

and confident.

There is a little period of silence and then he speaks again:

"But there is another decoration, upon a room's walls and furnishings, which is invisible. Yet it is very important. Do you know that these things carry the influence of people's thoughts and feelings? Every room every chair even, gives out the unseen influence of the person who has constantly used it. You may not see this atmosphere but it is nevertheless there, and all who enter within its range are unconsciously affected by it—to varying degrees."

"Do you mean that there are electrical or magnetic radiations around objects which reflect human characters?"

"Quite so. Thoughts are real things on their own plane and they attach themselves, for shorter or longer periods, to whatever we consistently use."

"That is an interesting theory."

"It is more than a theory; it is a fact! Man possesses a subtler body than the physical, and in this subtle body there exists centres of activity which correspond to the physical organs of sense-activity. Through these centres he can discern invisible forces for, when they are energized, they bestow psychic and spiritual sight."

A brief pause follows and then he asks my impressions of India's condition. I frankly criticize his country's neglect of modern ways of living, its slowness in picking up all those pleasant comforts, handy conveniences and mechanical inventions which improve man's brief sojourn in this world, its inattention to the demands of sensible hygiene and proper sanitation, and its excessive devotion to stupid social customs and cruel practices, which are supposedly based on religious practices. I tell him freely that priestly preoccupations seem to have kept India's energies in a cul-de-sac with deplorable results. I instance some of the irrational things which I have seen done in the name of religion, but which merely succeed in proving how men can neglect or misuse the gift of intelligence which their God has bestowed upon them. My outspoken observations draw a definite assent from the lips of Sahabji Maharaj.

"You have hit on the very points which form part of my programme of reform," he remarks, gazing at me reminiscently.

"On the whole, it seems that many Indians expect God to do it for them what they are perfectly capable of doing themselves."

"Exactly. We Hindus talk glibly of religion in order to cover up a lot of things which have nothing to do with religion. The trouble is that for the first fifty years or so a religion is pure and vital. Later it degenerates into a mere philosophy; its followers become talkers—not religiously-living men. Finally it descends, for its last and longest phase, into the arms of hypocritical priests. In the end, hypocrisy becomes accepted as religion."

I gasp at such straightforward admissions.

"What is the use of wrangling about heaven and hell, about God and so forth? Humanity finds itself on the physical plane and it ought not to neglect the matters which pertain to this plane. Let us try to make our life here more beautiful and happier," he concludes.

"That is why I have sought you out. Your disciples seem such fine men, straining to be as practical and up-to-date as any European, making no parade of religion but living good lives, and withal they keep to their Yoga practices with faithful regularity."

Sahabji smiles in acknowledgement.

"I am glad you have observed that," he replied quickly. "By setting up these activities at Dayalbagh I am attempting to show the world the same thing—that a man can be perfectly spiritual without running away to caves, and that he can reach the highest attainments in Yoga while carrying on with worldly avocations."

"If you can succeed in that effort, the world may think a lot more of Indian teachings than it does now."

"We are going to succeed," comes the confident answer. "Let me tell you a story. When I first came here to begin the colony, one of my chief desires was to have plenty of trees about the place. But outsiders told me that it was impossible to grow trees in this barren, sandy soil. The Jumna is not far off and this site is one of its old tracks—an ancient river bed, in short. There were no experts among us and we had to learn by frequent experiment and constant failure which kind of tree could live in such unpromising soil. Almost all the trees planted during the first year—and there were over a thousand of them—died off. However, one tree thrived. We noted it and

kept up our endeavours. Now there are nine thousand healthy trees growing in Dayalbagh. I tell you this because it is symbolical of the attitude with which we are facing our problems. We found barren ground here; it seemed so worthless that no one else would buy it. Look how it has been transformed!"

"Then it is your aim to build an Arcadia near Agra?"

He laughs.

I tell him of my desire to see the town.

"Certainly! I shall arrange it for you at once. See Dayalagh first and then we can talk about its why and wherefore. You will understand my ideas better when you can see them in practice."

He rings a business-like bell. A few minutes later I am walking on a tour of inspection along half-finished streets and among bright-looking factory buildings. My guide is Captain Sharma, who was formerly in the Indian Army Medical Service, but who is now devoting all his services to the constructive effort which is being made here by his master. A quick reading of his character conveys the impression of another successful combination of Western striving with sincere spirituality.

A luxuriant avenue provides the entrance to Dayalbagh, which is a clean little town. All the streets are bordered by shady trees. Some beautiful flower gardens adorn the central place. I am told that they represent repeated efforts to conquer dry desert, which does not take kindly to horticultural activity.

A mulberry tree which was planted by Sahabji Maharaj in 1915 when he began to build his colony, stands as a symbol of his appreciation of an artistic background.

The industrial quarter's chief feature is a group of workshops which are called "Model Industries." They are sensibly designed, light, airy, clean and spacious.

†

My first steps take me into the footwear factory. Busy driving-belts hum continuously from an overhead spindle and set a long line of machines in operation. The dusky mechanics work with deft hands amid the din, and seem as expert at their task as the operators I have seen in huge English factories at Northampton. The workshop manager tells me that he had

learnt his technique in Europe, whither he had gone to study twentieth-century methods of leather-goods manufacture.

Boots, shoes, sandals, handbags and belts pass noisily through all the processes of mechanical manufacture. The men at the machines had begun as raw novices and were taught and trained to their work by the manager.

Some of the goods produced find a local outlet in Dayalbagh and in Agra, while the rest goes to more distant cities. Shops are being opened in the latter places, the sales organization being based on the multiple store idea.

I pass into the next building, which proves to be a textile factory. The products are mercerized cloths and silks, which are made in a limited range of patterns.

In another building I find an up-to-date engineering machine-shop, a smithy and a moulding shop, where a monster sledge-hammer sounds the active inspiration of the place with each of its power-operated thuds. Scientific instruments, laboratory apparatus, balances and weights are being made in a nearby workshop, and made well enough to have won the patronage of the United Provinces Government. I watch the delicate operations of gold, nickel and brass electro-plating.

The other departments of "Model Industries" are busily producing electric fans, gramophones, knives and furniture. One of the mechanics has invented a special type of sound-box and this, too, will be manufactured in the near future.

I am surprised to discover a fountain-pen workshop and learn that it is the first one to come into existence in India. A long series of experiments has been necessary before the first pen could be marketed. One thing has baffled these industrial pioneers: how to put the iridium tip on gold nibs. They hope to discover the secret one day but meanwhile the nibs are sent to a European firm to undergo the process of tipping.

A complete printing equipment at the Dayalbagh Press looks after the town's print needs, both in the business and literary fields. I inspect samples of its output in three languages—Hindu, Urdu and English. A small weekly newspaper, the *Prem Pracharak*, is also run off the machines and posted to many Radha Soamists living in distant parts of the country.

In every building I find workers who are not merely satisfied but positively enthusiastic. A trade union would be an

utter anomaly in this place. Everyone does his job, whether it be high or low, as though it were a real pleasure and not a task.

The town possesses its own electrical generating installation, which provides the power for all the machinery in factories and for the ventilating ceiling fans in larger houses. In addition, every house is electrically illuminated at communal expense, thus avoiding the necessity of costly meters.

The agricultural section contains a small but modern farm, which is still in an early stage of development. A steam tractor and a steam plough are amongst the mechanical equipment. The chief products are fresh vegetables and cow fodder.

Perhaps the most efficiently organized section is the dairy farm. Nowhere else in India have I seen its like. It constitutes a model dairy fit for exhibition purposes. Every head of cattle is a picked specimen which provides a significant and favourable contrast to the animals one may see no further than Agra. Scrupulous cleanliness is observed in the stalls and I am told that the scientific methods pursued have resulted in a substantially higher yield of milk than that obtained in the average Indian dairy. A pasteurizing and refrigerating plant has enabled those inhabitants of Dayalbagh and Agra who appreciate good, germ-free milk to obtain it for the first time. Another imported appliance is an electrical butter-making machine. All the credit for this section goes to a son of Sahabji Maharaj. That energetic and efficient young man informs me that he travelled to the chief dairying centres of England, Holland, Denmark and the United States in order to learn the most up-to-date methods used in his work.

The supply of water for the farms, as well as for the rest of the town, proved a difficult problem in the colony's early days. An irrigation canal was dug and a waterworks installation erected, but expanding demand forced Sahabji Maharaj to seek additional sources of supply. He enlisted the help of Government engineers, who bored a deep tube-well with successful results.

The colony possesses its own banking institution, a strongly built structure with iron-grilled windows bearing the words: "Radha Soami General and Assurance Bank, Limited." The bank has an authorized capital of twenty lakhs¹ of rupees, and not only transacts private banking business but controls the town's finances.

The Radha Soami Educational Institute stands in the centre of Dayalbagh; it is fitly placed for it is the finest building in the colony. Its two hundred feet of red brickwork look well to a Western eye. The windows are shaped into Gothic arches and surrounded by white marble. Flowering gardens front the edifice.

This modern High School has several hundred students and is managed by a principal and thirty-two qualified teachers. The latter are idealists who are young, enthusiastic and filled with a desire to serve both their pupils and their master, Sahabji Maharaj. A high standard of general education is maintained. No formal religious teaching is given but an effort is made to develop noble character. In addition, Sahabji Maharaj visits the boys from time to time and every Sunday delivers a spiritual talk to the assembled school.

The boys are encouraged to practise sports; hockey, football, cricket and tennis are their favourites. A library with seven thousand books and a curious little museum complete the institute.

Another magnificent building houses the Girls' College, which is conducted on similar lines. It represents a determined effort by Sahabji Maharaj to break down, within his own sphere of influence, the unenviable illiteracy which was forced on Indian women until recently.

The Technical College is the youngest of the educational institutions. It provides courses in mechanical, electrical and automobile engineering, and trains mechanics and foremen for manufacturing industries. Special machines and benches have been placed in the "Model Industries" section for the use of college students, so that class-room instruction goes hand in hand with practical experience under factory conditions.

There are several attractive hostels for the hundreds of pupils who attend the three colleges. Each hostel is light, airy and modern.

The residential part of the town is under the supervision of the Dayalbagh Building Department, which provides the plans and erects all houses. Each street possesses its own pleasant harmony of architecture, and it is evident that artistic unity is one of the ideals of these town-planners. Ugly erections and defective, shoddy buildings are barred, because a prospective tenant is free to choose his style of house only from the

Department's own plans. Four sizes of residence have been standardized at graded and fixed prices. The buyer pays actual cost plus a very small percentage.

