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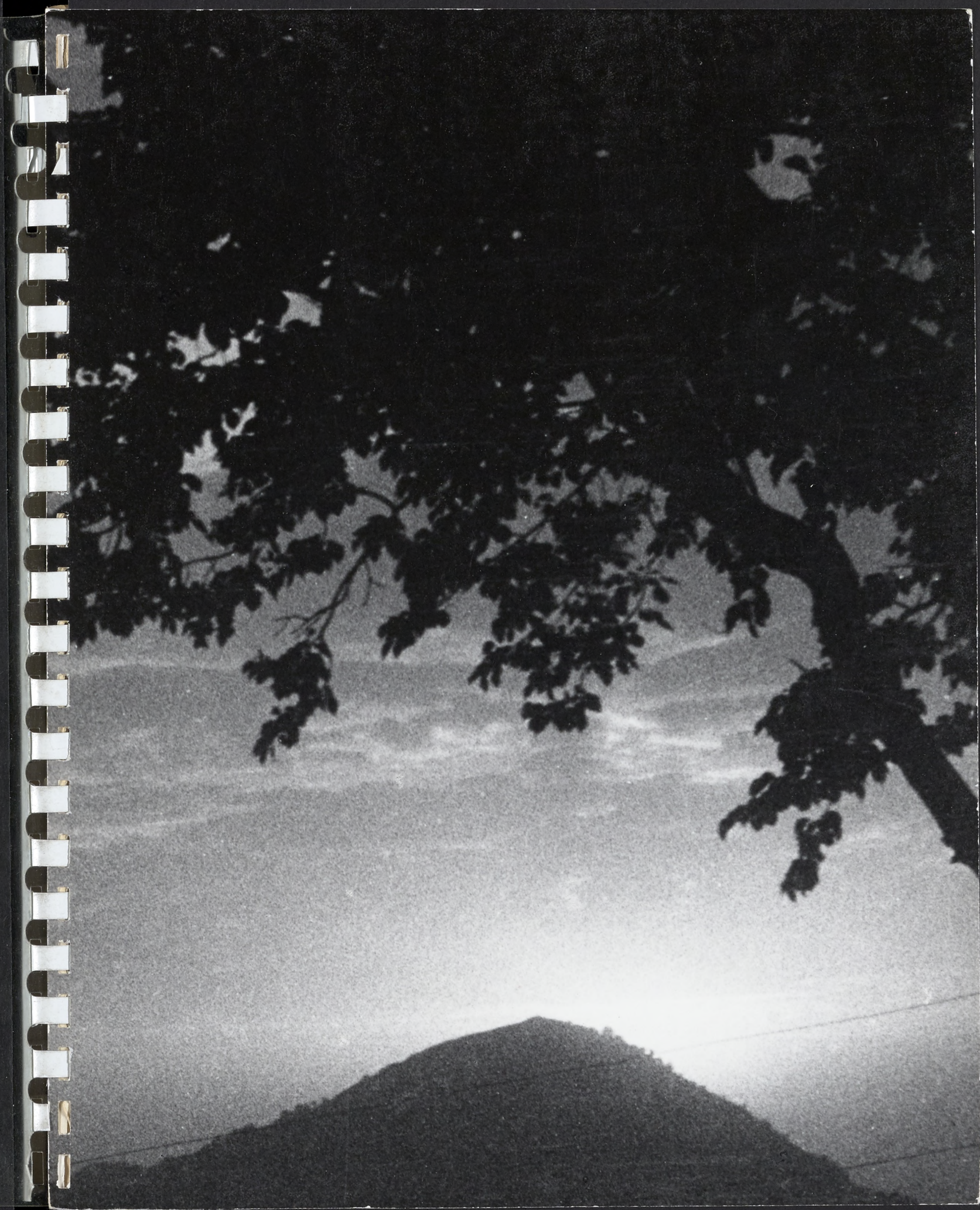
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INDIAN TWILIGHT

Edwin Mertner Standing

3



E. M. STANDING
MONTESSORI STUDIES CENTER
SEATTLE UNIVERSITY
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98122

Letter XIII

THE PARCEL FROM MAPPIN AND WEBB.

The Retreat,
Shahibag,
Ahmedabad.

June 12th, 1921.

My dear All,

The rains are still with us but not quite as heavy as before. All the same we have had 15 in. in the last fortnight; but four or five of these days have been without any rain. It is rather a trying time for the children, these long rainy days (and for me too!) but on the whole they manage to amuse themselves in their out-of-school hours very amicably. I have just taught the elder ones how to play chess, and they are shaping well at it; and will no doubt soon be as keen and as expert at it as they are at draughts. They are also very keen on card games, and amuse themselves by the hour at whist, snap, and other games I have never heard of. They don't seem to care for dolls except Leena; and her dolls, as I said before, all look like war victims with broken arms and injured heads. (I think the puppies have been responsible for some of the casualties.)

The children all went to the cinema the other day to see the Life of Vishnu - done by an American film company. Strictly speaking I should have said "The Lives of Vishnu", for most of these Hindu deities go in for a bewildering number of incarnations. Vishnu's last incarnation, by the way, has not come off yet - I mean in reality, not in the film. He is supposed to come at the end of the world, as a triumphant conqueror riding (like King William at the Battle of the Boyne) on a white charger.

I was unable to go owing to a bout of fever; but I would much like to have seen it, for I know very little, really, about the Hindu Mythology. I pick up odd scraps of information from the children, now and then, quite incidentally. Thus, a week or so ago in a Geography lesson we were looking at a map of India; and apropos of nothing at all Mrudula pointed to the strip of the sea separating Ceylon from the mainland, and said "That, Mr. Standing, is where Hanuman, the

Monkey God, discovered Seeta carried off by the demon Ravana and set fire to the island with his flaming tail". The Hanuman seems to be one of the more important deities; and another whose name often crops up is Krishna. What strikes me as odd is the fact that not only the children but also the grown-ups seem to make no distinction, as far as I can see, between Myths and True Religion - as though, for instance, we were to place the story of Perseus and the Gorgan's Head on exactly the same level of historicity as - say - the Babylonian Captivity or St. Paul's Missionary Journeys.¹ They don't, as a civilization and culture, seem to have acquired the historical sense as we have in Europe. This applies much more to the Hindus than to the Mahommedans.

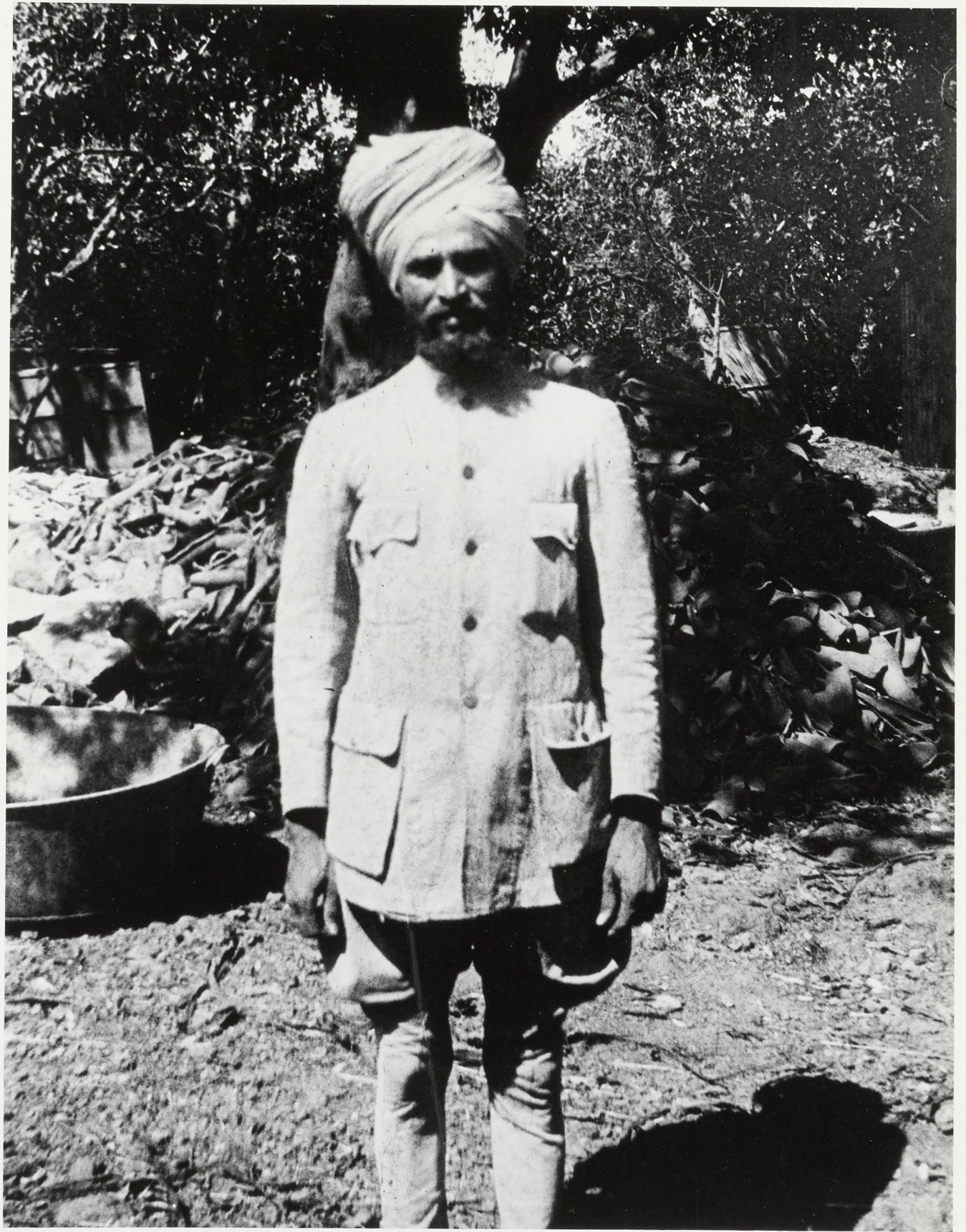
Speaking of Mahommedans reminds me that the other day there was a great festival for the followers of the Prophet, of whom there are thousands in Ahmedabad. All the devout Mussulmans dressed up in their best coats and fez hats, etc. and made a day of it. This Feast is accompanied by an immense slaughter of goats - for sacrifice - a practice which disgusts the Hindus.

I happened that morning to go for a walk outside the Compound and met a group of about a dozen Mahommedans; it looked like a family party. They all appeared to be in a gay and festive mood; and in their midst was a goat. This creature's head and horns had been garlanded with flowers, and its coat all brushed up and its horns polished. The goat itself, happily, seemed quite unconscious of its impending doom; and I thought what a mercy it is that animals have not the power of "looking before and after",² which is the price we pay for being, as Aristotle says, "rational animals".

What goes on outside the Compound is none of our business; but there was a great row next day because it leaked out that one of Mr. Sarabhai's own servants had sacrificed a goat inside the walls of The Retreat. The villain in the play was Salim Khan, "The Handsome", (as I call him), the head Sawar who is responsible for all the horses and ponies, and teaches the children riding. Deliberately to kill a goat is an enormity in the eyes of a good Jain - who would not even kill a fly. So you can imagine what a to-do there was. Salim Khan in fact was given the sack; but after much pow-wowing and many promises not to do it again he was allowed to stay on. As a matter of fact I discovered afterwards that the same thing

¹Gandhi writes "Rama, Krishna etc. are called incarnations of God because we attribute divine qualities in them. In truth, they are creations of man's imagination. Whether they lived or not does not affect the picture of them in men's minds." - "In Search of The Supreme."

²"Hamlet".



Salimkhan, the Handsome Head Sawar, in charge of the stable.

had happened before; but Salim Khan is such an excellent man at his job that I imagine the authorities, after due protest, are not unwilling to forgive and forget.

And do you know what the original event was which led up to this celebration, and these particular consequences in the year of Grace, 1921? You would never guess. It was Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac!

I got rather a similar surprise a few days later. I had gone into the city of Ahmedabad to attend a lecture. (It was by that Mr. Arundale, the Theosophist whom I mentioned in a previous letter). I happened to find myself sitting next to a nature doctor whom I had met before. "And how is your wife?" I enquired, "isn't she coming?" "No", he replied "she is obliged to keep indoors to-day". "Oh", I said, "I hope she is not unwell". "Oh, no, it's not that, I am glad to say, but you see it is a special feast day with us to-day, and my wife is very strict in her observances". "Indeed?" I went on in an expectant tone. "Yes, to-day is the day set apart to mourn the fall of Jerusalem". I was surprised because I had no idea he was a Jew at all - he was just as brown as any Indian. He was, in fact, an Indian Jew, with the name of Solomon. He is still devoutly expecting the Messiah and thinks he will come very soon.

The lecture was, by the way, a complete wash-out - a pompous, prolix and muddle-headed affair. It struck me as pathetic to see that hall full of so many young, eager, questioning, upturned faces, listening to all that Theosophical rubbish. I felt as though they were asking for bread, poor things, and were being given a stone. "The hungry sheep look up and are not fed".¹

There must be some special planetary influences at work during this month; for it seems such a sacred one; there are so many feasts in it. The Brahmins had a sort of spiritual "beano" last Tuesday. They all had to go and have a ritual bath in the river; and at the same time go through the ceremony of "Changing the Sacred Thread". This is a piece of string or cord which they always wear round their bodies, hung over one shoulder and going under the other - somewhat in the manner that Catholics (who seem to have adopted many pagan practices) wear their scapulas. We have three Brahmin cooks, and I was interested to observe a new white string round each of their sacred persons that night as they

¹ Milton

waited at dinner. There was no difficulty in seeing their new "threads" because they never wear any clothes above their waists. These Brahmin servants somehow look a cut above the rank and file of the servants, as though they had more "Blue Blood" in their veins. They have beautifully coloured skins, and I am never tired of admiring their bronzed and brawny muscles as they bring round the trays with the food.

It seems a curious and anomalous fact to me that these cooks and waiters should be of a higher caste than the Sarabhais who employ them. But so it is. And a revealing incident happened the other day. I was dining with the family and was sitting next to Leena. As the waiter brought round the dishes, there was one with something on it - some sort of sweet - of which Leena is specially fond. As any young child of five might easily do, just as the Brahmin waiter came in front of her in his round, she put forward her hand instinctively to take one off the tray. Immediately her mother who sat on Leena's other side simply pulled back her arm and reprimanded her very sharply in Gujarati. I was very surprised and must have looked it, for Mrs. Sarabhai who is usually so very patient with her children, went on to explain to me (in English) why she had done it. She informed me that if Leena, or any of us - including myself - had touched one of the dishes, the cooks themselves would not have been able to eat any of it afterwards, as is their usual custom when we have finished. The Sarabhais being of a lower caste than they - not to mention myself being of no caste - the food would have been defiled by our touch. Therefore, before the cook-waiters could have their dinner, they would have to throw away (as far as they were concerned) the contaminated food and cook a new dinner for themselves right from the start. One always addresses these waiters as "Maharaj" - not "waiter" - which means Great King, and comes from the same root as Raja.

There is another curious custom in connexion with this Brahmin Feast which I was not only able to observe but in which I took a part. It came about as follows. One of the servants - a sort of footman - came up to me with a very serious air, made a deep salaam, and then without a word but in a very polite manner took hold of my right wrist. I was the more surprised at this because as a rule the servants are extremely deferential and always stand up and salaam whenever you just happen to pass by. I thought the fellow must have gone a bit light headed (we did have a mad chap here not long ago - did I tell you?) However, as it seemed

a quiet and inoffensive sort of madness, I made no protest. He then produced a small shining artificial flower with a bright spangle glistening in the heart of it - not unlike the sort of spangles one hangs on a Christmas tree.* This flower was attached to a bit of coloured cord. He then proceeded to tie this outfit round my right wrist, giving the general effect of a rather "smashing" bracelet. This done his mission seemed accomplished, and after making another elaborate salaam he silently effaced himself - leaving me regarding my new bauble with as much pride and delight as a child with its first bracelet. Shortly afterwards, meeting one of the stewards who speaks English, I asked him what it was all about. He smiled and said "You must wear it all the rest of the day, and all night too until 10 o'clock to-morrow morning. If you do that you will obtain the blessing of the Brahmins for the next 360 days". I fulfilled the injunction to the letter, and so now I am all right for a year less five days!

Life here - at the Retreat at any rate - is a curious mixture of East and West, and the two distinct and often opposing elements suddenly stand out, like a rock formation coming to the surface in a railway cutting, and in the most unexpected manner. Yesterday two enormous packing cases arrived from Mappin and Webb, London. They were full of all manner of silver plate - in fact a complete set of everything necessary for giving a banquet in European style. (I told you, I think, we have two dining rooms, one for the ordinary simple Indian way of eating and the other for entertaining according to western ideas). We - that is the children and myself - had quite an exciting time in the afternoon watching the unpacking of these treasures. What a dazzling display it was! Soup tureens, vegetable and other dishes of all kinds, cutlery, finger bowls, etc., etc. It was like unpacking a Christmas hamper sent by a Fairy Godmother! I happened to see the invoice which the secretary was using to check up the goods. It came to £2,300!

And the odd thing about it is that it is quite likely that, after all - after they have already been paid for and come thousands of miles over sea - they may never be used! And why not? I can give you the answer in one word - Gandhiji (i.e. Mahatma Gandhi). It may turn out this way. The good Mahatma, in his newly launched Swadeshi or

* A reference to the custom of raksha bandhan when a sister ties a rakhadi or thread round the wrist of her brother as a blessing that protects.

Home Rule campaign, has laid down that there shall be a boycott of all British goods; and the idea is taking on like wild-fire. It is the Sinn Fein business all over again, "Ourselves alone in India".

It was most interesting to note the children's reactions on this question. One could plainly see that they were all impressed by the beauty and splendour of all these things; and when the matter was discussed Bharati and Suhrid were all for using them "now that they have come". Mrudula, on the contrary, was quite adamant about it. Although she is only 10 years of age, she is already an ardent follower of Gandhi, and as a most keen nationalist will have nothing British at any price. And she is prepared, too, to make sacrifices for her ideals. I notice that she has lately - like so many Indian ladies of the better class - put away her fine saris and wears only a simple Khadi one - Khadi means homespun. This is also a part of Gandhi's campaign.

There is another and different problem, which confronts me in particular, and illustrates how hard it is for East and West to be of the same mind. One of the things I most miss here is a nice bit of cake and a few 'pastries and things' with my afternoon tea. (I say this by way of a confession as I know I ought to rise above such things, such material things. But anyway "if the King liked a little marmalade with his breakfast"¹ I don't see why I shouldn't be allowed to have some cake with my tea!) Mulji assured me from the beginning "Yes master - me make very nice Engleesh Cakes", and he certainly tried times without number. But though very occasionally his products don't look so bad, there is invariably something mysteriously wrong with them: what it is I haven't the art to know. So eventually I have resigned myself to perpetual bread and butter - or the everlasting chopatees, as one of the ineluctable conditions of exile.

Bharati has just been in to tell me that there will be another holiday next week. It is to celebrate Krishna's birthday. Napoleon, I read somewhere, disapproved of the Roman Catholic religion because it gave the people too many holidays on which they did not work, to the detriment of economic progress, and doubtless of his own plans. I don't know what he would have said to the frank Polytheism of India. There are so many gods in the Indian Pantheon that

¹ "The King's Breakfast": A.A. Milne

I believe we could have a holiday every day of the year;* and still miss a lot of them out. Not that the holidays make much difference to me, though they do to the other masters who live in their own homes. In fact a holiday for me generally means that I am more with the children than if it were an ordinary school day. It means more stories to tell, more walks, more discussions, more tennis and badminton and so forth. Not that I grudge a minute of it, for these young people are much more to me now than just pupils: they are my friends, and I depend on them as they do on me.

*It would be true (and certainly more appreciative) to recognize the fact that "Secular" India allows people of all religions and sects the privilege of observing their own special days.

Letter XIV

THE WORLD OF INSECTS

The Retreat,
Shahibag,
Ahmedabad.

June 25th, 1921.

My dear All,

As you will see by the address, we are back again at The Retreat after our various sojourns in Bombay and Matheran. It is still very hot down in the plains, but not so bad as before the monsoon burst here, as it did several weeks ago in the hills. We do get periods of repite from the heat, of comparative coolness, when it is actually raining. It does not rain every day, but sometimes it will rain from five to ten days at a stretch.

When it does rain it does rain! It is a wonderful sight, or to be more accurate a wonderful sound; for it is the sound that impresses me most. It reminds one of the noise made by the escape of steam from a locomotive in a railway station - you know the sort of thing I mean, that makes you want to close your ears as the engine goes by.

Look at it this way. The annual rainfall in Bombay Matheran and parts of the West Coast of India is somewhere round 200 inches; that of London about 30 inches; so that if you remember that 200 inches fall within three months of the year, it means that in a fortnight we may get as much rain as they do in the Home Countries in the whole of the year!

We had five days and nights continuous rain last week. At night I could not sleep because of the noise it made pouring off the roof. It was like the roar of the sea - and was so loud you could hardly hear a person speaking to you on the telephone. Half the gardens has been flooded: and I suggested to the children that we ought to make a raft and play Robinson Crusoe on one of the new islands that have been formed. If the weather were like this all the year, I think the inhabitants would evolve into strange amphibian creatures with webbed hands and feet.

