

enfeebled body that I become as a babe in its hands. Through all this sudden overpowering urgency which asks my instant return to the Maharishee, I see his summoning irresistible eyes in a most vivid manner.

I cease all further argument with the inner voice, because I know that I am now helpless in its hands. I shall travel at once to the Maharishee and, if he accepts me, entrust myself to his tutelage. I shall hitch my wagon to his shining star. The die is cast. Something has conquered me, though I do not understand what it is.

I return to the hotel, mop my brow and sip a cup of lukewarm tea. As I drink it I realize that I am a changed man. I am conscious that my dark burden of wretchedness and doubt is falling from my shoulders.

Next morning I come down to breakfast aware that I am smiling for the first time since I came back to Bombay. The tall bearded Sikh servant, resplendent in white jacket, golden cummerbund and white trousers, smiles back in response as he stands with folded arms behind my chair. Then he says:

"A letter for you, sir."

I look at the cover. It has been twice readressed and has followed me from place to place. As I take my seat I slit it open.

To my delight and surprise I discover that it has been written in the hermitage at the foot of the Hill of the Holy Beacon. Its writer, once a prominent public man and Member of the Madras Legislative Council, has withdrawn from worldly affairs following a tragic domestic bereavement and become a disciple of the Maharishee, whom he visits on occasions. I had met him and we were engaged in a desultory correspondence.

The letter is full of encouraging thoughts and suggests that I shall be welcome if I care to revisit the hermitage. When I finish reading it one sentence flames out in memory so as to obliterate the others.

"You have had the good fortune to meet a real Master," it runs.

I treat the letter as an omen favourable to my new-born decision to return to the Maharishee. A ride down to the shipping offices follows breakfast, and I leave the intimation that I am not sailing.

It is not long before I bid adieu to Bombay and carry out my new plan. I cross hundreds of miles of flat colourless

Deccan tableland, with long stretches where solitary bamboo trees alone rear their leafy heads to vary the scene. The train cannot roll through the scanty grass and occasional trees of this Indian prairie fast enough for me. As it flies joltingly along the rails, I feel that I am speeding towards a great occasion—spiritual enlightenment and the most mysterious personality I have ever encountered. For as I look out of the screened compartment window, my slumbering hopes of discovering a Rishee, a spiritual superman, awaken once more.

When, on the second day, we have covered over a thousand miles and have begun to enter the placid Southern landscape, broken by a few red hills, I feel strangely happy. And when we leave the torrid plains behind, I find the dank, steamy heat of Madras City positively welcome, for it means that I have broken the back of my journey.

After leaving the South Mahratta Company's terminus, I have to cross the scattered town in order to change on to the South Indian Railway. Finding that I have a few hours to spare before the train starts, I use the time to make some necessary purchases and to have a hurried chat with the Indian author who introduced me to His Holiness Shri Shankara, the spiritual head of South India.

He greets me warmly, and when I inform him that I am on the way to the Maharishee, the writer exclaims:

"I am not surprised! That is what I expected."

I am taken aback, but ask him:

"Why do you say that?"

He smiles.

"My friend, do you not remember how we parted from His Holiness in the town of Chingleput? Did you not notice that he whispered something to me in the ante-room just before we left?"

"Yes, now that you remind me, I certainly do remember it."

The author's thin, refined face still keeps its smile.

"This is what His Holiness told me. 'Your friend will travel all round India. He will visit many Yogis and listen to many teachers. But, in the end, he will have to return to the Maharishee. For him, the Maharishee alone is the right Master.'"

These words, coming as they do on the eve of my return,

deeply impress me. They reveal the prophetic power of Shri Shankara; more, they offer a kind of confirmation that I am taking the right course.

How strange are the wanderings which my stars have imposed upon me.

1 Meher Baba has since appeared in the West and Western cult has started to gather around him. He still promises wonderful things, which will happen when he breaks his silence. He has several times visited England, has acquired a following in France, Spain and Turkey, and has been twice to Persia. He made a theatrical journey across the continent of America with a mixed retinue of men and women. When he arrived in Hollywood, he was given a royal reception. Mary Pickford entertained him in her home. Tallulah Bankhead became interested in him, while a thousand leading people were presented to him at Hollywood's largest hotel. A large tract of land was acquired in the United States to establish his Western headquarters.

2 Time has written its confirmation of the first half of this prediction.

XVI

In a Jungle Hermitage

There are moments unforgettable which mark themselves in golden figures upon the calendar of our years. Such a moment comes to me now, as I walk into the hall of the Maharishee.

He sits as usual upon the magnificent tiger-skin which covers the centre of his divan. The joss-sticks burn slowly away on a little table near him, spreading the penetrating fragrance of incense around the hall. Not to-day is he remote from men and wrapped up in some trance-like spiritual absorption, as on that strange occasion when I first visited him. His eyes are clearly open to this world and glance at me comprehendingly as I bow, and his mouth is stretched in a kindly smile of welcome.

Squatting at a respectful distance from their master are a few disciples; otherwise the long hall is bare. One of them pulls the punkahfan, which flaps lazily through the heavy air.

In my heart I know that I come as one seeking to take up the position of a disciple, and that there will be no rest for my mind until I hear the Maharishee's decision. It is true that I live in a great hope of being accepted, for that which sent me scurrying out of Bombay to this place came as an absolute command, a decisive and authoritative injunction from a supernatural region. In a few words I dispose of the preliminary explanations, and then put my request briefly and bluntly to the Maharishee.

He continues to smile at me, but says nothing.

I repeat my question with some emphasis.

There is another protracted pause, but at length he answers me, disdaining to call for the services of an interpreter and expressing himself directly in English.

"What is all this talk of masters and disciples? All these differences exist only from the disciple's standpoint. To the one who has realized the true self there is neither master nor disciple. Such a one regards all people with equal eye."

I am slightly conscious of an initial rebuff, and though I press my request in other ways the Maharishee refuses to yield

on the point. But in the end he does say:

"You must find the master within you, within your own spiritual self. You must regard his body in the same way that he himself regards it; the body is not his true self."

It begins to voice itself in my thoughts that the Maharishee is not to be drawn into giving me a direct affirmative response, and that the answer I seek must be found in some other way, doubtless in the subtle, obscure manner at which he hints. So I let the matter drop and our talk then turns to the outward and material side of my visit.

I spend the afternoon making some arrangements for a protracted stay.

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The ensuing weeks absorb me into a strange, unwonted life. My days are spent in the hall of the Maharishee, where I slowly pick up the unrelated fragments of his wisdom and the faint clues to the answer I seek; my nights continue as heretofore in torturing sleeplessness, with my body stretched out on a blanket laid on the hard earthen floor of a hastily built hut.

This humble abode stands about three hundred feet away from the hermitage. Its thick walls are composed of thinly plastered earth, but the roof is solidly tiled to withstand the monsoon rains. The ground around it is virgin bush, somewhat thickly overgrown, being in fact the fringe of the jungle which stretches away to the west. The rugged landscape reveals Nature in all her own wild uncultivated grandeur. Cactus hedges are scattered numerous and irregularly around, the spines of these prickly plants looking like coarse needles. Beyond them the jungle drops a curtain of scrub bush and stunted trees upon the land. To the north rises the gaunt figure of the mountain, a mass of metallic-tinted rocks and brown soil. To the south lies a long pool, whose placid water has attracted me to the spot, and whose banks are bordered with clumps of trees holding families of grey and brown monkeys.

Each day is a duplicate of the one before. I rise early in the mornings and watch the jungle dawn turn from grey to green and then to gold. Next comes a plunge into the water and a swift swim up and down the pool, making as much noise as I possibly can so as to scare away lurking snakes. Then, dressing,

shaving, and the only luxury I can secure in this place—three cups of deliciously refreshing tea.

“Master, the pot of tea-water is ready,” says Rajoo, my hired boy. From an initial total ignorance of the English language, he has acquired that much and more, under my occasional tuition. As a servant he is a gem, for he will scour up and down the little township with optimistic determination in quest of the strange articles and foods for which his Western employer speculatively sends him, or he will hover outside the Maharishee’s hall in discreet silence during meditation hours should he happen to come along for orders at such times. But as a cook he is unable to comprehend Western taste, which seems a queer distorted thing to him. After a few painful experiments I myself take charge of the more serious culinary arrangements, reducing my labour by reducing my solid meals to a single one each day. Tea, taken thrice daily, becomes both my solitary earthly joy and the mainstay of my energy. Rajoo stands in the sunshine and watches with wonderment my addiction to the glorious brown brew. His body shines in the hard yellow light like polished ebony, for he is a true son of the black Dravidians, the primal inhabitants of India.

