attends on us provides a picturesque note, for he wears a white jacket and trousers, a golden sash and spotless turban.

During the course of the meal our talk is superficial and general, yet whatever my host says, whatever subject he touches, his words invariably carry an air of finality. His statements are so phrased that they leave one with little ground for argument; his accents are so confident that his talk sounds like the last word upon the matter. I cannot help being impressed by his air of quiet assurance.

Over the coffee cups he tells me a little about himself. I learn that he has travelled widely and that he possesses some means. He regales me with vivid impressions of China—where he has spent a year; of Japan—whose amazing future he tersely predicts; of America, Europe and —strangest of all—of life in a Christian monastery in Syria, where he had once spent a period of retirement.

When we light our cigarettes he touches on the subject which was mentioned at the bookshop. But it is evident that he desires to talk of other things, for he soon leads the way to larger issues, and broaches the subject of India's ancient wisdom.

"Some of the doctrines of our sages have already reached the West," he remarks impressively, "but in most cases the real

teachings have been misunderstood; in a few instances they have somehow been falsified. However, it is not for me to complain. What is India to-day? She is no longer representative of the lofty culture of her past. The greatness has gone out of her. It is sad, very sad. The masses hold on to a few ideals at the cost of being enmeshed in a fussy tangle of pseudo-religious fetters and unwise customs."

"What is the cause of this degeneration?" I ask him. My host is silent. A minute slowly passes. I watch him while his eyes begin to narrow until they are half-closed; then he quietly breaks the silence.

"Alas, my friend! Once there were great seers in my land, men who had penetrated the mysteries of life. Their advice was sought by king and commoner. Under their inspiration Indian civilization reached its zenith. To-day, where are they to be found? Two or three may remain—unknown, unrecorded and far from the main stream of modern life. When those great sages—Rishees, we call them—began to withdraw from society, then our own decline also began."

His head droops till the chest must support his chin. A sorrowful note has entered his voice with the last sentence. For a while he seems withdrawn from me, his soul wrapped in melancholy meditation.

His personality impresses me again as being provocatively interesting and decidedly attractive. Eyes, dark and flashing, reveal a keen mentality; voice, soft and sympathetic, reflects a kindly heart. I feel anew that I like him.

The servant noiselessly enters the room and approaches the lacquered table. He lights a joss stick and a blue haze rises to the ceiling. The strange perfume of some Eastern incense spreads around the room. It is not unpleasant.

Suddenly my host raises his head and looks at me.

"Did I tell you that two or three still remain?" he asks queerly, "Ah, yes! I said that. Once I knew a great sage. It was a privilege about which I rarely speak to others now. He was my father, guide, master and friend. He possessed the wisdom of a god. I loved him as if I were really his own son. Whenever I stayed with him at fortunate intervals, I knew then that life at its heart is good. Such was the effect of his wonderful atmosphere. I, who have made art my hobby and beauty my ideal learnt from him to see the divine beauty in men who were

leprous, destitute or deformed; men from whom I formerly shrank in horror. He lived in a forest hermitage far from towns. I stumbled upon his retreat seemingly by accident. From that day I paid him several visits, staying with him as long as I could. He taught me much. Yes—such a man could give greatness to any country.”

“Then why did he not enter public life and serve India?” I question frankly.

The Indian shakes his head.

“It is difficult enough for us to understand the motives of such an unusual man. It would be doubly difficult for you, a Westerner, to understand him. His answer might probably be that service can be rendered in secret through the telepathic power of the mind. that influence can be exerted from a distance in an unseen yet no less potent manner. He might also say that a degenerate society must suffer its destiny until the fated hour of relief strikes.”

I confess to being puzzled by this answer.

“Quite so, my friend, I expected that,” observes the other.

†

After the memorable evening I visit the Indian's home many times, drawn by the lure of his unusual knowledge as much as by the attractiveness of his exotic personality. He touches some coiled spring among my ambitions and releases into urgency the desire to fathom life's meaning. He stimulates me, less to satisfy intellectual curiosity than to win a worthwhile happiness.

One evening our conversation takes a turn which is destined to have important results for me. He describes on occasions the queer customs and peculiar traditions of his countrymen. Sometimes he portrays in words a few of the types who people his amazing land. He drops a remark this evening anent a strange type, the Yogi. I possess but a vague and incoherent idea of what the term really means. It has come to my notice a few times during the course of my reading, but on each occasion the terms of reference differ so much from the others that confusion is the natural result. So, when I hear my friend use the word I stop him short and beg for further information.

“That I shall do with pleasure,” he answers, “But I can

hardly tell you, in a single definition, what constitutes a Yogi. No doubt, a dozen of my countrymen will define the word in a dozen different ways. For instance, there are thousands of wandering beggars who pass by this name. They swarm through the villages and attend the periodic religious fairs in droves. Many are only lazy tramps and others vicious ones, while most are totally illiterate men, unaware of the history and doctrines of the science of Yoga, under whose shelter they masquerade."

He pauses to flick the ash off his cigarette.

"Go, however, to some place like Rishikesh, over which the mighty Himalayas keep eternal guard. There you will find a totally different class of men. They live in humble huts or caves, eat little food and constantly pray to God. Religion is their breath; it occupies their minds day and night. They are mostly good men studying our sacred books and chanting prayers. Yet they, too, are called Yogis. But what have they in common with the beggars who prey on the ignorant masses? You see how elastic the term is! Between these two classes there are others who partake of the nature of both."

"And yet there seems to be much made of the mysterious powers possessed by Yogis," I remark.

"Ah! now you must listen to a further definition," he laughs back at me. "There are strange individuals in solitary retreats far from the big cities, in the seclusion of lonely jungles or mountain caves, men who devote their entire existence to practices which they believe will bring marvellous powers. Some of these men will eschew all mention of religion and scorn it; others, however, are highly religious; but all of them unite in the struggle to wrest from Nature a mastery over forces invisible and intangible. You see, India has never been without her traditions of the mysterious, the occult, and many are the stories told of those adepts who could perform miraculous feats. Now these men, too, are called Yogis."

"Have you met such men? Do you believe these traditions?" I ask innocently.

The other man is silent. He seems to be ruminating over the form in which to couch his reply.

My eyes turn to the shrine which stands upon the lacquered table. I fancy, in the soft light which fills our room, that the Buddha is smiling benignantly at me from its lotus throne of gilt wood. For half a minute I am ready to believe that there is

something uncanny in its atmosphere; and then the Indian's clear voice breaks into my thoughts and arrests my wandering fancies.