With the floods of water have come, as in Matheran,

floods of insects. I am sure that if Noah, in his deluge, had had to endure a twentieth part of the insects that surround us here, he would have flung himself headlong into the cooling waters. (There is no mention of Mrs. Noah having fitted up mosquito netting).

Now the rains have come we all sleep behind mosquito netting. My bed somewhat resembles those four posters you see in old houses ("where Queen Elizabeth slept once") except that it is on a smaller scale, and the surrounding curtains are made of mosquito netting.

This mosquito netting business is a great nuisance in some ways. For when you have just got into bed, adjusted the curtains, and are comfortably settled down for the night, you find you have forgotten your watch or your handkerchief. So you have to untuck the netting at the side of the bed where the curtains overlap, slip out, close the gap again, get what you have forgotten, open the folds again, slip in and quickly close up the curtains again from the inside. Then perhaps just as you are settling down again you hear the musical buzz of a mosquito near your face. The great question then is - is he inside or out? You will soon know; for if he is inside it will not be long before he lands on an exposed part of your body - face or arms, and prepares for his bloody business. If you are very quick you may do him in by slapping very quickly the place where you feel he has landed; but generally you slap yourself to no purpose; for in a few moments you hear him at it again. I have learned by experience, and now always take a flash light with me inside the netting. With this, like the searchlight of an anti-aircraft battery, I go into offensive action. When I have located the enemy in the sweeping rays of my searchlight, I try to bring him down, either by snapping at him with my hand, or driving him into a corner up against the netting and squashing him there.

There is a story told of an Irish Tommy, on service in India, who was given careful instructions how to arrange his netting so as to protect himself from mosquitoes. He heard a mosquito buzzing round trying to find his way in, but in vain, and then its buzz died away. "That's fixed him!" says Pat with a triumphant chuckle. A few minutes afterwards he saw a firefly hovering near his head. "Begorra!" says Pat, "He's come back for me with a lanthorn!"

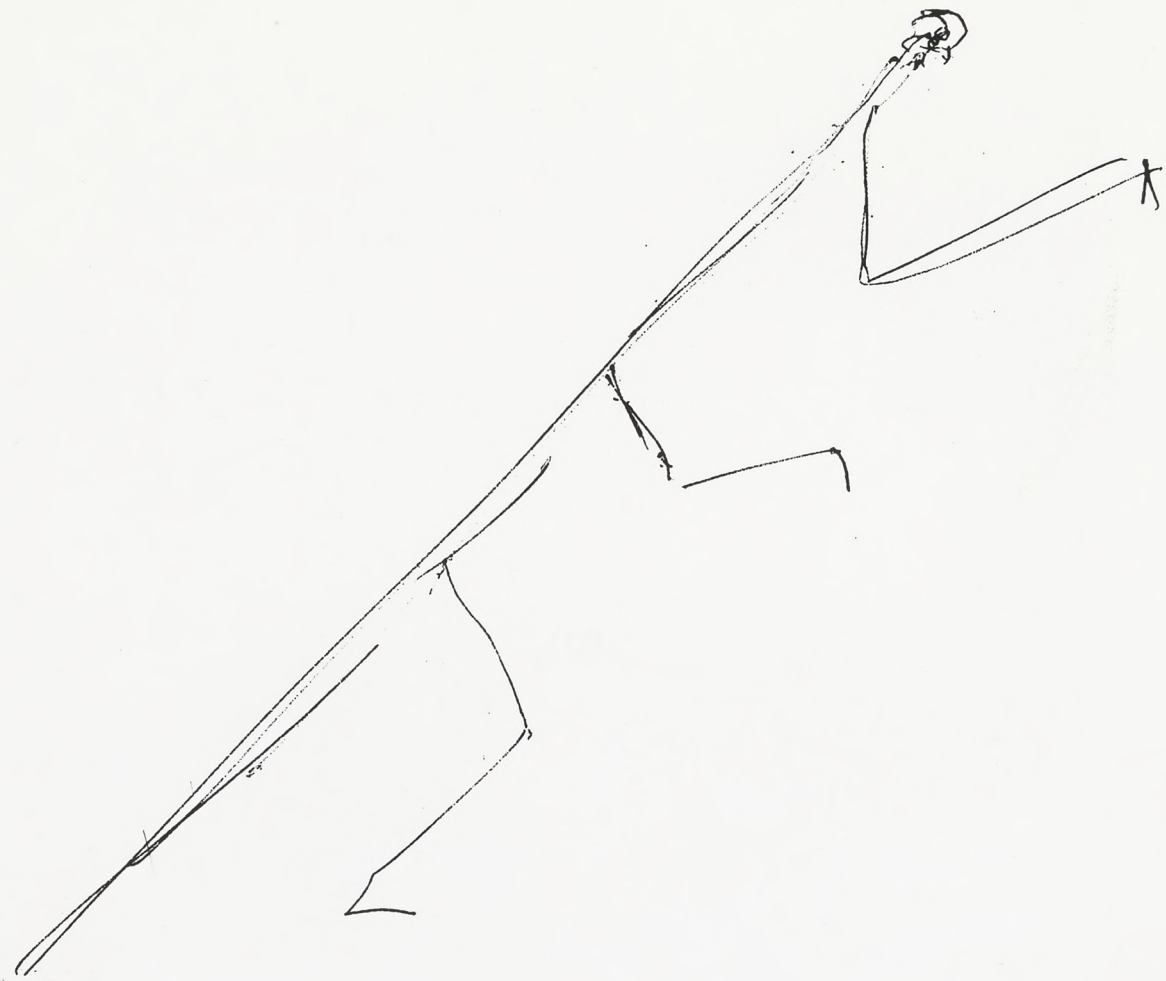
I marvel incessantly, not only at the number of insects, but also at their variety. To give you some idea as to their number: the other night I left the light on in my bath room without shutting the window, for less than 3 minutes.

In that short space of time I was visited by no less than 150 large flying ants - big fellows about an inch long. You might - very justifiably - wonder how I was able to count them. The answer is quite simple. These creatures have an untidy habit of flying into a room, landing on the floor, and then walking out and leaving (not "their tails behind them", like Bo-Peep's sheep) but their wings. All their wings - not just one, or two - but groups of four wings lying together, just where their owners abandoned them before they made their way on foot out of the room, down the tube where the bath water runs out. And so that was how I was able to be so numerically accurate, for I was interested enough to count them.

It is at night that the insects reveal their most sociable tendencies - attracted by the lights. At the moment we are suffering rather specially from a plague of beetles of various qualities and sizes. For the most part they are big meditative creatures, who buzz in, "shard-born, wheeling their drowsy flight".¹ They sweep in from the darkness outside like heavy armed knights, and have one tremendous tilt at the electric light bulb, after which they stagger heavily on to the mosquito netting roof over my bed. To this they cling with all their six legs, and settle down to brood over their late drastic experience, for the rest of the night. When I get inside my netting at night and look up, I see these monsters dotted about all over my muslin firmament like black stars. The other night I got out of bed to get something, and put my foot into my slipper without shaking it - as one usually does here - and felt something very hard, and slowly moving against my toes. I whipped my foot out again and switched on the light. I need not have been so alarmed: it was only one of these drowsy monsters. But what a whopper! I can't think how his wings carried him that far, even. And such a strange shape, too! He reminded me in some odd way of a motor furniture removal lorry.

A few days ago we had a visit from the Grass Insect. It came up uninvited on to the verandah where we were having afternoon tea. Seldom was an uninvited guest more appreciated. I never saw such a grotesque creature. It made me feel like the man that Cultton-Brock tells about, who was visiting the Zoo for the first time. When he came to the giraffe he looked at it long and intently, and then simply remarked "I don't believe it!" That was just the impression

¹ Gray's Elegy



~~If you could get an illustration~~
~~it would go well just here~~
by impression of the grass-insect

the Grass Insect made on me. The more I looked the less I believed! It was just too, too imaginary - too impossible. Yet there he was, walking amiably along in front of our 'wonder-wounded' eyes! Do you remember, in "Alice through the Looking Glass", the pictures of the Snap-Dragon fly and the "Bread and Butterfly"? Well, this creature seemed no less absurd. Imagine that you are lying down on the grass, dozing on a hot summer's day, and that you have idly plucked a blade of grass about six inches long. Then imagine that this blade of grass, suddenly developing arms and legs, began to walk away sedately in an almost vertical position, holding up its arms in front of it - Well, there you have it exactly! You would be inclined to think you had been dreaming, wouldn't you?

Three days ago I had my first little excitement with a snake. Happily I was not alone. I was taking a walk round the compound with Mr. Gidwani, a friend of the family's - a Cambridge graduate, by the way. We saw a black snake about four feet long glide away off the path from just under our feet. We followed it, Gidwani leading, and I bringing up the rear mortally afraid! It took refuge in a sort of circular trough of water, actually a hole dug for planting a tree and filled with rain. After a while this creature came up to breathe, and Giddy (as we call him) made a whack at it with a stick but missed it. This happened several times until he managed to hit it, whereupon the snake, enraged, tried to get out and come at us. Getting braver (like Caliban whose motto was "Beat him! after a while I'll beat him too!")¹ I also entered the fray, and hit out at him when he came in my direction.

It really wasn't a fair fight at all; for the snake was outnumbered two to one, and his enemies had all the advantage of the position. But somehow one doesn't feel like showing any chivalry to a snake. I was quite surprised - and still am - at the violence of the passion of hatred that was aroused in my usual placid bosom: it seemed like some elemental emotion not to be analysed. In dealing with a wasp, or a spider, or even a scorpion, I can appreciate their point of view; or, at any rate, feel that they have a point of view. Therefore, with them I can feel a sort of compunction that I am obliged to take offensive action - but not so with a snake! It has such a cold, glittering, venomous, passionlessly evil eye.

¹ "The Tempest" : Shakespeare

And then the way it walks! - or rather, that is just it! - it doesn't walk; it has neither "the gait of a Christian or pagan or any other man" (Shakespeare). No other creature crawls on its belly like that. Even the centipede and the millipede have legs. A snake, indeed, looks like what it is supposed to be - a creature under a curse - "and on thy belly shalt thou go and dust shalt thou eat all thy life."¹ I think it is Ruskin who says that we instinctively hate a snake because it is a natural anomaly. It seems to defy the law of gravity, because it presents the appearance of something which flows uphill. I try to exonerate myself for my lack of Christian sentiment towards it by falling back on the Biblical statement "I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed for ever."

It has been calculated that in India alone some 30,000 people are killed by snakes on an average every year - i.e. over 80 every day! At the Retreat, however, we are practically immune from such a danger, at least during the day. At night it is rather a different story, for the snakes, belonging to the Kingdom of Darkness, come out then: and I was warned never to dream of walking about the paths in the compound at night without carrying a light and a stout stick.

Last Sunday we had a birthday celebration. It was Bharati's and she is now nine years of age. She is as precocious as ever, and still often completely forgets her meals. Then there is a general hunt for her, until she is found tucked away in some corner, lost to the world, reading "Uncle Tom's Cabin", or "Tales from the Faery Queen", or whatever it is. Just at the moment she is buried in one of Mrs. Henry Wood's novels, reading it in a Gujarati translation. Last week it was Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Fin" - in English. As a birthday present her father has given her a Remington Typewriter, for which she has long had a craving. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if this child turns out to have unusual literary gifts. Anyway she is now well equipped for entering on that career!

Bharati had many visitors come to wish her Many Happy Returns, including the Gazelles, who, - now we are back in Ahmedabad - are also back living in their own home. Amongst the visitors was a Jain Sadhu or Priest. I was introduced

¹ Genesis

to him amongst the other visitors in the drawing room. I was careful, however, not to sit too close to this reverend gentleman, as I remember being told that it is a part of their 'rule' that Jain Priests are not allowed to have a bath! And why? Because so great is their respect for life in all its forms, however humble, that they fear that in taking a bath they might inadvertently destroy some of the (to speak euphemistically) more lowly forms of life that live parasitically about their persons!

We are living in "The Age of Chivalry" at present. This is one of the results of my relating to the children the stories of King Arthur and the Round Table. This afternoon I was dozing a little on the verandah, "my custom always in the afternoon",¹ when I heard a great commotion coming from the lawn in front of the house. Looking up I beheld Suhrid, sitting astride the vanquished Gautam, and brandishing a stick over his throat. "I am Sir Gareth," he bawled out at the top of his shrill little voice, "Yield or I will slay you!" Poor Gautam, who is too young to appreciate such knightly deeds of gallantry, strongly resented the whole performance, and was, I could see, on the verge of tears. Rather reluctantly, therefore, I forced myself to get up, and went along the verandah to the front door. In order to go out into the garden anywhere from the verandah, one has to do this, as it is caged in all along with a wire trellis to keep out thieves. But by the time I got round to the scene of combat all was peace again. Honour had been satisfied, and Sir Gareth and his vanquished foe ("Edyrn, son of Nudd," I presume!)² were going off with every appearance of friendship, to feed the Mouse Deer - a strange delicate looking fawn, with a curiously mouse-like face, and one of the family pets.

It is wonderful how these Eastern children lap up the stories of European Knights; they are always asking for more. King Arthur and his good company have kept us going for a long time, and Chaucer has been a great help. But both these sources have pretty well run dry, so I will have to think up something else for tomorrow. The Old Testament is always a good stand-by. Ah, good idea, I'll give them the story of David and Goliath of Gath.

1 "Hamlet"

2 "Idylls of the King"- Tennyson

Letter XV

HINDUISM AND CATHOLICISM:
HOLY MEN, BOGUS AND OTHERWISE.

The Retreat,
Shahibag,
Ahmedabad.

December 28th, 1921.

My dear Everyone,

In England it is often considered a little gauche - slightly out of order - to mention God and religion in a general drawing room conversation. Not so in India as everyone seems interested in religion and they are not at all embarrassed by showing that interest. Thus the Perawallahs (the Hall porters), who are Mahommedans, seem to think it is the most natural thing in the world to get down on their knees at certain intervals in the day and bow down, very low, three times in the direction of Mecca - at the same time repeating certain prayers. They are not in the least embarrassed by doing this in public nor does it cause any embarrassment to those who see them. Everyone takes that sort of thing for granted, as a matter of course. People seem to think it is just as natural to discuss religion as to discuss politics or the news of the day.

As for myself, in addition to these discussions with other people, I have a sort of perpetual religious discussion going on inside myself! For, as the weeks and months go by I find myself swinging like a pendulum now towards and now away from Roman Catholicism. For I must confess I have become somewhat infected with what some of my Protestant friends call "Roman Fever".

Curiously enough, just this last week, a number of incidents happened which bear directly on this issue. They have been so strikingly germane to the matter that I think the recipients of this circular letter - some of whom are Protestants and some Catholics - would both be interested - from their points of view.

Now for the first incident: about a week ago little Leena came up to me with a few grains of uncooked rice in her chubby little hand and said in a most charming manner, "Mr. Standing, would you like some of these grains of rice; they are very special."

"And why are they so very special?" I enquired.

"Because", she replied, "my God has blessed them. We put some of these grains out in front of our God and ask him to bless them and then we give them to our friends."

I thankfully accepted the offered grains in the spirit in which they were offered. But I could not help thinking, at the same time, how similar this rite seemed to that of the Catholics whose Priests - in the rite of Communion - bless the Bread and afterwards distribute to the Faithful.

Leena, seeing that I was interested said in a burst of confidence, "Would you like to see my God?" Upon my replying in the affirmative, she led me upstairs to her room where she conducted me to a beautifully made wooden cabinet, open at the front. In the center of it was a beautiful golden image of Krishna - seated like a Buddha - with some flowers placed in front of him. "I put the grains down in front of him", said Leena, "and asked him to bless them."

I was interested to notice that there were quite a number of other deities in the same cabinet - quite a Pantheon, in fact - amongst whom was a statue of the Madonna with the Infant Jesus in her arms. There was also a statue of Peter Pan - a replica of the one in Kensington Gardens, London.

A few days after this incident I met Mrudula in one of the corridors carrying what looked like a golden candle stick with several arms - not unlike the one taken by the Emperor Trojan from the Temple in Jerusalem - but a good deal smaller. When I asked her what it was for she replied, "We put ghee - that is melted butter - in each of these little pits (at the top of each arm); then we light them and place them in front of our God." At once the thought struck me, "That's exactly what the Catholics do in their churches; they light a candle and place it in front of a statue of Christ or His Mother or some other Saint." It is clear that the Catholics have stolen this idea from the pagans.

A few days after this I went to have dinner - Indian fashion - with the family in their dining room (usually I have my meals by myself, cooked by Mulji, and sitting at a table). As one of the Indian waiters passed I noticed he had a long string of beads hung around his (very handsome) torso, which was bare to the waist. "What are those beads for?" I asked, and Suhrid who was sitting next to me, replied, "Oh he says his prayers on those." "Ah!" I said to myself, "that is where the Catholics pinched the idea of

their Rosary Beads".

The very next day I went with Vasuben and Induben (the Gazelles) on a visit to a Jain temple. As we went around I was interested to notice that the two girls dipped their fingers in receptacles containing water and after carefully and reverently touched themselves with this water. At once I thought to myself, "That is something which the Catholics have taken over - doing practically the same thing - as they make the Sign of the Cross with Holy Water."

I had often heard Protestants say that the Catholic religion has lost the primitive simplicity of its early Gospel days, becoming debased with the accretion of a lot of pagan customs. And all these experiences which I have just related seemed to corroborate the statement to the full. It seemed to me that the primitive simplicity of worship had become overlaid with many superficial external forms and practices which had in reality nothing to do with the inner spiritual life which Jesus taught and practiced - as none of these things are mentioned in the Gospels.¹

¹It was only several months later - thanks to the reading of Cardinal Newman's famous book "The Development of Doctrine" (lent to me by the Rev. Archbishop Goodier of Bombay) that I saw the true significance of these "pagan accretions" and then the pendulum began to swing the other way - back to Catholicism.

Newman maintains that one of the "seven characteristics of a vital movement" is the power of assimilation. Why should not Christianity in its development through the centuries adopt certain practices from Pagan religions so long as in doing so it is able to "assimilate" them - that is, take them into itself without losing its own proper form. Why should it not make use of such obviously sound psychological aids to devotion such as lighted candles, blessed objects, Holy Water and so forth; as long as they do not interfere with the essential dogmas of its teaching? That it should be able to do so is a sign of its strength and vitality. Without doubt such external materials and actions help many devotees to concentrate as they carry out their worship.

All which goes to show the truth of an observation by G.K. Chesterton. He says that many persons say that "all religions essentially and fundamentally reach the same truths but differ only in their external manifestations and manner of presentation." On the contrary says Chesterton, it is much more true to say that most of the great world religions resemble each other in exterior manifestations - having a priesthood, an altar, certain prescribed rites and prayers but differ fundamentally in what they teach.

Since we are talking of religions let me relate a rather amusing incident which occurred last week in the city of Ahmedabad. It took place in the following manner: There was a sort of special fair, mela, being held - an annual event - a kind of extra market - something beyond the usual. To this fair many traders come from all the surrounding districts. One of these was a strange kind of merchant, as you will see, but he made his money all right!

A week or two before the extra fair was held, a bazaar rumour began circulating that when the fair did come off it would be attended by the Holy Sadhu, a Saint in other words, who would work a miracle. It was even said that a certain God would appear to this man under the form of an idol.

Well the time came, and amongst the people at the Fair was a Holy man. In fact there were lots of Holy men. That is nothing new in India. At this very moment there are some eight million Holy men wandering like beggars over the face of India. That is their occupation - they are "seekers of enlightenment." They usually go from house to house with a begging bowl and even the poorest will give them something, so great is the respect in India for these seekers of enlightenment.

This particular Holy man had set up a little tent in one corner of the bazaar, and sat there all day cross-legged; and as the people passed by some of them would drop a pie (less than a farthing) into his bowl. But only farthings came.

Then one day the miracle happened! Right out of the ground, just in front of his tent, came up slowly a statue - the statue of this particular God who was to appear (I forget his name). So now there was great excitement and fervour; and the money came rolling in as you can well imagine.

This went on for three or four days when suddenly the Holy man disappeared; tent, begging bowl, God and all. And why? Because he was wanted by the police! What they were on his track for I never found out but it was not for the miracle; but for some crime against the law which he had committed.

You are wondering how the miracle took place? Well it was quite simple and very ingenious - as you will see. Our "Saint" had come by night and, in the ground, just opposite his tent had dug a large hole into which he had placed some sort of spherical receptacle. I am not quite sure of all the

exact details (a professional secret, no doubt) but he had filled this spherical underground receptacle with dried grain. Now this underground sphere filled with grain communicated with the surface through a sort of vent like a volcano. When all was ready he poured water down the vent into the dried grain and then placed the God in the vent. Result: the water percolated down into the grain and made it swell. Since the only point of exit was through the vent, the grain, as it began to swell with the moisture, gradually pushed up the idol from below -- and Hey Presto! -- there rising like Persephone from the lower regions was the God whose visit had been forecast.