The colony maintains a bright little hospital and a maternity home. It has fixed its aim at being self-contained in every way, so that I am hardly surprised when I learn that the uniformed policeman who brings his hand to a smart salute is also a member of the Radha Soami fraternity. Yet his presence raises a piquant note of enquiry in my mind, for I expect that the level of morality in Dayalbagh is so high as to render crime conspicuous by its absence. He is here to protect the place from undesirable intruders.

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When Sahabji Mararaj is able to spare me a little time again from the pressure of his heavy duties, I pay me meed of tribute to his praise-worthy achievement and then tell him of my astonishment at finding such a progressive town in unprogressive India.

"But," I ask, "how do you finance it? You have surely spent a great sum in capital outlay?"

"You will probably have an opportunity later of seeing the money come in," he returns. "The members of the Radha Soami fraternity are themselves financing the colony. There is no complusion on them to do this, nor are subscriptions required from them, but they regard it as a religious duty to give what they can to help Dayalbagh grow. But although we have had to depend on these contributions during the initial stages, my aim is to make it completely self-supporting. I shall not rest until we approach the stage of complete independence."

"You have wealthy supporters, then?"

"Not at all. The rich Radha Soamis can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Our members are all in modest or moderate circumstances. The progress we have made has called for self-sacrifice on the part of many. Thanks to the grace of the Supreme Father, we have been able to find and spend many lakhs of rupees so far. The colony's future is assured, for its income will grow as our fraternity expands; therefore, we shall never be out of funds."

"How many members have you?"

"Our membership is over 110,000 but, of course, only a few thousands have settled here. The Radha Soami fraternity is nearly seventy years old but its greatest growth has been made during the last twenty years. And this progress has occurred, mind you, without public propaganda because we are a semi-secret organization. If we cared to come out into the public eye and propagate our teachings openly, we could increase our membership tenfold. Our members are spread all over India already, but they look to Dayalbagh as their headquarters and visit us as often as they can. They are organized into local groups which meet every Sunday at precisely the same hour when we hold a special meeting at Dayalbagh."

Sahabji pauses to wipe his spectacles.

"Just consider. When we began building this colony we possessed no more than five thousand rupees, which had been presented for the purpose. Our first plot of ground was no larger than four acres; now Dayalbagh covers thousands of acres. Does it not seem that we are indeed growing?"

"How large do you intend to make Dayalbagh?"

"I expect to settle about ten or twelve thousand people here and then we shall stop. A town of twelve thousand people, if it is properly laid out, is large enough. I do not want to copy the monstrous town of your Western countries; they are overcrowded and therefore breed many undesirable qualities. I want to build a garden city where people can work and live happily, where they can have plenty of space and air. It will take a few years more to finish Dayalbagh's growth and then it will be a model community. Incidentally, when I first read Plato's *Republic* I was pleasantly surprised to find in that book many of the ideas I am trying to express here. When Dayalbagh is complete I want it to act as a prototype for the creation of similar communities all over India, or at least one in each province. I shall offer it as my solution of many problems."

"You want India to turn her energies into industrial development?"

"Most certainly. That is her crying need. But—I would not like to see India lose herself completely in it, as you in the West have done," he laughs back. "Yes, India must build up an industrial civilization to rid herself of the poverty which grinds

the masses, but she must build it up on a system which will avoid the fight between capital and labour that would otherwise accompany it."

"How do you propose to do that?"

"By aiming at personal well-being through general well-being and, not at the expense of the community. We work on a co-operative principle and everyone sets the success of Dayalbagh as being higher than personal success. There are pioneers working here for salaries much lower than those they could obtain elsewhere; I refer to trained and educated men, not to illiterate labourers, of course, who do this voluntarily and gladly. This principle works well here only because we are inspired by a spiritual purpose, which is also the motive power behind all our other efforts. Some men, who are in a position to do so, are even giving their services freely. This will show you what a fine spirit and enthusiasm our people have. But when Dayalbagh is fully developed and completely self-supporting, I hope such sacrifices will be unnecessary. Anyway, it is the ideal of making spiritual progress more quickly which has brought these people here, for that is the fundamental aim of our fraternity. If you were to come here and join our colony, you might be worth a thousand rupees a month, but you might have to take only one-third that amount because we cannot afford to pay high salaries. Then, gradually, you might build a house, acquire a wife and beget children. But if, in this process, you begin to think only of the material side to your career and lose sight of the spiritual ideal for which you really joined us, then to that extent you begin to fail. Despite all these material activities you see here, we try never to lose sight of the central purpose for which our fraternity was founded."

"I see."

"Now we are not socialists in your Western sense, but it is a fact that the industries, the farms and colleges are owned by the community. Moreover, this ownership extends to land and houses. You may build a house here but it is only yours whilst you tenant it. Beyond these limits, everyone is perfectly free to possess and accumulate whatever money and property he has and wherever he has it. This, of course, completely divides us from the tyrannies of socialism. All our communal properties and all the money offerings voluntarily made by members are regarded as trusts to be administered in a religious spirit.

Everything is subordinated to our spiritual ideal. This administration is supervised by a body of forty-five members, representative of the various provinces in India, which meets twice a year to scrutinize accounts and consider budgets. The ordinary work and general control is in the hands of an executive committee of eleven members."

"You said before that you would offer Dayalbagh as a solution of the economic problem, which is, perhaps, the chief one to-day."

Sahabji Maharaj smiles confidently.

"Even India may have something useful to contribute on that point," he rejoins. "Let me tell you about a plan which we have lately put into operation in order to quicken our rate of growth during the next few years. This plan, to my mind, embodies economic and social principles of radical importance. We have established an inheritance fund which invites offerings from those of our members who are able to subscribe one thousand rupees and upwards. Every such subscriber then receives an annuity of not less than 5 per cent from our administrative committee. At his death, the same annuity will be paid to his wife, child or whoever else he has previously named. The second person has the same right to name his or her successor to the annuity. But with the death of the third generation, all payment ceases. Should the original subscriber find himself in difficult circumstances or urgent need, then part or even all of his sum may be repaid him. Thus, lakhs of rupees will, in course of time, pour into the coffers of our committee through the inheritance fund, yet the purses of our members will not be laid under heavy toll. Whatever contribution they make, they will be sure of a moderate income in return."²

"I take it that you are trying to find a clear place between the evils of capitalism and the fancies of socialism. Anyway, I am sure you will deserve every bit of your success and I hope it comes quickly."

It becomes clear to me that Dayalbagh possesses assured resources for a successful future in the ever-growing inheritance fund, in the constant stream of voluntary donations and in those industries which have reached a profit-making stage.

"Several well-known leaders in India are watching our experiment and waiting to see its result," says the white-turbaned head of the Radha Soamis. "Some have visited

Dayalbagh and even critics who oppose our ideas have come here. You see, the Indian people are among the weakest and poorest in the world, and its leaders offer conflicting panaceas. Gandhu came here once and engaged me in a long conversation. He wanted me to join his political campaign, but I refused. We have nothing to do with politics here. We believe in concentrating on the practical means of regeneration. Although I do not concern myself with Gandhi's political plans, I scout his economic ideas as being visionary and unpractical."

"He wants India to throw all machinery into the sea."

Sahabji shakes his head.

"India cannot go back to the past; she must go forward and develop the best points of a material civilization, if she is to become more prosperous. My countrymen had better take a lesson from America and Japan. The hand spinner and the hand weaver can no longer stand the onslaught of modern rationalized methods."

And as Sahabji Maharaj expounds his ideas I catch the picture of an alert American mind encased in a brown Hindu body, so efficient and business-like is his manner, so precise is the expression of his thoughts. My rational temperament is attracted by his air of common sense, balance and sanity—qualities not very common in this sub-continent.

I realize anew the curious paradox which his character presents. Master of over one hundred thousand people, who practise a mysterious form of Yoga; prime organizer of the Dayalbagh; taken all in all, I write him down as a brilliant and breath-taking man. Nowhere in India, nowhere in the entire world, may I expect to meet his like again.

His voice breaks into my thoughts.

"You have seen two aspects of our life here in Dayalbagh, but our activities are threefold. Man's own nature is threefold—spirit, mind and body. Therefore we have the workshops and farms for physical work, the colleges for mental growth, and lastly there are the group meetings for spiritual activities. Thus we aim at harmonious and all-round growth for each individual. But we place the greatest emphasis on the spiritual side and every member of our fraternity endeavours to carry out his individual Yoga practices regularly, wherever he may be."

"May I join one of your group meetings?"

"With pleasure. We shall welcome you at every gathering."

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Dayalbagh's activities begin at six o'clock in the morning with the first group meeting. Dawn swiftly rubs away the darkness of night; sweet chirrups mingle with the funereal cries of crows; and all the birds begin their matutinal homage to the sun. I follow my guide to a gigantic canvas structure, which is supported by wooden posts.

A huge crowd of people presses around the entrance, where each person removes his sandals or shoes and hands them to waiting attendants. I follow the requirements of custom and then enter the great tented hall.

A raised platform stands in the centre and His Holiness Sahabji Maharaj sits there in a chair. Hundreds of his followers squat in circling ranks around him, so that the entire floor is carpeted with human bodies. All eyes are turned upon the master, all tongues are still in silent reverence.

I make my way to a place beneath the platform and then squeeze myself into the narrow space. Soon, two men stand up at the rear of the hall and their voices break out into a slow chant. The words are Hindu and the rhythm is extremely agreeable to one's ears. This continues for some fifteen minutes, by which time the strange, sacred words have lulled one into a peaceful mood. And then the voices diminish in volume until they die down altogether.

I look around. Every person in the vast tent is quiet, motionless, sunk in meditation or prayer. I look at the modest, plainly dressed figure on the platform from whose lips no single word has yet come. His face is graver than usual; his alert, active manner has disappeared; and a serene contemplation seems to engage his mind. What thoughts cross and criss-cross under his white turban, I wonder? What responsibility lies upon his shoulders, for all these people regard him as their sacred link with a higher life!

The utter silence lasts for another half-hour. Not a cough, not even a stir! Have all these contemplative Orientals withdrawn their minds into a world barred to the sceptical Westerner? Who knows? But it is a striking prelude to the

forceful activities which will soon make the town hum.

We recover our footgear and quietly disperse homewards.

During the morning hours I enter into conversation with many Radha Soamists, both residents and visiting members. Several of them speak good English. There are turbaned men from the North-West, pig-tailed Tamils from the South, active little Benegalees from the East and bearded figures from the Central Provinces. I am impressed by their air of self-respect and by the shrewd practicality which counterpoises their spiritual aspirations. If their desires soar into the empyrean, their feet still walk firmly on the solid earth. Here, I reflect, is a type of citizen of whom any town might be proud. I like them instinctively and admire them immensely, for they possess that rare quality—character!