After breakfast comes my quiet lazy stroll to the hermitage, a halt for a couple of minutes beside the sweet rose bushes in the compound garden, which is fenced in by bamboo posts, or a rest under the drooping fronds of palm trees whose heads are heavy with coconuts. It is a beautiful experience to wander around the hermitage garden before the sun has waxed in power and to see and smell the variegated flowers.

And then I enter the hall, bow before the Maharishee, and quietly sit down on folded legs. I may read or write for a while, or engage in conversation with one or two of the other men, or tackle the Maharishee on some point, or plunge into meditation for an hour along the lines which the sage has indicated, although evening usually constitutes the time specially assigned to meditation in the hall. But whatever I am doing I never fail to become gradually aware of the mysterious atmosphere of the place, of the benign radiations which steadily percolate into my brain. I enjoy an ineffable tranquillity merely by sitting for a while in the neighbourhood of the Maharishee. By careful observation and frequent analysis I arrive in time at the complete certitude that a reciprocal inter-influence arises

whenever our presences neighbour each other. The thing is most subtle. But it is quite unmistakable.

At eleven I return to the hut for the midday meal and a rest and then go back to the hall to repeat my programme of the morning. I vary my meditations and conversations sometimes by roaming the countryside or descending on the little township to make further explorations of the colossal temple.

From time to time the Maharishee unexpectedly visits me at the hut after finishing his own lunch. I seize the opportunity to plague him with further questions, which he patiently answers in terse epigrammatic phrases, clipped so short as rarely to constitute complete sentences. But once, when I propound some fresh problem, he makes no answer. Instead, he gazes out towards the jungle-covered hills which stretch to the horizon and remains motionless. Many minutes pass, but still his eyes are fixed, his presence remote. I am quite unable to discern whether his attention is being given to some invisible psychic being in the distance or whether it is being turned on some inward preoccupation. At first I wonder whether he has heard me, but in the tense silence which ensues, and which I feel unable or unwilling to break, a force greater than my rationalistic mind commences to awe me until it ends by overwhelming me.

The realization forces itself through my wonderment that all my questions are moves in an endless game, the play of thoughts which possess no limit to their extent; that somewhere within me there is a well of certitude which can provide me with all the waters of truth I require; and that it will be better to cease my questioning and attempt to realize the tremendous potencies of my own spiritual nature. So I remain silent and wait.

For almost half an hour the Maharishee's eyes continue to stare straight in front of him in a fixed, unmoving gaze. He appears to have forgotten me, but I am perfectly aware that the sublime realization which has suddenly fallen upon me is nothing else than a spreading ripple of telepathic radiation from this mysterious and imperturbable man.

On another visit he finds me in a pessimistic mood. He tells me of the glorious goal which waits for the man who takes to the way he has shown.

"But, Maharishee, this path is full of difficulties and I am so

conscious of my own weaknesses" I plead.

"That is the surest way to handicap oneself," he answers unmoved, "this burdening of one's mind with the fear of failure and the thought of one's failings."

"Yet if it is true—?" I persist.

"It is not true. The greatest error of a man is to think that he is weak by nature, evil by nature. Every man is divine and strong in his real nature. What are weak and evil are his habits, his desires and thoughts, but not himself."

His words come as an invigorating tonic. They refresh and inspire me. From another man's lips, from some lesser and feebler soul, I would refuse to accept them at such worth and would persist in refuting them. But an inward monitor assures me that the sage speaks out of the depths of a great and authentic spiritual experience, and not as some theorizing philosopher mounted on the thin stilts of speculation.

Another time, when we are discussing the West, I make the retort:

"It is easy for you to attain and keep spiritual serenity in this jungle retreat, where there is nothing to disturb or distract you."

"When the goal is reached, when you know the Knower, there is no difference between living in a house in London and living in the solitude of a jungle," comes the calm rejoinder.

And once I criticize the Indians for their neglect of material development. To my surprise the Maharishee frankly admits the accusation.

"It is true. We are a backward race. But we are a people with few wants. Our society needs improving, but we are contented with much fewer things than your people. So to be backward is not to mean that we are less happy."

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How has the Maharishee arrived at the strange power and stranger outlook which he possesses? Bit by bit, from his own reluctant lips and from those of his disciples, I piece together a fragmentary pattern of his life story.

He was born in 1879 in a village about thirty miles distant from Madura, which is a noted South Indian town possessing one of the largest temples in the country. His father followed

some avocation connected with law and came of good Brahmin stock. His father appears to have been an extremely charitable man who fed and clothed many poor persons. The boy eventually passed to Madura to carry on his education, and it was here that he picked up the rudiments of English from some American missionaries who were conducting a school.

At first young Ramana was fond of play and sport. He wrestled, boxed and swam dangerous rivers. He betrayed no special interest in religious or philosophical concerns. The only exceptional thing in his life at the time was tendency to somnambulism or sleep-walking, and to a condition of sleep so profound that the most disturbing interruptions could not awaken him. His schoolmates eventually discovered this and took advantage of it to sport with him. During the daytime they were afraid of his quick punch, but at night they would come into his bedroom, take him into the playground, beat his body and box his ears, and then lead him back to bed. He was quite unconscious of these experiences and had no remembrance of them in the mornings.

The psychologist who has correctly understood the nature of sleep will find in this account of the boy's abnormal depth of attention, sufficient indication of the mystical nature which he possessed.

One day a relative came to Madura and, in answer to Ramana's question, mentioned that he had just returned from a pilgrimage to the temple of Arunachala. The name stirred some slumbering depths in the boy's mind, thrilling him with peculiar expectation which he could not understand. He enquired as to the whereabouts of this temple and ever after found himself haunted by thoughts of it. It seemed to be of paramount importance to him, yet he could not even explain to himself why Arunachala should mean anything more to him than the dozens of other great temples which are scattered over India.

He continued his studies at the mission school without showing any special aptitude for them, although he always evinced a fair degree of intelligence in his work. But when he was seventeen, destiny, with swift and sudden strokes, got into action and thrust its hands through the even tenor of his days.

He suddenly left the school and completely abandoned all his studies. He gave no notice to his teachers or to his relatives,

and tol; no one before the event actually occurred. What was the reason of this unpromising change, which cast a cloud upon his future worldly prospects?

The reason was satisfying enough to himself, though it might have seemed mind-perplexing to others. For life, which in the ultimate is the teacher of men, set the young student on another course than that which his school-teachers had assigned him. And the change came in a curious way about six weeks before he dropped his studies and disappeared from Madura for ever.

He was sitting alone one day in his room when a sudden and inexplicable fear of death took hold of him. He became acutely aware that he was going to die, although outwardly he was in good health. The thing was a psychological phenomenon, because there was no apparent reason why he should die. Yet he became obsessed with this notion and immediately began to prepare for the coming event.

He stretched his body prone upon the floor, fixed his limbs in the rigidity of a corpse, closed his eyes and mouth, and finally held his breath. "Well, then," said I to myself, "this body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and then reduced to ashes. But with the death of the body, am I dead? Is the body I? This body is now silent and stiff. But I continue to feel the full force of my self apart from its condition."

Those are the words which Maharishee used in describing the weird experience through which he passed. What happened next is difficult to understand though easy to describe. He seemed to fall into a profound conscious trance wherein he became merged into the very source of selfhood, the very essence of being. He understood quite clearly that the body was a thing apart and that the I remained untouched by death. The true self was very real, but it was so deep down in man's nature that hitherto he had ignored it.

Ramana emerged from this amazing experience an utterly changed youth. He lost most of his interest in studies, sports, friends, and so on, because his chief interest was now centred in the sublime consciousness of the true self which he had found so unexpectedly. Fear of death vanished as mysteriously as it came. He enjoyed an inward serenity and a spiritual strength which have never since left him. Formerly he had been quick to

retaliate at the other boys when they had chaffed him or attempted to take liberties, but now he put up with everything quite meekly. He suffered unjust acts with indifference and bore himself among others with complete humility. He gave up old habits and tried to be alone as much as possible, for then he would sink into meditation and surrender himself to the absorbing current of divine consciousness which constantly drew his attention inwards.

These profound changes in his character were, of course, noticed by others. One day his elder brother came into the room when the boy was supposed to be doing his homework and found him sunk in meditation with closed eyes. The school books and papers had been tossed across the room in disgust. The brother was so annoyed at this neglect of studies that he jeered at him with sharp words:

"What business has a fellow like you here? If you want to behave like a Yogi, why are you studying for a career?"