This story reminds me of another incident which I think is worth mentioning. Every morning before the household is up we hear a voice singing as its owner moves along outside the high wall of the Retreat compound - singing cheerfully and with gusto and joy. We often used to wonder who it was and where the man was going (it was a man's voice). Finally, one day Mr. Sarabhai told one of his servants to find out who he was and where the man was going. It appeared it was the voice of a man who came every day on foot from the city two miles away to say his prayers at a particular temple down by the Sabarmati river which is not very far from us.

This rather intrigued Mr. Sarabhai; so one day he asked one of his servants to invite the man to come in on his way back--which he did. Mr. Sarabhai, who is always interested in questions of religion, spoke to the man and asked him questions about his beliefs. I could not follow all the conversation but afterwards Mr. Sarabhai said that this devotee was a very simple fellow, quite illiterate but absolutely sincere. He was extremely humble and did not think it was anything at all out of the ordinary to walk four miles every morning to and fro to his devotions, singing hymns and prayers most of the way. On further questioning he found it a great help to his inner life to do so before he began his day's work. The man had a really beautiful face and if anyone was really a saint in that vicinity I should say that he was. He was not a scholar or a philosopher nor did he pretend to be anybody in particular, but I am sure in the eyes of God, he - in spite of - or perhaps just because of his simplicity is a very Holy individual.

Letter XVI

The Retreat,
Shahibag,
Ahmedabad.

August 22nd 1921.

My Dear Friends,

I think it is about time I sent off another Circular Letter - if only in the hope of getting a letter in reply from some kind individual. Not that anything special has happened to me lately, except that I got vaccinated a few days ago. That in itself is not an event; but - as I had it done by Colonel Tuke, the English doctor in the Civil Service here - it almost seemed like an event to me, because it was such a change meeting, after so long a time, another European again.

There is an English colony in Ahmedabad but I have practically nothing to do with it. Or, to express it perhaps more accurately, they have nothing to do with me. I did call once on the chief English official here but he was out, so I left my card; but nothing has happened since. The fact that I am employed by a "native" does not tend to make me a persona grata amongst the Burra Sahibs of the English settlement. Not that I would hesitate a second if I had to choose between living amongst them or in my present environment. I grow more and more fond of my "family" every week, and nothing would persuade me to leave them. In fact, I think of myself as extremely fortunate, and can hardly imagine that in all India I could have hit upon a family more "simpatico" as the Italians say.

There has been no diminution in the plagues of insects, but we have however experienced some new varieties; for nature here is immensely prodigal in her gifts! The latest plague to descend upon us for our sins (as upon Pharoah of old) is one which I am sure would have caused him quickly to soften his hard heart. It is called the "Stink Bug". Not a very euphonious title but an extremely apt one. They are the most odious creatures and "odorous" too. The "Stink Bug" is really a species of beetle, quite small, not much bigger than a Ladybird (I wish they would "fly away home" as the song says!) They don't look so bad with their shining

steel-blue cases, but they possess the villainous property of emitting the most vile and pungent smell if you scarcely so much as look at them. Give them the slightest touch and they retaliate with this dreadful odour. The only way to get rid of them is to flick them off very quickly, very neatly and cleanly. If you make the slightest blunder, you have to retire and wash your hands for about half an hour. One of them landing on a plate or dish of food can render the whole unpalatable in a twinkling of an eye. They come flying round at night "not single spies but in battalions" dropping like an infernal hail on everything. One has to shut all the doors and windows very early, as soon as darkness approaches and the lights are lit, for they come in hordes flinging themselves against the pane. In the morning Mulji goes along my verandah with a dustpan and brush, sweeping up hundreds of them at a go.

Then there are the Blister Beetles. We call them that although I suppose they have a scientific name. They are nearly an inch long, rather slender and graceful. Their peculiar property is to raise a blister on your skin if you touch them. Happily they are fewer in numbers and one can generally steer clear of them. (There are some spiders, by the way, that have the same genial characteristics!)

Not all my animal intruders are so unwelcome. I have one most delightful visitor who often comes to my study in the form of a baby squirrel. He lives with his mother in a coign of vantage in the verandah roof, and is the most inquisitive fellow imaginable, - worse than the "Elephant's Child."

Small as he is he often gives me quite a start. I will be quietly sitting at my table reading or writing and suddenly there is a terrific noise just at my elbow at the other end of the table, or perhaps under it. It is a strange call. Imagine the twitter of a robin raised to the hundredth degree and there you have the vocal performance of my young friend as he stands trembling with excitement looking at me with his dancing, inquisitive, shiny, beady little eyes, his whole being torn between the desire to explore further and the fear of the unknown monster who has turned to look at him.

Meanwhile his mummy, who is less foolhardy, stands just outside the door, calling to him excitedly. When he goes out, which he does eventually, his mummy gets hold of him just at the top and thinnest part of his tail (which is

exactly half way from the tip of his nose to the tip of his tail) whereupon the little one responds by clinging to her neck with his claws. Then away goes mummy carrying her precious burden along the overland route; i.e. by the verandah netting, up a post and along one of the roof beams, to their home. Once there I expect she administers a sound spanking for his "insatiable curiosity." I have never actually witnessed these exhibitions of maternal discipline (only heard them!) but what I have seen, and it is the prettiest sight, is the mother giving him lessons in the art of climbing and crawling along difficult places. You can almost hear her say, "Now don't be afraid, darling. Just put your foot out like that, and the other one here, and you will be all right; so - come to me!"

(Two hours later)

At the moment when I had got to the end of the last sentence I was invaded by a troupe of human visitors with their usual demand. So now, having steered the Knight of the Lion Heart through a series of adventures in which he vanquished in turn the dragon, the giant, Sir Kaye, and the other False Knights; and after having obtained for him and his lady a happy issue out of all their afflictions (and fulfilled my own promise) I am once more at liberty to complete this letter.

To return to the squirrels. You might wonder why they are so tame as to come and live on the verandah. Well, the chief reason is that - since this is a Jain household - no one drives them away, or does them any harm; and so they get more and more cheeky. In fact they would become worse and worse were it not for a sort of yearly purge, which takes place clandestinely, when Mrs. Sarabhai and the children and all the ladies go off to the hill station, as soon as the really hot weather sets in. Then, Mr. Sarabhai - who is a good Jain - but not a fanatical one, directs a brief war on the squirrels. A few are slaughtered, and the rest make off, to take up their abode in the trees of the compound or beyond it.

I seldom go outside the high walls of the "Retreat" compound except to go to Church on Sundays, or visit some of the family's relations, especially the home of the Gazelles. And after all, why should I? For we are a self-contained little world with our own houses, gardens, tennis court, lake, riding track, school building, and even our own post office; and we shall soon have our own

swimming bath. Besides all these I have my own good companions - my children and my books.

A few evenings ago, however, Mr. Sarabhai took me and the family to see the famous "Tanks" situated just outside the city. The first was a large artificial lake with sixty-four equal sides, with a Palace on an island in the middle of it. It reminded me of the tanks where Kas Kaa in the "Jungle Book" hunted the Bandalog. As we watched we saw hundreds of big turtles swimming lazily about in the water. Mr. Sarabhai then told me a rather gruesome story about an English Magistrate who once visited this lake. Stooping down to feed the turtles a crocodile caught his arm and pulled him down into the murky depths, and he was never seen again.

We went on to a second tank, which was beautifully starred with myriads of lotus flowers; and near to it was a Hindu temple. We went into the latter and they showed us, in the dimly lit inner shrine, a hole in the floor where the Sacred Snake lived. I wasn't a bit sorry when we got out again; I felt it might have disapproved of me as a heretic!

At one of the outdoor shrines, I watched one of the "Religious" at his devotions - loud, clamourous prayers, a strange mixing of foods, the carrying out of certain ritual actions, and the tinkling of a little bell at intervals. So like the Mass, I thought, and yet so different! for it was a completely individualistic form of worship with no sign of any communion of spirits. The whole scene, the lake, the temple, the lotus flowers, was wonderfully impressive. Every vestige of breeze had dropped; and the evening was "quiet as a nun breathless with adoration."¹ In the middle distance the stars were already twinkling through the branches of the large banyan trees. In the background - curiously incongruous to all this - was a forest of tall chimney stacks belonging to the Ahmedabad cotton mills, including no doubt Mr. Sarabhai's own factory.

One evening last week we had a remarkable old Mahomedan gentleman to dinner, Mr. Taiyabji. He is a convert to Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Co-operation Movement. As a consequence he has given up all his fine clothes, dresses always in home-spun cloth, with his head surmounted with the little Gandhi cap, which rather resembles a white Highland

1 Wordsworth

bonnet, without the ribbons. He sat and addressed us in the drawing-room as if we were a public meeting (as Mr. Gladstone did to Queen Victoria). His subject was the iniquitous behaviour of the English Government.

To me it seemed like Sinn Fein all over again! He gave us graphic accounts of the Amritsar riots, and of the "inhumanity" of the British General in charge, who ordered his soldiers to fire on the mob. This, I thought, is the other side of the Black Hole of Calcutta and other such incidents; and, judging from things which happened in Ireland, it might easily have been pretty black too. However, one must hear both sides first and reserve judgment.

Mota Bhen, Mr. Ambalal's sister, was also at this dinner; I like her immensely; she is such a genial and original character. She, too, is an all-out supporter of Gandhi; runs a children's creche, and a labour exchange; and even supports the workers in their strikes against her brother! But strangely enough there is nothing personal about it: so brother and sister remain the greatest possible friends in spite of these yawning differences.

Letter XVII

The Retreat,
Shahibag,
Ahmedabad.

September 13th, 1921,

My Dear Everyone,

The weeks seem to go by very quickly nowadays: I can hardly believe it is three weeks since I sent off the last circular. Life here is very quiet and very regular. My chief excitements are of an internal kind; for I spend nearly all my spare time reading books either for, or against, Roman Catholicism, with excursions now and then into reading plays.

Not long ago we had a very interesting visitor staying here, the Hon. Paranjape. He is one of the highest Indian officials, and is one of the members of the Council of the Madras Presidency. The Council consists of four individuals, who, with the Governor, are immediately responsible for government of the Madras Presidency, which contains some 40 million souls. The Hon. gentleman has come here to study the economic conditions of our district, which is sometimes called the Lancashire of India. He is really a most remarkable man, and a very different type from the ordinary Gandhi enthusiast. He represents a calmer, much more level headed type - very well educated, speaking English with an ease and fluency that many English would envy. He seems to be able to talk in an interesting manner on any subject that happens to come up. Amongst other things he is an Italian scholar and a great admirer of Dante.

He told me he is still a Hindu in his religious beliefs, and gave me the best, and most clear outline of Hinduism I have heard from anyone yet. To him Hinduism is first and foremost a Path - an ascending Path - along which the soul must travel. It is a definite science. The seeker of Truth must give up everything, and follow the rules laid down by the old Masters of the spiritual levels. In the course of this Spiritual Ascent he discovers, or rather uncovers new faculties of self-awareness until at last he attains the state and being of the Yogi or perfect sage. He added, however, that there is not anyone, living at the present time, who is actually the Yogi or perfect sage.*

* Most Indians would disagree with this observation. What about Sri Ramana Maharshi or Anandamayee Ma, just to mention widely known and recognised sages?



Further he maintained that it was useless for the ordinary man to go in seriously for the religious life. It would be impossible for him to follow the Path without giving up all his everyday concerns.

The Hon. Paranjape is very keen on Psychology and allied subjects. He gave me a graphic description of some of the thought-reading stunts he had witnessed in one of the Buddhist monasteries. One of these clairvoyant fellows asked him to think of a name. He thought of one - the most unlikely to be known to the Eastern monk; but the latter told him at once ("Sandro Botticelli"). Speaking of thought-reading, another visitor told me how he had once gone to consult one of these Yogis with a number of questions written on a piece of paper in his pocket. The clairvoyant answered them all in order whilst the papers still remained in his pocket. Our Hon. friend had to leave suddenly and go back to Madras on account of the Moplah riots which had just broken out.

September 20th

The family has just sustained a very sad loss - the death of Mr. Bakubhai, Mr. Sarabhai's cousin Nimaben's husband, his best friend and business partner, and also an intimate friend of the family. Mr. Sarabhai was away for nearly a month before he died, in order to be with him in his illness. I, too, feel the loss personally, for I knew Mr. Bakubhai very well. It was to his house I went when first arriving in Bombay; and he was extremely kind and hospitable to me, and made me feel at home at once.

As a sign of mourning the drawing-room and all the best rooms are locked up. It is also customary - at such a time - to take away all tables and chairs and beds too and live in the simplest manner possible. Another point to be observed is to avoid any mention of the departed one.* This makes one realize that death is a more terrible thing to a Hindu than to us, since they believe that they will never meet their friends again. (If they do meet them again in another incarnation, they cannot recognize them as such - they will be different people - or animals.) But that particular personality - your friend Jack or Margaret - has disappeared for ever from the cosmos - as a wave is lost in the sea.

I am very glad Mr. Sarabhai is home again. He is really quite a remarkable personality, and it makes things

*There is no such "custom" and generalisations are as usual misleading.

more interesting when he is here. Though this sad event has cast a certain gloom over the household, another event has taken place which has brought very much joy. There has been an addition to the family, in the form of a girl: So now "We are seven" - four girls and three boys.

A few weeks ago we had another excitement. Mrudula, the eldest of the seven, was thrown from her horse when it fell down, and she broke her collar bone. Happily, it is practically all right again now, at least she is able to use her hand again. It ought to have got better quickly for we had three doctors and a bone-setter come and attend her. (I remember very vividly how, that evening, the chauffeurs from four cars all sat in a ring on the ground around a lantern talking and smoking - making a most Rembrandtesque and impressive picture). In addition a fifth doctor came down from Bombay and X-Rayed the setting of the broken bone; and happily found everything in good order.

We have not seen quite so much of the "Gazelles" lately. You remember I gave this name to the two cousins of the family, the two girls who were with us at Matheran. They come up often and play games with the children here, or we go down to their house. Their first visit after the baby was born revealed another strange custom. They weren't allowed to touch, or even see the baby (though I could see the two girls were just longing to do so and take it in their arms). Nor were they allowed to touch any of us in the household. They mightn't even borrow a book from me! If they broke this rule they would not be allowed to go into the temple for twelve days; and would have to undergo various ceremonials of purification. This law must be observed until the poor innocent cause of this - Gita, the baby -- is thirty days old. Bharati and Suhrid were teasing poor Vasuben by running after her and trying to touch her. They even "touched" her motor-car "to prevent her from going home." It is a strange custom, and as Hamlet would say "more honoured in the breach than the observance."

We had a flutter of excitement in the school the other day. I had a lot of books and papers stored away in some cases in one of the school-rooms. The school servant discovered the ants and had got at them. Happily for me they were not the white ants who have such a keen taste for literature that they eat books covers and all. These were monstrous black ants, big lusty fellows nearly an inch long. They had taken possession of my stored books from domestic apartments, and had got in by the thousand. They evidently

believed in the importance of a sound early environment (like Montessori) for they laid their eggs on the impressive foundation of Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason", with Pascal's "Pensees", and Schopenhauer, and Bernard Shaw ready at hand for the opening minds of their offspring. I hear that there is a species of ant, which captures and makes slaves of another kind of ant, making them do all the hard work while they live in idle luxury. All which seems to show that, in spite of Solomon's advice (Go to the ant, then slugg and learn of him) - some ants are not above taking a few tips from mankind. It was an amusing sight to watch the men at work unpacking the cases; for these ants are no chickens and bite very heartily. This caused the men to be continually jumping about like bears on hot irons.

I was really concerned for them at first and offered to lend them boots: but they scorned the notion and seemed to think the whole business rather a joke, which is more than I would have done. For these ants are - if one might say so - of the bulldog breed. Once they bite hold of anything, nothing will persuade them to let go. They hang on as stupidly as the Lobster in "Water Babies". The only way to deal with them is to pull till their head comes right off.

I am glad to say none of my books are seriously damaged. Not that I would have minded very much, for most of the books are by German philosophers such as Nietzsche, Fechner, or Americans like Royce, whom I no longer find half as interesting as Newman or Saint Augustine. I must say, however, I would have been sorry to lose Pascal; and I was really grateful to the ants for drawing my attention to him again.

I expect to be going up to Bombay either tomorrow evening or the next day to meet my brother Bert, who is coming out to rejoin his regiment in Mesopotamia. I haven't seen him for about six years: so I hope we shall be able to recognize each other. He will have about six days before his boat sails from Bombay to Busrah.

Letter XVIII

THE GREAT MAHATMA GANDHI


The Retreat,
Shahibag,
Ahmedabad.

October 7th, 1921.

My dear everybody,

I have just seen the great Mahatma Gandhi - at last - and herewith send my first impressions.

It happened this-wise. I was just coming back from the school house, on the other side of the compound, this afternoon with Suhrid when we saw the family Daimler waiting outside the front entrance. "Who's going out?" enquired Suhrid of the Paherawallah (hall porter) on duty. "It is for the Mahatma," came the reply in a tone of awe, "he's here."

On going into the vestibule we saw a flotilla of about a dozen pairs of sandals and slippers -- a sure sign of visitors. (In the East men remove their footgear instead of their hats on entering the house). Prominent in the middle of this miscellaneous collection of footwear was a pair of enormous canoe shaped slippers like this,  decorated with gilt and purple embroidery. "Those are the Mahatma's", said the Paherawalla with a reverend mien, pointing - as at a thing miraculous - to two small and much-worn sandals. And in a sense the Paherawalla was right, for wherever the owner of these humble sandals will go, hundreds of thousands, indeed millions of his countrymen are ready to follow with a blind devotion.

I ran to get my camera, and followed Suhrid upstairs to a sort of Reception Room. Gandhi was seated at one end of it on a low sofa which he shared with Bharati and Nimabhen, one of the aunts.

I couldn't help experiencing something of a shock on setting eyes on the great man for the first time. It was not so much his apparel, as his astonishing lack of it! There was the world-famous leader in a well-furnished drawing room, his host immaculately dressed in well-cut English clothes, while he, Gandhi himself, was hardly

dressed at all in the European sense of the word. All he wore was a pair of white langoti - about the size of very abbreviated running shorts. They were, of course, made of Khadi -- i.e. homespun cloth. This made the contrast even more marked, when I considered that Mr. Sarabhai is the owner of one of the largest cotton goods factories in India.

Gandhi dresses in this manner on principle; first, to identify himself with the poor by wearing no more than the humblest gardener or beggar; and, secondly, to show that it is not necessary to health to wear a lot of clothes; and thirdly, to back up his great argument that India should, and could be able to supply enough cloth for all her needs without importation of any foreign material.

He looked very frail with his thin bare arms and legs and emaciated chest: it made me wonder how ever he gets through the immense amount of work he does daily. It was obvious that his great power lies in his spirit rather than his body. He lives largely on toast, milk and fruit, and not much of these; and his whole appearance reminds one of a professional ascetic.

When I entered he was talking rapidly and earnestly to the company in Gujarati, and as I was not able to follow what he was saying I had leisure to observe his personal appearance. He certainly has one of the most extraordinary -- if not the most extraordinary face that I have ever seen. For some minutes, as it happened, after I entered, I could only see his profile. He has a well-shaped head, prominent nose, good chin, and a rather protruding lower lip. His hair, which is turning grey, is close cropped, like a convict's (premonitory symptom!) except for a long wisp of hair, about six inches in length hanging from the back of his head. This is the "Shikha" (his, by the way, was waving the whole time in the breeze from an electric fan) and is worn as a sign of Hinduism. Its function, I am told, is to enable the Deva, or angel, to pull one up to heaven when one dies. (Rather a bad lookout for us old egg-heads).*

When he turned his head round, and I saw him full face, his features struck me as being even more extraordinary. His head presents the appearance of an animated skull so void is it of any spare flesh. At one moment it reminded me of

* No one would take this inference seriously! Dear Mr. Standing; even his errors are endearing.

the bust of Julius Caesar in the British Museum; and a few minutes after (when he laughed) of the grinning bust of Voltaire. The dignity of these comparisons, however, was somewhat lessened by the absence of a number of front teeth on the lower jaw -- he refuses to wear artificial ones -- and also by his ears which stick out pre-eminently, giving him at times a strangely gnome-like appearance. When he laughs, which he does frequently (he may be an ascetic but he is no wet blanket!) he "doth smile his face into more lines than there are on the new map with the augmentation of the Indies."¹ His eyes are quick, sympathetic, intelligent and penetrating; and his whole manner singularly vivacious.

I found it hard to make up my mind finally whether I was on the whole favourably impressed with his appearance and personality or not. One minute his face seemed to be that of a saint; the next of a thinker; the next of a fanatic: at another moment it would wear an almost Mephistophelian expression, to change in a few seconds to an impish look, like Puck or Pan, -- but never foolish or uninteresting. As a landscape varies under changing shadows made by passing clouds on a summer day, so his expression became sad, tender, humorous, stern, or scornful, in rapid succession, according to the changing thoughts within.

A pretty interlude was caused by the entrance of the Ayah, bringing in Geeta, the new-born baby of the family. This was Gandhi's first visit to the family since Geeta arrived into this troubled but interesting world, less than five weeks ago. It - or rather she - was carried up to the Mahatma: I presume for him to give her his blessing. The Ayah - a most graceful creature - bent down and handed the baby to him. I wondered how on earth this almost naked ascetic would deal with the situation. Where would he put the baby? - he had no "lap" to put it on! I need not have worried; for Gandhi rose to the situation with an admirable ingenuity. Taking Geeta in his thin bare arms he made a support for her round little head with one of his hands - on the cup and ball system! - whilst he supported her body with the other hand.