"Look!" he says quietly, holding something out for my inspection. He has loosed it from under his collar. "I am a Brahmin. This is my sacred thread. Thousands of years of strict segregation have made certain qualities of character instinctive in my caste. Western education and Western travelling can never remove them. Faith in a higher power, belief in the existence of supernatural forces, recognition of a spiritual evolution among men—these things were born in me as a Brahmin. I could not destroy them if I would, while reason is overpowered by them whenever the issue comes to battle. So, although I am quite in sympathy with the principles and methods of your modern sciences, what other answer can I give you, except this—I believe!"

He looks intently at me for a few moments. Then he proceeds:

"Yes, I have met such men. Once, twice, three times. They are difficult to come across. Once they were easier to find, I believe, but to-day they have almost disappeared."

"But they still exist, I presume?"

"Most likely, my friend. To find them is another matter. It would require a protracted search."

"Your master—was he one of them?"

"No, he belonged to a higher order. Did I not tell you that he was a Rishee?"

The term needs some elucidation before my mind can digest it. I tell him so.

"Higher than the Yogis stand the Rishees," he answers. "Transfer the Darwinian theory to the realm of human character; accept the Brahmin teaching that there is a spiritual evolution running parallel with the physical one; look upon the Rishees as men who have attained the crest of this upward climb; then you may form some rough conception of their greatness."

"Does a Rishee also perform those wonders of which we hear?"

"Yes, he certainly does, but he will not value them for their own sake, whereas many of the Yogi wonder-workers do. Such powers arise in him naturally by reason of his great

development of will and mental concentration. They are not his chief concern. he may even disdain them and use them little. You see, his first purpose is to become inwardly something akin to those divine beings of whom Buddha in the East and Christ in the West are the most illustrious examples."

"But Christ worked miracles!"

"He did. But do you think he performed them for any vain self-glory? Not so; He desired to help the souls of ordinary people by thus catching their faith."

"Surely, if such men as Rishees existed in India, multitudes would flock after them?" I conjecture.

"Undoubtedly—but they would first have to appear in public and announce themselves for what they are. Only in the most exceptional cases have Rishees ever been known to do that. They prefer to live apart from the world. Those who wish to perform a public work may emerge for a limited time and then disappear again."

I object that such men could hardly be of much service to their fellows if they hide themselves in inaccessible places.

The Indian smiles tolerantly.

"That is a matter which comes within the province of your Western saying: 'Appearances are sometimes deceptive.' Without intimate knowledge of these persons, the world is not in a position to judge them accurately, if you will pardon my saying so. I have mentioned that the Rishees did sometimes live for a while in towns and move in society. In olden times, when that was a little more frequent, their wisdom, power and attainment became obvious to the public; their influence was then openly acknowledged. Even Maharajahs did not disdain to pay reverent homage to those great sages and to consult them for guidance in their policies. But as a matter of fact, it is certain that the Rishees prefer to exert their influence in a silent and unknown manner."

"Well, I would like to meet such men," I mutter, half to myself. "And I should certainly like to encounter some real Yogis."

"You shall do so one day, without a doubt," he assures me.

"How do you know that?" I ask, somewhat startled.

"I knew it that day we first met," is the astonishing answer. "It came to me as an intuition—does it matter what you call

it?—as a message deeply felt but inexplicable by outward evidences. My master taught me how to train this feeling, to develop it. Now I have learnt to trust it implicitly.”

“A modern Socrates guided by his daemon!” I remark half-jocosely. “But tell me, when do you think your prophecy will come true?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“I am not a prophet. So I regret that I cannot date the event for you.”

I do not press him, though I suspect he could say more if he would. I meditate upon the matter and then offer a suggestion.

“I suppose you will return to your own country eventually. If I am ready at the time, could we not travel together? Would you not help me locate some of these men we have been discussing?”

“No, my friend. Go alone. It will be better that you do your own finding.”

“It will be so difficult for a stranger.” I complain.

“Yes—very difficult; But go alone; one day you will see that I am right.”

†

From that time I feel strongly that a momentous day will dawn which will find me at anchor in the sunny East. I reflect that if India has harboured such great men as the Rishies in the past, and if, as my friend believes, there may be a few of them still in existence, then the trouble of locating them might be balanced by the reward of learning something of their wisdom. Peradventure, I might then gain an understanding and content which life has so far denied me. Even if I fail in such a quest, the journey will not be a vain one. For those queer men, the Yogis, with their magic, their mysterious practices and their strange mode of living, excite my curiosity and arouse my interest. The journalistic grindstone has sharpened to an abnormal keenness my concern with the unusual. I am fascinated by the prospect of exploring such little-known trails. I decide to carry out my fancy to its full proportions and, when opportunity allow, take the first boat to India.

My Oriental friend, who has thus clinched and rendered final this determination to trek towards the rising sun, continues to receive me at his house for several months. He

assists me to take my bearings upon the swirling ocean of life, though he always refuses to act as a pilot across the uncharted waters which stretch ahead of me. To discover one's position, to be made aware of latent possibilities, and to get one's vague ideas clarified, is nevertheless of indubitable value to a young man. It is not amiss, then, if I pay my meed of gratitude to that early benefactor of mine. For a dark day comes when fate spins its wheel once again, and we part. Within a few years I hear, seemingly by accident, of his death.

Time and circumstance are not ready for my journey. Ambition and desire lure a man into responsibilities from which it is not easy to extricate himself. I can do little more than resign myself to the life which hems me in, and watch and wait.

I never lose my faith in the Indian's prophecy. One day it is strengthened by an unexpected confirmation.

Professional work throws me for several months into frequent contact with a man for whom I entertain a high respect and friendly regard. He is exceedingly astute and knows human nature through every letter of its alphabet. Many years earlier he held the post of Professor of Psychology at one of our universities, but an academic life was not to his taste. He deserted it for pastures where he could put his amazing range of knowledge to more practical use. For a time he acted as adviser to magnates of the business world. How often has he boasted of drawing several retaining fees from the chiefs of large firms!

He is born with the remarkable gift of inspiring others to their best endeavours. Every person he meets—from office boy to millionaire magnate—finds practical help and new enthusiasm from the contact; sometimes they receive golden advice. I make it a practice to take careful note of any counsel he gives me, for his foresight and insight usually receive startling verification in both business and personal matters. I enjoy his company because he has succeeded in fusing the elements of introspection and extrospection in his own nature, with the result that he can talk profound philosophy one minute and deal with a commercial report the next. Withal he is never dull, always witty and radiating good-humour.