A smaller meeting takes place during the afternoon. It is a brief, informal affair intended for the benefit of visiting members. Individual problems are discussed, questions answered and some matters of general concern are dealt with. Sahabji Maharaj reveals an uncommon resourcefulness in the way he disposes of everything which comes up. He adopts a chatty, witty tone, is never at a loss for an answer to the subtlest query, and delivers quick, confident opinions upon the most varied spiritual and material problems. His entire attitude betokens an unusual and successful reconciliation of complete self-confidence with quiet humility. He shows that he possesses an engaging sense of humour, which crops up again and again in merry remarks.

The evening brings another group meeting. Every workshop, store and farm in the colony has closed its activities for the day and a vast gathering once more fills the giant tent. Sahabji Maharaj occupies his platform chair again. I watch a file of his followers approach his seat and voluntarily place contributions for the funds of the board of management at his feet. Two committee members collect and record all these contributions.

The chief event which follows is a lengthy address by the master. His thousands of followers listen to the well-spoken Hindu with absorbed attention, for he has a good oratorical style. He seems to speak from the heart in a picturesque manner which is pregnant with deep feeling. He is so animated by the fiery vigour and ardent enthusiasm that the inspiring effect

upon his hearers becomes almost palpable.



Each day the same unvarying programme is followed. The evening meeting is the longest, for it lasts nearly two hours. It says much for the power of Sahabji Maharaj's mentality that he can keep up this programme without difficulty and with his usual dynamic power. No one knows beforehand what the subject of his evening address will be. I question him upon the point and he replies:

"When I sit down in the chair I am unaware of the subject. Even after I have begun, I do not know what my next sentence will be or even how I will finish. I trust myself unreservedly to the Supreme Father. He tells me instantly whatever I need to know. I take my orders from Him internally. I am actually in His hands."

The words of his first address haunt me for some days. Its theme of surrendering to a master piques my mind until I broach it eventually to Sahabji. We sit on a carpeted piece of ground in the centre of Dayalbagh—it is something like a village green—and develop a friendly discussion.

He reiterates his point and adds:

"The master is absolutely necessary. There is no such thing as self-reliance in the spiritual sphere."

"But did you find one necessary?" I ask boldly.

"Without a doubt. I spent fourteen years searching for a true master before I found him."

"Fourteen years! A fifth of your life! Was it worth while?"

"The time spent in search of a true master is never wasted, even if it is twenty years," he replies, quick as a flash. "Before I became a believer I was as sceptical as you are. And then I grew desperate in trying to discover a teacher who could open the way to spiritual illumination. I was young and simply crazy to find the truth. I asked the trees, the grass, and the sky to enlighten me if truth existed. I sobbed my heart out like a child, with head bent low, begging for light. Finally I could stand the strain no longer. One day I resolved to give up eating and starve to death, unless and until the divine power saw fit to grant me some illumination. I could no longer work even. The next night I had a vivid dream, wherein a master appeared to me and

revealed himself as such. I asked for his address. His answer was: Allahabad! You will know my full address later.' The next day I spoke to a friend who belonged to that town and told him of my dream. He went away and returned with a group photograph and asked me if I could identify the master's face in the group. I at once pointed to it. My friend then explained that he belonged to a semi-secret society in Allahabad and that the figure I indicated was the master. I quickly got into touch with him and became a disciple."

"How interesting!"

"Even if you take up Yoga exercises alone and depend on your own powers, the day your true prayer is heard will be the day when you will be led to meet a master. There is no escape. You must have a guide. A sincere, fully determined seeker will eventually be brought to his real master."

"How is one to recognize him?" I murmur questioningly.

Sahabji's face relaxes and an amused expression flickers across his eyes for a moment.

"The master knows beforehand who is to come to him and he will draw them magnetically to him. His power meets their destiny and the result is inescapable."

A little company of variegated figures has gathered around us and is rapidly increasing. Soon, Sahabji Maharaj will have not one hearer, but two or three score.

"I have been trying to form a clear understanding of your Radha Soami doctrines," I tell him, "But they are hard nuts. One of your disciples has loaned me some writings on the subject by an earlier master of your fraternity, His Holiness Brahm Sankar Misra, with the result that my brain is working overtime."

Sahabji laughs.

"If you want to understand the truths of Radha Soami teachings, you must perform our Yoga practices. We regard the daily performance of these practices as being far more important than theoretical understanding of our doctrines. I am sorry that I cannot explain the detailed methods of meditation we employ, because they are only imparted under a vow of secrecy to those who apply to join us and are accepted. But the basis of them is 'Sound-Yoga,' or 'listening for the internal sound,' as we usually call it."

"The writings I am studying say that sound is the force

which called the universe into being."

"From a material standpoint you understand it correctly, but rather it is that a current of sound was the first activity of the Supreme Being at the beginning of creation. The universe is not the result of blind forces. Now this divine sound is known to our fraternity and can be phonetically transcribed. It is our belief that sounds bear the impress of their source, of the power which created them. Therefore, when one of our members listens internally and expectantly for the divine sound, with controlled body, mind and will, he will become lifted up towards the bliss and wisdom of the Supreme Being as soon as he hears the divine sound."

"Is it not possible to imagine that the sound of the blood beating through one's arteries is the divine sound? What other sound can one hear internally?"

"Ah, we do not mean any material sound, but a spiritual one. The force which appears as sound on our material plane is only a reflection of that subtler force whose workings evolved the universe. Just as your scientists have reduced matter to electricity, so we may trace the force which we hear on the material plane as sound to a higher vibration that escapes our physical ears because it exists on the spiritual plane. A sound carries the influence of the region whence it emanates and so, if you concentrate your attention inwardly in a certain way, you may one day hear the mystic words which sounded forth at the first upheaval in the primeval chaos and which form the true name of the Creator. The echoes of those words reverberate back into man's spiritual nature; to catch those echoes, by means of our secret Yoga practice, and to trace them up to their origin is literally to be carried up to paradise. The man who faithfully carries out our Radha Soami practices which are intended to enable him to hear the mystic sound, will forget himself in utter ecstasy when at last it impinges itself upon his inner ear."

"Your teachings are startlingly novel."

"To the West, but not to India! Kabir taught the Soun-Yoga in Benares as far back as the fifteenth century."

"One hardly knows what to say about them."

"Why the difficulty? You will readily admit that one form of sound—music—can throw a man into emotional ecstasy. Then how much more will the heavenly internal music affect

him?"

"Agreed!—if one could prove that the internal music really does exist."

Sahabji shrugs his shoulders.

"I might present you with several arguments to convince your reason, but I fancy you are looking for something more than that. How can I prove the existence of super-physical states by mere reasoning? It is natural for the unprepared brain to perceive nothing beyond this physical world. If you want the best proof—first-hand experience—of these spiritual truths, then you must persistently follow up a course of Yoga practices. I assure you that the human body is really capable of higher functions than those we commonly know; that the innermost parts of our brain centres are associated with subtle worlds of being; that, after proper training, these centres can be energized until we become aware of these subtler worlds; and that the most important centre of all enables us to obtain divine consciousness of the highest order."

"Are you referring to the brain centres known to anatomists?"

"Partly. They are merely the physical organs through which the subtler centres work; the real activity takes place in the latter. The most important of these centres is the pineal gland, which, as you know is situated in the region between the eyebrows. It is the seat of the spirit-entity in man. Shoot a man through that spot and death is certain and instantaneous. The spirit-currents which flow through the auditory, optic, olfactory and other nerves converge in that gland."

"Our medical men are still puzzled about the chief functions of the pineal gland," I comment.

"And well they might be, considering that it is the focus of the individual spirit-entity which gives life and vitality to man's mind and body. It is when this spirit-entity recedes from the pineal gland that the conditions of dream, deep sleep or trance supervene, and when it finally leaves the gland the body falls dead. Since the human body is an epitome of the entire universe, inasmuch as all the elements employed in the evolution of creation are represented in it on a miniature scale, and since it contains links with all the subtler spheres, it is quite possible for the spirit-entity in us to reach the highest spiritual world. When it leaves the pineal gland and passes upwards, its

passage through the grey matter of the brain brings it into contact with the region of universal mind, and its passage through the white matter exalts its consciousness to lofty spiritual realities. But to attain this spiritual consciousness all the activities of the bodily senses have to be brought to a standstill, otherwise it is not possible to shut off external stimuli. Therefore the essence of our Yoga practices is a complete concentration which turns the current of attention inwards, away from one's environment, until a profound degree of internal contemplation is attained."

I look away, trying to digest this suavely-spoken flow of subtle, recondite ideas. A goodly-sized gathering around us is taking a keen interest in the talk. The tranquil assurance which underlies their master's words attracts me, but . . .

"You say that the only way to verify these statements is to practise your Sound-Yoga exercises. But you keep those exercises secret," I complain.

"Whoever applies for admission to our fraternity and is accepted, will have our methods of spiritual practise communicated verbally to him."

"Can you not give me some personal experience first, some convincing proof at first hand? What you say may be perfectly true—indeed my heart wants to believe it."

"You must join us first."

"I am sorry. That I cannot do. I am built in such a way that it is difficult to give belief before proof."

Sahabji spreads out his hands in a helpless gesture.

"What can I do then? I am in the hands of the Supreme Father."



Day after day I attend all the group meetings as regularly as the members of the society themselves; I meditate silently in their midst and listen to their master's addresses; I question them freely and study such portions of the Radha Soami teachings concerning the universe and man as are made available to me.

Late one afternoon I wander with a disciple about one mile or so away from Dayalbagh to where the jungle begins. Then we turn our feet towards the Jumna and eventually sit down on the banks of that wide river. From the steep and sandy height we

watch the slow-moving water wind its placid way through the plain which stretches to Agra. Now and then a great vulture flaps its way over our heads towards its home.

The Jumna! Somewhere along these banks Krishna moved victoriously among the milkmaids, charming them with his wondrous lute and his love-making. To-day he is probably one of the most worshipped gods in the Hindu pantheon.

"Up till recent years," murmurs my companion, "this place was the abode of wild animals and at night they roamed over the very site on which Dayalbagh has been built. And now they avoid the place."

We sit silently for a couple of minutes and then he says:

"You are the first European to sit in our group meetings, though you will certainly not be the last. We appreciate the understanding and sympathy you have shown. Why don't you join our society?"

"Because I have no faith in faith. Because I realize that it is fatally easy to believe in what you want to believe."

He draws his knees up and rests his chin upon them.