Gandhi was genuinely delighted with his wee visitor, who for her part, rested completely contented in this unusual cradle. As I watched this charming picture, still

¹"Twelfth Night" : Shakespeare

another expression lit up the Mahatma's face -- a gentle and paternal tenderness. Several times Mrs. Sarabhai made a move to relieve him of the burden, but he refused to give her up, and continued talking and laughing to her and to Vikram and Leena and the other children who had gathered round.

On the baby's departure I was brought forward and formally introduced to the Mahatma. After this - with that unfailing courtesy which distinguishes Oriental hosts - the conversation now went on in English. It soon turned to the all-absorbing topic of politics and Home Rule, a subject in which I was particularly interested, just coming from Ireland. "Don't you think", I said, "that the situation in that country is very similar to what it is in India?" "No," he replied, "it is not the same. England does not want to exploit Ireland like she does India. With her it is only a matter of geography, or shall we say military strategy. England does not wish to have another country outside the Empire near her own shores."

"In the case of India it is a racial question. If an Englishman meets an Irishman in any other part of the world, as in South Africa, for instance, he treats him as a friend and a brother and is glad to live on equal terms with him. On the other hand no such brotherhood is felt, or shown, to an Indian because he belongs to a coloured race. At the bottom it is a question of racial cleavage." "But surely," I replied, "it is possible to get over this colour bar. For to those that believe in the Fatherhood of God we are all brothers irrespective of colour or caste." "Yes," he replied, "it is of course possible, and that is what Christianity teaches; and real Christianity acts on it too. And that is why Europe has failed to interpret Christianity." "I grant you," he continued, "that some Christians, like the Quakers, for instance, have got very near to it; they have a certain warmth in their hearts towards the Universe."

When I told him at this point that I was a Quaker he seemed glad, and went on to speak very highly of that community. "I have had some very good friends amongst them, especially when I lived in South Africa. There was a Mr. Coates, in particular, who was always lending me books and trying to convert me to Christianity. He was a splendid fellow, '24 carat gold' - the sort of man you could not help loving at first sight."

Reverting to our previous conversation I tried to sound the Mahatma as to what he meant by the limiting expression

that the Quakers had only a "certain warmth" to the Universe. "In what way do you consider their Charity limited? Is it because they take animal life and are not vegetarians?" "Exactly", replied the Mahatma, "really Universal good-will - which extends even to the animal kingdom - this is India's prerogative." Mahatma Gandhi, by the way, has been influenced by the same religious sect as the Sarabhais - the Jains - who, as I think I mentioned before, are the most strict of all Hindus in the matter of not taking animal life.

When I told him that I was feeling "the strait Quaker waistcoat" rather too tight and cramping, and was in some ways more attracted to the Roman Catholic Church, he replied, "I am not surprised at that, for I, too, have a great respect for Roman Catholics. They have their religion in their hearts, and get it by faith, while the Quakers get it more through their intellect."

Our conversation drifted towards other Christian bodies including the Anglican Church. Of this he declared that it was much more a national religion than others; and went on to say that if the English left India to-morrow the Anglican Church, in this country, would to a large extent go with them. "But not so The Roman Church," he continued, "there is no trace of nationalism about that." (This remark brought to my mind a shrewd comment by Cardinal Newman that I read only the day before, "Islamism is said to be the form or life of the Ottoman Empire, and Protestantism of the British Empire; and the admission of European ideas into the one, or of Catholic ideas into the other, would be the destruction of the respective religions of their power.")

We passed easily from this subject to that of "Religious Authority" as compared with the "Light Within." "Do you think," I enquired, "it is safe to trust to each individual's private intuition in religious matters, without having any external authority to serve as a standard or limit?" "Yes," he replied, "if the individual has sufficiently developed in himself the requisite spiritual conditions." On being asked to explain the matter more clearly, he went on - "I mean if the individual has subdued not only his bodily passions but also the sins of the mind. To such I would say 'Trust absolutely in the Voice of God in your heart and act on it without fear'." I ventured at this point to interpolate the remark that he would be a bold man who could be sure, in himself, that he had reached such a state of perfection. "Such a state of soul," continued the Mahatma, "comes only to the man who seeks truth with a single mind, one who has followed

the doctrine of Ahimsa or Innocence, in the original Latin meaning of the word, i.e. doing no harm, 'non-violence.' In the last resort we must all fall back on the Voice Within." "Why," I exclaimed laughing, "thou art not far from being a Quaker! For that is almost exactly their doctrine of the Inner Light." At which he laughed heartily, and reiterated his sympathy with the Quakers, though he admitted he had never attended one of their meetings. I went on to remark that though I was sure there was a great deal to be said for the doctrine of the Inner Light yet it surely had its limits, as it often led to the illogical position of two persons sincerely believing contradictory statements - one at least of which must be false. When I added that perhaps the answer was a "Deposit of Faith" carried on through the centuries, as Catholics believe, he replied that the Mahommedans had a very similar arrangement, and went on to compare the Caliphate with the Papacy. As he expounded this view, even I though not a Catholic could see that he entertained some very crude ideas with regard to the Catholic claims to Papal infallibility. Nevertheless I found his comparison between the "Apostolic Succession" in the Caliphate, and that in the Catholic Church interesting and suggestive.

Shortly after this he rose to go. I was anxious to take a photograph of him before he went and requested him to pose for a few seconds. "I never sit for 'camera fiends' on principle," he replied, with a disarming smile. "But think of the pleasure you will be giving to me and my Quaker friends," I answered, "surely you cannot be following your Inner Light in this!" Whereupon he laughed -- he has a hearty and infectious laugh -- and actually took a step forward into the sunlight, standing still for a moment whilst I snapped the shutter.

The whole Sarabhai family -- including myself who am now almost a part of them -- accompanied Gandhi and his friends down the stairs to the vestibule, where the flotilla of sandals was set in motion.

Then this little man -- whom millions think of as the greatest man in the world -- this strange little man, in a loin cloth and a pair of sandals, stepped into Mr. Sarabhai's luxurious two thousand pound Daimler, and vanished in a whirl of dust.

Letter XIX

VISIT OF THE
PRINCE OF WALES STAGED

The Retreat,
Shahibag,
Ahmedabad.

November 23th, 1921.

My dear everybody,

The Prince of Wales, who is coming on an official visit to India, arrived at Bombay a few days ago. Of-course, all the papers are full of it, each giving graphic descriptions after their kind. Those favouring the Government emphasise the completeness and heartiness of the welcome, not failing to remark on the number of Gandhi Caps that line the sides of the road, and were waved as the Prince passed. The Nationalist papers, on the other hand, exulted in the splendid manner in which the "painful duty" of boycotting the Prince had been carried out; and joyfully described "the crowds who went to witness the Solemn Burning of Foreign Cloth, at the very moment when the Prince placed his Royal Foot on this downtrodden and unfortunate country". Although the news of the riots, which followed almost immediately after his arrival, had not yet been made generally known, nevertheless everyone, everywhere, is talking of the Prince's visit and its different aspects and possibilities.

It is not to be wondered at that some of this excitement trickled down into the world of make-believe and imitation where children live and move and have their being. Yet few could have foretold the manner in which it found expression amongst the little people with whom I am privileged to live.

After lunch is a slack time of day in India when all reasonable people take a siesta. As the saying is "Only the English and the Devils run to and fro without a cause" at that period of the day. Children, however, as everyone knows - like poets and other geniuses - are above reason; so they had no intention of wasting their precious hours in this idle manner. I was just going off to my room when I was confronted by Leena dressed up in the most extraordinary manner. She wore a sort of a uniform, surmounted by a helmet, and one of her chubby little hands was wielding a tin sword in a glistening sheath, and the other a murderous looking toy pistol. "Aren't you coming to the Circus, Mr. Standing,"

she said. "Well," I replied, "I didn't know there was one; but I will come if I may." "All right," she answered, "It's in that room - there - and it's beginning in about ten minutes." "Very good Leena, I'll be there."

"I wonder what new devilment these youngsters are up to now!" I mused, as - a few minutes later - I entered the room Leena had indicated. It was the European drawing-room, and it presented a most unusual appearance. Towards one end of it three or four sarees had been stretched right across it, from side to side, to form a drop curtain. Behind this - dimly visible through the diaphanous material, like figures in a mist - great preparations were going on, swords flashing, orders being shouted out, and scene shifters busily at work. Then it was borne in upon me that Leena whose English, though admirable for her age, is not yet word perfect had meant Theatre instead of Circus: and that a play or pageant was toward. Mrudula (aged 10) was the stage manageress; and the rest of the company was made up of the other five members of the family, plus two small visitors, their ages ranging from ten to two.

At last all the preparations were complete and there ensued an awful hush. The curtain went up (but wouldn't stay up and had to be held in its position by the stage manageress) and the orchestra began the Prelude. The orchestra was a small harmonium played with one finger by Bharati; and the tune the "National Anthem". It was played andante serioso with the solemnity of the Funeral March. Not a figure on the stage moved a muscle, not even the two-year-old baby, Vikram, till the last note had been panted out, at which the audience burst into applause.

Then came the first scene. As far as I could make out it was a combined representation of the Landing of the Prince of Wales and a great Review of the Troops. Even the Baby had been "pressed" into service to swell the ranks. The Army, accoutred with swords, pistols and other weapons, went successfully through various manoeuvres - until the smallest soldier got tangled up with the curtain. This somewhat destroyed the morale of the Army, and the Review was brought to an abrupt close.

When the curtain went up again (more successfully this time) we saw a Rajah on his throne with his Ranee beside him and a child on her knees (Vikram the Baby again). This peaceful domestic scene was destroyed by the entrance of the Villain - a usurper - whose obvious intent was to "wade through

slaughter to a throne". He, I presume, represented the wicked British. He was beaten back, however, by a faithful bodyguard and met the death he deserved after a furious battle. I was personally very relieved when this scene was over, as I felt almost certain the combatants would spike each other's eyes out - or baby's eyes, for he persisted in wandering in and out between "the fell incensed points of mighty opposites".¹

When all traces of the struggle had been removed, the curtain - on going up again - disclosed the two eldest girls of the family, Mrudula and Bharati facing each other. They stared at each other so fixedly, not to say fiercely, that I was relieved to see they had discarded their swords. It soon transpired that there was going to be another combat, but not with any carnal weapons this time - only with words. It was, in fact, to be a verbal duel; and, to my astonishment, it was announced that the "causus belli" was none other than the Prince of Wales and his visit, one protagonist maintaining that he was "an unjust tyrant" and the other that he was a "jolly decent chap".

As a special concession to me, the programme was slightly altered and the dialogue took place in English. (After all I was fifty per cent of the audience, - an aunt, Nimaben Bakubhai - whose husband died about six months ago - who knew English, being the other fifty). It was perhaps a good thing that it was in English, since it prevented the discussion from going too fast and too furious. As it was it soon tended to become heated and even personal. I am afraid I am unable to give a detailed account of the course of the debate as I was too anxious to keep the peace and see fair play. But I do remember some disconnected fragments, which - seen rightly - are a remarkable reflection of the conflicting currents of thought and feeling which are sweeping through India at the present time:-

Mrudula (aged 10)

The Prince is very bad. He has taken India from us Indians and has come to get a lot of money out of India.

Bharati (aged 9)

No, excuse me, it is not so. India was taken by the English long ago, and it was taken from us because, at that time,

¹ "Hamlet"

we were fighting amongst ourselves and could not drive them away. So it was really our own fault.

Mrudula

The Prince ought to give up India now and let us have Swaraj (Home Rule).

Bharati

It is a good thing that the English are here, for look how when the Moplahs attacked the Hindus the English stopped the riot.

(Bharati's argument would have been much stronger if she had known that at that very moment Hindus and Mahommedans were attacking Parsees and Jews in the streets of Bombay and the British authorities had to intervene).

Mrudula

The English ought to go away, and then there would be no more killing of animals and eating meat.

Bharati

But if the English did go away there would still be Mahommedans, and they eat meat.

Mrudula

But they learned it from the English.

Bharati

I don't think so. Is it true?

This last remark was addressed to the audience, and led to general discussion after which Bharati went on, in a more conciliatory tone:-

Perhaps the Prince of Wales and Mahatma Gandhi will be able to meet, and then the Prince will agree to give us Swaraj.

But Mrudula - the ardent Non-Co-operator - would have no compromise, and was determined not to give in an inch. She answered:

Mrudula

The English don't give us justice. There was an Englishman, a planter,

who killed an Indian but he was not punished by the court; but if an Indian does anything wrong, not even half as bad as killing, he is always punished. Always when an Englishman does anything wrong he is let off. What we want is justice!

Shortly after this the discussion got more and more heated until, arriving at a certain temperature, it melted into the vernacular, when it flowed along in a double stream at double speed.

The other fifty per cent of the audience the aunt, now interposed in the spirit of the Seventh Beatitude (Blessed are the Peacemakers) and it was made quite clear that in the opinion of the audience the question had been very ably and sufficiently thrashed out, with honour and glory to both sides!

The atmosphere being still rather heavily charged with electricity, and the dialogue, being the last official item on the "Circus" programme, it seemed to me the right moment to suggest the acting of Hamlet's ghost. For the past ten days or so, I have been taking the story of Hamlet with the elder ones. The idea met with general approval; and soon, like Puck, from "being auditor I became an actor too". So in a few minutes, draped in long folds of sarees (each saree is about twenty feet long) I was proclaiming to a bronzed and handsome young Hamlet (Suhrid) that I had been fully murdered and dispossessed. Political feuds were soon forgotten in the serene atmosphere of Art. Mrudula, now transformed into Queen Gertrude, was wringing her hands in horror, as Bharati, a Prince herself now, lunged fiercely through a towel rail at the eavesdropping Polonius. If you had heard that cry "A rat, a rat, dead for a duct", seen that lunge, heard Polonius (Gautam) fall with a thud on the drawing-room floor, and seen the Queen fall back fainting, you would have been led to speculate that - whatever may become of her political institutions - there is certainly a great future for the Drama in India.¹

¹Bharati has become a Dramatist; and one of her plays - "The Well of the People" - was reviewed on the B.B.C. by E.M. Forster, while T.S. Eliot writes ".....So far as there is any parallel or prototype in English for The Well it would seem to be in some of the later plays of Yeats - dramatically, I mean, for the use of language seems to owe little if anything to him..... as for the language, it seems to me poetic, in a strikingly original but generally correct English idiom."

Letter XX

THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
MEETS IN AHMEDABAD.

The Retreat,
Shahibag,
Ahmedabad.

December 19th, 1921.

My dear Everyone,

By a sort of natural law the more there is to write about the less time there is to write it. I have so much to say that I despair of ever saying even a quarter of it, and yet so many interesting things are happening every day that if I don't make the effort half of them will be crowded out.

There are great doings going on in the political world now. Everyone is frightfully excited; and no one knows what is going to happen next. It is very like living in Ireland. The latest turn of events is the wholesale arrests of leaders of the Non-Co-operation movement: over a hundred have been arrested in the last week. In fact, everyone is trying to get into prison now; for, as Gandhi says, it is the "Gate of Freedom". I enclose a sort of Non-Co-operation manifesto, with a most interesting and amusing sermon picture. It is very crude; but is just the sort of thing to appeal to an illiterate people.

We are just on the verge of the greatest annual event in the "Swaraj" movement -- this year it will be held in Ahmedabad, the meeting of the Indian Congress. As I think I mentioned before, there will be some twelve thousand delegates and eight thousand attenders. With feeling running as high as it is against the Government -- fanned by Gandhi and his followers -- I expect it will be rather a lively time. There are all sorts of wild bazaar rumours going round that there is going to be trouble and violence - so much so that hundreds of the poor people, mill-hands and the like, have gone off to their villages in the country, and consequently it is difficult at present to get any servants or malis (gardeners). The commissioner, the chief Govt. official, has issued a statement in the papers that all such rumours are unfounded. As a matter of fact, I don't think there is much likelihood of anything very serious happening, though there may be a few scraps here and there amongst the hooligans. After the Bombay riots of a few weeks ago I expect the Govt. will take no risks. Anyhow such disturbances as may take place in the city, will not come near the enchanted stillness of our Shantiniketan - our "abode of peace".

We are going to have a very full house in the Congress week, as there are going to be over thirty guests. I am very much looking forward to meeting them. Two I have already heard about - Mrs. Naidu, an Indian poetess and politician, and Mr. Bhagavandas, a big gun amongst the Theosophists.

The Sarabhai family belong to the Jain caste, a sort of very strict sect in Hinduism. When I first met them they seemed rather hostile to Christianity, or at any rate absolutely indifferent. This was really because they did not know anything about it. But Mr. Sarabhai has been reading a lot lately, especially Tolstoy, and latterly to my intense surprise, he bought a Bible, and has been reading up the Gospels. Mr. Bakubhai's widow (I told you of the death of this friend, cousin's husband and business partner of Mr. Sarabhai) is also staying here, and she too is very interested in philosophy.

Poor thing, she has had a very stiff time of it the last few months. Widowhood is a much more terrible thing in India than in Europe and Mrs. Bakubhai was exceptionally and exclusively devoted to her husband. She felt the blow so terribly that, at first, we almost feared for her life, or her reason. She had religious beliefs but they failed to sustain her; for she had abandoned the "superstitions" and the scheme of metaphysics she had been brought up in, and had acquired nothing instead which could withstand the shock of such a loss. I lent her Mat. Mciklem's "Open Light", and have been reading it with her; and she is very interested, and is really finding it an "Open Light".

But the most unexpected development of all happened just the last few weeks. Finding this "treatment" seemed to agree with Nimaben (Mrs. Bakubhai) they sent for Mr. Parekh to carry it on more thoroughly. I think I mentioned Mr. Parekh before in one of my letters. He is a distant uncle of Mrs. Sarabhai and is a baptized Christian. For years he has been on the black books of the community because of this step; but now the family have actually asked him to come and stay here, and go through a course of reading with Nimaben, for the sake of her health; and he is continuing to read the "Open Light", varying it with "Tauler's Sermons" and Emerson's Essays. Mr. Sarabhai has also asked Mr. Parekh to join the staff of our school, as Spiritual Instructor. I hope very much that he will see his way to doing so; though

at present he is not quite sure, as he cherishes the scheme of himself starting a Christian Ashram. I must tell you more of this man another time. He is, I think, the most interesting and able person I have met since coming out. He is an ardent Christian, and yet at the same time retains all that is good in his national culture. He realizes that the only way to bring India to Christ is by means of an Indigenous Church.

So many people in India are prejudiced against Christianity because they think it synonymous with Western Civilization.* "Look at this war", they say - "That's what your Christianity makes of you! No thanks!" - and so they never get near "The Prince of Peace". Then again Christianity comes to them bound up with an alien Government, which, many of them believe, is standing in the way of their national aspirations. That is why a man like Parekh, who still wears Eastern dress and calls himself a Brahmin - though he openly professes his undivided allegiance to Christ, can reach persons, who would otherwise never come near him. He has written a little booklet called - "From the Brahma Samaj to Christianity".

The Brahma Samaj, by the way, is a very interesting religious development. It is a Reform Movement in Hinduism, which has been galvanized into being by contact with Christianity.* It has adopted many ideas from Christianity, and altogether it is a great advance on ordinary Hinduism.* They believe in communal worship; have their own hymn book and prayer book; and have discarded idolatry and child marriages. The founder, Keshab Chander Sen, was a great admirer of Christ and did a great deal to bring His Personality and teaching before his countrymen. My friend, Mr. Parekh, has just written a life of this leader, which I think is at this moment in the press. I attended with him one of the meetings of this sect last week; and though I did not understand much, was very interested in the whole service, not least, in the musical efforts of some professional musicians, who fairly knew how to "lay it on". I met there a most charming young fellow, who is training to be a missionary

*Proselytisation by the clerical members of a foreign imperialist government is understandably resented and seems a more significant reason; as also the claim that Christianity is the one true religion.

* By the challenge of Christianity, I would say.

*"Ordinary Hinduism" or rather practices which have lost the spirit and the drive.

of the Brahma Samaj. He had a really beautiful face, reminded me of what I imagine the young John of the gospels to have looked like - at least in his expression.

I am contemplating purchasing some means of locomotion, so as to be able to get about a bit more, as we live about two miles out of the city. I am divided in mind between a motor-bike or a camel! I think the motor-bike would probably give less trouble; but think of the dignity of sailing along on a camel's hump, "up above the world so high". Mr. Sarabhai recommends I ought to get a camel, as a motor-bike would be dangerous for an absent minded person like me!! But then what if the camel became absent minded too?! Of-course a little bullock cart would be the safest: but then one would have to have the leisurely temperament of the East to put up with that; and I haven't "attained" to that, at least not yet!