Young Ramana was deeply stung by these words. He immediately realized their truth and silently decided to act upon them. His father was dead and he knew that his uncle and other brothers would take care of his mother. Truly he had no business there. And back into his mind there flashed the name which had haunted him for nearly a year, the name whose very syllables fascinated him, the name of the temple of Arunachala. Thither would he go, although why he should select that place he was quite unable to say. But an impelling urgency arose within him and formed the decision for him of its own accord. It was entirely unpremeditated.

"I was literally charmed here," said the Maharishee to me. "The same force which drew you to this place from Bombay, drew me to it from Madura."

And so young Ramana, feeling this inner pull within his heart, left friends, family, school and studies, and took the road which eventually brought him to Arunachala and to a still profounder spiritual attainment. He left behind a brief farewell letter, which is still preserved in the hermitage. Its flourishing Tamil characters read as follows:

"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. To trace this out, no money need be spent."

With three rupees in his pocket and in utter ignorance of the world, he set out on the journey into the interior of the South. The amazing incidents which marked that journey prove conclusively that some mysterious power was protecting and guiding him. When at last he arrived at his destination, he was utterly destitute and among total strangers. But the emotion of total renunciation was burning strong within him. Such was the youth's scorn for all earthly possessions, at the time, that he flung his robe aside and took up his meditative posture in the temple precinct quite nude. A priest observed this and remonstrated with him, but to no purpose. Other shocked priests came along, and, after vehement efforts, forced a concession from the youth. He consented to wear a semi-loincloth, and that is all he has ever worn to this day.

For six months he occupied various spots in the precinct, never going anywhere else. He lived on some rice which was brought him once a day by a priest who was struck by the precocious behaviour of the youth. For Ramana spent the entire day plunged in mystical trances and spiritual ecstasies so profound that he was entirely oblivious of the world around him. When some rough Moslem youths flung mud at him and ran away, he was quite unaware of the fact until some hours later. He felt no resentment against them in his heart.

The stream of pilgrims who descended on the temple made it difficult for him to obtain the seclusion he desired, so he left the place and moved to a quiet shrine set in the fields some distance from the village. Here he continued to stay for a year and a half. He was satisfied with the food brought by the few people who visited this shrine.

Throughout this time he spoke to no one; indeed, he never opened his lips to talk until three years passed since his arrival in the district. This was not because he had taken a vow of silence, but because his inner monitor urged him to concentrate all his energy and attention upon his spiritual life. When his mystic goal was attained the inhibition was no longer necessary and he began to talk again, though the Maharishee has remained an extremely taciturn man.

He kept his identity a complete secret, but by a chain of coincidences, his mother discovered his whereabouts two years after his disappearance. She set out for the place with her eldest son and tearfully pleaded with him to return home. The lad

refused to budge. When tears failed to persuade him she began to upbraid him for his indifference. Eventually he wrote down a reply on a piece of paper to the effect that a higher power controls the fate of men and that whatever she did could not change his destiny. He concluded by advising her to accept the situation and to cease moaning about it. And so she had to yield to his obstinacy.

When, through this incident, people began to intrude on his seclusion in order to stare at the youthful Yogi, he left the place and climbed up the Hill of the Holy Beacon and made his residence in a large cavern, where he lived for several years. There are quite a few other caves on this hill and each one shelters holy men or Yogis. But the cave which sheltered young Ramana was noteworthy because it also contained the tomb of a great Yogi of the past.

Cremation is the usual custom of the Hindus in disposing of their dead, but it is often prohibited in the case of a Yogi who is believed to have made the highest attainment, because it is also believed that the vital breath or unseen life-current remains in his body for thousands of years and renders the flesh exempt from corruption. In such a case the Yogi's body is bathed and anointed and then placed in a tomb in a sitting posture with crossed legs, as though he were still plunged in meditation. The entrance to the tomb is sealed with a heavy stone and then cemented over. Usually the mausoleum becomes a place of pilgrimage. There exists still another reason why great Yogis are buried and not cremated, and that is because of the belief that their bodies do not need to be purified by fire since they were purified during their lifetimes.

It is interesting to consider that caves have always been a favourite residence of Yogis and holy men. The ancients consecrated them to the gods; Zoroaster, the founder of the Parsee faith, practised his meditations in a cave, while Muhammed received his religious experiences in a cave also. The Indian Yogis have very good reasons for preferring caves or subterranean retreats when better places are not available. For here they can find shelter from the vicissitudes of weather and from the rapid changes of temperature which divide days from nights in the tropics. There is less light and noise to disturb their meditations. And breathing the confined atmosphere of a cave causes the appetite to diminish markedly, thus conducing to a minimum of bodily cares.

Still another reason which may have attracted Ramana to this particular cave on the Hill of the Holy Beacon was the beauty of its outlook. One can stand on a projecting spur adjoining the cave and see the little township stretched out flat in the distant plain, with the giant temple rising as its centre-piece. Far beyond the plain stands a long line of hills which frontier a charming panorama of Nature.

Anyway, Ramana lived in this somewhat gloomy cavern for several years, engaged in his mysterious meditations and plunged in profound trances. He was not a Yogi in the orthodox sense, for he had never studied any system of Yoga and he had never practised under any teacher. The inner path which he followed was simply a track leading to self-knowledge; it was laid down by what he conceived to be the divine monitor within him.

In 1905 plague appeared in the locality. The dread visitant was probably carried into the district by some pilgrim to the temple of Arunachala. It devastated the population so fiercely that almost everyone left the little township and fled in terror to safer villages or towns. So quiet did the deserted place become that tigers and leopards came out of their lurking dens in the jungle and moved openly through the streets. But, though they must have roamed the hill-side many times, for it stood in their path to the township, though they must have passed and repassed the Maharishee's cave, he refused to leave, but remained as calm and unmoved as ever.

By this time the young hermit had involuntarily acquired a solitary disciple, who had become very much attached to him and persisted in staying by his side and attending to his needs. The man is now dead, but the legend has been handed down to other disciples that each night a large tiger came to the cave and licked Ramana's hands, and that the tiger was in return fondled by the hermit. It sat in front of him throughout the night and departed only at dawn.

There is a widespread notion throughout India that Yogis and faqueers who live in the jungles or on the mountains, exposed to danger from lions, tigers, snakes and other wild animals more unharmed and untouched if they have attained a sufficient degree of Yogic power. Another story about Ramana told how he was once sitting in the afternoon outside the narrow entrance to his abode when a large cobra came swishing

through the rocks and stopped in front of him. It raised its body and spread out its hood, but the hermit did not attempt to move. The two beings—man and beast—faced each other for some minutes, gaze meeting gaze. In the end the snake withdrew and left him unharmed, although it was within striking distance.

The austere lonely life of this strange young man closed its first phase with his firm and permanent establishment in the deepest point of his own spirit. Seclusion was no longer an imperative need, but he continued to live at the cave until the visit of an illustrious Brahmin pundit, Ganapati Shastri, proved another turning-point of his outer life, which was now to enter on a more social period. The pundit had recently come to stay near the temple for study and meditation. He heard by chance that there was a very young Yogi on the hill and out of curiosity he went in search of him. When he found Ramana, the latter was staring fixedly at the sun. It was not at all uncommon for the hermit to keep his eyes on the dazzling sun for some hours till it disappeared below the western horizon. The glaring light of the rays of an afternoon sun in India can hardly be appreciated by a European who has never experienced it. I remember once, when I had set out to climb the steep ascent of the hill at a wrong hour, being caught without shelter by the full glare of the sun at midday on my return journey. I staggered and reeled about like a drunken man for quite a time. So the feat of young Ramana in enduring the merciless glare of the sun, with face uplifted and eyes unflinching, may therefore be better evaluated.

The pundit had studied all the chief books of Hindu wisdom for a dozen years and had undergone rigorous penances in an endeavour to reach some tangible spiritual benefit, but he was still afflicted by doubts and perplexities. He put a question to Ramana and after fifteen minutes received a reply which amazed him with its wisdom. He put further questions, involving his own philosophical and spiritual problems, and was still more astounded at the clearing-up of perplexities which had troubled him for years. As a result he prostrated himself before the young hermit and became a disciple. Shastri had his own group of followers in the town of Vellore and he went back later and told them that he had found a Maharishiee (Great Sage or Seer), because the latter was undoubtedly a man of the

highest spiritual realization whose teachings were so original that the pundit had found nothing exactly like them in any book he had read. From that time the title of Maharishee began to be applied to young Ramana by cultured people, although the common folk wanted to worship him as a divine being when his existence and character became better known to them. But the Maharishee strongly forbade every manifestation of such worship in his presence. Among themselves and in private talk with me, most of his devotees and people in the locality insist on calling him a god.