"The contact that you are having with our master will benefit you in any case. I shall not press you to join. We do not attempt to make converts and our members are not allowed to preach."

"How did you learn of the existence of the society?"

"Very simply. My father has been a member for many years. He does not live at Dayalbagh, but visits it from time to time. He brought me with him on some of those visits, but never, on any occasion, did he attempt to induce me to join. About two years ago I began to puzzle over things and went about questioning various friends as to their beliefs. I questioned my father too, and what he told me drew me to the Radha Soami teachings. I was accepted as a member of the fraternity and time has confirmed my faith. I was fortunate, perhaps, because others have come to us only after a lifetime spent in perplexity."

"If I could settle my doubts as easily and as quickly as you settled yours. . . ?" I respond vacantly.

Once again we both revert to silence. The dark blue Jumna water draws my gaze and I slip insensibly into a profound reverie.

All the conscious and unconscious thinking of these Indians is coloured by faith, by the necessity of owning allegiance to some sort of religion, creed or sacred script. Every kind of faith from the most degraded to the most dignified is represented in India.

Once I stumbled across a little temple on the Ganges. Its pillars were covered with carved reliefs depicting men and women engaged in sexual embrace, and its walls were frescoed with erotic scenes which might horrify a Western clergyman. There is room for this kind of thing in Indian religion, and it may well be that the religious recognition of sex is a better thing than its relegation to the gutter, but then—there is also room for faiths embodying the loftiest and purest conceptions possible to man. Such is India!

But nowhere in this land have I come across such an amazing cult as the Radha Soamis. It is undeniably unique. What brain other than Sahabji Maharaj's could have conceived this paradoxical combination of Yoga, the oldest learning in the world, with the high-pressure, mechanized civilization of an up-to-date European or American city?

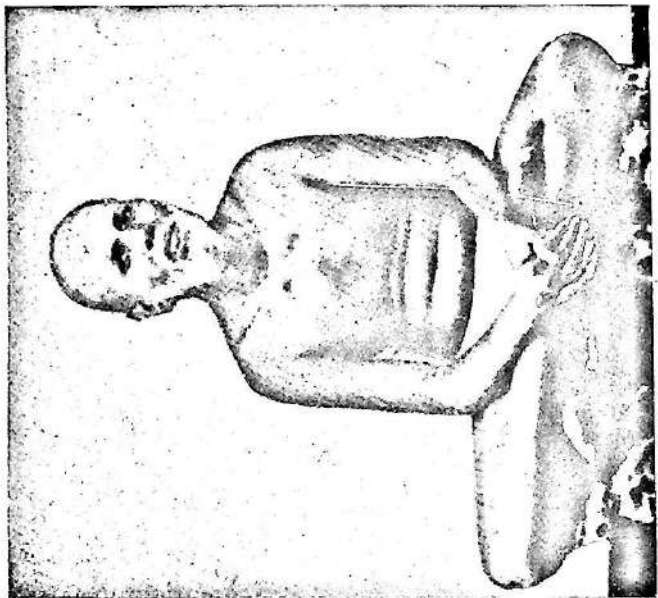
Is Dayalbagh likely to loom forth in Indian history out of all proportion to its present apparent unimportance? If India is a crossword puzzle to which no one seems to have yet found the correct solution, that is not to say that the coming years shall not provide an answer.

Sahabji had laughed at Gandhi's preaching of medievalism, and the town of Ahmedabad, where Gandhi's own headquarters lie, still echoes back this laughter. From the Sabarmati River one can count half a hundred tall factory chimneys, which smoke defiance at the little cluster of white, wooden bungalows where the gospel of peasant handicrafts finds its inspiration.

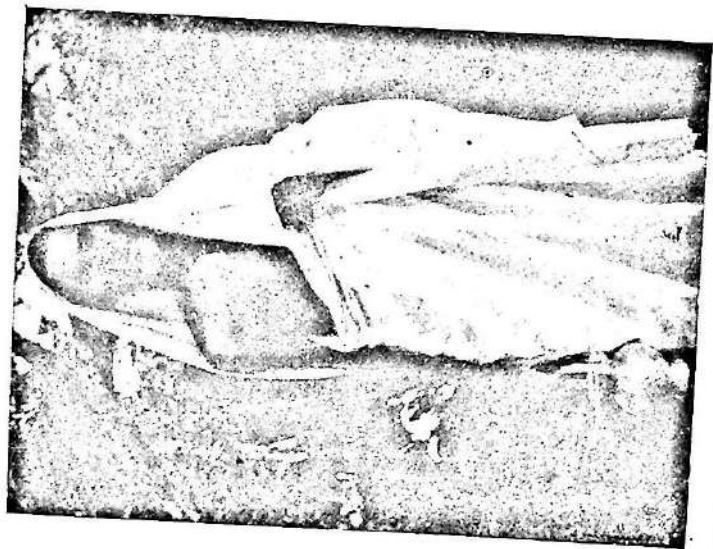
The forceful impact of Western ways has begun to disintegrate India's traditional methods of carrying on the necessary business of living. The first Europeans who appeared off the sea coast of India brought not only bales of goods, but also ideas. When Vasco da Gama landed his rough-bearded sailors in the quiet harbour of Calicut, there began that process of Westernization which is moving at such a quick rate to-day. The industrialization of India has begun in a tentative and timid fashion, but it has begun. Europe has faced in turn the



YOUNG RAMANA, THE FUTURE MAHARISHEE
 'I have, in search of my Father and in obedience to His command, started from here. This is only embarking on a virtuous enterprise. Therefore none need grieve over this affair.'
 See page 284.



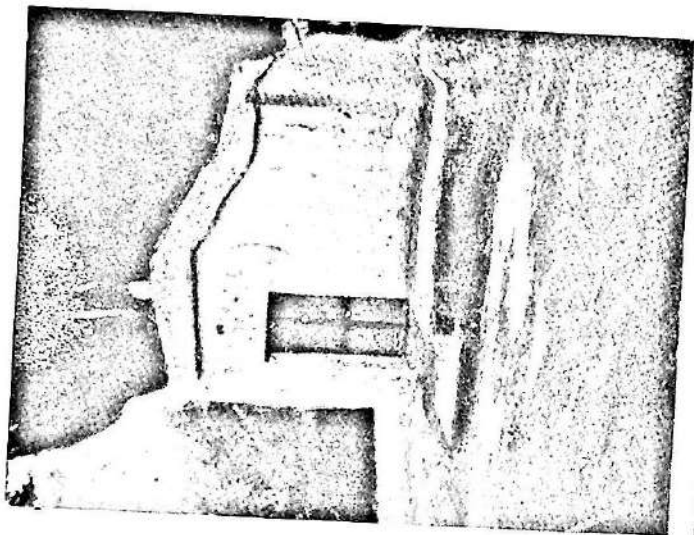
THE MAHARISHEE OR GREAT SAGE
 'He gazes out towards the jungle-covered hills, which stretch to the horizon, and remains motionless. It is impossible to be in frequent contact with him without becoming lit up inwardly, as it were, by a ray from his spiritual orb.'
 See page 280.



YOGI RAMIAH

'I meet him at the pool, whither he has come with a brass pitcher for water. His darkly mysterious, but benignant, countenance again attracts me.'

See page 297.



RAMIAH'S QUAINT ABODE

'He stays in a small stone shelter which he has had constructed under the shadow of some huge boulders.'

See page 297.

Renaissance of intellect, the religious reformation and the industrial revolution, and she has left these things behind. India has awakened and finds them lying in her stride. These are now her problems. Will she blindly imitate the Europeans or will she work out her own—and perhaps better—way of solving them? Will Sahabji Maharaj's unique contribution focus her attention one day?

If I am certain of anything I am certain of this: India will be thrown into a melting-pot of unparalleled character before long. Thousands of years of a society tied up in worn-out traditions, imprisoned in hide-bound religious conventions, will vanish within two or three decades at most. It will seem a miracle, but it will happen.

Sahabji Maharaj has evidently grasped this situation clearly enough. He realizes that we live in a new epoch; the old order of things is being destroyed everywhere, and in India as in other countries. Are Asiatic lethargy and Western practicality to remain twin incompatibilities? He thinks not. Why should not the Yogi put on a worldling's clothing? And so he gives forth the fiat that the Yogi must come out of his habitual seclusion and mingle with the noisy assemblages where men command machines. He thinks it is time for the Yogi to descend into the factory, the office and the school and attempt to spiritualize them—not by preaching and propaganda, but by inspired action. The way of hustling everyday activity can and must be made the way of heaven. A spiritually based way of living like Yoga, which stands too aloof from workaday men, may come to be regarded by them as a deceptive form of self-important stupidity.

If Yoga is to remain the hobby of a few hermits, the modern world will have no use for it and the last traces of the dying science will disappear from existence. If it is to serve only as the delectation of some lean anchorites, we who push pens or ploughs, move amid the grease and grime of engine-rooms, who have to endure the hubbub of stock exchanges and the busy barter of shops, we shall roughly turn our heads away. And the attitude of the modern West will shortly be the attitude of modern India.

Sahabji Maharaj has shrewdly foreseen the inevitable trend of things and has made a striking effort to save the ancient science of Yoga for modern use. This inspiring and strenuous

man will certainly leave his mark upon his native land. He has realized that his country has lain in lethargy long enough. He sees clearly why the West, throbbing with manufacture and trade and its agriculture modernized, lives a wealthier life. He sees also that the culture of Yoga remains one of the valuable inheritances which India has received from her ancient sages, but that the few masters who keep this culture alive in lonely places are a fading remnant of their class; when they die, the real secrets of Yoga will die with them. And so he has come down from the rarefied air of those peaks of thought to our own times, to the energetic strivings of the twentieth century, and is endeavouring to relate the two.

Is his effort too fantastic? On the contrary, it is highly admirable. We live in days when Muhammed's tomb in Arabia is illumined by electric light, when the camel is being pushed off the desert sands of Morocco by luxuriously fitted motor cars. What then of India? This vast country, startled from the sleep of many hundred years by the impact of a completely opposite culture, must go on opening its heavy-lidded eyes. The English have done more than turn sandy deserts into fertile fields; than build canals and dams to assist agriculture and regulate the floods of great rivers; than fling an impenetrable barrier of highly efficient soldiers across the North-West Frontier to keep peace and property secure; than bring in a healthy breeze of sane, rational ideas.

Out of the grey North and distant West came the white men. Fate placed India at their feet and the country became theirs with but a few efforts.

Why?

Perhaps the world, incubating over Asiatic wisdom and Western science, will one day hatch out civilization that will shame antiquity, deride modernity and amaze posterity.