More guests for the political house party have begun to arrive to join the ones who have already appeared. If the new comers are as interesting as the first comers, we shall certainly have an entertaining time. One is a Mahomedan gentleman, from the neighbouring state of Baroda. He used to be a judge; and even without his wig looks the most imposing old boy imaginable. He is very tall, with white flowing locks and a Father Christmas beard. He rattles away sixteen to the dozen in the most excellent English. He is very much "against the Govt." and has burnt all his fine toggery, his gold turbans etc., and wears the simple Gandhi home-spun. He brought with him, as an uninvited guest, a person still more amazing than himself - an English officer, who has just married a Russian lady, who has ridden all the way from Russian Turkestan on horseback. The lady is a Mahomedan; and her husband has adopted this religion - chiefly I think at the command of Cupid. This man whose name is Woodford has had to resign his commission as the British army does not like Russians in India.

His wife wired yesterday that she was coming today. He says she can't speak English, and he can't speak Russian. So how they get on is more that I can understand. However, I think they are coming here to lunch today; so I may be able to solve the mystery. Her father was killed before her eyes by the Bolsheviks, as were two of her sisters also.

I must stop now, and will continue the subject in my next.

Letter XXI

THE MAHATMA : AN EPISODE
AT THE CONGRESS.

The Retreat,
Shahibag,
Ahmedabad.

January 25th, 1922.

My dear all,

It is a long time, I think, since I sent a circular letter, not that there has not been anything to say. Far from it. We have been living through the most exciting times politically, and here in this house socially too. The National Congress was held at Ahmedabad this Christmas time and some twenty thousand Indians came from all over the country. We had about forty guests here, and a most interesting and varied lot of people they were.

I wrote two articles on my impressions; one on the Congress itself, and the other on The House Party we had there.* I sent them to the "Manchester Guardian"; though I don't know yet whether they have accepted them or not. If they do I will send round copies to such as I think might care to see them.

What splendid news it is about Ireland! Lots of people here say "India next"; but I tell them it is hardly a parallel case, as India is such a huge place with 300,000,000 people all speaking different languages, having different religions, different castes and the vast majority of them absolutely illiterate, and totally unable to understand the meaning of franchise and the responsibility that goes with it. All the same I think the British Government has made several idiotic blunders; but on the whole I am certain that India couldn't run herself yet -- and not for a good while either. For one thing the great difference between the Hindus and Mahommedans (which is only covered over on the surface - like snow over a crevasse - for the time being, under the influence of Gandhi) - this difference would soon lead to trouble if the English were not there.

I have seen Mahatma Gandhi several times again during the last few weeks. He really is a most marvellous personality; an absolute genius in his own way. It is most extraordinary the way the people almost worship him. I was going with him, and some others through a crowd, one day at the Congress time,

*See next letter. What a pity the other article cannot be traced!



Khadi Nagar or the Town of Homespun. Delegates to the National Congress 1921.
Notice they are all wearing (homespun) Gandhi Caps.



Tagore

भारतमाता

PRINTED & PUBLISHED AT THE "INDIAN PRESS", ALLAHABAD.

MOTHER INDIA

ভারতমাতা

This is a political propoganda picture of Mother India which is on sale at the big National Congress which is being held in Ahmedabad at present at which there are some 20,000 delegates from all over India.

The bounty of Mother India is showed by the typical symbolism of her many arms and hands. She carried the various things like cotton and homespun and jewels which the people can give towards the liberation of Mother India and the establishment of National Independence.

after a meeting, to get into a car out on the road. He was just about a yard in front of me. Suddenly there was a commotion, and I saw a number of men rush through the crowd towards us. They broke through the sort of lane that had happened to be made to let us get to the car, and before I knew what had happened Gandhi had stopped. On the ground in front of him, literally prostrated were four men. They had seized hold of his feet and were kissing them passionately; if he had been a god they could not have showed more devotion. Gandhi spoke to them in a tone of vehement protest, and urged them to desist, which eventually they did; but not till they had been almost shoved away by force.

I could tell you a lot more stories about the Mahatma, but I have not the time now. I hope however to write a sketch of him soon. He lives the most simple life, and is without the slightest trace of affectation. In fact an amusing story is told of how once a high and mighty British officer took him for a coolie at a railway station, and ordered him to carry his luggage -- which Gandhi (who has a great sense of humour) willingly did. The man was surprised when he refused a tip; still more so, when he saw the great crowd in the station waiting to see somebody, waiting to see his coolie.

He offends the high and mighty Brahmins by embracing and dining with "Bhangis" (the "untouchable caste").

The weather, which has been delightfully cool, is beginning to warm up again, though not unpleasantly so yet. As a consequence I have seen several large butterflies to-day; and this evening, while I was writing this I had a visit from an unpleasantly large winged creature nearly three inches long. I think he must have been a locust. Happily he was by himself and not part of a "plague"; and after putting him out I was relieved to find he did not return. You notice I put him out, and did not kill it. It is quite strange how the environment affects one. I feel it very much harder to take the life of any creature (even a wasp for instance) after living in India, and have heard several Englishmen say the same thing.

Letter XXII

AN INDIAN HOUSE PARTY

My Dear Everybody,

I am sending my letter again to-day in the form of an article.¹

AN INDIAN HOUSE-PARTY

For the last nine months I have been the only European in the society of Indians; and in the last ten days it has been my lot to make one of a large house-party of some thirty to forty guests from all over India. Most of these were persons keenly interested in the Nationalist movement. They represented many different walks of life, and included in their number several doctors, two editors, some lawyers, a judge, an eminent barrister, a poetess, a Himalayan seer come down to the plains with a "message to India", a dramatist, Government officials, a commercial magnate, a physical culturist, and many ladies and children pertaining to them. A variety of religions were represented - Mohammedans, Hindus, Parsees, and Christians, not to mention some tough Agnostics.

The general atmosphere of the party was an extraordinary mixture of East and West. For instance, lunch and dinner were taken in Eastern fashion, squatting cross-legged, the food eaten with one's hands (the Himalayan sage was the only exception, and he ate with chopsticks). On the other hand, afternoon tea was served from costly silver tea-sets, on little tables covered with snow-white linen of the finest texture, and the guests sat in chairs. Round the lawn were statues and bronzes from Paris and Italy, including a full-sized cast of the Venus de Milo: and when it grew dark the garden was illuminated by coloured electric lamps. Yet even here the East was just below the surface. One afternoon I was going to the lawn, where tea was usually served, when I heard a voice calling from another part of the garden.

¹ From "The Manchester Guardian"

"You can't go there today", it said. "Why not?" I asked with some surprise. "Some Mohammedan ladies have come to tea today, and they keep Purdah." Then I realised that all the menfolk were sitting together and taking tea in another part of the garden.

One of the most striking of the guests was an elderly Mohammedan who was accompanied by his wife and two daughters. He is a tall imposing figure with a face kindly, though powerful, a strong Roman nose, and white hair and long beard. He is a man of Western education, speaking English and French fluently, has served for many years as a judge in a Native State, and has been the friend and confidant of his Rajah. A couple of years ago he came under Gandhi's influence, and was converted by him to the Nationalist movement. As a consequence he has given up all his fine clothes and wears simple home-spun and by his political activities has lost his Government pension. One evening as I came into the drawing-room I noticed him in eager conversation with another man as interesting as himself. The latter was for ten years a missionary in the Brahma Samaj movement (a sort of Hindu Protestantism), but had left this for the Christian Church. I joined myself to them, and listened to the conversation, which I record in substance if not in letter.

"Poo! Miracles!" the old gentleman was saying; "the miracles of Christ are merely legends that have grown around his name and teaching. Take the story of the five loaves and two fishes; everybody knows that in the East bread is used symbolically for wisdom, the staff of the spiritual life. The ignorant compilers of the Gospel incidents confused the symbol with the fact."

Shortly after this we were joined by one of his daughters, a dark, handsome young lady of twenty with a vigorous character and passionate convictions. The discussion had drifted to a comparison between the characters of Mohammed and Christ. "You must admit," said the Brahmin Christian (or Christian Brahmin), "that the character of Jesus displays greater love than that of your Prophet." The girl's dark eyes flashed angrily. "I don't think it's at all fair," she retorted; "people are always saying that Jesus was more loving than Mohammed. It is because they don't understand. The love of Jesus was a different kind: It was the sweet, tender love of a mother: Mohammed's was the strong, virile, almost fierce love of a father".

"But look at Christ's denunciation of the Pharisees,"



was the reply: "His love combined the tenderness of a mother's and the strength of a father's."

Now we were joined by the girl's mother. "What are you discussing so vehemently?" she asked. "Which is the greatest - a mother's love or a father's?" said the girl. "Oh, a mother's of-course," said the new-comer, who, by the way, has a sense of humour unusual in the Eastern women. Of-course the father protested and appealed to the other fathers present, and the discussion terminated in a general bantering between the husbands and wives present - each claiming the superiority of the love of their kind. To calm the atmosphere, the girl, who has a beautiful voice, was asked to sing, which she readily agreed to do without any fussing or false modesty.

A nephew of this old Mohammedan gentleman was also of the party, a young fellow of about eighteen. He surprised me by remarking that he had read and enjoyed "The Egoist", and further by revealing on the last day of his visit that he had brought a violin with him and was assiduously practicing a rondo by some Italian composer. And, speaking of music, one lady told me she had been harmonizing some Bengal airs with parts for two violins, 'cello and piano. This surprised me much. Eastern music is devoid of harmony - it is, as you might say, one-dimensional, - and in this attempt to enrich its (to us) weird melodies by harmony and counterpoint one sees again something of the fusion that is taking place between elements so dissimilar, and giving rise to a new kind of culture.

Perhaps nothing that I heard better illustrates this fusion than a conversation that I heard taking place between two of the children of the party, one a Hindu, the other, I think a Mohammedan. The former was a bright little girl of nine, (Bharati!) with bobbed hair and an English frock; the other a beautiful dark-haired girl of sixteen dressed in a "Sari" and sandals. The conversation was as follows:

Nine Years to Sixteen: "Have you taken your Matric?"

Sixteen: "No. I was ready to, and was just going to, but" --

Nine: "But what?"

Sixteen: "Well, you see, I joined the Non-Co-operation party and had to leave school."

Nine: "Why so?"

Sixteen: "Because, you see, it was a Government school....."
(Later)

Nine (Hindu strictly vegetarian): "Are you a vegetarian?"

Sixteen (Mohammedan): "No."

Nine (with horrified, and eager curiosity): "Then do you eat meat?"

Sixteen: "Why, yes, of-course."

Nine: "Do you eat cows?"

Sixteen: "Yes."

Nine: "And goats?"

Sixteen: "Yes."

Nine: "And rabbits?"

Sixteen: "Yes."

Nine: "And fish?"

Sixteen: "Yes."

Nine: "Don't you think it's cruel to kill animals?"

Sixteen: "Perhaps so. I don't know. But it's the custom, and I eat what's given me without making a fuss...."
(Later)

Nine: "Have you read 'Alice in Wonderland'?"

Sixteen: "Yes."

Nine:

"And 'The Looking-Glass'?"

Sixteen:

"Yes."

and so on, with "Macbeth", "Hamlet", "Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Treasure Island", and, most important of all, "Peter Pan". Yes, Sixteen had read them all; and I could see from Nine's expression that acquaintance with these people - especially Peter Pan - went far to covering up the crime of eating cows and goats, and would be counted unto her as righteousness....

"What do you think of it all?" I asked a barrister from Bombay.

"Well," he replied with legal caution, "If you ask me, I think both sides are wrong."

"And what do you think of it?" I demanded of the Himalayan seer. "Well," he replied, "I think it will lead to great trouble and violence and disorder; but out of that chaos - as at the beginning of the world - there will be born a new India."

Letter XXIII

JAINISM: "A DISMAL CREED."

My dear All,

I am sending my letter to-day in the form of an article which I have written for our English Journal.¹

(Visit to Manekba - Vasuben's Mother)

A DISMAL CREED

It is becoming quite the fashion nowadays, in certain circles, to affect a sort of Neo-Buddhism, and believe in Reincarnation.

But it is one thing to hold this doctrine as a dilettante speculation in a country that has been Christianized for more than a millenium, and quite another to be brought up from infancy in an environment which has been saturated with it for thousands of years. It is doubtless very sweet and touching that Edwin and Angelina should gaze soulfully into each other's eyes, in some West-end drawing-room, and feel such intense spiritual affinity that they "are sure" they must have known each other in some former existence (very probably in Egypt, which seems for some reason or other to be the favourite place for these by-gone rendezvous): but it would be a very different thing for Edwin if, as a result of his beliefs, he was never allowed to have a bath; or for Angelina if she thought - in order to acquire merit - it was the proper thing to pay a beggar to sleep in a place infested with vermin - for the sake of the vermin -- for whose sake, also, by the way, Edwin would have to forego the luxury of his daily ablutions. Yet this is the way things work out amongst certain of the strictest devotees in the Jain Sect in India.

Far be it from me, however, to say a word in scorn

¹ "The Month"

against the Jains. I have many personal friends amongst them (including Mahatma Gandhi who was greatly influenced by them), and cherish an infinitely greater respect for the conscientious Hindu than it is possible to feel for such persons as European Theosophists, who pretend to be Buddhists and Christians at the same time.

It was my privilege, when I was in India, to be introduced to a very cultured family of Jains, consisting of a widow and her two elegant and accomplished daughters. Both of the latter, by the way, had passed the Bombay Matriculation Examination, one of them with honours. This lady was exceedingly zealous in the practice of her religion, and used to go a considerable distance every day to pay her devotions at a magnificent Jain Temple, whither she was generally accompanied by one or both of her daughters. The rest of this article is a description of the visit I paid to her house, and of the conversation -- as accurately as I could write it down immediately afterwards -- which took place while I was there.

On arriving, I was led by a servant through the bungalow to a spacious verandah on the far side of the house, where I was soon joined by my hostess and one of her daughters.¹ As a concession to the weakness of the flesh (or to put it more accurately, the stiffness of my European joints) I was given a chair to sit on. My hostess, to keep me in countenance, accommodated herself in like manner, though I am quite sure she would have felt much more at her ease sitting on the carpet in the ordinary Eastern fashion.

It was a beautiful, still evening, and the view from the verandah was magnificent. The indescribable colours of an Eastern sun-set were reflected in the waters of the broad river by which the house was situated; they shone also, with no less beauty on a stately palace on our right, which had been built many years ago by long-forgotten Mohammedan kings.

Tea was brought in, and we talked for a while on subjects of general interest: the long-delayed rains, the prospect of famine, the Government, and the inevitable Mr. Gandhi and his Non-Co-operation Movement.

It was a very close evening, and innumerable flies buzzed about in the windless air. One of these seemed to

¹ These are the "Gazelles" - see previous letters.

have singled me out for its especial victim, and kept annoying me in a most pertinacious manner. After I had flicked it away from my face for about the fourth time in one minute, in desperation I made a snatch at it, as it returned once again to the onset. My hostess eyed me critically. "I suppose" I remarked -- thinking it would be a suitable transition to the subject I had come to discuss -- "I suppose you'd think it very dreadful of me if I were to have killed that fly." "Well, we wouldn't do it," she replied seriously and with unmistakable emphasis. "You believe it might have been a man in a former life, don't you?" I went on.

"Yes," she replied, "It might, or it might have been a plant, or an animal; in fact any living thing. I suppose you don't think so," she added with a smile.

"No," I replied, "we don't think so, and it is hard for us to understand how you do. Don't you think there is a great difference between the soul of a man and the soul of a fly -- if a fly has a soul at all?"

"There is a difference, of course," she replied, "in so far as a man knows more; but the essence of his soul - the innermost principle of life -- is the same in both cases, and in all cases. Hence the first principle in our Jain Religion is the Doctrine of Ahimsa -- or Harmlessness, -- the holding sacred all forms of life. For it is the same life, in its essence, in all living things. And therefore we regard it as a sin, willingly to take the life of any creature."

"The soul," she went on, "can be compared to pure gold, hidden in an ore. It has to go through a long period of purification before it is perfected, until it is freed from all the dross of the baser metals. For this purpose it has to go through an infinite number of different bodily forms. It may, for instance, take the form of a tree, and for many years endure the buffeting of wind and weather, till at last it suffers under the wood-cutter's axe: or it may come as a bird, or a tiger, or a fly - or as a man. But always it is the same soul. So therefore we refrain from taking life as far as it is possible."

At this point my hostess drew my attention to the neighbouring bungalow - a palatial erection - the home of a very wealthy Jain manufacturer. "The gentleman who lives in that house is a very orthodox Jain - much more so than we are. In his house no one - including children and servants - is allowed to eat or drink between sun-set and sun-rise."

"Why is that?" I asked.

"Lest they might accidentally swallow, and so kill any small insects that have settled on their food or drink."

"I am glad I don't live there," I replied, laughing, "especially in the hot season," I added; at which my hostess smiled tolerantly.

Soon after this the conversation turned to the subject of the Jain temples, many of which are very beautiful. In answer to my inquiry, my hostess informed me that regular services are not as a rule held in these places, but that each person goes there to pray, whenever he feels inclined to do so. Several times previous to this I had visited Jain temples; and, as I had watched the devotees bowing down in front of the various images with their jewelled eyes, I had wondered very much what was going on in their minds. "And to whom do you pray?" I asked, "when you go to your temples - to God I suppose." It seemed to me rather a futile question once I had made it, for the answer to it seemed so obvious. Therefore I was rather surprised when the lady replied "Oh, no, we never pray to God. God is a part of ourselves. We pray to the twenty-four founders of the Jain Religion, especially to Mahavira, the last one."

"Then you do not think God loves us, as a father loves his children," I went on.

"No," she replied again, "we must cease to feel any love to God or to anyone else before we attain to perfection. Love is a form of desire; it is a limitation; we must learn to outgrow all such emotions."*

"But," I broke in, "is not the love for great and noble persons - like your Mahavira for instance - a great stimulus for us to become better and nobler ourselves?"

"Most certainly," she answered, "the love for such persons helps us for a while - at the beginning of the Path. But we must give it up before we reach the end. Love is like a carriage which brings us to the door of the palace; but we

*I suppose personal love is meant; when the ego of a person is not free from attachment. Freedom from desire and attachment to action or the result of action is also a central point in the "Geeta".

must leave the carriage outside before we enter through the portals. We must cease to feel any affections before we are ready to enter in."

"I am afraid I am very stupid," I said, "and perhaps a little stubborn, but I do not yet see why Love should be locked out. Is it not the thing we prize most, more than health or riches or even fame? We have a saying that it is 'Love which makes the world go round'."

"That's just it," she replied, "love leads to action, and action makes more Karma (which is the second great doctrine of our religion).* And Karma brings re-birth into the ceaseless round of earth-lives, which is the very thing from which we want to escape."

"It is true," I answered, "that love leads to action; but what other joys are equal to the willing service of love?"

"Here on earth that is so," she replied, "but if love brings us our greatest joys, it is also the cause of our deepest sorrows. For love must end in separation, as surely as the night follows the day. The more you love anyone, the greater is the dread of the separation which inevitably follows, and the more terrible that separation when it comes."

"But do you not expect to meet your friends again in the future, after death?"

"There is practically no chance of that," she answered sadly, "once death has intervened; for the paths of the lives of different souls are so infinitely varied that they are never likely to meet again."

The note of sadness in the lady's voice, as she enunciated this melancholy dogma, seemed to me the more pathetic as I recalled to mind what I had been told with regard to her previous history. Her husband, to whom she had been devotedly attached, had died some thirteen years before this time. Since his death, she had divided her time between the practice of her religion and the care of her two daughters, for whom she did her utmost to procure the best education. Considering she had sustained so heavy a bereavement with nothing more to rely on than the negative

*See foot-note on p.116. The doctrine of Karma or causality is lucidly explained in Swami Vivekananda's Karma Yoga.

consolations of such a faith, it was no wonder, I thought, that there should have settled on the lady's face an expression of almost habitual melancholy. Yet it was a noble melancholy, an expression of true resignation. There did not seem to be a trace of bitterness, resentment or scorn in those calm and dignified features, though they had been set, day after day, and year after year, against a destiny so bleak and cheerless.

I have observed, amongst the Jains, that when a member of the family dies - however much he may have been loved and admired - he is seldom or never referred to again by his relatives in conversation.* And believing as they do, it is the most reasonable attitude to adopt. For what is the use of harrowing the soul by causing to vibrate in it memories which, in proportion as they are dear and tender, must torment it with longings as hopeless and "wild with all regret".¹ Remembering this I made no allusion to the deceased member of the family, of whom I felt sure my hostess was thinking, but I went on somewhat as follows: "Supposing, however, that, after all, God's nature was in a sense personal, and that He loves us individually, because His very nature is Love; then all true and noble love between human beings would be, in some sort, a reflection or emanation of His Divine Love, and as such - though occurring in time - would have in it something of His eternal nature. And this would be a sort of guarantee to us that - even if we were separated by death from our beloved ones - we could look forward with some confidence to meeting them again in some other part of God's Universe."

The lady smiled tolerantly and rather wistfully. "Yes, Supposing all that to be so," she said, "but it is a very big 'suppose', isn't it? Too big, in fact! for by its very nature love belongs to this world of fleeting illusions; and like all such must eventually pass away."

"In other words," I said, referring to her former simile "there is no other way of doing it; we must 'leave the carriage outside' if we are to enter into the Palace of Eternity?"

At this she nodded her head slightly as though to express her agreement; said nothing, however, but turned to gaze across the great expanse of river with a far-away expression

*This is not at all so.