He admits me into the circle of intimate friendship and, sometimes, we spend several hours at a time in mingled work and pleasure. I never tire of listening to his talk, for its latitude

of subjects enthral me. I wonder often that one small head can carry all he knows!

One night we go out to dine together in a little Bohemian restaurant where pleasantly shaded lights and nicely cooked food accompany each other. After the meal we find a full moon resplendent in the heavens, and tempted by the witchery of its poetic light, decide to walk homewards.

The conversation has been somewhat light and frivolous for most of the evening, but as we walk on through the city's quieter streets it drifts into philosophical depths. The close of our nocturnal peregrination finds us discussing subjects so abstruse that some of my companion's clients would take fright at the mere sound of the names. Outside his door, he turns and proffers a hand in farewell. As he grips mine, he suddenly addresses me in grave tones and says slowly:

"You ought never to have entered this profession. You are really a philosopher caught up in the ink-slinging business of writing. Why did you not become a university don and spend your life in secluded research? For you like to put on those carpet slippers of yours and walk around inside your brain. You are trying to reach the very source of the mind. One day you will go out to the Yogis of India, to the Lamas of Tibet and the Zen monks of Japan. Then you will write some strange records. Good night!"

"What do you think of these Yogis?"

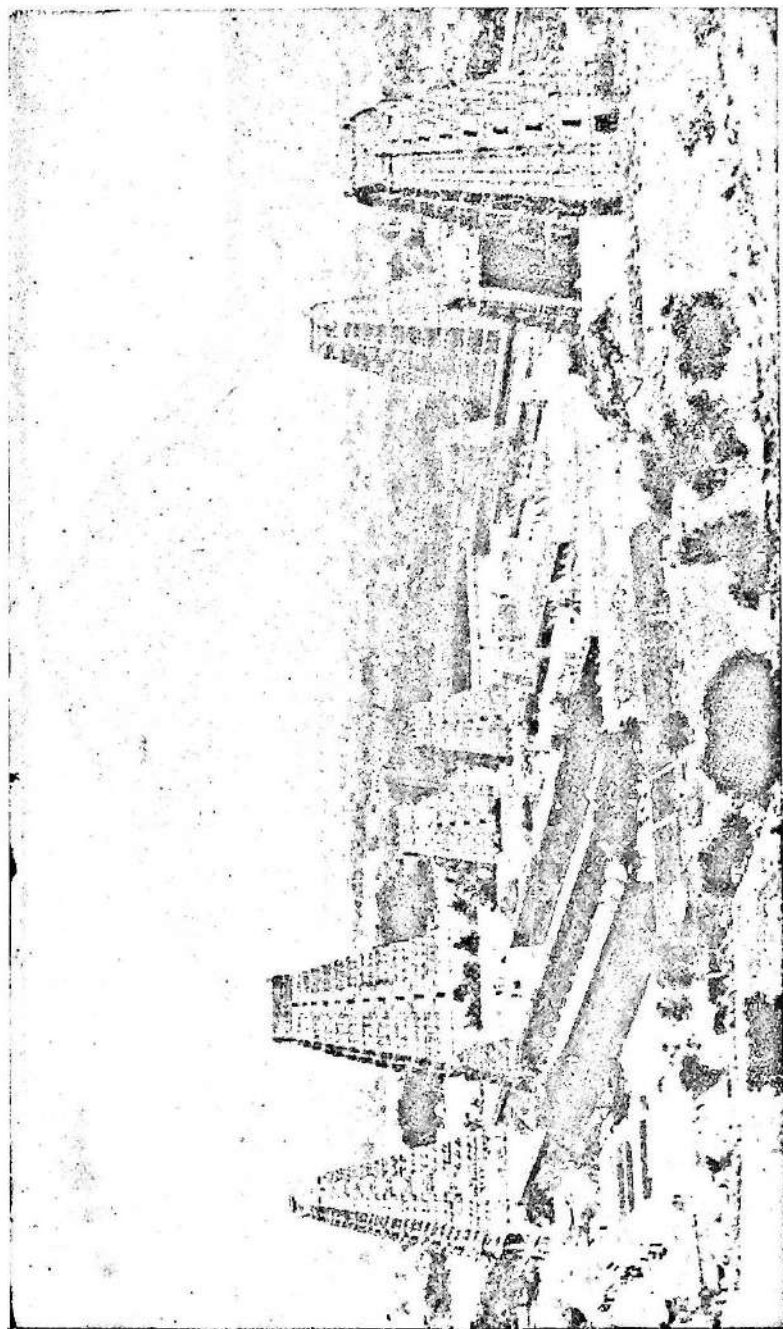
The other man bends his head towards mine and half-whispers in my ear:

"My friend, they know, *they know!*"

I walk away greatly puzzled. This Eastern journey is not likely to happen for a long time ahead. I am sinking deeper and deeper into a maze of activities from which escape becomes proportionately more difficult. For a while pessimism seizes me. Am I not doomed by destiny to remain imprisoned in this maze of private bonds and personal ambitions?

Yet my guess at the unseen writ is wrong. Fate issues its orders every day, and though we are not literate enough to be able to read them, nevertheless we unconsciously move about to obey! Before twelve months pass I find myself disembarking at Alexandra Dock, Bombay; mingling with the motley life of that Eastern city, and listening to the weird medley of Asiatic tongues which contribute to its cacophony!

1 Now, alas, he had departed from terra firma and his shop had disappeared with him!



THE GREAT TEMPLE OF ARUNACHALA AND THE HILL OF THE HOLY BEACON

'Here is no stone building whose columned beauty stays one's emotions in a few minutes of silent wonder, as do those courts of the deities near Athens, but rather a gloomy sanctuary of dark mysteries.'



YOGIS' CAVES HEWN OUT OF SOLID MOUNTAIN ROCK

'Go to some place over which the mighty Himalayas keep eternal guard. There you will find a totally different class of men. They live in humble huts or caves, eat little food and constantly pray to God. They, too, are called Yogis.'

III

A Magician out of Egypt

It is a singular fact—and perhaps a significant one—that before I can begin to try my luck in this strange quest, Fortune herself comes in quest of me. I have not even taken the tourist's privilege of exploring the show places of Bombay. All I know of the city can be comfortably written down on a postcard. My trunks, save one, remain in a sedate, unpacked condition. My sole activity consists in an attempt to familiarize myself with my surroundings in the Hotel Majestic, which a shipboard acquaintance had described as one of the most comfortable hotels in the city. It is through this activity, then, that I make a startling discovery. For, staying as a fellow guest of the hotel, I find a member of the magician's fraternity, a weaver of strange spells, in short, a wonder-worker in the flesh!