The trail of my meditation comes to an end. I raise my head and address a questioning word to my companion. I do not think he hears me. He continues to stare across the river, which reflects the last red light of sunset. It is the twilight hour. I watch the great orb make its rapid disappearance from the sky. The stillness is indescribable; all nature, dumb at the lovely sight, seems to have come to momentary rest. My heart drinks in the superb peace. Once more I glance at the other man. His figure is now wrapped in the shroud of fast-gathering dusk.

So we sit in the dead silence for a few more minutes until the sun slips suddenly into black night.

My companion rises and quietly leads me through the shadows back to Dayalbagh. Our walk terminates under a canopy of thousands of starry points of light.

†

Sahabji Maharaj decides to leave Dayalbagh and go down to a place in the Central Provinces for a well-earned rest. I take the event as our destined time of farewell and plan a move in the same direction. We shall travel together as far as Timarni and then our ways will diverge.

About one hour after midnight we descend on Agra Station. A score of close disciples accompany their master and so the size of our party is quite noticeable. Someone procures a chair for Sahabji, and while he sits in the midst of his devoted followers I pace the half-lit platform.

During the day I have reviewed my stay at Dayalbagh and realize with regret that no memorable inner experience has occurred, no soul-upheaving vision of life's secret meaning has been vouchsafed to me. I had hoped that some illuminating Yogic expansion of consciousness might pierce my mental gloom for an hour or two, so that I could then follow up the track of Yoga with sight and not with faith. But no, the benediction is not for me. Perhaps I am not worthy of it; maybe I demand far too much; I do not know.

From time to time I glance at the seated figure. Sahabji Maharaj possesses a magnetic personality which fascinates me. He is a curious mixture of American alertness and practicality, British predilection for correct conduct and Indian devoutness and contemplativeness. He is a type which is rare in the modern world. Over one hundred thousand men and women have entrusted the guidance of their inner lives to this man, yet he sits there in quiet modesty and humility, this unassuming master of the Radha Soamis.

At last our train roars into the station and a giant headlight throws an uncanny illumination upon the scene through which the rails pass. Sahabji enters his reserved compartment and the rest of us sort ourselves into other carriages. I stretch myself out for a few hours' sleep and know nothing more until I awake

in the morning with an incredibly dry throat.

At every halt which the train makes during the next few hours, followers of Sahabji who live in the vicinity or even many miles away crowd around his compartment window. They have been notified of his journey in advance and eagerly seize the opportunity of obtaining this brief contact, for it is said in India that even a minute's contact with a master will produce important spiritual and material results.

I seek and obtain Sahabji's permission to spend my last three hours with him in his own compartment. We fall into a long talk about world conditions, about the nations of the West, about India's future and about the future of his own cult. At the end he tells me in his pleasant, suave manner:

"Let me assure you that I have no consciousness of India being my own country. I am cosmopolitan in outlook and look on all men as my brothers."

Such amazing frankness delights me. It is so with all his conversations. He always goes straight to the point; he shoots every sentence at a definite target, and he has the full courage of his convictions. To converse with him, to commune with his mind, is a welcome experience. Always he comes out with some unexpected phrase, some new view-point on things.

The train now moves across country at an angle which brings an intolerable sun through the window and into my eyes. The torrid heat bakes one's flesh, the merciless rays weary one's mind. I pull up the wooden sun-blind, that peculiar structure which is so curiously like a Venetian blind, and switch on the electric fan, thus gaining a slight relief from the midday heat. Sahabji Māharaj notices my discomfort and draws some oranges out of a travelling bag. He puts them on the small table and asks me to share them with him.

"They will cool your throat," he observes.

As his knife slowly parts the coloured peel, he remarks musingly:

"You are right in being so careful about taking anyone as your master. Scepticism is a useful attitude before you decide on him, but afterwards you must have full faith. Don't rest until you find your spiritual preceptor. He is absolutely essential."

Before long there is a grinding sound and someone noisily shouts:

“Timarni!”

Sahabji Maharaj rises to depart. Something awakens in me before his disciples can come and capture him. It breaks my reserve, ignores my Western pride, crushes my anti-religious temperament and speaks through my lips.

“Your Holiness, may I have your blessing?”

He turns with a friendly smile, beams pleasantly through his glasses, and, cordially pats my shoulder.

“You have that already!” he assures me in farewell.

I return to my compartment and the train moves rapidly away. Dun-coloured fields flash by the window. Little groups of drowsy-eyed cattle munch contentedly on the sparse herbage. My eyes register them only half-consciously, for my mind is carrying away a picture of a notable man, whom I greatly like and profoundly admire. For he is at once an inspired dreamer, a serenely-minded Yogi, a practical man of the world and a polished gentleman!

1 A lakh is the equivalent of 100,000.

2 European economists have long been familiar with an almost identical scheme evolved by Professor Rignano, of Italy, who proposed to modify the law of inheritance in such a way as to cause the least opposition and entail the least sacrifice.

XIV

At the Parsee Messiah's Headquarters

The trail from Agra to Nasik is a long one, but I shall make no more mention of it than this short paragraph, so that the record of my wanderings may come to its allotted end.

The wheel of time turns its inevitable course and so carries me around India on its spokes. Once again I am to see Meher Baba, the Parsee holy man and self-styled "new messiah."

It is with no keen desire that I return to him. The cold serpents of doubt have firmly coiled themselves around my mind, and a strong inner feeling tells me that my proposed stay near him will be waste of time, and that Meher Bab, though a good man and one living an ascetic life, is unfortunately suffering from colossal delusions about his own greatness. Incidentally, I have taken the trouble to investigate during my travels the few so-called miracles of healing which he is alleged to have performed. One is a case of appendicitis, and the sufferer's simple faith in Meher is said to have completely cured him. But strict enquiry shows that the doctor who has attended this man could discover nothing worse than severe indigestion! In another case a nice old gentleman, who has been reported cured overnight of a whole catalogue of ailments, seems to have had little more than a swollen ankle! In short, the marvellous healing power of their master has been grossly exaggerated by his disciples, whose exuberant fervour is understandable enough in a country where fable often runs faster than fact.

I do not believe that the Parsee messiah can keep the extraordinary promises of wonderful experiences which he has made me; but because I have agreed to spend a month near him. I think my pledge is not to be lightly broken. So, against every instinct and all judgment, I take train for Nasik, that he may not accuse me of never having given him the chance to prove his alleged powers.

Meher has set up his headquarters in some modern houses on the extreme outskirts of the town. A retinue of forty disciples wander aimlessly about the place.

"What are you thinking about?" is one of the first questions to me when we meet. I feel tired and travel-worn; he has probably mistaken my haggard appearance for the pallor of profound meditation, but no matter, my reply is instantly forthcoming.

"I am thinking of the dozen or more messiahs whom I have discovered in India since I have been here."

Meher Baba does not seem surprised.

"Yes," he rejoins with fingers moving slickly across his alphabet board, "I also have heard of some of them."

"How do you explain it?" I ask innocently.

His forehead contracts into wrinkles, but his mouth smiles in a superior sort of way.

"If they are honest, then they are mistaken. If they are dishonest, then they are deceiving others. There are holy men who make good progress and then develop spiritual 'swelled-head.' Such a sad state of affairs usually arrives when they have no proper master to advise and guide them. There is a point which is midway along the mystical path and which is most difficult to cross; it often happens that the person whose devotions have brought him to this point foolishly believes that he has reached the highest goal. It takes little more for him to imagine himself a messiah!"

"An excellent and logical explanation. But unfortunately I have heard very much the same thing from the other men who claim to be messiahs. Each asserts that he is perfect; each allots imperfection to his rivals!"

"Do not worry about it. All these people are unconsciously helping to do my work. I know who I am. When the time comes for me to fulfil my mission, the world will also know who I am."

It is not possible to argue rationally in such an atmosphere, so I let the matter drop. Meher Baba indulges in some pleasant platitudes and then he dismisses me.

I settle down to live in a bungalow which is two or three minutes' walk from his headquarters. I resolve ruthlessly to thrust my feelings aside and keep a perfectly open mind to the events of the coming four weeks. There shall be no mental

hostility to Meher, no inner attitude of scepticism, but rather a mood of expectant waiting.

Each day I associate closely with the disciples: I see their manner of existence, study their psychological make-up and probe into the history of their spiritual relationship to Meher. Each day the Parsee messiah gives me a little of his time. We talk about many things and he answers many questions, but not once does he make any reference to the strange promises which he gave me at Ahmednagar. I resolve to make no attempt to jog his memory and so the matter seemingly falls into abeyance.

One result of the constant rain of questions which I let fall upon him and his disciples—partly out of my journalistic instinct of curiosity and partly out of a sincere desire to find enough facts, either to buttress my intuitions of the futility of my visit or to dispose of them altogether—is that he places at my disposal a set of secret diaries which have been kept by his command for several years. They contain a connected history of the chief events concerning the messiah and his group of followers, and a record of every important teaching, message and prophecy which he has verbally given out. These books cover nearly two thousand pages of closely written manuscript, which is mostly composed in English.

The diaries have clearly been compiled in a spirit of blind faith, but I find them to be a valuable searchlight upon Meher's character and powers. The very honesty of these pages, despite their devoutness, in recording matters which might seem trivial to an outsider excellently serves my purpose, for I view these matters as psychological straws that show which way Meher's mind is moving. The two disciples who have kept these diaries are young men with only a fragmentary experience of life beyond their extremely limited circle, but their very naïveté and complete trust in their master have caused them to place on record things which are really uncomplimentary to him.

Why have they recorded that Meher struck one of his most intimate disciples a stinging blow on the ears during a train journey to Muttra, a blow so severe that the unfortunate follower had to seek medical attention? Why have they recorded the lame excuse of their master, this man who preaches a gospel of divine love, that when a messiah pretends to show anger towards one of his devotees, the sins of the latter which are awaiting punishment are thereby heavily reduced?

Why have they recorded the comical incident of the disciple who was "lost" at Arangaon for whom Meher sent out a search party which returned after several hours without its quarry. He turned up of his own accord ultimately and explained that having suffered with insomnia for several nights, he had unexpectedly fallen asleep in a disused building which stood close to Meher's own abode! The master, who claims to have been taken into the council of the gods and to know the future of all mankind, did not know that his "lost" disciple was in the next field.