A small group of disciples attached themselves to the Maharishee in time. They built a wooden frame bungalow on a lower spur of the hill and persuaded him to live in it with them. In different years his mother had paid him short visits and became reconciled to his vocation. When death parted her from her eldest son and other relatives, she came to the Maharishee and begged him to let her live with him. He consented. She spent the six years of life which were left to her at his side, and finished up by becoming an ardent disciple of her own son. In return for the hospitality which was given her in the little hermitage, she acted as cook.

When the old lady died, her ashes were buried at the foot of the hill and some of the Maharishee's devotees built a small shrine over thyplace. Here, ever-burning sacred lamps glow in memory of this woman, who gave a great sage to mankind, and little heaps of scented jasmynes and marigolds, snatched from their stalks, are thrown on a tiny altar in offering to her spirit.

The efflux of time spread the reputation of the Maharishee throughout the locality, so that pilgrims to the temple were often induced to go up the hill and see him before they returned home. Quite recently the Maharishee yielded to incessant requests and consented to grace the new and large hall which was built at the foot of the hill as a residence for him and his disciples.

The Maharishee has never asked for anything but food, and consistently refuses to handle money. Whatever else has come to him has been voluntarily pressed upon him by others. During those early years when he tried to live a solitary existence, when he built a wall of almost impenetrable silent reserve around himself whilst he was perfecting his spiritual powers, he did not disdain to leave his cave with a begging bowl in hand

and wander to the village for some food whenever the pangs of hunger stirred his body. An old widow took pity on him and thenceforth regularly supplied him with food, eventually insisting on bringing it up to his cave. Thus his venture of faith in leaving his comfortable middle-class home was, in a measure, justified, at any rate to the extent that whatever powers there be have ensured his shelter and food. Many gifts have since been offered him, but as a rule he turns them away.

When a gang of dacoits broke into the hall one night not long ago and searched the place for money, they were unable to find more than a few rupees, which was in the care of the man who superintended the purchase of food. The robbers were so angry at this disappointment that they belaboured the Maharishee with stout clubs, severely marking his body. The sage not only bore their attack patiently, but requested them to take a meal before they departed. He actually offered them some food. He had no hate towards them in his heart. Pity for their spiritual ignorance was the sole emotion they aroused. He let them escape freely, but within a year they were caught while committing another crime elsewhere and received stiff sentences of penal servitude.

Not a few Western minds will inevitably consider that this life of the Maharishee's is a wasted one. But perhaps it may be good for us to have a few men who sit apart from our world of unending activity and survey it for us from afar. The onlooker may see more of the game and sometimes he gets a truer perspective. It may also be that a jungle sage, with self lying conquered at his feet, is not inferior to a worldly fool who is blown hither and thither by every circumstance.



Day after day brings its fresh indications of the greatness of this man. Among the strangely diversified company of human beings who pass through the hermitage, a pariah stumbles into the hall in some great agony of soul or circumstance and pours out his tribulation at the Maharishee's feet. The sage does not reply, for his silence and reserve are habitual; one can easily count up the number of words he uses in a single day. Instead, he gazes quietly at the suffering man, whose cries gradually diminish until he leaves the hall two hours later a more serene

and stronger man.

I am learning to see that this is the Maharishee's way of helping others, this unobtrusive, silent and steady outpouring of healing vibrations into troubled souls, this mysterious telepathic process for which science will one day be required to account.

A cultured Brahmin, college-bred, arrives with his questions. One can never be certain whether the sage will make a verbal response or not, for often he is eloquent enough without opening his lips. But to-day he is in a communicative mood and a few of his terse phrases, packed with profound meanings as they usually are, open many vistas of thought for the visitor.

A large group of visitors and devotees are in the hall when someone arrives with the news that a certain man, whose criminal reputation is a byword in the little township, is dead. Immediately there is some discussion about him and, as is the wont of human nature, various people engage in recalling some of his crimes and the more dastardly phases of his character. When the hubbub has subsided and the discussion appears to have ended, the Maharishee opens his mouth for the first time and quietly observes:

"Yes, but he kept himself very clean, for he bathed two or three times a day!"

A peasant and his family have travelled over one hundred miles to pay silent homage to the sage. He is totally illiterate, knows little beyond his daily work, his religious rites and ancestral superstitions. He has heard from someone that there is a god in human form living at the foot of the Hill of the Holy Beacon. He sits on the floor quietly after having prostrated himself three times. He firmly believes that some blessing of spirit or fortune will come to him as a result of this journey. His wife moves gracefully to his side and drops to the floor. She is clothed in a purple robe which flows smoothly from head to ankles and is then tucked into her waist. Her sleek and smooth hair is glossy with scented oil. Her daughter accompanies her. She is a pretty girl whose ankle-rings click in consort as she steps into the hall. And she follows the charming custom of wearing a white flower behind her ear.

The little family stay for a few hours, hardly speaking, and gaze in reverence at the Maharishee. It is clear that his mere

presence provides them with spiritual assurance, emotional felicity and, most paradoxical of all, renewed faith in their creed. For the sage treats all creeds alike, regards them all as significant and sincere expressions of a great experience, and honours Jesus no less than Krishna.

On my left squats an old man of seventy-five. A quid of betel is comfortably tucked in his cheek, a Sanskrit book lies between his hands, and his heavy-lidded eyes stare meditatively at the bold print. He is a Brahmin who was a station-master near Madras for many years. He retired from the railway service at sixty and soon after his wife died. He took the opportunity thus presented of realizing some long-deferred aspirations. For fourteen years he travelled about the country on pilgrimage to the sages and saints and Yogis, trying to find one whose teachings and personality were sufficiently appealing to him. He had circled India thrice, but no such master had been discoverable. He had set up a very individual standard apparently. When we met and compared notes he lamented his failure. His rugged honest face, carved by wrinkles into dark furrows, appealed to me. He was not an intellectual man, but simple and quite intuitive. Being considerably younger than he, I felt it incumbent on me to give the old man some good advice! His surprising response was a request to become his master! "Your master is not far off," I told him and conducted him straightaway to the Maharishee. It did not take long for him to agree with me and become an enthusiastic devotee of the sage.

Another man in the hall is bespectacled, silken-clad and prosperous-looking. He is a judge who has taken advantage of a law vacation to pay a visit to the Maharishee. He is a keen disciple and strong admirer and never fails to come at least once a year. This cultured, refined and highly educated gentleman squats democratically among a group of Tamils who are poor, naked to the waist and smeared with oil, so that their bodies glisten like varnished ebony. That which brings them together, destroys the insufferable snobbishness of caste, and produces unity, is that which caused Princes and Rajahs to come from afar in ancient times to consult the forest Rishies--the deep recognition that true wisdom is worth the sacrifice of superficial differences.

A young woman with a gaily attired child enters and prostrates herself in veneration before the sage. Some profound

problems of life are being discussed, so she sits in silence, not venturing to take part in intellectual conversation. Learning is not regarded as an ornament for Hindu women and she knows little outside the purview of culinary and domestic matters. But she knows when she is in the presence of undeniable greatness.

With the descent of dusk comes the time for a general group meditation in the hall. Not infrequently the Maharishee will signal the time by entering, so gently as occasionally to be unnoticed, the trance-like abstraction wherein he locks his senses against the world outside. During these daily meditations in the potent neighbourhood of the sage, I have learnt how to carry my thoughts inward to an ever-deepening point. It is impossible to be in frequent contact with him without becoming lit up inwardly, as it were, mentally illumined by a sparkling ray from his spiritual orb. Again and again I become conscious that he is drawing my mind into his own atmosphere during these periods of quiet repose. And it is at such times that one begins to understand why the silences of this man are more significant than his utterances. His quiet unhurried poise veils a dynamic attainment, which can powerfully affect a person without the medium of audible speech or visible action. There are moments when I feel this power of his so greatly that I know he has only to issue the most disturbing command and I will readily obey it. But the Maharishee is the last person in the world to place his followers in the chains of servile obedience, and allows everyone the utmost freedom of action. In this respect he is quite refreshingly different from most of the teachers and Yogis I have met in India.

My meditations take the line he had indicated during my first visit, when he had tantalized me by the vagueness which seemed to surround many of his answers. I have begun to look into my own self.

Who am I?

Am I this body of flesh, blood and bone?

Am I the mind, the thoughts and the feelings which distinguish me from every other person?