Not that he is one of those juggling fellows, mind you, who make their own and theatres' fortune by bewildering jaded audiences. He is not some clever individual attempting to emulate the feats of Maskelyne and Devant in a less prosaic environment than that of Regent Street. No! This man belongs to the line of medieval sorcerers. He engages daily in commerce with mysterious beings, invisible to normal human eyes, but plain enough to his own! Such, at least, is the peculiar reputation which he has created. The hotel staff regard him with fearful looks and speak of him with bated breath. Whenever he passes by, the other guests instinctively break off conversation and a puzzled, questioning look comes into their eyes. He makes no overtures to them and usually insists on dining alone.

What makes him more intriguing in our eyes is that he bears neither European nor Indian nationality; he is a traveller from the country of the Nile; in very sooth, a magician out of Egypt!

It is not easy for me to reconcile the appearance of Mahmoud Bey with the sinister powers with which he has been credited. Instead of the stern visage and lean body which I look for, I observe a good-looking smiling face, a well-built figure

with massive shoulders and the quick walk of a man of action. Instead of the white robe or voluminous cloak, he is sprucely dressed in well-fitting, modern clothes. He looks like a handsome Frenchman, such as one might see any evening in the better restaurants of Paris.

I ruminate upon the matter for the rest of the day. Next morning I wake up with a clear-cut decision. Mahmoud Bey must be forthwith interviewed. I shall "get his story," as my fellow scribes of the Press might say.

I write a few lines, expressive of my desire, on the back of a visiting card and then, in the right-hand corner, I draw in tiny characters a certain symbol which will indicate that I am not unfamiliar with the traditional side of his mysterious art and which, I hope, may help me to obtain an interview. I slip the card into the hand of a soft-footed servant, add a silver rupee, and send him up to the magician's room.

Five minutes later the response arrives: "Mahmoud Bey will see you at once, sir. He is just about to take breakfast and invites you to join him."

This first success encourages me. The servant leads the way upstairs and I find Mahmoud Bey seated at a table whereon there is tea and toast and jam. The Egyptian does not rise to greet me. Instead, he points to a chair opposite him and says, in a clear, resonant voice:

"Please be seated. Excuse me, but I never shake hands."

He wears a loose grey dressing-gown. There is a leonine mane of brown hair on his head. A curling lock strays over his forehead. His teeth flash white in a charming smile as he asks:

"You will share my breakfast, eh?"

I thank him. Over the cups I inform him of the awe-inspired reputation which belongs to him in the hotel, and of the prolonged meditation in which I have indulged before having the temerity to approach him. He laughs heartily and half raises a hand into the air, as a gesture of helplessness, but says nothing.

After a pause, he asks: "Are you representing any paper?"

"No. I have come to India on a private mission—to study some out-of-the-way things, and possibly make a few notes for literary work."

"Will you stay here long?"

"That depends on circumstances. I have fixed no period," I

answer, with a queer feeling that the affair is becoming a case of the interviewer interviewed. But his next words reassure me:

"I, too, am here on an extended visit. Possibly one year, possibly two years. After that, I am off for the Far East. I would like to see the world and then return home to Egypt, if Allah permits."

The servant enters and clears the table after we have finished. I feel that it is time to plunge into deeper water.

"Is it true that you possess these magical powers?" I question him pointedly.

Calmly and confidently, he says: "Yes! Allah, the all-Powerful, has granted me such powers."

I hesitate. His dark grey eyes gaze fixedly at me.

"You would like me to demonstrate them, I believe?" he asks, suddenly.

He has correctly gauged my desire. I nod assent.

"Very well. Have you a pencil and some paper?"

I hastily feel in a pocket for my notebook, tear out a page, and then produce a pencil.

"Good," he remarks. "Now please write some questions on the paper." With that he withdraws and sits at a small table in the window recess. He half turns his back upon me and looks down into the street below. Several feet of space now separate us.

"What kind of question?" I query.

"Anything you wish," he replies promptly.

My brain plays with a few thoughts. Finally, I write down a brief question. It is: "Where did I live four years ago?"

"Now fold the paper repeatedly until it forms a tiny square," he instructs me. "Let it be the smallest possible fold."

I obey him. Thereupon he draws his chair back to my table and faces me once again.

"Please clench the piece of paper, together with the pencil, in the palm of your right hand."

I hold the articles tightly clutched. The Egyptian closes his eyes. He appears to fall into a profound concentration. The heavy lids open once more, the grey eyes look steadily at me, and he quietly says:

"The question which you asked—was it not, 'Where did I live four years ago?'"

"You are correct," I reply, astonished. This is a case of

mind reading extraordinary!

"Now, please unfold the piece of paper in your hand," his voice breaks in.

I place the tiny scrap upon the surface of the table and slowly open out its many folds until the paper lies flat, extended to its original size.

"Examine it!" commands the other man. I do so and make a surprising discovery. For some unseen hand has written in pencil the name of the town where I lived four years ago. The answer has been placed immediately beneath the written question.

Mahmoud Bey smiles triumphantly.

"There is the answer. Is it correct?" he demands.

I give a wondering assent, for I am baffled. The feat hardly seems credible. As a test, I ask him to repeat it. He readily agrees and moves away to the window while I write down a further question. Thus he avoids any possible accusation of being close enough to read my writing. Besides, I watch him carefully and note that his eyes are set upon the colourful scene in the street below.

Once again I fold the paper and clutch it tightly against the pencil which is in my hand. He returns to the table and plunges again into close concentration, his eyes fast shut. Then come the words:

"Your second question—'What journal did I edit two years ago?'"

He has given my query quite accurately. Thought-reading again, I presume.

Once more he requests me to unfold the tiny scrap in my right hand. I place it flat on the table and it reveals to my astounded gaze the name of the journal in question, clumsily written in pencil!

Conjuring? I dismiss the suggestion as absurd. The paper and pencil were supplied from my own pockets, the questions were unpremeditated, while Mahmoud Bey has scrupulously put several feet between us at each writing. Moreover, the entire feat has been performed in the morning daylight.

Hypnotism? I have studied the subject and know well when any attempt at undue influence is being made. I know equally how to guard against it. And the mysteriously added words still remain on the paper.¹

I am baffled again. For a third time I request the Egyptian to repeat the experiment, and he agrees to a final test. From this, too, he emerges completely successful.