¹Tennyson.

that I could not fathom.

The darkness had come swiftly down on our talk. Lights had begun to twinkle, here and there, along the river bank; bats were flitting swiftly and obliquely in and out amongst the verandah pillars; and stars were beginning to twinkle in the deep purple sky. So I rose, thanked my hostess for her kind hospitality and her patience in answering my questions, and having made my salaams, took my departure.

As the car made its way through the uneven streets of the crowded bazaars, dodging the usual goats, children and wandering cattle, my mind brooded ceaselessly over my late conversation. It seemed a terrible thing that thousands and even millions of people should be brought up to such a cold and cheerless belief. The very thought of it weighed upon my soul, oppressing it with a weight as of piled mountains. The unspeakable tragedy of it all! Here, certainly, "death had its sting, and the grave its victory."¹*

I thanked God that I had been brought up amongst brighter hopes and clearer revelations. I thought of the noble words of Wordsworth, where he speaks of that "primal sympathy which, having been, must ever be." I thought of Shakespeare's brave sonnet: "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments" - in praise of that love which "bears it out even to the edge of doom." But most of all I thought of that redeeming and triumphant love which is the basis of all our hopes for this life and the next.

¹ St. Paul's second letter to Corinthians: Chapter 15 Verse 55.

*This seems a misinterpretation, a serious misunderstanding of how people in general actually believe and feel.

Letter XXIV

A DAY'S ROUTINE: "MY DAILY ROUND
AND COMMON TASK."

The Retreat,
Shahibag,
Ahmedabad.

February 9th, 1922

My dear all,

It is extraordinary how quickly the days and weeks go flying by. I suppose it is the regularity, not to say the monotony, of our manner of life that makes it go so quickly. Of-course, in one sense, the situation here in Ahmedabad is anything but monotonous. It becomes more and more tense and exciting every day. In fact one feels that we are all sitting on the edge of a volcano that may go off any minute in a violent eruption. But all this excitement, these plots and counter plots, these moves and counter-moves between Gandhi and the Government - all these are in the world outside - beyond the charmed circle of the Retreat compound. They do not affect us very nearly except in so far as Mr. Sarabhai is often away attending political conferences, or going off to see Gandhi on some point or other; and of course the political situation is the never-ending topic of conversation at meals among the grown-ups.

We - the children and the masters in the school - carry on just as usual in our ordinary routine no matter whether Empires rise and fall beyond the high walls of our enclosure. That is, with the exception of one of the masters, who has left us to join the sixty thousand other volunteers, who are going deliberately to court imprisonment at the town of Bardoli under Gandhi's, "Civil Disobedience campaign". In the world of politics we are just now, as you might say, in the "hush before the storm". The Government and Gandhi have both **made clear statements** as to their positions and neither is willing to give another inch -- and, well! Time must unravel the issue; for it is exceedingly **difficult** to make any forecasts as the event depends on so many incalculable factors.

Meanwhile, as I say, we pursue the even tenor of our way and go through our daily programme almost as regularly as the stars in their courses.

Perhaps you might be interested to hear how I spend an

ordinary day. So, for lack of anything more sensational I will just describe my ordinary "downsittings and uprisings".

The very first thing that happens to show the new day has begun doesn't really concern me, except in so far as it gives me food for thought. I refer to the "hooters", that go off at about five a.m. These are the sirens for waking the mill-hands in the city two miles away. The hideous blare of these brazen voices reminds me of the bellowing of the Minotaur in the ancient myth. Indeed one cannot help thinking - as one hears the silence of the night, (still beautiful with stars and moonlight) rent asunder by these hideous shrieks that they are, in a very real sense, the voice of a gigantic and cruel monster that is devouring hundreds of human beings -- I mean the Industrial System. The social incongruity of things out here is a source of perpetual wonder to me. Yesterday, for instance, I went out with Mr. Sarabhai and saw a whole forest of factory chimneys in the background, and in the foreground a large lake with a beautiful Mahommedan temple near by, and hosts of vast turtles, and crocodiles inside; and strange quaint, thoughtful black cranes meditating on one leg in rows on the margin, whilst from the trees on the left there came the melancholy chorus of jackals serenading the setting sun.

But to return to the sirens. Happily for me I do not need to respond to them: if I hear them at all, it is to congratulate myself on that I have yet another couple of hours of bed.

I might add too there is a certain homeliness about these early morning hooters, for in the darkness (for it is not light till after six) I can imagine myself back in Yorkshire again, and can see in my mind's eye scores of British navvies going off to work in factory and mine.

The next part of the daily programme is also one in which I again am only passively concerned. It is the morning song of the "Ocarina Bird". I call it by this name because I don't know its real name, and because its voice has a most peculiar soft, velvety, mellow cooing quality -- like that instrument. It has a very liquid (as Sir Toby would say)¹ "a mellifluous voice, as I am true knight". I have never seen the bird clearly, as it always comes in the morning twilight before it is light enough to distinguish things properly. But nearly

¹ "Twelfth Night"

every morning, if I am awake at that time, I hear it sing its strange song, in its soft blue velvety voice. It only has five notes as a rule and it always takes them in the same order; and for about the same length of time. It is exactly as though it was going through its morning devotions - perhaps it is? Did not the birds listen to St. Francis's sermon?

Speaking of morning devotions, reminds me I have forgotten to mention another of these very early morning sounds: and that is the Chauffeur saying his prayers. The chauffeurs are all Mahomedans except one (there are I think five altogether) and one of them, who bears the Prophet's name, is very devout. Though his quarters are a good hundred yards away, you can hear him bawling out his Koran at the top of his voice in morning darkness at five of the clock.

But generally I am more or less asleep at this time; if I do hear any or all of these morning noises, they occasion no uneasy stirrings of conscience about getting up. But when it comes to the entrance of the sparrows, then I know things are getting serious, for their persistent chirpings are a sign that I too must be stirring. For when they arrive it means that "Lo! the Hunter of the East has caught The Sultan's turret in a noose of light".¹

I think I mentioned these sparrows and their peculiar weaknesses in a former letter; how they have discovered they can see themselves in my looking-glass, and how they come and patrol up and down my dressing table, literally by the hour, watching the reflection of themselves in the mirror, and how nothing keeps them away. If I shut the window they come in through the door, if I fling a sock at them they return unabashed in less than five minutes. They are at it the livelong day. Almost every time I come into the room I find two of them there. I don't know for certain if it is the same two all the time. They are apparently a married couple; and naturally it is the lady who spends the time looking at herself and pecking away at her own sweet image. The gentleman generally sits on a cigarette tin I place there, to keep their "carpet" in place; he looks rather bored by the whole business. I have been obliged to give my boy orders to put a fresh carpet (of paper) for them every day as they are such messy creatures. At first I tried to frighten them out

¹ "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam"

of coming because of their untidy habits; but after trying various expedients - all in vain - I came to the conclusion that nothing but murder would be of any avail: and to go to this extent I had not the necessary hardness of heart. One afternoon I amused myself by covering up the looking-glass with paper. They were awfully intrigued about it, and flew all round and behind the glass many times to see if they could solve the mystery of its disappearance.

But I am not getting on very fast with my day's programme. My breakfast -- not a real breakfast, but more like a German Frühstück, just tea and toast and honey -- comes about 7.30.

School begins at 8 a.m. I can always tell when it is about time for I see the car go by, which goes down town every day to bring up the three masters that live in the city. The other three masters have small houses in the compound (These are the two drawing masters and the music master).

We start school with what corresponds to "Prayers". It is a strange ceremony. We all squat on the floor (of course having removed our sandals or shoes). The singing master sits at the head with a queer enormous instrument, rather like a gigantic guitar. It has three strings, but they all play the same note, a very deep note. It makes a deep sort of buzzing sound like a thousand bumble bees all playing the same note. Then we sing some prayers, in a very mechanical manner, always ending up with the very impressive "Om, Shanti, Shanti, Shanti!" ("Om" a mantric syllable standing for the One without form, the omnipresent timeless Brahman; and the rest "Peace, peace, peace!") Lately, however, we have introduced something in addition more suitable to the children's minds. Very often these are stories from the Bible. In some ways it is much easier to teach Bible stories, such as the incidents in the life of Jesus, to children here than in England, because so many of the Eastern customs need no explanation. The children, by the way, are most enthusiastic listeners to the Bible stories, especially the New Testament. The only thing they cannot understand about Him is that Jesus ate fish; but his other actions and sayings, however, meet with such deep admiration and reverence that this "weakness" seems more and more to be lost sight of.

Little Leena told me such a pretty dream she had the other day. She said she wrote her name on a piece of paper and put it in an envelope and it went like a letter up to God. "And I saw Him; He was all bright and shining, and

His face looked just like Jesus. He wrote a letter back to me and sent it down from Heaven, and said in it He was going to come down and live with me for the rest of my life." Another time this same wee girl (she is only six) put her theological knowledge to very practical use in the following manner. She had come in to my room, and without permission, had opened a bottle of gold paint and spilt it all over. On remonstrating with her severely for her lack of respect for other people's property, she remarked:- "But it isn't yours; it's God's; all the world and everything in it belongs to God!"

I had such an interesting talk last night on idols and idol-worship with Mrs. Sarabhai, who is in her way a very deeply religious person. I came away from it wondering whether the Roman Catholic church is more pagan than I thought (for they both for instance make use of external things;) or whether the Catholic church has absorbed into itself some of the practices of Paganism, and in so doing has hallowed them.

I don't seem to be getting on with my programme very fast on account of so many side issues. And there is not time for any more today, as the mail goes out this afternoon; and I have other work to do.

The political situation has eased off a little since I started this letter (it is now the 17th) as Gandhi has once more decided to postpone his mass civil disobedience.

Letter XXV

A DAY'S ROUTINE: "MY DAILY ROUND
AND COMMON TASK" (Continued.)

The Retreat,
Shahibag,
Ahmedabad.

March 5th, 1922.

My Dear All,

Last letter I wrote, I believe I stopped in the middle of an account of my "daily round and common task". I had better lose no time in finishing it; for before long there will be a great, if temporary, change in our manner of life; we shall be going away to some hill station.

Well, to proceed. School starts in the morning at 8 a.m. I think I told you of the strange ceremony of "Prayers" that we go through in the morning. The children - to use a Daisy Ashford expression - simply "lap up" the Bible stories. Apart from Our Lord, who of-course makes the strongest impression, the honours seem at present to be divided fairly equally between Joseph the Dreamer, David, and St. Peter.

I told the story of Gideon one day last week, and it so pleased Suhrid that he wanted it all again the next day. He is a very independent-minded young fellow. I was telling him one day the parable of the rich husbandman who was pulling down his barns to build greater ones when Death overtook him. "Well" he said, "it was some good for him after all, for he knew his son would come in for the property after him." Doubtless he had in mind his Daddy's affairs: the latter is actually at the moment constructing several new factories.

What staggers me is that, though I have carefully and on principle avoided anything in the way of dogma, or invidious comparison with other great Teachers, the children entirely on their own account have begun to discuss whether they "believe" in Jesus. I have been specially careful to avoid using this word. Yet Suhrid said to me the other day "I believe in Jesus; but I don't think he was a God: you can't prove He was." And Bharati, who was there, said "Suhrid really thinks so; but he won't admit it because he thinks it isn't Indian to do so." Later - having obviously been reflecting on the matter - Suhrid said to me "If you were an Indian, do you

think you would believe in Him?" Of-course, I assured him that Christianity was not an English invention, and that we ourselves had had it brought to us from the East, and that we too had previously worshipped other gods, and this was evident he added from the days of the week. Also I told him that in appearance and manners and dress Jesus was far more like an Indian than an Englishman.

Little Leena is so passionately fond of the story of Jesus, which I tell her from Hole's magnificent pictures, that of late I can only get her to work at her English reading ("My hat is on the mat" etc.) by striking a bargain with her. At half time I will stop - and tell her a story about Jesus. When we come to any very sad parts she says "Poor Jesus! how kind!"; and now and then I can hardly restrain her from personally attacking the picture of Judas, or the Pharisees. She is so sweet and sympathetic over the story of His woes that I am reminded of the inimitable description of Cordelia's grief at the account of her Father's mal-treatment. But I shall not finish this mail unless I go back to my subject.

We have three periods, of forty minutes each for ordinary lessons in the morning. I am always "off" the first period: so my actual teaching hours in the morning are from nine to eleven.

The three elder children -- Mrudula, Bharati and Suhrid -- I have separately for English. These lessons consist for the most part of reading books. We have a splendid collection of children's Readers and children's editions of famous books. So far we have read Alice's Adventures, Water Babies, and Stories from King Arthur, and The Faerie Queen, and from Chaucer etc. With Bharati, who though not the oldest is the quickest, I have started on Dickens; which she loves. She has a wonderful mind for a child of nine. She is always prowling round the Library and picking up fresh books. Guess what I found her absorbed in yesterday. "The Adventures of Hucklebury Finn". In spite of the slang and the dialect she understood enough to sustain her interest, and afterwards I found she had retailed the story to Suhrid.

Mrudula, the eldest, is very different in her tastes. She is all for domestic things. She minds Baby (who has grown prodigiously) for the hour together; and often spends the greater part of her spare time cooking. This cooking business would take a letter to itself to describe; both the manner of it and the objects which are cooked.

The lessons which I think I enjoy most are those in which I have all three of the eldest children together. I am taking them in European History, Geography and Science. For the latter I am going to fit up one of the rooms as a laboratory. In History we have been doing Ancient Jewish History, and Greek History - only on very simple outlines of-course. We are now coming on to Roman History.

Indian people generally - I mean adults - seem to have very little idea of History and historical methods. In fact they hardly seem to realise the difference between history and legend. The average Indian does not seem to possess historical sense at all. In their own country there is very little genuinely authenticated history (I mean based on contemporary documents) prior to about the fifth century A.D.

They might almost be Theosophists in their indifference to the distinction between historical facts and myths and legends! They will talk of the exploits of Krishna or Rama with the underlying assumption that they are walking on as sure ground as if they were talking of Christ. Indeed in an argument I had recently with Sarojini Naidu, the Indian Poetess (who was staying here in the Congress time), she said that Legend was more true than historical fact! I suspect she got the idea from Mrs. Beasant, with whom she used to be friends till they quarrelled over something, I forget what.

Mr. Sarabhai has ordered a cinema, in which he is going to show instructive and educational films - which he will get week by week to the work-people at his various mills. He sticks at no expense in getting anything that he thinks will be good for the children's education. A telescope is also on the way from Germany; and the swimming bath is getting near completion. After that he is going to build a gymnasium: so that soon as far as outward appliances are concerned we shall be, I suppose, as well equipped as any school in India. My only regret is that the school is so limited in numbers: and that more children do not benefit by these advantages. But perhaps this may come later.* I am always urging that the admission of another twenty scholars or so would greatly benefit our own children. It would hardly be any extra expense, and not much of extra trouble. But it seems to me characteristic of Indian life that they should be willing to

*A premonition of the Shreyas School and Foundation founded by Leena.

make any sacrifice for their own kith and kin, at the same time being less conscious of any direct obligation to those less fortunately placed.*

Morning school is over at 11 o'clock. By this time the sun is going pretty strong; and the first thing I do as a rule on coming back from the school is to change into lighter clothes. Then I have a little light refreshment to keep me going till lunch, which I take at about 12.30 p.m. The intervening time I generally spend reading or writing (as at this moment): or now and then - if the children are very insistent - telling them a story. They are very keen on stories from Shakespeare: and at present we have just embarked on "As You Like It".

I have lunch in the "European Dining room", sitting in state at table with knives and forks and plates etc. - not with my hands as Indians do. My meals are cooked by my Boy - Mulji, of whom I wrote previously. He has to prepare them in a special kitchen away from the house. This is because I am not a vegetarian and eat such forbidden things as chicken, fish and even meat. My Boy not being a Brahmin (but only a "Scotch Presbyterian"!) would contaminate the other kitchen. As a matter of fact I seldom eat meat - but fish, even eggs are Taboo amongst the Jains.

Would you like to know what my lunch menu is? It is very simple, and - alas - almost always according to the same formula. First, fish with tomato salad and potatoes in some form or other. The fish is fresh water fish, and has a rather muddy taste, but I have got quite used to it now. For second course I nearly always have some sort of stewed fruit - apples or pears - and custard. Mulji cooks well enough but his menus

*I wouldn't have thought this is generally true of our tradition of culture. A portion of one's income is, conventionally enough, set apart for public or charitable purposes, even companies do this and the donation enjoys an exemption from taxation - this particular instance being cited to show that social obligations are understood and accepted.

I think the reason why my parents confined their home education experiment to their children alone was that it was after all an experiment. What it would lead to was still to be seen. Nor, I suppose, would they have enjoyed the same freedom to explore had other parents and children been involved.

are terribly limited.

I have found by experience that he is no good at making pastry or puddings, though I have made him experiment many times. There is always something wrong; either they are too heavy, or too sad, or too sticky or too something. What was gone wrong with them I could no more tell you than I could tell what is wrong with a motor car that sticks. So I rather stick to what I have than fly to "ills I know not of".

The Family and Visitors have lunch - Indian fashion - before I have mine and so very often the children drop in and talk to me as I am having my lunch. Mrudula always puts her hands to her eyes to shield them from the abomination if I am still at the fish stage. But it is more affectation than a real horror. The others have no such scruples, and come and look on with a sort of horrified interest as I eat the forbidden things. They are always getting me to try and explain to them the taste of meat and fish. But they strongly approve of my second course: and very often Leena and Gautam will come and have a second innings after their own lunch - at my stewed fruit and custard.

After lunch I generally have a look at the papers, or sit and talk with the others, or go to the drawing-room to have a strum on the piano (a beautiful "grand"). Sometimes at this hour, if I feel like it, I may tell the children a story, or explain to them pictures on The Illustrate London News and the Sphere.

At about 2 p.m. I retire to my room: and take it easy for a while. Sometimes I read a novel; sometimes take a nap; more often a judicious mixture of both.

At 3 o'clock I hear the motor go by bringing the masters up from the city for afternoon school which begins at that hour. I however only have one lesson in the afternoon from 4.20 to 5 p.m. So I can snooze or read on a bit longer.

At half past three - as regularly as clockwork - my peace is broken by a prolonged, furious and unmitigated barking by Tippie whose kennel is built under the basement of the house quite near my room. The occasion of her anger is the advent of three Malis (gardeners) who arrive on the scene bearing a gigantic hose-pipe which is so huge and so long that it reminds me of the Midgard Serpent in the Norse Mythology which went right round the world. Although this ceremony happens every day - and has gone on as far back as I can

remember - it never fails to throw poor Tippie into a paroxysm of excitement and protest each recurring day. It is an excellent alarm clock and it prevents me sleeping too long.

After my afternoon period at school is over I have tea at five o'clock. Most days my official duties are over by this time; but on certain days I take them in games from 6 to 7. I generally do this everyday, so as to get some exercise. At the moment the rage is for Badminton and croquet. Suhrid is quite a sporting young chap and plays a very good game of Badminton for his size. It gets dark about seven or seven-thirty; but Mr. Sarabhai is going to get some arc lamps put up round the court, so that we can play on up to any time we like.

Dinner is the next item on the programme to be mentioned, and it is quite a formal meal, and takes place any time between 8 p.m. and 9 p.m. This meal I always take with the family in the dining room, and squat in approved style on the ground. All the others eat with their hands. I do so occasionally, if there is anything special on, just to show that I have no ill-feeling; but as a general rule I use a spoon and fork. No knife you notice; for there is nothing that needs cutting. In fact to a European - even if he were a vegetarian - it would seem a very messy sort of meal. I cannot get used to all the strange spices and chillies; but there is generally a good variety of vegetables on which I can satisfy my hunger; and there are always plenty of "pourries". There is also an ample supply of rice at every meal. So happily I can always eat that if nothing else happens to take my fancy. Generally, too, cooked tomatoes and potatoes are served up; and often fruit. The "sweets" are very strange things made of meal and sugar, and weird kind of flavourings: and you always begin with the sweets.

Another peculiarity of these meals is that one has to be very careful not to touch the cook as he comes round, or his dish. If you did, he would be obliged to have a bath before he could take his own meal. Furthermore he would have to cook some more food all over again for himself. This contamination would ensue, not only if I touched it, but if any of the family did so, even the cook's employers Mr. or Mrs. Sarabhai. The other night, I sat by Leena, and there was some dish that pleased her specially. Without thinking she put out her hand to take another. Like a flash the Maharaj (or cook) drew the dish away, just in time, and her Mummy gave her a little reproof for her thoughtlessness.

After dinner we often go into the Drawing-room and have some music, or especially when there are guests, which is very often, and we join in general conversation, mostly politics.

The children are then sent off to bed, after various more or less successful efforts to evade the carrying out of the order, as is the case with children all over the world! The grown-ups generally retire not long afterwards: in fact I am generally in bed soon after ten. "And so to bed" as Pepys would say.

You see there is nothing very exciting about this daily routine. But of-course I have only described what comes regularly. There are, almost every day, special things happening, not down on the programme. As for instance, yesterday I went with Mrudula and Vasuben -- one of the "Gazelles" as I call them -- to see a large Jain temple.

Yesterday we also had several guests, including two English people, a University professor and his wife and an American; also a Parsee lady-doctor and one or two Hindus.