I find enough matter, therefore, to feed the doubts which live repressed existences in my own mind. I find also that Meher Baba is a fallible authority, a man subject to constantly changing moods, and an egotist who demands complete obedience on the part of his brain-stupefied followers. And lastly, I find in these pages that he is a prophet whose predictions are seldom verified. At our first meeting near Ahmednagar he prophesied a coming world-war, but refused to say when it is going to happen, although he was careful to impress me with the claim that he knows the date. Now, in these diaries, I discover that he has made the same prophecy to his intimate disciples, and that he has made it not once but several times. On each occasion he has had to give a different date for that calamitous event because, as each date arrives, no war arrives. One year, when things look ominous in Asia, he has placed the outbreak in the East; another year, when things look dark in Europe, and when he has forgotten his earlier failure, he has placed it in the West and so on. His caution in hesitating to give me a date at Ahmednagar now becomes comprehensible. I tax one of the more intelligent disciples with this series of unfulfilled predictions and he candidly admits that most of his master's prophecies are generally wrong. "I doubt whether the war will ever take place as an ordinary war, but it will probably happen as an economic war!" he concludes naively.

Though I turn the last page of these astonishing diaries with a smile, I candidly confess to myself that I have read lofty and soul-elevating discourses in them, and that Meher Baba possesses religious genius. Whatever success he may have will arise from that last quality. But I do not forget one of his own sayings, recorded somewhere in these pages, that "Ability in advising others about virtue is no proof of saintliness, nor is it a

mark of wisdom."

†

It is better to pass over the rest of my stay in prudent silence. If I am living in the company of a world deliverer and redeemer of mankind, there is little to make me aware of my good fortune. This, perhaps, is because I am more interested in tangible facts than mythical legends. I shall not enter into the tale of childish actions and unfulfilled predictions, blind obedience to irrational orders on the part of disciples, and messianic advice which only increases the troubles of those who follow it.

Meher Baba seems to be avoiding contacts with me as my stay draws to its close, or it may be my fancy. When I do see him, he is always in a tremendous hurry, and rushes away a few minutes after. Each day I become conscious of my false position, and it is possible that Meher himself knows the discomfort which increasingly troubles me.

I wait for the wonderful experiences he has promised me, though I never expect them to arrive. My expectations are completely fulfilled! Nothing unusual happens nor do I see anything unusual happening to the other men. I make no effort to put Meher under a stringent interrogatory, merely because I realize the futility of such a proceeding. However, with the passing of the month I announce my impending departure and then tax Meher Baba with his failure to redeem his words. For answer he lightly transfers the date of his promised marvels to a couple of months later, and then dismisses the matter! I may be mistaken, but I fancy that in inward nervousness is affecting him, a peculiar impatience with my presence, a condition which I sense rather than see with my eyes. Yet I make no attempt to argue with him, for I see that it is useless to pit my straightforward direct question in unequal combat with his elusive Oriental mind.

Even at the last moment of parting, when I bid an amicable adieu and polite farewell for ever to Meher Baba, he talks as though there can be no question but that he *is* the world teacher for whom many are waiting. He even asserts that when he is ready to go to the West one day and spread his work there, he will send for me and I shall have to travel with him!¹

Such is the result of my foolish attempt to take this man at his word. What can one say of *soi-disant* "divine teachers" who promise an ecstasy of the spirit, but give instead an exasperation of the mind?



Is it possible to find any acceptable explanation of Meher Baba's strange career and curious conduct? A superficial estimate of the man may easily dismiss him as a rogue or as a charlatan. This has been done, but does not explain several things in his life and is manifestly unjust. I prefer to accept the opinion of old Judge Khandalawalla, of Bombay, who has known Meher Baba since the latter was a boy, and who told me that this Parsee messiah was simply an honest but mistaken man. This explanation is good as far as it goes, but for me it does not go far enough.

A little analysis of Meher Baba's character will make my theory more comprehensible. I have already mentioned that, at our first meeting near Ahmednagar, I was impressed by the peace and gentleness of his attitude. But observation during my stay at Nasik revealed, through everyday incidents, that this was the calmness of a weak character and the gentleness of a frail physique. I discovered that he is really an irresolute man, influenced by others and by circumstances. His small pointed chin is eloquent on this point. Moreover, sudden unaccountable impulses mark his conduct. He is obviously a highly emotional man. His passion for the theatrical, his childish but Oriental fondness for spectacular demonstrations also evidence the fact that he loves to dramatize himself. He seems to live more for an audience than for himself. And although he claims to have appeared on the stage of life in a serious part, those who see only an element of comedy in his acting are not wholly to blame!

My own theory is that the old Muhammedan woman faqueer, Hazrat Babajan, did really create an upheaval in Meher Baba's character that upset his equilibrium, in fact, so completely as to precipitate him into a condition which neither he nor those around him understand. My own experience with the remarkable lady, brief though it was, convinces me that she possessed some strange power sufficient to startle the most

hide-bound rationalist. I do not know why Hazrat Babajan should have suddenly intervened in Meher Baba's career, swept him off at a tangent and started him on a course whose outcome—whether merely farcical or really momentous—we have yet to witness. But I do know that she was quite capable of doing to him something which, metaphorically speaking, took the earth from under his feet.

The kiss which she gave him was nothing in itself, but became important as the symbolic conveyance of her psychic inner grace. The peculiar cerebral condition which he developed as a result is significant in view of his later history. "My mind received a great shock which caused it violent vibrations for some time," he told me once in reference to this event. He was clearly quite unprepared for it. He had gone through no training and no discipline to fit himself for what might be tantamount to a Yogic initiation. "When I was a friend of Baba in his youth," said his disciple Abdullah, "I never found him interested in religion or philosophy. He was always keener on sports, games and fun. He played a principal part in our school debates and activities. His sudden departure into spiritual matters took us by surprise."

I believe that the youthful Meher became quite different as a result of this unexpected experience. This was obvious enough when he fell into a condition of semi-idiocy and behaved like a human robot, but it is not so obvious now that he has recovered sanity. I do not believe that he has returned to normality as a human being. To some people, a sudden overdose of religion, Yogic trance, or mystic ecstasy is as unbalancing as a sudden overdose of certain drugs. In short, I believe that Meher Baba has not yet recovered from the first intoxication of his exalted mood, and a lack of balance still exists as a result of the tremendous derangement which occurred to his mental faculties at such an early age. On no other hypothesis can I account for the extraordinary behaviour which he manifests from time to time.

He shows, on the one hand, all the qualities of a mystic—love, gentleness, religious intuition, and so on, but on the other hand he shows signs of extreme self-centredness. He sees everything revolving around his own self. This condition is also found among religious enthusiasts who experience sudden but temporary states of ecstasy. They emerge with the

awareness that something colossal has happened to them. It is only another step for them to make unwarranted claims to spiritual greatness, and so they begin to found new cults or to set up queer societies with themselves at the head. The deification of self, the belief that they are messiahs destined to save all mankind, is the final step taken by the audacious few.

In India I find that there are men who want the exalted consciousness which Yoga promises its votaries, but are unwilling to pay the price in training and discipline which it demands. So they take drugs, such as opium and hasheesh, and thus obtain a colourable imitation of that transcendental consciousness. I have watched the behaviour of these drug addicts and discovered that one quality (or vice) is common to all of them. They exaggerate tremendously the small or great phenomena of their lives, and will tell you outright lies in the firm belief that they are telling you the truth! Hence the development of paranoia, which is an exaggeration of self-consciousness to the point of complete delusion.

The drug addict may notice a woman glance carelessly at him. At once he weaves a whole romance with her in his mind. His world revolves entirely around his own glorified self. He will make such fantastic assertions about his own wonderful powers that one wonders whether he is in full possession of his faculties. And his actions spring out of sudden, inexplicable impulses.

Some of the unbalanced qualities which mark the characters and lives of such unfortunate persons are a consequence of the change of consciousness which they have artificially brought about. We should remember this as a warning of the mind's possible vagaries when we turn from them to study those religious devotees who make higher claims. To borrow a phrase from Nietzsche, the Parsee messiah is "human, all-too-human."

Much ado is made in regard to the time when he will break his silence. One wonders whether he will ever dare to do so, but it needs no great discernment to see that his voice, if at long last it comes forth, will fall futile upon the world's ears. Words cannot work miracles. His rash prophecies may or may not be realized; what matters is that the prophet dares to class himself with such figures as Jesus and Buddha, but I felt no inspiration emanating from him not even what might be expected from an

ordinary holy man, let alone from one invested with a divine mission. The message of such a man must necessarily fall on deaf and unheeding ears.

What of his ardent followers? Will Time come with cold hands and take them away? That depends upon the degree of intellectual and spiritual maturity they possess and also upon their breadth of practical experience and ability to read character. India suffers from the defects of an uninstructed and over-religious race, untrained in those scientific modes of thought which demand the divorce of emotion from reason, history from hearsay, and fact from imagination. It is easy enough to gather a flock of enthusiastic followers, whether from sincere aspirants, foolish and inexperienced persons, or those who deem it wise to attach themselves and their fortunes to stars of greater magnitude than themselves.

I have neither the space nor the patience to point them out, but it is a fact that Meher Baba has committed blunders at every step of his career. So have I. But he claims to be a divinely inspired messiah, whereas I am only too painfully aware of my limitations as an ordinary mortal. My point is that his followers will never admit that Meher Baba can commit blunders. Always they naively assume that some mysterious esoteric purpose lies behind everything he says or does. They are content to follow blindly, as indeed they must, for reason soon rebels at what they have to swallow. My own experience with him only tended to confirm and deepen that cynicism which has taken the allegiance of so much of my life, and to strengthen that radical scepticism which hid the inner sensitivity that guided my wanderings around this sub-continent.

All over the East there have been recurring hints of a coming event which is to prove the greatest thing history has given us for many hundred years. The prophecy of a Coming rears its head among the brown faces of India, the stocky people of Tibet, the almond-eyed masses of China, and the old grey-beards of Africa. To the vivid and devout Oriental imagination, the hour is ripe and our restless time bears outward portent of the near approach of this event. What more natural than for Meher Baba to regard his sudden psychological change as an indication of his own messianic destiny? What more natural than his fondly cherished belief that one day he will announce himself to an awe-stricken world? What more

natural than for his own obedient flock to take it upon themselves to spread the news of their messiah's advent? Such methods as Meher Baba used are somewhat too distasteful to appeal to those who are sufficiently informed about the history of religions. They do not satisfy either reason, intuition or spiritual etiquette. I have a shrewd suspicion as to what form the future actions of this spectacular "saint" will take. But time will reveal them for the world's entertainment better than the present writer.

And as this long reflection draws to an end, I realize that I need not deny that many high and sublime sayings have been communicated through the lithe fingers of Meher Baba. But, when he descends from his religious inspirations, as descend he must, and stoops to talk of his own personal greatness and personal fortunes, it is time to put on one's shoes again.¹

¹ He went to the West in due course, but his prediction as regards myself proved utterly fallacious.