The facts cannot be gainsaid. He has read my mind (as I believe); he has somehow, by some inexplicable magic, caused certain words to be written by an invisible hand upon a piece of paper which I clutch tightly in my hand; and, finally, those words form correct replies to my question.

What is the strange process he uses?

As I ponder over the matter, I feel the presence of uncanny forces. To the normal mind, the thing is incredible. It is something alien and apart from sane existence. My heart almost stands still with a sense of eeriness.

"Have you men in England who can do this?" he asks, half boastfully.

I am compelled to admit that I know of none who can perform the feat under similar test conditions, though several professional conjurers can doubtless perform it if allowed to use their own paraphernalia.

"Would you care to explain your methods?" I inquire weakly, fearing that in asking him to reveal his secrets I am asking for the moon.

He shrugs his broad shoulders.

"I have been offered large sums of money to give my secrets away, but I do not intend to do so yet."

"You are aware that I am not entirely ignorant of the psychic side of things?" I venture.

"Assuredly. If I ever come to Europe—which is quite possible—you may be able to render certain services to me. In that case, I promise to train you in my methods so that you could do the same things, if you wish."

"How long does the training last?"

"That would differ with different persons. If you worked hard and gave the whole of your time to it, three months would be enough to get an understanding of the methods, but after that years of practice may be required."

"Can you not explain the broad basis of your fetas, the theoretical side alone, without explaining your secrets?" I persist.

Mahmoud Bey muses over my query for a while.

"Yes, I am willing to do that for you," he answers softly.

I feel for my shorthand book, draw it out of a pocket, and poise the pencil in readiness

"No, please. Not this morning," he protests, smiling. "I am busy; you must excuse me now. Come here to-morrow at one hour before noon, and we shall continue our talk."

†

Precisely at the appointed time I sit again in Mahmoud Bey's room. He pushes a box of Egyptian cigarettes over the table towards me. I pick one out and, as he proffers the light, he remarks:

"These come from my native country. They are good."

We lean back in our chairs, puffing a few preliminary whiffs. The smoke is fragrant, aromatic; certainly these cigarettes are excellent indeed.

"So I must now describe my theories, as your English friends would call them; to me they are certainties." Mahmoud Bey laughs good-naturedly. "Perhaps you will be surprised to hear that I am a man expert in scientific agriculture and that I hold diplomas in the subject?" he adds irrelevantly.

I begin to scribble a note.

"That does not seem to fit in with my—shall we say interest in magic, I know," he continues. I look up at him and notice a smile hovering around his lips. He gazes back at me. There is a good "story" in this man, I reflect.

"But you are a journalist; probably you would like to know how I became a magician, eh?" he queries.

I express an eager assent.

"Good! I was born in an interior province, but brought up in Cairo. Let me tell you that I was just a normal boy, with the usual interests which schoolboys possess. I was very keen on making agriculture my profession, so I attended the Government Agricultural College for that purpose. I worked hard at my studies and went on with them most enthusiastically.

"One day an old man took an apartment in the house where I lived. He was a Jew, with bushy eyebrows and a long grey beard, and his face was always grave and serious. He seemed to be living in the past century, for he wore very old-fashioned clothes. His manner was so reserved that the other inhabitants

of the house were kept at a distance. Strangely enough, instead of having the same effect upon me, this mysterious reserve piqued my interest. Being young, self-assertive and utterly without a trace of shyness, I persistently strove to make his acquaintance. At first he rebuffed me, but that only added fuel to the fire of my curiosity. Eventually, he gave way to my constant attempts to engage him in conversation. He opened his doors to me and permitted me to enter his life. Thus I came to learn that he spent much of his time in strange studies and weird practices. In short, he confessed to me that he was making researches into the supernatural side of things.

"Imagine it! Hitherto my life had run along the even channel of youthful study and healthy sport. Now, I was forced abruptly face to face with a totally different kind of existence. And it appealed to me. The thought of the supernatural did not frighten me, as no doubt it would have done other boys. Really, it thrilled me because I saw the possibilities of great adventures opening up through it. I begged the old Jew to teach me something about the subject, and he yielded to my desire. In this way I was brought into a new circle of interests and friends. The Jew took me with him to a society in Cairo which conducted practical investigations into magic, spiritualism, theosophy and the occult. He often delivered lectures to them. The group was composed of society people, learned savants, Government officials and other persons of good standing.

"Although I had only just reached manhood, I was permitted to accompany the old man to every meeting of the society. On each occasion I listened eagerly; my ears drank in every word of the talk around me; my eyes watched with keen fascination the strange experiments which were so often made. Of course, it was inevitable that my technical studies in agriculture were neglected, so that more time could be given to the researches into supernatural matters. However, I had a natural genius for the former studies and scraped through my diploma examinations without difficulty.

"I studied the musty old books which the Jew lent me, and practised the magical rituals and other exercises which he taught me. I made such quick progress that I began to discover things which he himself did not know. At length, I became acknowledged as a expert in these arts. I delivered lectures and gave demonstrations to the Cairo Society, until its members

appointed me as its President. For twelve years I remained its leader. Then I resigned, because I wanted to leave Egypt and travel to certain countries and, incidentally, to acquire a fortune!"

Mahmoud Bey stops speaking; his carefully manicured fingers, which I have not failed to observe, flick the ash from his cigarette.

"A difficult task!"

He smiles, "For me it will be easy. I need only a few clients among the super-rich who wish to make use of my magical powers. Already I am known to certain wealthy Parsees and rich Hindus. They come here to consult me about their problems or troubles, or they wish to discover certain things which elude them, or they want information which is only to be procured by occult means. I charge them high fees, naturally. One hundred rupees is my minimum. Frankly, I want to make a lot of money and then throw the whole thing up and retire to some quiet interior province in Egypt. I will buy a large orange-grove plantation and take up my agricultural work once again."

"Did you come here direct from Egypt?"

"No. I spent some time in Syria and Palestine, after leaving Cairo. The Syrian police officers heard of my powers and occasionally asked me to help them. Whenever they were puzzled by some crime, they used my services as a last resource. Almost always I succeeded in finding the criminal for them."

"How were you able to do that?"

"The inner secrets of the crimes were revealed to me by my attendant spirits, who created a vision of the scenes before my eyes."

Mahmoud Bey relapses for a minute into reminiscent thought. I wait patiently for his next words.

"Yes, I suppose you could call me a practising Spiritualist of a sort, since I do invoke the aid of spirits," he goes on. "But I am also what you call a magician in the real sense—not a conjurer—as well as a thought reader. I do not claim to be anything more than this."