One has hitherto naturally and unquestioningly accepted the affirmative answers to these questions, but the Maharishee has warned me not to take them for granted. Yet he has refused to formulate any systematic teaching. The gist of his message

is:

"Pursue the enquiry 'Who am I?' relentlessly. Analyse your entire personality. Try to find out where the I-thought begins. Go on with your meditations. Keep turning your attention within. One day the wheel of thought will slow down and an intuition will mysteriously arise. Follow that intuition, let your thinking stop, and it will eventually lead you to the goal."

I struggle daily with my thoughts and cut my way slowly into the inner recesses of mind. In the helpful proximity of the Maharishhee, my meditations and self-soliloquies become increasingly less tiring and more effective. A strong expectancy and sense of being guided inspire my constantly repeated efforts. There are strange hours when I am clearly conscious of the unseen power of the sage being powerfully impacted on my mentality, with the result that I penetrate a little deeper still into the shrouded borderland of being which surrounds the human mind.

The close of every evening sees the emptying of the hall as the sage, his disciples and visitors, adjourn for supper to the dining-room. As I do not care for their food and will not trouble to prepare my own, I usually remain alone and await their return. However, there is one item of the hermitage diet which I find attractive and palatable, and that is curds. The Maharishhee, having discovered my fondness for it, usually asks the cook to bring me a cupful of the drink each night.

About half an hour after their return, the inmates of the hermitage, together with those visitors who have remained, wrap themselves up in sheets or thin cotton blankets and retire to sleep on the tiled floor of the hall. The sage himself uses his divan as a bed. Before he finally covers himself with the white sheets, his faithful attendant thoroughly massages his limbs with oil.

I take up a glazed iron lantern when leaving the hall and set out on my lonely walk to the hut. Countless fireflies move amongst the flowers and plants and trees in the garden compound. Once, when I am two or three hours later than usual and midnight is approaching, I observe these strange insects put out their weird lights. Often they are just as numerous among the thick growths of bush and cactus through which I have later to pass. One has to be careful not to tread on scorpions or snakes in the dark. Sometimes the current of

meditation has seized me so profoundly that I am unable and unwilling to stop it, so that I pay little heed to the narrow path of lighted ground upon which I walk. And so I retire to my modest hut, close the tightly fitting heavy door, and draw the shutters over glassless windows to keep out unwelcome animal intruders. My last glimpse is of a thicket of palm trees which stands on one side of my clearing in the bush, the silver moonlight coming in streams over their interlaced feathery tops.

XVII

Tablets of Forgotten Truth

One afternoon I notice a new visitor walk with dignified step into the hall and take his seat close to the Maharishee's couch. He is extremely dark-skinned, but otherwise his face is highly refined. He makes no attempt to speak, but the Maharishee immediately gives him a welcoming smile.

The man's personality makes a powerful impression upon me. He looks like a graven Buddha. Extraordinary tranquillity is deeply charactered on his face. When our eyes meet eventually, he gazes for a long time at me until I turn away disquieted. Throughout the afternoon he does not utter a single word.

My next contact with him comes the following day and in a totally unexpected manner. I leave the hall and return to my hut to prepare tea, as the servant Rajoo has gone off to the township for some things. Unlocking the heavy door I am about to step on the threshold, when something moves across the floor and stops within a few inches of my feet. Its furtive gliding motion and the faint hissing which I fancy I can hear warn me almost before I see it that a snake is in the room. For the moment I am so struck with horror at my escape from the death which lurks underfoot, that I am at a complete loss what to do. The creature holds my fascinated gaze . . . and yet it terrifies me. My nerves are strung to their highest pitch of tension. Horror and loathing rise up in the depths of my heart, but my eyes remain staring at the handsome shapely head of the creature. The surprise encounter has quite overwhelmed me. The malevolent reptile continues to watch me in a cold-blooded way, its hood raised around its sinewy neck and its sinister eyes fixed upon mine.

At last I manage to recover my senses and draw back with a rush. I am about to go off for a heavy stick with which to break its spine, when the figure of yesterday's new visitor appears in the clearing. His noble face, with its habitual look of dignified reflection, slightly restores my calm. He approaches my hut,

takes the situation in at a glance, and imperturbably begins to enter the room. I shout a warning to him, but he takes no notice. Once more I am distinctly unnerved. For, weaponless as he is, he holds both hands out towards the snake!

Its forked tongue moves about in its open mouth, but it does not attempt to attack him. Just then two men, attracted by the sound of my shout, come hurrying to the hut from the pool where they have been washing themselves. Before they reach us, the strange visitor stands quite close to the snake, which bends its head before him, and then he gently strokes its tail!

The fangs cease their sinister movement in the handsome but venomous head, until the arrival of the other two men. Then the supple body of the snake begins to move with a quick writhing movement as it seems to recollect itself and, before four pairs of eyes, it slithers quickly out of the hut into the safe refuge of the jungle undergrowth.

"It is a young cobra," remarks one of the late arrivals, who is a leading merchant in the township, and who often comes to pay his respects to the sage or to have a chat with me.

I express my astonishment at the fearless way in which my first visitor handled the snake.

"Ah, that is Yogi Ramiah," replies the merchant when I ask for an explanation. "He is one of the most advanced disciples of the Maharishee. A remarkable man!"

It is not possible to enter into conversation with the Yogi because I discover that part of the special discipline which he has imposed upon himself consists in keeping strict silence, and because he comes from a Telegu-speaking district. His acquaintance with English is as limited as mine with Telegu; that is, almost nil. I learn also that he maintains an almost complete reserve and does not associate with the others in the place, as a rule; that he stays in a small stone shelter which he has had constructed under the shadow of some huge boulders on the other side of the pool; and that he has been a disciple of the Maharishee's for ten years.

The gap between us is bridged, however, soon after. 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 and, as I happen to have a camera in my pocket, I request him by means of gestures to pose for his

photograph. He offers no objection, and even follows me to the hut after it is taken. There we encounter the ex-station-master, who is squatting outside my door and awaiting my arrival.

In the result I discover that the old man knows Telegu almost as well as he knows English and is quite agreeable to play the interpreter between us, with pencilled notes as a substitute for vocal speech. The Yogi is not very communicative and evidently dislikes being interviewed, but I manage to elicit a few more facts about him.

Ramiah is still on the right side of forty. He owns some landed property in the Nellore district, and although he has not formally renounced the world, he lets his family carry on the active control of his estates so that he can give more time to his Yoga interests. He has a group of his own disciples in Nellore, but once every year he leaves them to visit the Maharishee with whom he stays for two or three months at a time.

He has made an extensive tour of South India in his younger days, when he sought actively for a master in Yoga. He has studied under different teachers and developed some exceptional faculties and powers. Breathing exercises and meditation practices come easily to him. He appears to have outstripped his teachers, because he obtained experiences which they could not explain satisfactorily to him. As a consequence he came at last to the Maharishee, who quickly provided him with the correct explanation and assisted his further course.

Yogi Ramiah tells me that he has come to stay for two months, bringing his own personal servant with him, and that he has been glad to find a Westerner taking an interest in the ancient wisdom of the East. I show him an illustrated English magazine and he makes a curious commentary upon one of the pictures.

"When your wise men in the West leave off trying to make engines run faster than those which they already have and begin to look into their own selves, your race may then find more real happiness. Can you say that your people become more contented each time they discover something that enables them to travel more quickly?"

Before he leaves me I question him about the incident with the young cobra. He smilingly scribbles a reply:

"What have I to be afraid of? I approached it without

hatred and with love for all beings in my heart."

I fancy that there is more behind the Yogi's words than his somewhat sentimental explanation implies, but without further questioning I let him return to his lonely dwelling across the pool.

During the weeks which succeed my first meeting with Ramiah, I come to know him a little better. We meet frequently in the little clearing around my hut, or at the pool-side, or even outside his own dwelling. I find in his outlook something which is conformable to my own temperament, while his large dark eyes possess a tranquillity which is singularly attractive. We strike up a strange kind of silent friendship, which culminates one day when he gives me his blessing by stroking my head and then clasping each hand in his own. Aside from a few pencilled notes in Telegu which the old man translates for me, no word is spoken during the whole of our association. Yet I feel that something is being built up between Ramiah and me which can never be broken down. From time to time I accompany him on short walks through the jungle areas, and once or twice we toil up the rugged hillside amid great boulders, but wherever we go he is always a serene dignified figure whose noble carriage I cannot help but admire.

It is not long, however, before I receive another striking revelation of his extraordinary power. A letter has found its way to me, bringing extremely bad news. It means, so far as I can see, that my financial fuel will unexpectedly run so low soon that my stay in India must be cut short. I can, of course, enjoy the protracted hospitality of the Maharishee's hermitage which the disciples will doubtless offer, but such a position would go right against the grain of my nature. And in any case the matter is settled for me by certain obligations which I consider it my duty faithfully to meet, and which can now be met only through the resumption of activities in the West.