XV

A Strange Encounter

I wander about Western India for the second time in a leisurely and indeterminate manner. Tired of travelling in dusty railway trains and seatless bullock-carts, I take to an old, but sturdy touring car with a Hindu who plays the threefold part of companion, chauffeur and servant.

We move on through several changes of scenery, while the miles speed away under our tyres. In the forest areas the chauffeur stops at nightfall, if unable to reach a village in time, and halts till dawn breaks. Throughout the night he keeps a large fire burning, feeding it with twigs and bushes. He assures me that the flames will keep wild beasts from approaching us. Leopards and panthers haunt the forests, but such is the fear which a simple fire seems to inspire in them that they keep at a respectful distance. Not so the jackals. Among the hills we hear their lugubrious barking quite close to us at times. And during the daytime we meet on occasions with vultures soaring out of their eyries into the brassy sky.

Late one afternoon, while we are motoring along a road which is thickly covered with dust, we overtake a queer couple sitting by the wayside. One is a middle-aged holy man, crouching on his hams and apparently contemplating his navel under the thin shade of some scanty-leaved bushes; the other is his youthful attendant, probably a disciple. The older man's hands are joined, his eyes are half shut, in meditation, and he sits perfectly unmoved as we pass. We do not succeed in winning so much as a glance from him, although his youthful devotee stares in a dull way at our car. Something in the man's face attracts me and decides me to stop a little way off. My Hindu companion goes back to question them and I watch him nervously approach the couple. At length he gets into a lengthy conversation with the young man.

When he returns he informs me, amongst a multitude of trivial details, that the couple are indeed master and disciple, that the older man's name is Chandī Das, and that according to

the youngster's tribute, he is a Yogi gifted with exceptional faculties. They are wandering from village to village and have already covered a great distance, partly on foot and partly by train, since they left their native Bengal nearly two years ago.

I offer them a lift which they immediately accept, the older man with benign grace and the younger one with impulsive gratitude. And so, half an hour later, the car deposits a strangely mixed crew in the next village, where we resolve to spend the night.

No other soul has been in sight on the route except, when nearing the village, a boy tending a small herd of scraggy cows. The afternoon is drawing to its end as we stand beside the village well and drink some refreshing though dubiously coloured liquid. The forty or fifty huts and cottages which make up the village's single straggling street, with their unevenly thatched grass roofs, low irregular mud walls and rough bamboo uprights, depress me a little with their squalid appearance. A few inhabitants squat in the shade before their unattractive dwellings. A grey, sad woman with half-hidden shrivelled breasts approaches the well, stares at us, fills her brass pitcher with water, and sets out for home again.

My Hindu companion collects the things for making tea and goes off in search of the village headman's house. The Yogi and his faithful attendant disciple squat in the dust and rest. The former knows no English and I have already discovered in the car that the latter possesses a smattering of the language, though hardly adequate enough to carry on a proper conversation. After a few attempts I found it more profitable to wait until we could all settle down in the evening for the interview, I am determined to secure, when I can call on the services of my Hindu interpreter.

Meanwhile a little group of men, women and children has collected around us. These inhabitants of the interior seldom come into contact with Europeans. I have often found it an interesting experience to talk to some of them, if only for the unsophisticated and innocent view-point of life which such talks disclose. The children are shy at first, but I win them by distributing a few annas. They regard my alarm watch with incredulous wonder and naive delight, as I set the dial and let the little peals ring forth for their benefit.

A woman approaches the Yogi, prostrates herself before

him in the open street, touches his feet and then puts her fingers to her own forehead.

My Hindu servant returns with the headman and with the announcement that tea is ready. He is a college graduate, but is quite content to act as bearer, chauffeur and interpreter, for he is seeking to fathom my Western experience and lives in the constant hope that one day I will take him to Europe. I treat him as a companion and with that friendliness which I feel his good intelligence and character deserve.

Meanwhile someone has captured the Yogi and his disciple and taken them off to a hut for hospitality. Certainly these village folk are kindlier than their brethren of the towns.

As we walk down to the headman's house, I watch the west reddening behind the distant hills as an orange sun flickers out its life. We halt at a superior-looking cottage, and inside I take the opportunity of thanking the headman.

"The honour of your visit overwhelms me," he replies simply.

We rest awhile after the tea. The shadows of a brief twilight now lie across the fields and I can hear the cattle being driven into the village for the night. Later my servant goes out to visit the Yogi and succeeds in preparing the way for me. He leads me to the door of one of the humbler huts.

I enter the square, low-roofed room and my feet tread an earthen floor. Hardly any furniture is to be seen, though a few clay pots lie around a rude hearth. A bamboo pole stuck into the wall acts as a kind of wardrobe, for clothes and rags hang upon it. One corner is graced with a brass water-jug. I think how bare the place looks in the pale light of the primitive lamp. Such are the cheerless comforts of a poorer peasant's home.

The Yogi's disciple greets me with his broken English, but his master is not visible. The latter has been called to the side of an ailing mother for his blessing. I wait for his return.

At length there is a sound outside in the street and then a tall figure appears on the threshold. He enters the room gravely. Seeing me, he makes a gesture of acknowledgment and murmurs some words. My bearer whispers the translation:

"Greetings, sahib. May the gods protect you!"

He refuses my offer of a cotton blanket to squat on and drops to the floor, where he crosses his legs. We confront each other, and I take the opportunity to study him more closely.

The man before me is probably fifty years of age, though the short rugged beard on his chin gives him an older appearance. His hair hangs down in tangled strands to his neck; his mouth is serious and always unsmiling. But what struck me most when we first met strikes me anew at this moment—the strange glitter of his coal-black eyes, their lustrous brilliance. I know that such unearthly eyes will continue to haunt me for days.

“You have travelled far?” he asks quietly.

I nod assent.

“What do you think of the Master Mahasaya?” he demands suddenly.

I am startled. How has he come to know that I have been to his native Bengal and visited Mahasaya in Calcutta? I gaze at him for a while in bewilderment and then recall myself to his question.

“He is a man who has won my heart,” I reply. “But why do you ask?”

He ignores my counter-question. There is an embarrassing silence. I try to keep up the conversation by saying:

“I am looking forward to seeing him again when I revisit Calcutta. Does he know you? Shall I carry your greetings?”

The Yogi shakes his head firmly.

“You will never see Mahasaya again. Even now Yama, the god of death, is calling to his spirit.”

Another pause. And then I tell him:

“I am interested in the lives and thoughts of Yogis. Will you not tell me how you came to be one and what wisdom you have gained?”

Chandi Das does not encourage my attempt to interview him.

“The past is but a heap of ashes,” he answers. “Do not ask me to poke my finger in the ashes and pick out dead experiences. I live neither in the past nor the future. In the depths of the human spirit, these things are no more real than shadows. That also is the wisdom I have learnt.”

This is disconcerting. His stiff hieratic attitude upsets my composure.

“But we who live in the world of time must take account of them,” I object.

“Time?” he queries. “Are you sure there is such a thing?”

I fear that our talk is becoming fantastic. Does this man

really possess the wonderful gifts which his disciple claims on his behalf? Aloud I say:

"If time did not exist, then the past and the future would both be here now. But experience tells us to the contrary."

"So? What you mean is that *your* experience, the world's experience, tells you that!"

"Surely, you do not suggest that you have a different experience of the matter?"

"There is truth in your talk," comes the strange answer.

"Am I to understand that the future shows itself to you?"

"I live in the eternal," replies Chandi Das. "I never seek to discover the events that coming years will pass over my head."

"But you can for others?"

"If I wish—yes!"

I am determined to get the thing clear in my mind.

"Then you can give them an understanding of events which are yet to happen?"

"Only in part. The lives of men do not move so smoothly that every detail is ordained for them."

"Then will you reveal that part of my future which you can discover?"

"Wherefore do you seek to know these things?"

I hesitate.

"God has not dropped a veil over what is to come without fit cause," continues the other man almost sternly.

What can I say? And then an inspiration comes.

"Grave problems vex my mind. In the hope of finding some light upon them I have come to your land. Perhaps in what you can tell me there may be guidance for my feet, or perhaps I shall know whether I have come on a fruitless errand."

The Yogi turns his shining black eyes upon me. In the silence which ensues I am impressed once more by the grave dignity of this man. He seems so profound, so pontifically wise as he sits there with folded legs and interlocked feet, as to transcend his mean surroundings in this poor hut of a remote jungle village.

I notice, for the first time, a lizard watching us from the upper part of a wall. Its bead-like eyes never leave us, and its grotesquely wide mouth is so fantastic that I almost believe it is grinning wickedly at me.

At last Chandi Das finds his voice.

"I am not adorned with the polished jewels of learning, but if you will listen to what I have to say, then your journey will not be fruitless. Go back to the same place where you started your Indian journey and, before a new moon will have arisen, you shall have your desire satisfied."

"Do you mean that I should return to Bombay?"

"You speak rightly."

I am puzzled. What can that hybrid half-Western city hold for me?

"But I have never found anything there to help on my quest," I protest.

Chandi Das looks at me coolly.

"There is your path. Follow it as quickly as your heels can carry you. Lose no time, but hasten back to Bombay to-morrow."

"Is that all you can tell me?"

"There is more, but I have not troubled to perceive it."

He reverts to silence. His eyes become as expressionless as still water. A while later he speaks:

"You will leave India and return to the Western lands before the next equinox. A grievous illness will fall upon your body almost as soon as you leave our soil. The spirit will struggle in the racked body, but not yet is its hour of escape. And then the hidden work of destiny will come to light, for it will send you back to Aryavarta (India) so that in all you visit us thrice. A sage awaits you even now and for his sake, since you are tied to him by ancient threads, you will come back to dwell among us."²

His voice stops and faint tremor passes across his eyelids. When, later, he looks directly at me, he adds:

"You have heard. There is nothing more to say."

The rest of our talk is desultory and unimportant. Chandi Das refuses to enter into further discussion about himself, so that I am left wondering how to receive his strange words, although I feel that there is more behind them.

There is an amusing moment, when, in the course of a brief conversation with his youthful disciple, the latter asks me earnestly:

"Do you not see such things among the Yogis of England?"

I try to restrain a smile.

"There are no Yogis in that country," I answer.