His claim is sufficiently startling to require no further additions!

"Please tell me something about your invisible employees," I ask him.

"The spirits? Well, it took me three years of difficult practice to get my present control of them. You see, in the other world which exists outside our material senses, there are bad as well as good spirits. I try to use good spirits only. Some of them are human beings who have passed through what the world calls death, but most of my attendants are *jinn*s—that is, native inhabitants of the spirit world who have never possessed a human body. Some of them are just like animals, others are as shrewd as men. There are also evil *jinn*s—we call them *jinn*s in Egypt and I do not know any suitable English word for them—who are used by low sorcerers, especially by the African witch doctors. I refuse to have anything to do with them. They are dangerous servants and will sometimes turn treacherously on the man who is using them and kill him."

"Who are these human spirits you employ?"

"I can tell you that one of them is my own brother. He 'died' some years ago. But remember—I am not a Spiritualist medium, for no spirit ever enters my body or is allowed to control me in any way. My brother communicates with me by impressing upon my mind whatever thought he wishes, or by bringing a picture-vision before my mind's eye. That is how I knew the questions you wrote down yesterday."

"And the *jinn*s?"

"I have as many as thirty at my command. Even after obtaining mastery over them, I had to train them how to do my bidding, just as you train children to dance. I have to know the name of each one, because you cannot bring or use them without knowing their names. Some of these names I learned from the musty old books which the Jew lent me."

Mahmoud Bey pushes the cigarette-box towards me again, and then continues:

"I have given each spirit a particular duty; each one is trained to do a separate work. Thus, the *jinn*s who produced the pencil-written words on your piece of paper yesterday would be quite unable to help me discover the nature of your questions."

"How do you get into contact with these spirits?" is my next query.

"I can call them to me very quickly merely by concentrating in thought upon them, but in practice I usually write down in Arabic the name of the spirit required; that is

sufficient to bring it to me almost at once."

The Egyptian looks at his watch. He rises and says:

"And now, my friend, I regret to say that I cannot give you any further explanation of my methods. Perhaps you will now understand why I must keep them secret. We may meet again one day, if Allah wills. Good-bye."

He flashes his teeth in a smile as he bows. The interview is at an end.



Night in Bombay. I go to bed late, but not to sleep. The heavy air suffocates me; it seems to contain no oxygen; and its heat is intolerable. The whirring blades of an electric fan which hangs from the ceiling bring little relief, certainly not sufficient to induce my weary eyes to close. I find that the simple act of breathing is a distinct labour. The air is hot enough to hurt my inexperienced lungs with every dilation. My wretched body becomes flaccid and drips a continuous stream of perspiration which my pyjamas soak up. Worse, my oppressed brain finds no rest. The devil of insomnia enters my life this night and is destined to haunt me until the day when my shoes tread Indian soil for the last time. I have begun to pay the inevitable price of acclimatization to the tropical world.

A mosquito net hangs around my bed like a white shroud. Through a tall window which opens on the veranda balcony the moonlight comes streaming and casts eerie shadows on the pale ceiling.

Musing over the morning's talk with Mahmoud Bey and the astounding phenomena of the previous day, I seek for some explanation other than that he has given me, but can find none. If those thirty or more mysterious servitors of his really exist, then one is back in the medieval period when—assuming legend does not always lie—magicians flourished in every city of Europe, though often hindered in their dark work by Church and State.

The more I seek for an explanation, the more I retreat baffled.

Why had Mahmoud Bey instructed me to hold the pencil simultaneously with the piece of paper? Did his alleged spirits draw some constituent atoms from the lead to enable them to

write the answers?

I cast about in memory for instances of similar feats. Does not the famous Venetian voyager, Marco Polo, relate somewhere in his book of travel how he came across certain magicians in China, Tartary and Tibet and how they were able to perform pencil writing without contact? And did not those wizards inform him that this weird art was known and practised among their people since centuries before?

I remember, too, that Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the enigmatic Russian lady who founded the Theosophical Society, produced somewhat parallel phenomena fifty years ago. Certain favoured members of her society received somewhat lengthy messages through her agency. They propounded philosophical questions and the replies were scrawled—precipitated, she called it—upon the actual letter paper bearing the questions! It is curious that Mme Blavatsky claimed intimate acquaintance with both Tartary and Tibet, the very lands where Marco Polo met with the same phenomena. Yet Mme Blavatsky did not claim to control any mysterious spirits, as Mahmoud Bey had done. Her assertion was that the mysterious writings emanated from her Tibetan masters, who lived in the flesh and lurked unseen as the inspirers of her society. Apparently they were better hands at the feat than the Egyptian, for they produced such writings hundreds of miles away from Tibet. There had been much dispute at the time whether the Russian lady's phenomena were really genuine, and whether her Tibetan teachers really existed. But that is not my concern, for that brilliant woman has long since gone to the other world in which she seemed so much at home while yet here. I know my own experience and what I have witnessed with my own eyes. I must accept the genuineness of the performance, even if I reserve its explanation.

Yes, Mahmoud Bey is a magician, a twentieth-century wizard. My discovery of him so soon after landing on Indian earth seems to be herald, apt and prophetic, of even stranger discoveries yet. Metaphorically, I have cut the first notch in my stick of Indian experience. Actually I have put down the first note on the virgin white sheets of my note-book.

I The scrap of paper remained in my possession for several months, and the writing did not disappear during the whole of that time. I showed it to two or three persons who readily identified the added answers. It is therefore evident that the experience had not been a hallucination.

IV

I Meet a Messiah

"I am pleased to see you" is the somewhat conventional greeting with which I am received by Meher Baba. He is destined, had I but known it, to flash like a meteorite across the Western sky and to rouse the curiosity of millions of people in Europe and America. Moreover, like a meteorite, he will fall ingloriously to earth. I am the first Western journalist to interview him, for I track him down to his Indian abode when he is almost unknown to more than local fame.

I have become acquainted with one of his chief disciples and, after some correspondence, wonder what manner of man has joined the ranks of self-appointed deliverers of mankind. Two Parsee disciples come to Bombay to escort me. Before we leave the city, they inform me that it is necessary to make a present of choice flowers and fruits to their master. So we proceed to the bazaar and they collect a large hamper of these commodities on my behalf.

Our train arrives at Ahmednagar next morning, after travelling through the night. I remember it as the historical place where the cruel Emperor Aurungzeeb, Preserver of the Faith and Ornament of the Moghul Throne, stroked his heavy beard for the last time, for Death caught him here in his tent.