The news provides an excellent test of the mental and spiritual training which I have been undergoing, and so poor is my material that I emerge quite uncreditably. I feel badly shaken. I am unable to effect my usual inner contact with the Maharishee in the hall, and leave him abruptly after a short visit. For the rest of the day I wander about somewhat disconsolate, a silent rebel against the crushing power of fate, which can upset all one's plans by a single blow.

I turn into the hut and fling a weary body and wearier mind upon the blanket. Some kind of deep reverie must have supervened, for, a while later, I start with sudden shock at a gentle tap on the door. I bid the visitor enter. Very slowly the door opens and to my surprise Ramiah's figure enters the hut.

I rise hastily and then, when he squats down, do the same facing him. He looks intently at me, a questioning expression in his eyes. I am alone with a man whose tongue I cannot speak and who cannot speak a word of English. Yet a queer feeling impels me to address him in my tongue which is so alien to him, in the almost fantastic expectation that he will catch my thoughts, though he fails to catch my words! And so, in a few jerky phrases, I hint at the difficulties which have suddenly dropped out of the skies upon me; and supplement my speech with gestures of defeat and expressions of disgust.

Rahiah listens quietly. When I finish he nods his head gravely in sympathetic response. A little later he rises and, with signs and gestures, invites me to follow him outside. Our path lies through shaded jungle, but before long emerges in a large dusty open space, where we are exposed to the full glare of the afternoon sun. I continue to follow him for about half an hour, when I seek the shelter of a banyan tree which then lends its protecting shade to my overheated body. After a short rest we travel on for another half-hour, again crossing a patch of scrub jungle, and ultimately wander down to a great pool by a route with which Rahiah appears to be familiar. Our feet sink deeply into its soft, sandy bank as we walk up to a patch of water which is overgrown with coloured lotuses.

The Yogi selects the shade of an exceptionally low tree and seats himself beneath it. I drop to the sand and squat beside him. The tufted head of the palmyra is spread out above us like a green umbrella. We seem to be entirely alone in this quiet corner of our turning globe, for a bare deserted landscape stretches away for a couple of miles until it meets dense hilly jungle again.

Rahiah crosses his legs and folds his feet under him in his customary meditation posture. He beckons me with his finger to approach a trifle closer. Then his placid face turns to the front and his eyes gaze steadily across the water, and he quickly sinks into a condition of profound meditation.

The minutes which seem so slow creep past, but Rahiah

remains quite motionless, with his face as tranquil as the surface of the pool beside which we squat, and with his body fitting into Nature's landscape like a tree unstirred by the slightest wind. A half-hour passes, yet he still sits under the palmyra, very strange and very quiet, wrapt in introspective silence. His face now seems transfigured by a profounder peace than usual, and his rigid eyes are fixed either in vacancy or on the distant hills—I do not know which.

It is not much longer before I become acutely susceptible to the silence of our lonely surroundings and to the amazing calm of my companion. Little by little, with an insidious but persistent gentleness, peace weaves itself into the texture of my soul. The mood of serene triumph over personal distresses, which I could not reach before, now comes to me more easily. In his own mysterious way the Yogi is helping me; I cannot doubt that. Barely a breath comes from his quiet form, so sunk is he in deepest contemplation. What is the secret of his sublime condition? What is the source of this beneficent radiation which emanates from him?

The heat is lessening with the approach of evening, and the baked sand begins to cool. A ray of vivid gold from the westering sun falls on the Yogi's face, turning his motionless body for the nonce into a haloed idol. I let go of him in thought that I may turn again to enjoy the increasing peace which is flowing in waves over my being. The changes and chances of mundane existence now take their fit proportions, as I begin to live in my own diviner depths. I perceive with startling clarity that a man can look serenely upon his tribulations, if only he can find the standpoint of his deeper self; that it is foolish to cling to the transient comfort of worldly hopes when the unchanging certainty of a diviner protection awaits his acceptance; *and that the reason why the wise Galilean told his disciples to take no thought for the morrow was because a higher power had taken thought for them.* I perceive, too, that once a man accepts this invitation to place his confidence in the prophetic element within his being, he may pass through the vicissitudes of human life in this world without fear and without flatering. And I feel that somewhere close at hand there is the fundamental value of life, in whose calm air no cares may exist. Thus the burden which lay so heavily on my mind vanishes with this change of spiritual atmosphere.

I reckon little of time during this beautiful experience, and I do not know how one can satisfactorily explain the mystery of the divine within-ness and its independence of any temporal sense. Twilight falls upon the vivid scene. Somewhere in the dim recesses of memory I am aware that night comes in these tropic parts with surprising quickness, yet I feel no concern about the matter. It is enough that this wonderful man at my side is content to stay and lead me inwards to the sovereign good, serenity.

When at length he lightly touches my arm as a signal to rise, the darkness is complete. Hand in hand we wander into the night through this lonely and desolate region, making the homeward journey without light and without track, guided only by Yogi Rahiah's uncanny sense of location. At any other time this place would have filled me with unpleasant fears, for past experience of the jungle at night has left eerie memories; one felt that a world of unseen living forms was close at hand, with animals moving hither and thither. And for a moment or two there flashes across my mind's eye a picture of Jackie, the dog which often accompanies my walks in the district and my meals at the hut, with the two scars around his throat from cheetah-bites, and of his unfortunate brother who was captured by the same cheetah and never seen again. Perchance I, too, may see the glowing jade-green eyes of a prowling, hungry cheetah, or tread unwittingly in the darkness on a cobra lying coiled up on the ground, or even touch a king scorpion, that deadly, little white monster, with my sandalled foot. But, almost immediately afterwards, I feel ashamed of these thoughts in the Yogi's fearless presence and at once resign myself to his protective aura, which I somehow feel is enfolding me.

The strange chorus of nature which begins with the Indian dawn is now being rivalled by the stranger chorus which begins when night is somewhat advanced. A jackal sounds repeatedly in the distance, and once there comes the ominous echo of a wild beast's snarl, and when we near the pool which divides our respective dwellings the croaks of frogs, lizards and bats come to our ears. . . .

In the morning I open my eyes on a sunny universe and my heart to its sunny message.



My pen would wander on into some account of the scenic life around me, and into further record of the many talks with the Maharishee, but it is now time to draw this chronicle to a close.

I study him intently and gradually come to see in him the child of a remote Past, when the discovery of spiritual truth was reckoned of no less value than is the discovery of a gold mine to-day. It dawns upon me with increasing force that in this quiet and obscure corner of South India, I have been led to one of the last of India's spiritual supermen. The serene figure of this ancient sage brings the legendary figures of his country's ancient Rishees nearer to me. One senses that the most wonderful part of this man is withheld. His deepest soul, which one instinctively recognizes as being loaded with rich wisdom, eludes one. At times he still remains curiously aloof, and at other times the kindly benediction of his interior grace binds me to him with hoops of steel. I learn to submit to the enigma of his personality, and to accept him as I find him. But if, humanly speaking, he is well insulated against outside contacts, who-ever discovers the requisite Ariadne's thread can walk the inner path leading to spiritual contact with him. And I like him greatly because he is so simple and modest, when an atmosphere of authentic greatness lies so palpably around him; because he makes no claims to occult powers and hierophantic knowledge to impress the mystery-loving nature of his countrymen; and because he is so totally without any traces of pretension that he strongly resists every effort to canonize him during his lifetime.

It seems to me that the presence of men like the Maharishee ensures the continuity down history of a divine message from regions not easily accessible to us all. It seems to me, further, that one must accept the fact that such a sage comes to reveal something to us, not to argue anything with us. At any rate, his teachings make a strong appeal to me for his personal attitude and practical method, when understood, are quite scientific in their way. He brings in no supernatural power and demands no blind religious faith. The sublime spirituality of the Maharishee's atmosphere and the rational self-questioning of his philosophy find but a faint echo in yonder temple. Even the

word "God" is rarely on his lips. He avoids the dark and debatable waters of wizardry, in which so many promising voyages have ended in shipwreck. He simply puts forward a way of self-analysis, which can be practised irrespective of any ancient or modern theories and beliefs which one may hold, a way that will finally lead men to true self-understanding.