We have had several holidays lately, which are a pleasant change. There is at least this much to be said for Polytheism that you have plenty gods, whose birthdays have to be celebrated by taking a holiday! Of course the Catholics do nearly as well with Saints' Days etc. In fact I read once that Napoleon objected to the Catholic religion on this very score viz., that it gave the people too many holidays and was bad for trade! Have you ever thought - by the way - how typical it is of the contrast between mediaeval times and our own that they took their "Holy" days from the Church, while we from the banks - "Bank Holidays"!

Letter XXVI

SOME PERSONALITIES: ABBAS TAIYABJI, The Retreat,
PAUL RICHARD. Shahibag,
Ahmedabad.

March 28th, 1922.

My dear All,

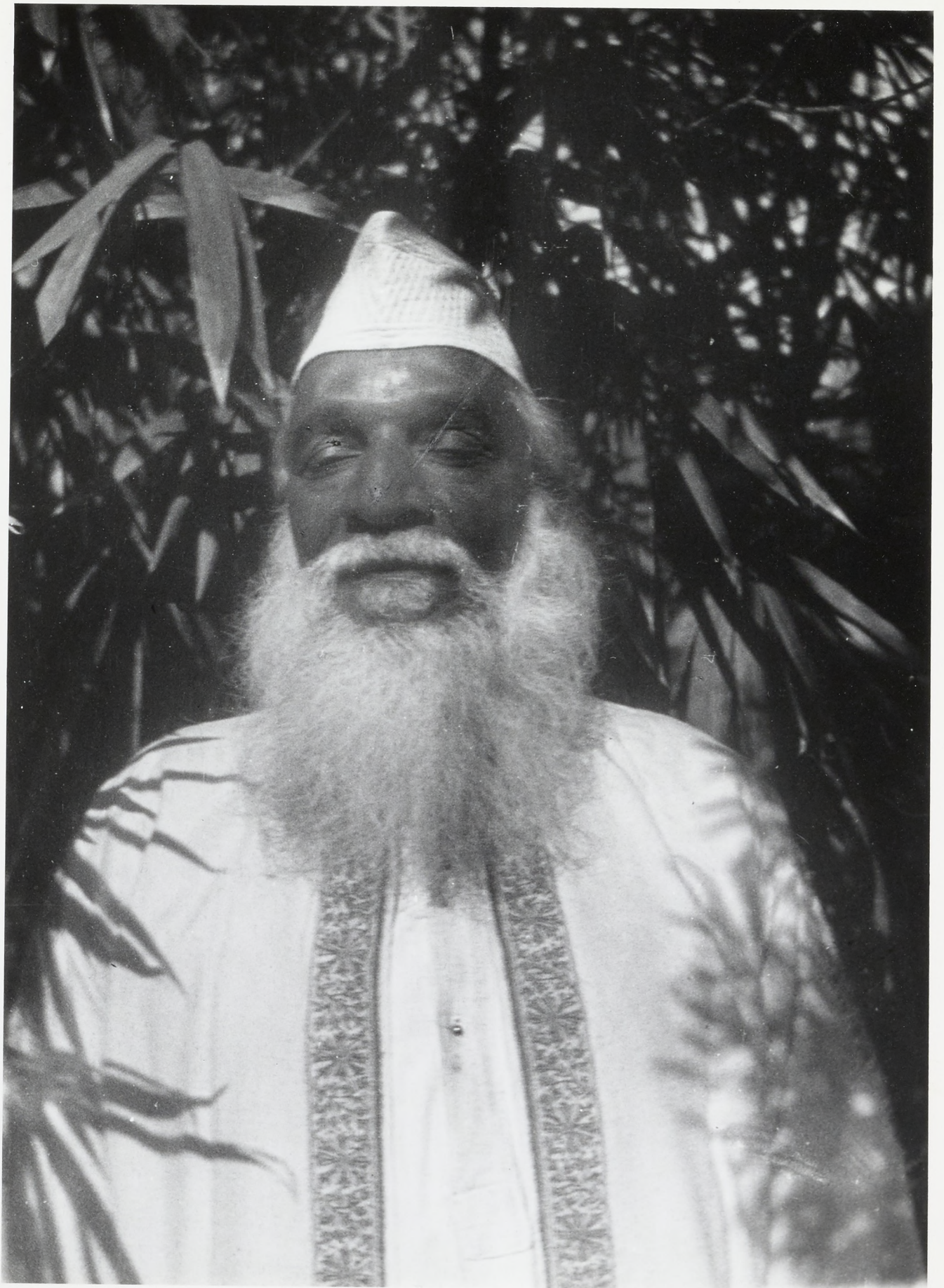
We have had very stirring times since the last letter I wrote about three weeks ago. The great Mahatma Gandhi has been arrested at last. Of course you have seen the news in the papers; also that he has been sentenced to 6 years imprisonment.

He was arrested at his Ashram, about a mile away from here, and we heard about it at once from Anasuyaben, who was with Gandhi at the time. She is the sister of Mr. Sarabhai and an ardent supporter of the Non-Co-operation Movement.

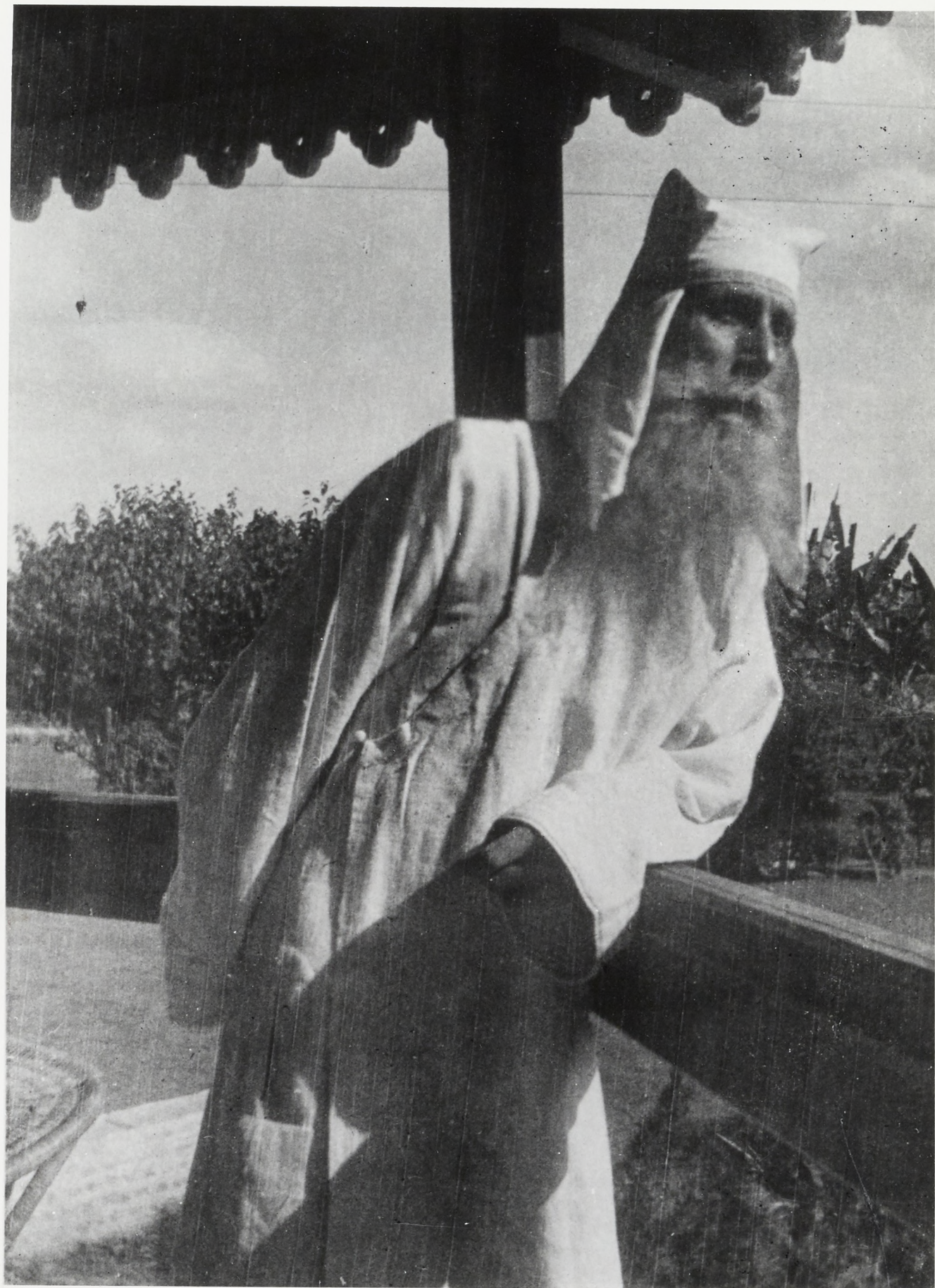
Mr. Gandhi had two trials, one before the local magistrate, and the other before the judge at the sessions. I managed to get to both trials, and extraordinarily impressive they were, especially the last one. I wrote some impressions of the first one and sent them to the Manchester Guardian, with instructions, in case they published it to send copies round. (I hope by the way you have received copies of the other sketches I wrote. It is a much simpler method of communicating with my friends; and does not lay upon them the burden of forwarding). So I will not enter into a long description of the trial now. The second trial - when Gandhi received his sentence was one of the most wonderful occasions at which I have ever been present. I have not had an opportunity to write an account of that yet; but hope to soon. One could not help feeling that it was a historical event; and as for it being dramatic -- why you could have put it almost without any alteration on the Stage as an Act in a Play.

At present the weather has become so hot that I do not have much superfluous energy after my ordinary work to do anything in the way of writing. We expect to be going away to the Hills in about a fortnight and then we shall all get a new lease of life.

It is almost decided that we are going to the Himalayas for the hot weather. Mr. Sarabhai's secretary has gone off



Mr. Abbas Taiyabji - Mohomedan Guest and political leader - with Gandhi Cap!



Paul Richard - French Huguenot turned Buddhist - lives in the Himalayas as a Yogi, wrote a book called "The Scourge of Christ" a satire on modern Christianity.

today to Mussoorie to look at some houses. I am very excited to think that we shall see the Himalayas; but hardly dare let my hopes rise until all the arrangements are finally fixed.

The photos I am sending this time are:-

- 1) Mr. and Mrs. Sarabhai. It is not a good one, especially of Mrs. Sarabhai, for the sun was rather too glaring; but I trust it is better than nothing. They are really delightful people to live with. I get to like them more and more. It is just the opposite of the saying, familiarity breeds contempt. Mrs. Sarabhai is an almost ideal mother in her willingness to sacrifice all her time and energy to her children. They in their turn are all very devoted to her. Mr. Sarabhai is a good natured and genial father: in some ways he reminds me of a big schoolboy himself, especially when he is with the children. He is very open-minded and balanced in his views both political and religious.
- 2) The next is Mr. Abbas Taiyabji a very frequent visitor here. He lives in Baroda, and is a Mahommedan. He was staying here with his wife and two daughters at the Congress time; and I mentioned him and his daughter in my article. He is a very keen follower of Gandhi. I shouldn't wonder if he is arrested before long. He is a very well-educated man and speaks English and French fluently; and has been very many times to Europe. One of his daughters has a most beautiful voice, and one a very beautiful face.
- 3) The third is a snap of a most extraordinary Being. He is a Frenchman - Paul Richard - who has become a Yogi. He is the Himalayan Sage I referred to in my article on the House Party. He happens to be staying here again at this very time. He has most strange views, some of which are sane, some fantastic, but all interesting. He wears a most wonderful headgear, as you see from the photo. It is however very simple in make, for it merely consists of a napkin which he folds in some

cunning manner and fastens with a pin. Paul Richard has the most strange notions about Good and Evil, and thinks the Devils are doing God's will as much as the Angels.¹ He is off back to his Eyrie in the mountains in a few weeks. He has written a book called the "Scourge of Christ", which is an indictment, in the most burning and acid terms, of the Materialism of Christianity in the West. It is full of this sort of thing:

"Today when the Seventy are starting on their mission they first take out an insurance policy." "If Noah had had a committee he would never have built his ark. We call 'Good' what pleases us; 'Evil' what pleases Others". He is a very picturesque man, this French Yogi, and would be an impressive person to bring into a play. He is six foot tall; and looks taller still by reason of his long flowing gown and patriarchal beard.

There is another guest staying here at present who - like me is a great admirer of Emerson. He also has a great devotion to St. Francis, and informed me he is just reading his sixth biography of the Saint. He told me he is going to get hold of all the Lives of Christ he can find, and take them with him up to the Himalayas when he goes for his holidays.

Truly this is a wonderful place for meeting all sorts of interesting people. The other day I went to a garden party at the house of an Indian Judge. After it was dark we sat out on the city wall - which goes by the house - on a sort of platform - it was just the place to have acted the ghost scene from "Hamlet". There we entered into a long discussion on Spiritualism - this was a propos of some exposures of Connan Doyle's writings on this subject which have appeared recently. Then some of those present went on to describe some amazing "psychic" happenings that they or their friends - had experienced. Now I must stop as it is time for dinner.

¹ This reminds one of the episode in Goethe's Faust. When Mephistopheles appears conjured up from the lower world Faust says "who are you?" and the devil replies "I am a part of that power which ever would the Evil do - and ever does the Good".

Letter XXVII

THE SUPER-VEGETARIANS

The Retreat,
Shahibag,
Ahmedabad.

My dear Everyone,

My letter today is in the form of an article called "The Super-Vegetarians".

There was a time when I used to be a vegetarian, and earnestly ate nut rissoles and marmite sausages. In those days, if I looked at a dish of lamb cutlets, I was haunted by the spectral bleatings of woolly innocents being led to the slaughter; a mutton chop was to me a menace; and if I saw a bottle of Bovril I sighed with genuine sympathy, 'Alas, my poor brother!' For were not the animals our 'younger brothers'? Were they not even as we ourselves - climbing the ladder of evolution to higher and better things? What right had we to cut off their innocent lives before their destined hour had struck?

Then, by the hand of destiny, I was brought in contact with the Super-Vegetarians. The Super-Vegetarians are a sect of Hindus, usually known as the Jains. It so happened that my work in India threw me into intimate contact with these interesting people. I found them not only interesting, but exceedingly kind and hospitable, and in many other ways unusually charming and refined. In fact their code of ethics with regard to the animal world was too refined for me altogether. I became aware that I was only a beginner in these matters, a despairing amateur in the presence of professionals; I was not even an 'also ran'. In the presence of such high and austere consistency I gave up the competition; and, realising the direction in which my ideals were leading, fell back -- not without relief -- on the "flesh-pots of Egypt".

The root principle of the Jain religion is the doctrine of Ahimsa or Harmlessness. It is founded on the belief in the transmigration of souls, i.e. that the same soul comes to earth many times in different bodies. For instance, it might come successively as a beetle, a man, a crocodile, a horse,

a scorpion, and so on during countless re-births. Hence all life, even plant and animal life, is to be held sacred since there is only One Indwelling Spirit or essence that pervades all that is. It goes without saying, therefore, that the Jains are strict vegetarians. They will not even eat eggs, and many will not drink milk. Some of the very strict ones hardly eat anything more than fruit and nuts. Another of their peculiarities is that they will neither eat nor drink between sunset and sunrise, lest by mischance they might swallow a fly or other insect in the dark - and this of course is for the sake of the fly!

They are much more than vegetarians. This amazing respect for all forms of life affects not only the food they eat, but influences their life in many other ways. For instance, though their house may be swarming with an Egyptian plague of flies, they would never dream of doing anything to mitigate their discomfort by the use of fly-papers. I remember once staying in the house of a wealthy Jain (a most accomplished gentleman, by the way, with a University degree), where the compound round his house was infested with monkeys. Though they ravaged his garden and stole his fruit, he would never allow anyone to shoot at them. He had two men permanently employed whose sole duty it was to drift about all day, scaring the monkeys away by shouting at them and throwing stones (but not to hit them). Even this was not a sufficient protection; for the second day I was there, on going into my bedroom, I was surprised to see a large black-faced monkey emerge from under my bed. One might almost have supposed that I had intruded into his apartment to judge by his angry looks and the nonchalant way he strolled across the room to the open window.

In one city where I lived some time there exists a society - not for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, but for the Preservation of the Life of Animals. This society runs various activities, including the free distribution of milk for monkeys and rice for ants. But the most striking of its undertakings is displayed when there has been a specially long season of drought. At such a time it happens naturally that many lakes and rivers begin to dry up, and the fishes, turtles and other aquatic animals therein are in grave danger of dying for lack of water. To prevent such a calamity this society, which has ample means at its disposal (the Jains being a very wealthy sect), engages a number of servants to transport these creatures overland to larger lakes and rivers. By providing for such acts of charity the subscribers acquire much merit. Not content with saving the lives of fishes

(which they transport in buckets), they have been known at times to turn their kind attentions even to crocodiles. They carry these slung on to long poles, having however first taken the wise precaution of blocking their jaws up with a log of wood. There was a curious sequel on one occasion to an act of kindness thus bestowed on a crocodile. The men employed, having carried the crocodile several miles overland, let it loose again in a large river. It climbed out, and found a resting place in an enclosure belonging to one of the cotton mills adjacent to the river. The mill, by the way, belonged to a Jain, and the spot chosen by the crocodile happened to be the place where his workers used to eat their midday food. You can imagine the surprise of these people the next day on finding the crocodile in possession of their luncheon ground. They drew back in alarm, not wishing to take any risks. Not so, however, a young and inexperienced puppy, with an enquiring mind, which happened to be there. Unperturbed by the ferocious spectacle, it waddled up to the monster to investigate, when suddenly -- well, the crocodile was not a vegetarian! The body of the puppy disappeared in a flash, while its soul (according to the Hindu belief) was transferred to another body. Perhaps, in its next incarnation, it has come back as a baby, destined to grow up into an intrepid explorer who will go big-game hunting in the jungles of Africa!

I remember once, in a conversation with Mahatma Gandhi (who does not belong to the Jain Sect), discussing this question of reincarnation with him. He assured me, with the utmost sincerity, that if he were confronted by a crocodile and could not escape without either killing it or being killed by it, it would be his duty to let the crocodile eat him rather than, by taking its life, violate the principle of Ahimsa. He also added with his characteristic sense of humour that he could not predict whether, in a sudden emergency, he would have moral strength to carry out his convictions, but he hoped he would. Personally I think it quite likely that Mr. Gandhi would not violate his principles even in such a predicament. I used to visit him at his Ashram or Settlement, sometimes, before he was put into prison; and one of his secretaries, whom I know very well and whose veracity I would never question however strongly I differed from him in principle, told me the following incident, corroborated by several others who were present. One evening, as they were sitting in the garden at their evening meditation, a large cobra came out of the long grass and made in the direction of the Mahatma. His followers, fearing for the safety of their leader, made preparations to seize and remove it. He motioned to them, however, to remain still, as he did himself. The loathsome thing crawled right across his bare

knees, and then slid quietly away into the jungle about its own poisonous business.

As a general rule the true Jain will not kill a snake, however deadly. What they do usually is to capture it alive with a sort of long forked stick and force it into a jar. Then they carry it -- or more usually their servants carry it -- to a safe distance and let it go. In practice this amounts, in many cases, to dropping it unobtrusively near somebody else's compound.

Many of the more modernised Jains, however, do not carry out the practice of Ahimsa so strictly as this. I know one, for instance, who eats eggs. He allows himself to do so because he says it prevents the chickens from growing up only to be cruelly slaughtered by his less enlightened countrymen who are not Jains. But then he was a lawyer! This is a profession, one might remark in passing, which is adopted by a good many Jains. A number of the ordinary walks of life are closed to these people on account of their peculiar beliefs. For instance, no Jain could take up a military life, or go in for agriculture, since both these occupations involve the taking of life.* A considerable number have become bankers, and not a few of the leading cotton manufacturers belong to this sect -- these being innocent employments from their point of view.

The researches of modern biology have caused the Jains much searching of heart. I heard of one gentleman who bought a microscope, and was so horrified by the revelation which it gave him of countless minute forms of life in earth, air, and water, that he smashed the instrument. He was horrified, for he realised for the first time how many such organisms he must have unwittingly destroyed, and must continue to destroy, in his ordinary course of life.

The Jain who related to me the above incident takes a much more lenient view of things. He told me himself, without any pangs of conscience, that he killed half a dozen black scorpions in one afternoon, as they came crawling one after the other on to the verandah out of the rain. His wife, however, is much more orthodox than he, and every year he

*Actually such extreme adherence to theoretical principles is rare; as it is with the ten Commandments of the Bible, for example.

waits till she has gone off to the Hills in the hot weather to arrange for an annual slaughter of rats, mice, and other small animals that live in the bungalow as uninvited guests.

There is a convenient doctrine amongst the Jains that a man may acquire merit by doing virtuous actions by proxy. Thus there are certain wealthy Jains who give money so that persons, brave or desperate enough to earn it, may sleep in beds swarming with the most disgusting vermin, in order that the latter may enjoy a hearty meal. It is with a somewhat similar thoughtfulness in view towards the 'lower forms of life!' that the priests of the Jain religion -- according to the tenets of their order -- are never allowed to take a bath. On two occasions I had the doubtful privilege of meeting some of these holy men, and I confess that I took care to seat myself at a very respectful distance. These priests are the salt of Jainism; but under these conditions one can easily understand that the salt is apt to 'lose its savour'.

