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## Box 08, Folder 11 - (Indian Twilight?) "Hinduism" (E.M.S.)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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The Retreat ,

Shahibag ,

Ahmedabad

Dec 28th ' 1921

My dear Everyone ,

In England <sup>?</sup> 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 . Everyone seems interested in religion, and they are not at all embarrassed by showing that interest . Thus the Perawallahs ( the Hall porters ), who are Mahomedans , seem to think it is the most natural ~~and ordinary~~ 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 . ~~and~~ They are not in the least embarrassed by <sup>doing</sup> 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 <sup>to discuss</sup> politics or the ~~local~~ 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 <sup>Somewhat</sup> infected with what some of my Protestant friends call "Roman Fever " .

Curiously enough, just this last week, a number of incidents ~~have~~ happened, which bear directly on this issue . ~~and~~ They have been so strikingly germane to the matter that I think the recipients of this circular letter <sup>& some</sup> ~~of~~ some of whom are Protestants and some Catholics <sup>would both</sup> ~~would~~ 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 it 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 centre 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 Mrudal in one of the corridors carrying what looked like a golden candlestick with several arms - not unlike the one taken by the Emperor Trajan from the Temple in Jerusalem - but a good deal smaller. When I asked her what it was for she replied "We put ghi - that is melted butter - in each of the

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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 exact;y 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 notice he had a long string of beads hung round 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, Ya!" I said to myself " that is where the Catholics pinched the idea of their Rosary beads .

The very next day I went with Wasu ~~Bhen~~ and Indu Bhen <sup>Bhen ( "the Gazelles " )</sup> on a visit to a Jain temple . As we went round 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 ~~wharxxxxxx~~ 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 seemd to corroborate the statement to the full . It seemed to me that the primitive simplicity of 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. (I) this indicates a footnote see next page

### Footnote

It was only several months later - thanks to the reading of Cardinal Newman's famous book "The Development of Doctrine" (sent 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 <sup>devotees</sup> ~~minds~~ 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 their exterior manifestation - having a priesthood, an altar, certain prescribed rites and prayers  $\frac{3}{4}$  but differ fundamentally in what they teach.

End of footnote, which should have been in single spacing )

(Back to the text )

Talking of religions a rather amusing incident occurred last week down in the city (of Ahmedabad) It took place in the following manner. There was .....

Some Saint !

A rather amusing incident happened last week down in the city of Ahmedabad -- the appearance of a "saint". It happened ~~in~~ <sup>following manner.</sup> like this. There was a sort of special fair being held - an annual event - a kind of extra market, something beyond the usual. ~~one.~~ To this fair many traders come from all the surrounding district. 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 a ~~a~~ <sup>r. holy</sup> ~~Saint~~ a Sadhu, a saint in other words, who would work a miracle. It was ~~said~~ <sup>even said</sup> that a certain god would appear to ~~him~~ <sup>this man</sup> under the form of an idol.

Well the time came, and amongst the people at the fair was a holy man ~~nothing new in India - it is full of them -~~ <sup>in set</sup> ~~wandering Sanyasi men.~~ 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 <sup>a</sup> holy man had set up ~~his~~ little ~~primitive~~ tent in one corner of the bazaar, and sat there all day cross-legged; and as the people passed by some to 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, slowly ~~then~~ <sup>who was to appear.</sup> a statue - the statue of this particular god (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 for why? Because he was wanted by the police. What they were on his

inset  
over-  
page

In fact there were lots of haly men. That is  
nothing new in India. At this very moment there  
are some 8 million haly men wandering  
like leopards over the face of India. That is  
their occupation - they are "seekers of enlighten-  
ment". They usually go from house to house.....  
(back to same page)

track for I never found out , but it was not for the miracle  
but for some ~~other~~ 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 ny night, and in the ground just oppos ite his tent had dug  
a large hole into which he had placed some sort of spherical receptacle <sup>see</sup>.  
- I am not quite sure of <sup>all</sup> the exact details? ( a professional secret  
no doubt ' ) <sup>but</sup> he had filled this spherical underground receptacle  
with dried grain . <sup>now</sup> this underground sphere ~~of grain~~ filled with  
grain communicated with the surface through a sort of vent like  
a volcano . <sup>when all was ready</sup> Then he poured water down the vent into the dried grain  
and then placed the god in the vent . Result : <sup>was</sup> the water percolated  
down into the grain it made it swell : And <sup>since</sup> 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 <sup>lower</sup> ~~ether~~ regions . ~~Quite simple~~  
~~when you know how~~ . was the god where ~~to~~ visit  
had been foretold.



This story reminds me of another incident which I think is worth mentioning. Every <sup>morning</sup> before the household is up we hear a voice singing as its ~~wheel~~ <sup>Owner</sup> moves along outside the ~~high~~ <sup>high</sup> wall of the Retreat compound - singing cheerfully and with <sup>just</sup> 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 <sup>he</sup> ~~it~~ was and where he was going. It appeared it was the voice of a man who came everyday <sup>on foot</sup> from the city two miles <sup>away</sup> to <sup>say</sup> his prayers at a particular temple down by the Gabarmati river, which is not very far from us.

This rather intrigued Mr Sarabhai; so one day 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 S. said that this devotee was a very simple fellow <sup>quite sincere</sup> and 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. <sup>On further questions</sup> but he said he found it a great help to do so to his inner life before he began his days 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, <sup>he is</sup> just because of his simplicity a very holy individual.