I follow this process of self-divestment in the effort to arrive at pure integral being. Again and again I am aware that the Maharishree's mind is imparting something to my own, though no words may be passing between us. The shadow of impending departure hangs over my efforts, yet I spin out my stay until bad health takes a renewed hand in the game and accelerates an irrevocable decision to go. Indeed, out of the deep inner urgency which drew me here, has come enough will power to over-throw the complaints of a tired sick body and a weary brain and to enable me to maintain residence in this hot static air. But Nature will not be defeated for long and before long a physical breakdown becomes threateningly imminent. Spiritually my life is nearing its peak, but—strange paradox!—physically it is slipping downwards to a point lower than it has hitherto touched. For a few hours before the arrival of the culminating experience of my contact with the Maharishree, I start to shiver violently and to perspire with abnormal profuseness—intimations of coming fever.

I return hastily from an exploration of some usually veiled sanctuaries of the great temple and enter the hall when the evening meditation period has run out half its life. I slip quietly to the floor and straightway assume my regular meditation posture. In a few seconds I compose myself and bring all wandering thoughts to a strong centre. An intense interiorization of consciousness comes with the closing of eyes.

The Maharishree's seated form floats in a vivid manner before my mind's eye. Following his frequently repeated instruction I endeavour to pierce through the mental picture into that which is formless, his real being and inner nature, his soul. To my surprise the effort meets with almost instantaneous success and the picture disappears again, leaving me with nothing more than a strongly felt sense of his intimate presence.

The mental questionings which have marked most of my earlier meditations have lately begun to cease. I have repeatedly

interrogated my consciousness of physical, emotional and mental sensations in turn, but, dissatisfied in the quest of self, have eventually left them all. I have then applied the attention of consciousness to its own centre, striving to become aware of its place of origin. Now comes the supreme moment. In that concentration of stillness, the mind withdrawn into itself, one's familiar world begins to fade off into shadowy vagueness. One is apparently environed for a while by sheer nothingness, having arrived at a kind of mental blank wall. And one has to be as intense as possible to maintain one's fixed attention. But how hard to leave the lazy dalliance of our surface life and draw the mind inwards to a pin-point of concentration!

To-night I flash swiftly to this point, with barely a skirmish against the continuous sequence of thoughts which usually play the prelude to its arrival. Some new and powerful force comes into dynamic action within my inner world and bears me inwards with resistless speed. The first great battle is over, almost without a stroke, and a pleasurable, happy, easeful feeling succeeds its high tension.

In the next stage I stand apart from the intellect, conscious that it is thinking, but warned by an intuitive voice that it is merely an instrument. I watch these thoughts with a weird detachment. The power to think, which has hitherto been a matter for merely ordinary pride, now becomes a thing from which to escape, for I perceive with startling clarity that I have been its unconscious captive. There follows the sudden desire to stand outside the intellect and just *be*. I want to dive into a place deeper than thought. I want to know what it will feel like to deliver myself from the constant bondage of the brain, but to do so with all my attention awake and alert.

It is strange enough to be able to stand aside and watch the very action of the brain as though it were someone else's, and to see how thoughts take their rise and then die, but it is stranger still to realize intuitively that one is about to penetrate into the mysteries which hide the innermost recesses of man's soul. I feel like some Columbus about to land on an uncharted continent. A perfectly controlled and subdued anticipation quietly thrills me.

But how divorce oneself from the age-old tyranny of thoughts? I remember that the Maharishee has never suggested that I should attempt to force the stoppage of thinking. "Trace

thought to its place of origin," is his reiterated counsel, "watch for the real self to reveal itself, and then your thoughts will die down of their own accord." So, feeling that I have found the birthplace of thinking, I let go of the powerfully positive attitude which has brought my attention to this point and surrender myself to complete passivity, yet still keeping as intently watchful as a snake of its prey.

This poised condition reigns until I discover the correctness of the sage's prophecy. The waves of thought naturally begin to diminish. The workings of logical rational sense drop towards zero point. The strangest sensation I have experienced till now grips me. Time seems to reel dizzily as the antennae of my rapidly growing intuition begin to reach out into the unknown. The reports of my bodily senses are no longer heard, felt, remembered. I know that at any moment I shall be standing *outside* things, on the very edge of the world's secret. . . .

Finally it happens. Thought is extinguished like a snuffed candle. The intellect withdraws into its real ground, that is, consciousness working unhindered by thoughts. I perceive, what I have suspected for some time and what the Maharishiee has confidently affirmed, that the mind takes its rise in a transcendental source. The brain has passed into a state of complete suspension, as it does in deep sleep, yet there is not the slightest loss of consciousness. I remain perfectly calm and fully aware of who I am and what is occurring. Yet my sense of awareness has been drawn out of the narrow confines of the separate personality; it has turned into something sublimely all-embracing. Self still exists, but it is a changed, radiant self. For something that is far superior to the unimportant personality which *was* I, some deeper, diviner being rises into consciousness and *becomes* me. With it arrives an amazing new sense of absolute freedom, for thought is like a loom-shuttle which is always going to and fro, and to be freed from its tyrannical motion is to step out of prison into the open air.

I find myself outside the rim of world consciousness. The planet which has so far harboured me, disappears. I am in the midst of an ocean of blazing light. The latter, I feel rather than think, is the primeval stuff out of which worlds are created, the first state of matter. It stretches away into untellable infinite space, incredibly *alive*.

I touch, as in a flash, the meaning of this mysterious

universal drama which is being enacted in space, and then return to the primal point of my being. I, the new I, rest in the lap of holy bliss. I have drunk the Platonic Cup of Lethe, so that yesterday's bitter memories and to-morrow's anxious cares have disappeared completely. I have attained a divine liberty and an almost indescribable felicity. My arms embrace all creation with profound sympathy, for I understand in the deepest possible way that to know all is not merely to pardon all, but to love all. My heart is remoulded in rapture.

How shall I record these experiences through which I next pass, when they are too delicate for the touch of my pen? Yet the starry truths which I learn may be translated into the language of earth, and the effort will not be a vain one. So I seek, all too roughly, to bring back some memorials of the wonderful archaic world which stretches out, untracked and unpathed, behind the human mind.



Man is grandly related and a greater Being suckled him than his mother. In his wiser moments he may come to know this.

Once, in the far days of his own past, man took an oath of lofty allegiance and walked, turbaned in divine grandeur, with the gods. If to-day the busy world calls to him with imperious demand and he gives himself up to it, there are those who have not forgotten his oath and he shall be reminded of it at the appropriate hour.

There is that in man which belongs to an imperishable race. He neglects his true self almost completely, but his neglect can never affect or alter its shining greatness. He may forget it and entirely go to sleep in the senses, yet on the day when it stretches forth its hand and touches him, he shall remember who he is and recover his soul.

Man does not put the true value upon himself because he has lost the divine sense. Therefore he runs after another man's opinion, when he could find complete certitude more surely in the spiritually authoritative centre of his own being. The Sphinx surveys no earthly landscape. Its unflinching gaze is always directed inwards, and the secret of its inscrutable smile is self-knowledge.

He who looks within himself and perceives only discontent,

frailty, darkness and fear, need not curl his lip in mocking doubt. Let him look deeper and longer, deeper and longer, until he presently becomes aware of faint tokens and breath-like indications which appear when the heart is still. Let him heed them well, for they will take life and grow into high thoughts that will cross the threshold of his mind like wandering angels, and these again shall become forerunners of a voice which will come later—the voice of a hidden, recondite and mysterious being who inhabits his centre, who is his own ancient self.

The divine nature reveals itself anew in every human life, but if a man walk indifferently by, then the revelation is as seed on stony ground. No one is excluded from this divine consciousness; it is man who excludes himself. Men make formal and pretentious enquiry into the mystery and meaning of life, when all the while each bird perched upon a green bough, each child holding its fond mother's hand, has solved the riddle and carries the answer in its face. That Life which brought you to birth, O Man! is nobler and greater than your farthest thought; believe in its beneficent intention towards you and obey its subtle injunctions whispered to your heart in half-felt intuitions.

The man who thinks he may live as freely as his unconsidered desires prompt him and yet not carry the burden of an eventual reckoning, is binding his life to a hollow dream. Whoever sins against his fellows or against himself pronounces his own sentence thereby. He may hide his sins from the sight of others, but he cannot hide them from the all-recording eyes of the gods. Justice still rules the world with inexorable weight, though its operations are often unseen and though it is not always to be found in stone-built courts of law. Whoever escapes from paying the legal penalties of earth can never escape from paying the just penalties which the gods impose. Nemesis—remorseless and implacable—holds such a man in jeopardy every hour.

Those who have been held under the bitter waters of sorrow, those who have moved through shadowed years in the mist of tears, will be somewhat readier to receive the truth which life is ever silently voicing. If they can perceive nothing else, they can perceive the tragical transience which attends the smiles of fortune. Those who refuse to be deluded by their brighter hours will not suffer so greatly from their darker ones.