Perhaps the most astonishing thing about the orthodox Jains is the fact that, along with their meticulous care to preserve the life of animals, there often goes the most callous disregard for the sufferings of human beings outside their own particular caste. Of-course there are exceptions, but they are exceptions, and must be so, from the nature of the case. For the philosophy behind this Super-Vegetarianism is a cold and lifeless system of abstractions - austere, legal and ponderous in its method and application. It knows nothing of the exuberant simplicity of simple faith, still less of the genial warmth of Christian charity. In their vivid appreciation of their brotherhood with crocodiles, some seem to have lost sight of the brotherhood of man.

Letter XXVIII

ARREST AND TRIAL OF MR. GANDHI.

The Retreat,
Shahibag,
Ahmedabad.

March 15th, 1922.

My Dear All,

My letter to-day is in the form of an article.

HOW MR. GANDHI WAS ARRESTED
AND BROUGHT TO TRIAL

Mr. Gandhi was arrested on March 10th about 10.30 p.m. It took place quietly. "We had had our suspicions," related one of Gandhi's inner circle, "and were motoring out to the Ashram that evening to be with the Mahatma. When we arrived we found Mr. Healy, the police superintendent, already there with his car. He was standing outside the Ashram. He very politely informed us that he had come to arrest Mr. Gandhi, and asked if he would kindly tell him. 'There is no hurry,' he added. 'Let him take his time.' So we went in and told the Mahatma. The people of the Ashram, for the most part, retire early but the news being sent round all the members collected together. Mr. Gandhi then led us in his favourite hymn. After that all the members did their obeisance to him and received his blessing. His parting words were, 'Work hard and tire **not.**'"

The trial, before the District Magistrate, took place at noon the following day in the Commissioner's Office. The onlookers were about sixty in number. They were practically all Indians and Mohammedans, many of whom were personal friends and supporters of Mr. Gandhi. Most of them wore khadi clothes and the Gandhi cap.

Before the Magistrate

In the centre of the room was the Mahatma sitting in a chair beside his young colleague, Mr. Banker. As usual he wore nothing save "Langoti" (of spotlessly clean khadi), a garment which amounts to little more than a loin-cloth: even his sandals had fallen from his feet. His head, too, was bare, and his close-cropped, grizzled hair revealed the

contours of his skull. For the most part he sat there like a bronze image, motionless save for the thin wisp of hair about six inches long (the "Shikha", a sign of Hinduism, like a miniature pigtail) which stirred restlessly in the breeze from the electric fan like a plume in the wind.

His whole demeanour was calm and dignified. His is a face worth a prolonged study. There is not a spare ounce of flesh on it, and every line of his features indicates the pressure and moulding force of the restless spirit within. It is the face of a man who has given up everything to the life of the intellect and will. There was no trace of anxiety in his expression, but the settled look of one who has made up his mind, counted the cost, and whom nothing external can change.

Behind and quite near him sat several Indian ladies; amongst them his wife. She has a kind, simple, and motherly face, not so intellectual as his, but with a singularly sweet and homely expression. Her sad looks betrayed the anxiety for him which he could not feel for himself, but her emotions were well under control.

The trial was long-drawn-out, and for the most part the proceedings were rather dry and technical, and their content largely known to those present beforehand. They related mainly to seditious articles and correspondence printed in Gandhi's paper "Young India".

The trial was a striking contrast to that of the Ali brothers, which was characterised by much disorder and bad feeling. Here everything was carried on in a quiet, dignified and gentlemanly manner on both sides. Indeed it was hard to believe one was witnessing an event which would react in some form or other on millions of people all over and beyond India. Everything was so quiet, so subdued - so dull, one might almost say. The quiet conversational tones of the court officials and witnesses, the rustling of papers as files were consulted, subdued whisperings here and there in the audience, the click-click of the typewriter, and the ceaseless whirl of the electric fans.

A Popular English Official

There was a stir of interest when the Collector of the District was called as a witness. He had given the warrant for Mr. Gandhi's arrest and for the search of his newspaper office. He was a tall, handsome, typical Englishman, over six feet, with an open manly face and bull-dog chin. He is

a popular man in spite of the extraordinary difficulty of carrying out Government orders in a disaffected area. "A real English gentleman of the old type", said an Indian lady to me. "He seems different from most of the English one meets out here," said another: "So courteous and polite to everyone, whatever rank or race. He always reminds me of being in England." His genial and courtly manner suffused a glow of good feeling into the room as long as he was present. As he rose to go at the end of his cross-examination he nodded affably to Mr. Gandhi, who smiled in return and acknowledged his salute in the Eastern manner of joining the hands and bowing a little.

This friendly relation between the prisoner and the man who had signed his warrant was one of the most striking features of the trial. One could not but feel that if all British officials and army officers had this man's genial and friendly manner towards Indians it would help, more than a whole Blue-book full of the constitutional reforms, towards settling the Indian question - which is in the last analysis a racial one.

The Prisoner's Jest

The proceedings lasted about four hours. At the conclusion of the evidence the prisoner was asked if he had anything to say. He replied: "I simply wish to state that when the proper time comes I shall plead guilty so far as disaffection to the Government is concerned."

An amusing moment occurred towards the end when the magistrate was applying to Mr. Gandhi for details as to his person.

Age?	-	Fifty-three.
Caste?	-	Hindu Bania.
Occupation?	-	Farmer and weaver.

A titter of merriment went round at this, for of-course it was a reference to the well-known policy of homespun which Gandhi has inaugurated.

There was a dramatic moment, too, towards the end caused by the entrance of the famous Indian poetess and Nationalist leader, Sarojini Naidu. She had set off at once from Ajmer on hearing of the Mahatma's arrest and travelled all night and



Mrs. Sarojini Naidu - famous Indian Poetess



came in haste straight up from the station. She is a great friend and devotee of the Mahatma. Strikingly handsome and tastefully dressed, she has a presence and air that would make her conspicuous in any company. She came straight into the room and walked up to the back of the prisoner's chair. The Mahatma turned round obviously touched by her loyalty in coming at such inconvenience and haste. She seized his hands and placed them on her closed eyes - a token of affection and reverence.

When the hearing was over the magistrate and other court officials retired, leaving Mr. Gandhi with his friends, with whom he talked and chatted with unaffected cheerfulness.

"Plenty of Time for Reading."

I had visited him once or twice at his Ashram some months ago and had lent him some books. On seeing me there he nodded and said: "I have not been able to read those books yet, but I have them with me in prison. I shall read them now," he added laughing, "as I shall have plenty of time for reading at last." "What was the book you lent?" said a friend of his to me shortly afterwards. "Was it called 'The Sermon on the Mount'?" "No", I replied; "why do you ask?" "Oh, because I saw a book of that title in his prison room this morning."

After he had been about half an hour with his friends, the police superintendent returned. "Are you ready?" he said politely, almost deferentially. "Yes, quite," replied Mr. Gandhi cheerfully. A handsome Daimler landau was waiting at the door, placed at his disposal by a rich cotton mill owner, who is a personal friend of his (in spite of the Mahatma's policy of hand-spun).¹ And so, surrounded by his friends, in the transient luxury of a £ 2,000 Daimler, the little man in a loin cloth vanished from sight: back to prison - and the Sermon on the Mount.

¹ Mr. Ambalal Sarabhai

Letter XXIX

GANDHI IN PRISON.

The Retreat,
Shahibag,
Ahmedabad.

March 29th, 1922.

My Dear All,

Here is another letter written in the form of an article
- forgive me if you find any repetitions from other letters.

GANDHI IN PRISON

It is no uncommon thing to hear Mahatma Gandhi referred to by his followers as "The Christ of India". To a Christian, of-course this phrase sounds exaggerated, but to the average Indian who knows about the Nazarene Prophet only by hearsay there are sufficient external resemblances to account for the use of this title. It is not alone the simple and saintly life of the Mahatma, his reputation amongst the ignorant as a miracle-worker,* his personal attraction, his belief in non-violence that suggest this comparison. In the political situation also in which he finds himself there are not a few striking, if superficial, resemblances to that in which Christ lived. But, however parallel the political situation may seem to be, there is one great difference that must present itself to the mind of any thoughtful person. In the incident of the tribute money and the payment of taxes to Caesar, it would seem that Christ's position was the very opposite of Gandhi's doctrine of Non-Co-operation with Imperial Government. "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and to God the things which are God's": Is not this the exact opposite of Gandhi's teaching?

I was fortunate enough to have a long conversation with Mr. Gandhi on this and other matters a few days before he was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. He was already in prison at Ahmedabad when I visited him, and was awaiting his

*I have never heard of this and I have no doubt Gandhiji himself never made any claims of the sort. He would have laughed heartily and taken it as a joke.

final trial before the assizes.

He and his fellow-prisoner - Mr. Banker, the printer of "Young India" - were comfortably accommodated with a pleasant verandah space opposite their cells, which were scrupulously clean and roomy. When I arrived, the Mahatma was holding a sort of levee on the verandah, and was surrounded by a group of relatives and followers. He seemed in the best of spirits, and was obviously the life and soul of the party. After a while his friends retired and - except for the gaoler - we were left alone to our discussion.

We came to the subject of Non-Co-operation. I asked him if - in view of the answer Christ gave in the incident of the tribute money - he did not think the policy of Non-Co-operation was contrary to Christ's teaching.

"Not being a Christian," he replied, "I am not bound to justify my action by Christian principles. But, as a matter of fact, in this case I do not think there is any indication that Christ was against the principle of Non-Co-operation. I think His words show that He was for it."

"I do not understand;" I protested. "Surely the meaning is quite clear. 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's' means that it is our duty to pay to the civil authorities what is their due. If it doesn't mean that, what does it mean?"

Gandhi's Explanation

"Christ never answered a question in a simple and literal manner," replied Mr. Gandhi. "He always gave in His replies more than was expected, something deeper - some general principle. It was so in this case. Here He does not mean at all whether you must or must not pay taxes. He means something far more than this. When He says 'Give back to Caesar the things which are Caesar's', He is stating a law. It means" - and here the Mahatma waved his hand as though putting something from him - "it means 'Give back to Caesar what is his - i.e., I will have nothing to do with it.' In this incident Christ enunciated the great law - which He exemplified all His life - of refusing to co-operate with evil. When Satan said to Him, 'Bow down and worship me' - i.e. co-operate with me - then He said 'Get thee behind me, Satan.' When the crowds round Him wanted to take Him by force and make Him a military king, He refused to co-operate with them as their method was evil: they wanted Him to rely on force. Christ's attitude against

the authorities was defiant," continued the Mahatma. "When Pilate asked Him if He were king He answered 'Thou sayest it.' Is not that treating authority with defiance? He called Herod 'that fox.' Was that like co-operation with authorities? And before Herod He would not answer a word. In short, He refused to co-operate with him: and so I refuse to co-operate with the British Government."

"But," I said, "surely it is our duty in this imperfect world to co-operate with what is good in individuals and institutions."

"As a man," said the Mahatma, "I would gladly co-operate and be friends with Lord Reading; but I could not co-operate with him as the Viceroy, being a part of a corrupt Government."

A Satisfactory Government.

Protesting further, I said: "Granted the Government has made mistakes, yet you cannot surely say it is wholly bad; if there is miscarriage of justice here and there, the broad fact remains that the 300 millions of India are kept in a condition of law and order. Are you against Government in general? Can you point out to me any Government on earth that is faultless and would satisfy you?"

"Yes," he replied at once. "Look at the Government of Denmark. I should be satisfied with such a Government. It represents the people; it does not exploit a conquered nation; it is efficient; the people under it are cultured, intellectual, manly, contented, and happy; it supports no large army and navy to keep others in imperial subjection."

"But," I answered, "do you think empires are inherently bad? Surely the Roman Empire was a benefit to civilization. Christ never said a word against it as far as we know."

"Quite so," He replied, "but it was not His business to inveigh against imperialism. Every great reformer has to struggle against the special evil of his age. Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, and in a lesser way Luther, had their own evils and difficulties to contend with peculiar to their age. So with us. Now it is imperialism that is the great Satan of our times."

"So you are out to destroy the Empire?" I asked.

"I would not put it that way," he answered. "I only wish to destroy the Empire by creating a commonwealth."

I do not wish for complete separation from England; we have no right to wish for it."

"What is your definition of this commonwealth to which India shall belong: what is to be its structure?"

"It is to be a fellowship of free nations joined together by the 'silver cords of love'. (I think it is Lord Salisbury's phrase). Such a fellowship already exists for many parts of the Empire. Look at South Africa! what fine fellows are there! Australia - fine fellows! And New Zealand - a splendid land and a fine people! I would have India enter freely into such a fellowship, and with the same rights of equality for Indians as for other members of the Commonwealth."

"But surely that is just the very aim that the Government has for India, - to become a self-governing unit in the Empire as soon as she is ready for the responsibility. Is not this the whole meaning of the Montague reforms?"

"Ah," said the Mahatma, shaking his head. "I am afraid I do not believe in those reforms. When they were first introduced I rejoiced and said to myself, 'Here at last is a small ray of light in the darkness. Just a small chink, but I will go forward to meet it.' I welcomed it; I fought against my own people to give it a fair chance. I said this is a sign of true repentance on the part of the Government. When the war broke out I went about speaking at recruiting meetings, because I thought the Government did really mean to give us what they promised. It is only a small beginning, I thought, but I will wait and see. I will humble myself, make myself small to go through this narrow opening. But events have changed me. Then came the Punjab atrocities, then the Khilafat question, and finally all the repressive action of the Government, and now I can believe in the reforms no longer. They were a mere blind, a camouflage, to prolong the agony. That is why I call the Government satanic and why I refuse to co-operate with it in any way."

The Khadi Campaign.

From the subject of Non-Co-operation the conversation passed naturally enough to the question of the boycott of foreign goods, and the great khadi (or home-spin) campaign. Here the Mahatma's face lit up, his eyes shone with enthusiasm. "Of all my plans and foibles, of all my weaknesses and fanaticisms, or whatever you like to call them, khadi is my pet one. This," he said, touching the rough

home-spun shawl over his shoulder, "this is sacred cloth. Think what it means! Imagine the thousands and hundreds of thousands of homes in the famine areas. When the famine comes they are stricken down; they are helpless. They do nothing in their homes - can do nothing - they wait and die. If I can introduce the spinning-wheel into these homes, their lives are assured; they can earn enough money with the sale of their home-spin to tide them over the famine.

"This coarse stuff," he went on, fingering it gently, almost caressingly, "is dearer and finer to me than the softest silks of Japan. Through it I am bound nearer to millions of my humble and starving countrymen. Look at the cloth you are wearing," and he pointed to my white machine-made serge, "when you buy that you put one or two annas into the hand of the workman and six or seven into the pocket of the capitalist. Now look at mine. All the money I spend on this goes straight into the hands of the poor - to the weaver, the spinner, and the carder, - and not a pice into the hands of the rich man. To know this fills me with a heavenly joy. If I can act thus, if I can introduce the spinning-wheel into every cottage in India, then I shall be satisfied for this life; I could go on with my other schemes in my next if it pleased God."

"What do you mean?" I asked, not quite sure of the drift of his last remarks. "You think we come back again to this earth?"

"Yes," he replied. "I think we all come back here again if we are not pure enough to go to heaven. You see," he went on, smiling, "it is the same principle we were talking about before. 'Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's' - the body must give back to the earth the things that are of the earth before the soul can give itself absolutely to God; or, rather, the soul must refuse to co-operate with the things of this earth; it must become quite free from any earthly desires and entanglements."

The Killing of Animals

"And do you believe animals have souls too?"

"Of course," he replied. "It is the same with them; they too, must learn to give back to Caesar the things which are Caesar's. That is why as Hindus we do not kill animals. We leave them free to work out their own destinies."

"Then you think it is wrong to kill even such things

as snakes, scorpions, and centipedes?"

"Yes," he said, "we never kill them at our Ashram. It is a high stage in the development of the soul to feel a love for all humanity, but it is a higher stage still to feel a heart of love for every living thing. I confess," he went on, "that I have not reached this stage. I still feel afraid when I actually see these creatures come near me. If we have no fear at all, I do not think they will harm us."

"I met an Englishman once," continued the Mahatma, still on the subject of our relation to the animal world. "He was a veterinary surgeon and had a wonderful way with animals. We were visiting a house together, and suddenly a gigantic brute of a dog rushed towards us, fierce as a lion, and raised himself at us. I was petrified with fear, but the Englishman went forward to meet it as it charged and embraced it without a trace of fear. Its anger evaporated at once and it began wagging its tail. It impressed me very much: that is the true way of meeting animals by non-resistance."

"But do you not think a man's life is worth more than an animal's? Take yourself now. You are the leader of a great movement which you believe to be for the good of your country. Supposing you were confronted by a crocodile and you could only escape by killing it, would not you think your duty and responsibility as a leader were more important than the life of that reptile?"

"No, I should say - or least I ought to say - to this crocodile, 'Your need is greater than mine,' and let it devour me. You see our life does not finish with the death of the body. God knows all about it. We none of us know what will happen next. If I escaped the crocodile I could not escape the flash of lightning that might come next minute."

"But surely," I urged, "a man's soul is different from that of a crocodile - if it has one at all. You remember what Chesterton says about it, 'When a man is taking his sixth whiskey and soda, and is beginning to lose control over himself, you come up to him and give him a friendly tap on the shoulder and say, 'Be a man.'" But when the crocodile is finishing his sixth missionary do not step up to it and tap it on the back and say, 'Be a crocodile.' Doesn't this show a man has an ideal in him to strive after in a way no animal has?"

"True," said the Mahatma laughing, "there is a difference between the souls of men and of animals. Animals live in a

sort of perpetual trance; but men can wake up and become conscious of God. God says, as it were, to man 'Look up and worship Me; you are made in My image.'

The Souls of Animals.

"And the souls of animals, where do they come from?" I queried. "Do you think the soul of a man can become the soul of an animal?"

"Yes," he replied. "I think all these horrible and evil creatures are inhabited by the souls of men who have gone wrong - **snakish** men, greedy, unmerciful crocodile men, and so on."

"But look at the infinite number of animals, the countless millions upon millions of insects, to mention only one group of the animal kingdom: are they all souls - the mosquitos, the sandflies, the microbes?"

"Who are we," he answered "to set the limit to God's sphere of action: are there not countless other suns and planets in this universe?"

It was time for me to go, for I had another appointment; so at this point I rose to take my leave. I went to the edge of the little carpet on the verandah where we had been sitting and began to put on my shoes (for I had removed them, Eastern fashion, being in a manner his guest).

As I lifted one shoe I saw a spider in it.

"See," I said to him, laughing, as I shook out the loathsome thing, and, resisting the impulse to crush it, let it run away. "Look; it has been sent me, as a temptation, to try if I have profited by your sermon."

He laughed - he has an infectious and hearty laugh and said, "Yes, a spider may be a great matter. Don't you remember the story of Mohammed and the spider?"

I confessed my ignorance, wondering vaguely if he had got the story muddled up with Robert Bruce.

"Yes," he said, "one day Mohammed was fleeing from his enemies in great danger. In desperation he turned into a sort of cave in the rock. A few hours afterwards the pursuers came

along. 'Ah,' said one, 'let's look in here; this is a likely place'. 'No,' replied the other, 'he couldn't be in here, for, see, there is a spider's web across the entrance.' Not realizing how recently it had been spun, they passed on, and so Mohammed escaped by the help of the spider and the will of Allah."

While he had been telling this, his friend and fellow-prisoner, Mr. Banker, had brought him his charkha or spinning-wheel. As I bade "Good-bye" to the Mahatma, he was just settling down to the daily duty, shared by all his followers (in theory if not in practice), of spinning or weaving a certain amount each day.

As I reached the end of the verandah, I turned for a last look. There was this un-assuming-looking little man, dressed with less ceremony than the meanest coolie, squatting cross-legged in front of his charkha, spinning away as contentedly as Mohammed's spider. Was he, I wondered, spinning a web that was to save the Indian peasant from the menace of an industrial system untinged with even a veneer of Christian ethics; or was he himself caught in the center of a vast web of illusions, spun from his own extraordinary brain, into which he had drawn hundreds and thousands of his ignorant and emotional countrymen?

E. M. STANDING
MONTESSORI STUDIES CENTER
SEATTLE UNIVERSITY
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98122

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While he had been telling this his friend and fellow-prisoner, Mr. Barker, had brought him his charka or spinning-wheel. As I said "good-bye" to the Khatam, he was just sitting down to the daily duty, shared by all his followers (in theory if not in practice), of spinning or weaving a certain amount each day.

As I reached the end of the veranda I turned for a last look. There was this unassuming-looking little man, dressed with less ceremony than the nearest cooie, squatting cross-legged in front of his spinning, spinning away as contentedly as Mohammed's spider. As I watched, spinning a web that was to save the Indian prisoner from the meshes of an industrial system untried with even a veneer of Christian ethics; or was he himself caught in the center of a vast web of illusions, spun from his own extraordinary brain, into which he had drawn hundreds and thousands of his ignorant and emotional countrymen?