A rickety old war-time Ford car, which does duty for the transport needs of Meher Baba's retreat, waits for us at the station. The seven-mile run which follows takes us through flat country. An avenue of neem trees lines part of the road. We pass a village whose huddled brown roofs rise against the elaborate little spire of the local temple. Then I sight a stream, whose banks are lined with pink and yellow flowers, and in whose muddy water buffaloes are blissfully resting.

We arrive at Meher Baba's curious colony, which is spread out in scattered erections. Three odd-looking stone structures, which I learn later are the remnants of a dismantled army camp site, stand in a field. Three plain wooden bungalows stand in an adjacent one. A quarter of a mile away is a little village whose

name is given as Arangaon. The whole place presents a bare appearance and seems half deserted. My Parsee escorts are at pains to inform me that this is only the country headquarters of their master, and that his principal centre is near the town of Nasik, where the majority of his intimate disciples reside and where visitors are usually received.

A few men emerge from one of the bungalows as we pass. They lounge on the veranda, smile, gesticulate, and seem pleased at the arrival of a European in their midst. We cross a field and reach a queer-looking structure, which is nothing less than an artificial cave. It is built of stones and rubble cemented together and is about eight feet deep. It faces due south and receives the bright morning sunlight full into its interior. I look around and see the rolling expanse of fields, the ring of hills which bounds the horizon on the east, and the tree-shaded village down in a hollow. This Parsee holy man is doubtless a great lover of Nature, for he has set his retreat in a scene of aloof, untroubled peace. I am, indeed, glad to find such a quiet backwater after the whirl of Bombay life.

Two men stand on guard like sentries outside the cave's entrance. They move at our approach and go inside to consult their master. "Put out your cigarette," whispers one of my escorts, "Baba does not like smoking." I throw the offending cigarette away. A minute later I am conducted into the august presence of the so-called "new messiah."

He squats at the far end of the cave, the entire floor of which is covered with a beautifully patterned Persian rug. He proves to be somewhat different from the person I have imagined. His eyes do not penetrate me, his facial expression lacks strength, and although I am aware of something ascetic, unworldly and gently in his atmosphere, I wonder why I feel no responsive thrill, such as one may reasonably expect to feel in the presence of one who proposes to win the allegiance of millions of people.

He is clothed in a long, spotless white robe, which looks ludicrously like an old-English nightshirt! His amiable and kindly face is framed in chestnut-coloured hair, which falls in long curly waves to his neck. I am struck by the soft, silky texture of the hair, which is remarkably like the hair of a woman. His nose rises into arched prominence and then descends into aquiline depth. The eyes are dark, medium sized

and clear, but I find them unimpressive. A heavy brown moustache stretches across his upper lip. The light-tinted olive skin betrays his Persian origin, for his father hails from the land of Shahs. Withal he is young, apparently somewhere in the thirties. A final feature which remains in memory is his forehead. It is so low as to appear less than average height, and it is so receding as to make me wonder. Do brain areas carry qualitative significance? Does a man's forehead indicate his powers of thought? But possibly a messiah is above such physical limitations!

"I am pleased to see you," he remarks, but not, mind you, in the usual manner of human speech. For he holds a small alphabet board upon his lap and points rapidly with his index finger to one letter after another. As the words are spelt out in this dumb pantomime manner, his secretary interprets them aloud for my benefit.

Since the tenth of July, 1925, the holy man has not uttered a single word. His younger brother tells me that when the new messiah breaks into speech, his message will startle the world! Meanwhile, he adopts a pose of strict silence.

Still fingering the board, Meher Baba makes some kindly inquiries into my personal well-being, asks questions about my life, and expresses his gratification at my interest in India. He possesses an excellent knowledge of English, so there is no necessity to translate my speech. He postpones till the late afternoon the lengthy interview which I request. "Food and rest are your immediate needs," he says or, rather, communicates.

I adjourn to one of the stone structures. It possesses a bare gloomy interior, but contains an old bedstead without bedding, a ramshackle table and a chair which might have rendered good service during the Indian Mutiny. Here I am to make my home for nearly a week. I peer through the glassless window and am rewarded by the view of sparse, untilled fields stretching away into scrub bush dotted with cactus.

Four hours creep lethargically around my watch. Once again I sit upon the Persian rug, face to face with Meher Baba, whose colossal claim that he is destined to give spiritual light and practical leading to the whole of mankind, I have yet to investigate.

He puts this claim into the first sentence which he flicks out

on the alphabet board.

"I shall change the history of the whole world!"

My note-taking disturbs him however.

"Can you not make your notes after you leave me?"

I agree, and henceforth inscribe his words upon the pages of memory.

"As Jesus came to impart spirituality to a materialistic age, so have I come to impart a spiritual push to present-day mankind. There is always a fixed time for such divine workings, and when the hour is ripe I shall reveal my true nature to the entire world. The great teachers of religion—Jesus, Buddha, Muhammed and Zoroaster—do not differ in their essential doctrines. All these prophets came from God. The chief commandments run through all their teachings like a golden thread. These divine ones came out into public when their help was most needed, when spirituality was at its lowest ebb and materialism was apparently everywhere victorious. Such a time we are fast approaching at present. The whole world is now enmeshed in sensual desires, in racial selfishness and money worship. God is forsaken. True religion is abused; man seeks life and the priests usually give him a stone. God, therefore, must send his true prophet among men once again to establish true worship and to awaken people out of their materialistic stupor. I but follow in the line of those earlier prophets: this is my mission. God has given me a mandate."

I listen quietly while the secretary voices these amazing assertions. I keep my mind open, uncritical, and offer no mental resistance. This is not to say that I accept them, however, but that I am aware one must know how to listen among these Orientals. Otherwise a Westerner will get little for his pains, even where there might be something worthy of acceptance. Truth can stand a ruthless investigation, but the methods of the Occident must be modified to suit the mental atmosphere of the Orient.

Meher Baba smiles genially at me, and then proceeds:

"The prophets lay down certain rules and regulations to help the masses lead better lives and to incline them towards God. Gradually these rules become the tenets of an organized religion, but the idealistic spirit and motive force which prevail during the founder's lifetime, disappear gradually after his death. That is why organizations cannot bring spiritual truth

nearer and why true religion is always a personal concern. Religious organizations become like archaeological departments trying to resuscitate the past. Therefore I shall not attempt to establish any new religion, cult or organization. But I shall rejuvenate the religious thought of all peoples, instil a higher understanding of life into them. Dogmas invented centuries after the founder's death, frequently differ startlingly, but the fundamentals of all religions are really the same, because all issue from the same source- God. Therefore, when I appear publicly I shall run down no existing religion, but then I shall not uphold any special one. I want to turn men's minds away from sectarian differences, so that they will agree on essential truths. Remember though, that every prophet considers the times, the circumstances and the prevailing mentality of the people before his public manifestation. He therefore preaches doctrines best understood and best suited to such conditions."