Everyone else has sat still and silent throughout the evening, but when the Yogi signifies that the interview is over, the owner of the hut, a peasant probably, approaches us and asks if we will share his humble meal with him. I tell him that we have brought some food in the car and that we will go over to the headman's house to cook it, since the headman had promised to accommodate us in a room of his house for the night. But the peasant replies that he will not have it said that he has forgotten how to be hospitable. I tell him that I have eaten well to-day and beg him not to trouble. However, he is firm and insistent, so, rather than disappoint him, I accept.

"It ill becomes me to receive a guest and give him no food," he remarks, when he offers a dish of fried grain.

I look through the barred hole which serves as a window. The opal crescent of the moon thrusts a pale light through the hole as I reflect upon the superior character and kindliness which one finds so often in these simple, illiterate peasants. No college education, no business acumen can compensate for the degeneration of character which so often marks the folk of the towns.

And when I have taken farewell of Chandi Das and his disciple, the peasant lifts the cheap lantern which hangs from a narrow beam in the roof and accompanies us to the street. I reassure him, so he touches his forehead, smiles, and stands in the open doorway. I follow in the wake of my servant, each of us flashing a torch, towards our place of rest for the night. Sleep eludes me; for, mingling with my thoughts of the mysterious Yogi from Bengal are the eerie cries of jackals and the peculiar long howl of a pariah dog.

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If I do not follow the counsel of Chandi Das to the strict letter, at least I turn the car's radiator towards Bombay and make a gradual return to that city. When I succeed in arriving there and installing myself in a hotel, I succeed also in falling ill.

Cooped up between four walls, tired in mind and sick in body, I begin to develop, for the first time, a pessimistic outlook. I begin to feel that I have had enough of India. I have covered many thousands of miles of travel in this country, and occasionally under dismal conditions. The India I have been

seeking is not to be found in the European quarters, where wining, dining, dancing, bridge and whisky-and-sodas make up the pattern of an attractive picture. Sojourn in the Indian quarters of towns, whenever decently possible, has helped me in my quest, but has not improved my health, while sojourn in up-country districts and jungle villages, with unsuitable food and bad water, unsettled life and tropical sleeplessness, has proved itself dangerous. My body is now a weary burden flung on a bed of pain.

I wonder how much longer I can stave off a breakdown. I have grown heavy-eyed with lack of sleep. For months I have been unable to exorcise this wraith of insomnia which has relentlessly pursued me throughout this land. And the need to walk warily between the strange types of men with whom I have come into contact has played sad havoc with my nerves. The necessity of keeping a careful inner balance, of being critical and yet receptive at the same time, while penetrating the unfamiliar circles of India's secret hinterland, has imposed a prolonged strain upon me. I have had to learn how to pick my way between genuine sages and fools who mistake their egotistic fancies for divine knowledge, between true religious mystics and mere mystery-mongers, between pseudo holy men working black magic and true followers of the way of Yoga. And I have had to cram and concentrate my investigations into minimum time, for I cannot afford to spend years out of a life upon a single quest.

If my physical and mental condition is bad, my spiritual state is little better. I am disheartened by a sense of failure. True, I have met some men of remarkable attainments and fine character, as well as others who can do amazing things, but I have not settled down to any positive inward recognition that here is the spiritual superman of my quest, the master who appeals to my rationalistic make-up and to whom I can gladly attach myself. Enthusiastic disciples have vainly endeavoured to draw me into their own teachers' folds, but I can see that, just as youth takes its first adolescent adventure as the last measure of love, so these good folk have been so thrilled by their early experiences that they have not thought to seek any farther. Besides, I have no desire to become the depository of another man's doctrines; it is a living, first-hand, personal experience which I seek, a spiritual illumination entirely my

own and not someone else's.

But, after all, I am only a humble and irresponsible scribe wandering in the East after abandoning his ambitions. Who am I to expect to be favoured with such a meeting? And so depression throws its heavy mantle around my heart.

When I am well enough to drag my body around, I sit at the hotel table with an Army captain as my neighbour. He unfolds a long story of a sick wife, a slow recovery, cancelled leave arrangements, and so on. He makes my own morbidity worse. When we have finished and are out on the veranda, he sticks a long cigar in his mouth and mutters:

"Some game—life, eh?"

"Yes—some!" I agree laconically.

Half an hour later I am in a taxi speeding along Hornby Road. We stop outside the tall, piazza-like facade of a shipping company's offices. I pay for my ticket with the consciousness that I have done the only possible thing in taking this sudden exit from India.

Despising the grimy hovels, dusty shops, ornate palaces and efficient-looking office blocks which are Bombay, I return to my hotel room in order to continue my unhappy ruminations.

Evening comes. The waiter sets a delicious curry on the table, but the dinner repels me. I take a couple of iced drinks and then taxi across the city. I get out and saunter slowly along a street until I find myself standing in front of one of the West's gifts to urban India—a great, gaudy-faced cinema theatre. I pause awhile before its brightly lit entrance and study its flaringly coloured posters.

Always fond of movies, they seem to offer to-night a welcome drink of the cup of Lethe. I do not imagine that I shall ever be completely forlorn while I can buy, for a rupee or its equivalent, a padded and plush-covered seat at a cinema in any city throughout the world.

Inside I settle down to watch the inevitable fragments of American life turned into tabloids and flung in shadows upon a white screen. Once again there reappears a foolish wife and faithless husband, both moving on a background of palatial apartments. I try hard to fix my attention on them, but somehow find myself becoming increasingly bored. To my surprise I discover that the old zest for cinema pictures has suddenly deserted me. The tales of human passion, tragedy and

comedy have strangely lost their power to sadden my heart or move me to laughter.

Half-way through the show the screen figures flicker away into sheer unreality. My attention becomes quite abstracted and my thoughts fasten themselves once again upon my strange quest. I realize unexpectedly that I have become a pilgrim without a God, a wanderer from city to city and from village to village seeking a place where the mind may rest, but finding none. How I have gazed into the faces of many men, hoping to find the exotic lineaments of a spiritual superman who has cast the plumb-line of thought deeper than the men of my own land and time; how I have looked into the dark flashing eyes of other peoples, hoping to find a pair that will echo back the mysterious answer which will satisfy me!

And then a peculiar tenseness arises in my brain and the atmosphere around me seems to be charged with potent electrical vibrations. I am aware that some profoundly dynamic psychic change is occurring within me. Suddenly a mental voice thrusts itself into the field of attention and forces me to listen, amazed, as it scornfully says to me:

"Life itself is nothing more than a cinema play unrolling its episodes from the cradle to the grave. Where now are the past scenes—can you hold them? Where are those yet to come—can you grasp them? Instead of trying to find the Real, the Enduring, the Eternal, you come here and waste time on what is even more deceptive than ordinary existence—a wholly imaginary story, an illusion within the great illusion."

Thereupon I lose the last shred of interest in the spinning film of human love and tragedy. To retain my seat any longer will be a farce. I rise and walk out of the theatre.

I wander slowly and aimlessly through the street under the brilliant moon which, in the East, seems so close to man's life. At the corner a beggar approaches me, and I gaze into his face as he utters his first unrecognizable sound. I recoil in horror, for he is disfigured by a terrible disease, which has left the skin of his face clinging in patches to the bone. But a profound pity for this fellow-victim of life replaces my first disgust and I thrust all my loose change into his outstretched hand.

I make my way to seashore, to a lonelier part where one can remain untroubled by the motley crowds of varied races which throng the Back Bay promenade each night. Gazing at the stars,

which form a beautiful canopy to this city, I realize that I have reached an unexpected crisis.

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Within a few days my ship will head its way to Europe and slide through the greenish-blue waters of the Arabian Sea. Once on board I shall bid farewell to philosophy and toss my Oriental quest into the waters of oblivion. No longer shall I give all that I have to offer—time, thought, energy, money—upon the altar of a search for suppositious masters.

But the inescapable mental voice persists in troubling me again.

"Fool!" it flings scornfully at me. "So this is to be the empty result of years of investigation and aspiration! You are to tread the same road as other men, to forget all you have learnt, to drown your better feelings in hard egotism and sensuality? But take care! Your apprenticeship to life has been served with terrible masters; unending thought has stripped the veneer off existence, ceaseless activity has lashed you with its whip, and spiritual loneliness has segregated your soul. Think you that you can escape the results of such an indenture? Not so, for it has put invisible chains on your feet!"

I see-saw from one mood to another, the while I stare at the thick star-clusters which overpower the Oriental sky. I seek to defend myself against the merciless psychic voice, pleading my helplessness in the face of failure.

The voice answers:

"Are you *sure* none of the men you met here in India can be the Master you seek?"

A long gallery of faces passes before my mind's eye. Quick-tempered Northern faces, placid Southern ones, nervous emotional Eastern faces and strong silent Mahratti faces from the West: friendly faces, foolish faces, wise faces, dangerous faces, evil faces and inscrutable ones.

A single face disentangles itself out of the procession and persistently hovers before me, its eyes quietly gazing into mine. It is the calm, Sphinx-like countenance of the Maharishree, the sage who has spent his life on the Hill of the Holy Beacon in the South. I have never forgotten him; indeed, a tender thought of the Maharishree has arisen for a brief life again and again, but the

abrupt character of my experiences, the whirling panorama of faces and events and the sudden changes which came during my quest have deeply overlaid the impressions of my short period with him.

Yet I realize now that he has passed through my life like a star, which moves across the dark void with its lonely light and then is gone. And I have to admit, in answer to my inner questioner, that he is the one man who has impressed me more than any other person I have ever met, whether in the East or West. But he had seemed so aloof, so remote from a European mentality, and so indifferent whether I became his pupil or not.

The silent voice now grips me with its intensity.

"How can you be sure that he was indifferent? You did not stay long, but hurried away."

"Yes," I confess, feebly. "I had to carry out my self-imposed programme. What else could I do?"

"There is one thing you can do now. Go back to him."

"How can I force myself upon him?"

"Your personal feelings are of less importance than success in this search. Go back to the Maharishee."

"He is at the other end of India and I am too ill to start my wanderings again."

"What does that matter? If you want a Master you must pay the price."

"I doubt whether I want one now, for I feel too tired to want anything. Anyway, I have booked a streamer berth and must sail in three days; it is too late to alter things."

The voice almost sneers at me.

"Too late, eh? What has happened to your sense of values? You admit that the Maharishee is the most wonderful man you ever met, but you are quite willing to run away from him before you have hardly tried to know him. Return to him."

I remain sullen and obstinate. The brain answers "Yes," but the blood says "No!"

Once more the voice urges me:

"Change your plans again. You *must* go back to the Maharishee."

Thereupon something surges up from the inner depths of my being and demands immediate assent to the command of that inexplicable voice. It overwhelms me and so forcibly does it master my reason-born objections and the protests of my