There is no life that is not made up of the warp of pleasure and the woof of suffering. Therefore no man can afford to walk with proud and pontifical air. He who does so takes his perambulation at a grave peril. For humility is the only befitting robe to wear in the presence of the unseen gods, who may remove in a few days what has been acquired during many years. The fate of all things moves in cycles and only the thoughtless observer can fail to note this fact. Even in the universe it may be seen that every perihelion is succeeded by an aphelion. So in the life and fortunes of man, the flood of prosperity may be succeeded by the ebb of privation, health may be a fickle guest, while love may come only to wander again. But when the night of protracted agony dies, the dawn of new-found wisdom glimmers. The last lesson of these things is that the eternal refuge in man, unnoticed and unsought as it may be, must become what it was once—his solace, or disappointment and suffering will periodically conspire to drive him in upon it. No man is so lucky that the gods permit him to avoid these two great tutors of the race.

A man will feel safe, protected, secure, only when he discovers that the radiant wings of sublimity enfold him. While he persists in remaining unilluminated his best inventions shall become his worst impediments, and everything that draws him closer to the material frame of things shall become another knot he must later untie. For he is inseparably allied to his ancient past, he stands always in the presence of his inner divinity and cannot shake it off. Let him, then, not remain unwitting of this fact but deliver himself, his worldly cares and secret burdens, into the beautiful care of his better self and it shall not fail him. Let him do this, if he would live with gracious peace and die with fearless dignity.

He who has once seen his real self will never again hate another. There is no sin greater than hatred, no sorrow worse than the legacy of lands splashed with blood which it inevitably bestows, no result more certain than that it will recoil on those who send it forth. Though none can hope to pass beyond their sight, the gods themselves stand unseen as silent witnesses of man's awful handiwork. A moaning world lies in woe all around them, yet sublime peace is close at hand for all; weary men, tried by sorrow and torn by doubts, stumble and grope their way through the darkened streets of life, yet a great light beats

down upon the paving—stones before them. Hate will pass from the world only when man learns to see the faces of his fellows, not merely by the ordinary light of day, but by the transfiguring light of their divine possibilities; when he can regard them with the reverence they deserve as the faces of beings in whose hearts swells an element akin to that Power which men name God.

All that is truly grand in Nature and inspiringly beautiful in the arts speaks to man of himself. Where the priest has failed his people the illumined artist takes up his forgotten message and procures hints of the soul for them. Whoever can recall rare moments when beauty made him a dweller amid the eternities should, whenever the world tires him, turn memory into a spur and seek out the sanctuary within. Thither he should wander for a little peace, a flush of strength and a glimmer of light, confident that the moment he succeeds in touching his true selfhood he will draw infinite support and find perfect compensation. Scholars may burrow like moles among the growing piles of modern books and ancient manuscripts which line the walls of the house of learning, but they can learn no deeper secret than this, no higher truth than the supreme truth that man's very self is divine. The wistful hopes of man may wane as the years pass, and the hope of undying life, the hope of perfect love, and the hope of assured happiness, shall ultimately find a certain fulfilment; for they constitute prophetic instincts of an ineluctable destiny which can in no way be avoided.

The world looks to ancient prophets for its finest thought and cringes before dusty eras for its noblest ethics. But when a man receives the august revelation of his own starry nature, he is overwhelmed. All that is worthy in thought and feeling now comes unsought to his feet. Inside the cloistral quiet of his mind arise visions not less sacred than those of the Hebrew and Arab seers, who reminded their race of its divine source. By this same auroral light Buddha understood and brought news of Nirvana to men. And such is the all-embracing love which this understanding awakens, that Mary Magdalene wept out her wasted life at the feet of Jesus.

No dust can ever settle on the grave grandeur of these ancient truths though they have lain in time since the early days of our race. No people has ever existed but has also received

intimations of this deeper life which is open to man. Whoever is ready to accept them must not only apprehend these truths with his intelligence, until thy sparkle among his thoughts like stars among the asteroids, but must appropriate them with his heart until they inspire him to diviner action.

†

I return to this mundane sphere impelled by a force which I cannot resist. By slow unhurried stages I become aware of my surroundings. I discover that I am still sitting in the hall of the Maharishee and that it is apparently deserted. My eyes catch sight of the hermitage clock and I realize that the inmates must be in the dining-room at their evening meal. And then I become aware of someone on my left. It is the seventy-five-year-old ex-stationmaster, who is squatting close beside me on the floor with his gaze turned benevolently on me.

"You have been in a spiritual trance for nearly two hours," he informs me. His face, seamed with years and lined with old cares, breaks into smiles as though he rejoices in my own happiness.

I endeavour to make some reply, but discover to my astonishment that my power of speech has gone. Not for almost fifteen minutes do I recover it. Meanwhile the old man supplements the further statement:

"The Maharishee watched you closely all the time. I believe his thoughts guided you."

When the sage returns to the hall, those who follow him take up their positions for the short interval which precedes the final retirement for the night. He raises himself upon the divan and crosses his legs; then, resting an elbow on the right thigh, he holds his chin within the upright hand, two fingers covering his cheek. Our eyes meet across the intervening space and he continues to look intently at me.

And when the attendant lowers the wicks of the hall's lamps, following the customary nightly practice, I am struck once again by the strange lustre in the Maharishee's calm eyes. They glow like twin stars through the half-darkness. I remind myself that never have I met in any man eyes as remarkable as those of this last descendant of India's Rishees. In so far as the human eyes can mirror divine power, it is a fact that the sage's

do that.

The heavily scented incense smoke rises in soft spirals the while I watch those eyes that never flicker. During the forty minutes which pass so strangely, I say nothing to him and he says nothing to me. What use are words? We now understand each other better without them, for in this profound silence our minds approach a beautiful harmony, and in this optic telegraphy I receive a clear unuttered message. Now that I have caught a wonderful and memorable glimpse of the Maharishee's view-point on life, my own inner life has begun to mingle with his.

†

I fight the oncoming fever during the two days which follow and manage to keep it at bay.

The old man approaches my hut in the afternoon.

"Your stay among us draws to an end, my brother," he says regretfully. "But you will surely return to us one day?"

"Most surely!" I echo confidently.

When he leaves me I stand at the door and look up at the Hill of the Holy Beacon--Arunachala, the Sacred Red Mountain, as the people of the countryside prefer to call it. It has become the colourful background of all my existence; always I have but to raise my eyes from whatever I am doing, whether eating, walking, talking or meditating, and there is its strange, flat-headed shape confronting me in the open or through a window. It is somehow inescapable in this place, but the strange spell it throws over me is more inescapable still. I begin to wonder whether this queer, solitary peak has enchanted me. There is a local tradition that it is entirely hollow and that in its interior dwell several great spiritual beings who are invisible to mortal gaze, but I disdain the story as a childish legend. And yet this lonely hill holds me in a powerful thrall, despite the fact that I have seen others infinitely more attractive. This rugged piece of Nature, with its red laterite boulders tumbled about in disorderly masses and glowing like dull fire in the sunlight, possesses a strong personality which emanates a palpable awe-creating influence.

With the fall of dusk I take my farewells of everyone except the Maharishee. I feel quietly content because my battle for

spiritual certitude has been won, and because I have won it without sacrificing my dearly held rationalism for a blind credulity. Yet when the Maharishee comes to the courtyard with me a little later, my contentment suddenly deserts me. This man has strangely conquered me and it deeply affects my feelings to leave him. He has grappled me to his own soul with unseen hooks which are harder than steel, although he has sought only to restore a man to himself, to set him free and not to enslave him. He has taken me into the benign presence of my spiritual self and helped me, dull Westerner that I am, to translate a meaningless term into a living and blissful experience.

I linger over our parting, unable to express the profound emotions which move me. The indigo sky is strewn with stars, which cluster in countless thousands close over our heads. The rising moon is a thin crescent disc of silver light. On our left the evening fireflies are making the compound grove radiant, and above them the plumed heads of tall palms stand out in black silhouette against the sky.

My adventure in self-metamorphosis is over, but the turning axle of time will bring me back to this place, I know. I raise my palms and close them together in the customary salutation and then mutter a brief good-bye. The sage smiles and looks at me fixedly, but says not a word.

One last look towards the Maharishee, one last glimpse by dim lantern light of a tall copper-skinned figure with lustrous eyes, another farewell gesture on my part, a slight wave of his right hand in response, and we part.

I climb into the waiting bullock-cart, the driver swishes his whip, the obedient creatures turn out of the courtyard into the rough path and then trot briskly away into the jasmine-scented tropic night.