Meher Baba pauses for a while to let these exalted ideas soak into my head, and then his words take a new turn.

"Have you not noticed how all the nations have been brought into quick communication with each other during this modern epoch? Do you not see how railways, steamships, telephones, cables, wireless and newspapers have caused the whole world to become a closely-woven unit? An important event which happens in one country is made known within a day to the people of a country ten thousand miles away. Therefore a man who wishes to deliver an important message can find almost the whole of mankind as a ready audience. For all that there is a sound reason. The time is soon coming to give mankind a universal spiritual belief which will serve all races of peoples and all countries. In other words, the way is being prepared to enable me to deliver a world-wide message!"

This breath-taking announcement indicates sufficiently that Meher Baba possesses an unlimited faith in his own future, and indeed, his whole manner confirms it. In his own estimation, his stock will one day stand at infinitely more than par!

"But when shall you tell the world about your mission?" I ask.

"I shall break my silence and deliver my message only when there is chaos and confusion everywhere, for then I shall be

most needed; when the world is rocking in upheavals—earthquakes, floods and volcanic eruptions; when both East and West are aflame with war. Truly the whole world must suffer, for the whole world must be redeemed."

"Do you know the date of this war?"

"Yes. It is not far off. But I do not wish to reveal the date."¹

"That is a terrible prophecy!" I exclaim.

Meher Baba spreads out his thin tapering fingers apologetically.

"It is. The war will be terrible in its nature because scientific ingenuity will make it more intense than the last war. However, it will last only a short time—a few months—and at its worst I shall make myself publicly known and declare my mission to the entire world. By my material efforts and spiritual powers, I shall speedily bring the conflict to an abrupt end, thus restoring peace to all the nations. Yet great natural changes must take place on this planet simultaneously. Life and property in different parts of the globe will suffer. If I play the role of a messiah it will be because world conditions require it. Be assured that I shall not leave my spiritual work undone."

His secretary, a short dusky-faced man who wears the round black cap of the Mahratta people, looks at me impressively after he finishes speaking the last word. The expression on his face seems to say: "There! how do you like that! You see what important things we know here!"

His master's fingers begin to move over the board once more, and he hastens to tell me their new import.

"After the war will come a long era of unique peace, a time of world tranquility. Disarmament will then no longer be a matter of mere talk, but an actual fact. Racial and communal strife will cease; sectarian hatred between religious organizations will come to an end. I shall travel widely throughout the world and the nations will be eager to see me. My spiritual message will reach every land, every town, every village even. Universal brotherhood; peace among men; sympathy for the poor and downtrodden; love of God—I shall promote these things."

"What of India—your own country?"

"In India I shall not rest till the pernicious caste system is uprooted and destroyed. India became depressed in the scale of

nations with the establishment of caste. When the outcastes and lower castes are elevated, India will find herself to be one of the influential countries of the world."

"And what of her future?"

"Despite its faults, India is still the most spiritual country in the world. The future will find it the moral leader of all the nations. All the great founders of religions were born in the East, and it is to the East that the peoples must continue to look for spiritual light."

I try to visualize the great Western nations sitting at the feet of the meek little brown men, but fail. Perhaps the white-robed figure squatting in front of me grasps my difficulty, for he adds:

"The so-called subjection of India is not real subjection. It is of the body, and therefore temporary. The soul of the country is deathless and great, even if outwardly the nation has lost its power."

This subtle explanation somewhat eludes my understanding. I return to our earlier theme.

"We in the West have heard most of the things in your message from other sources. You have nothing new to tell us, then?"

"My words can only echo the old spiritual truths, but it is my mystic power that will bring a new element into the world's life."

Upon this point I seek to rest my brain. For a while there is silence; I ask no more questions. I turn my head and gaze out of the cave. Far across the quiet fields, a line of hills rises in the distance. In the sky, a pitiless sun scorches man, beast and earth alike. The minutes pass. In this secluded cave, in this unending heat, surrounded by absorbent minds, it is easy to weave grandiose schemes of world reformation, to possess oneself of extravagant religious ideas. But out in the world of reality, amid the hard life of materialistic cities, these things would soon dissipate like mists before the dawning sun.

"Europe is hard, sceptical," I remark, turning and looking at the new messiah. "How can you convert unfamiliar peoples to your brand of spiritual belief? The average Westerner will tell you that it is impossible, and very likely he will laugh at you for your pains."

"Ah, you do not realize how changed the times will be."

Meher Baba strokes his pale slender hands. And then he adds some astounding claims, which sound fantastic to Western ears, yet his manner is quite matter-of-fact.

"Once I publicly announce myself as a messiah, nothing will be able to withstand my power. I shall openly work miracles in proof of my mission at the same time. Restoring sight to the blind, healing the sick, maimed and crippled, yes, even raising the dead--these things will be child's play to me! I shall work these miracles because through them people will everywhere be forced to believe in me, and then believe in my message. These wonders will not be done to satisfy idle curiosity, but to convince the sceptically minded."

I hold my breath. The interview has reached the boundry of common sense. My mind begins to falter. We are entering the region of Oriental fantasy.

"Make no mistake, however," continues the Parsee messiah. "I tell my disciples that these miracles are to be done only for the masses, not for them. I should not care to perform a single wonder, but I know that this will turn the minds of common people to my words. If I shall astonish the peoples of the world with these feats, it will be only because I wish to spiritualize them."

"Baba has already done marvellous things," breaks in the secretary.

I am instantly alert.

"Such as--?" I demand quickly.

The master smiles self-deprecatingly.

"Tell him another time, Vishnu," he communicates. "I can perform any miracle when necessary. It is easy to one who has reached my divine state."

I make a mental note to buttonhole the secretary on the morrow and get some details of these reputed marvels. They will form an interesting part of my investigation. I come as a circumspect inquirer and every kind of fact will make grist for my mill.

There is another interlude of silence. I request the holy man to give me certain information about his career.

"Tell him that also, Vishnu," he answers, directing me again to his secretary. "You will have plenty of opportunity to talk to my disciples, since you are staying here for a little while. They can tell you about the past."