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Box 08, Folder 18 - (Indian Twilight?) "The Retreat" (E.M.S.)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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Recommended Citation

Standing, Edwin Mortimer, "Box 08, Folder 18 - (Indian Twilight?) "The Retreat" (E.M.S.)" (2022).
Manuscripts, ca. 1921-ca.1966; n.d., Edwin Mortimer Standing. 49.
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The Retreat

Shaibag

Ahmedabad

19th Dec. 1921

Letter

123

15

(Small)
My dear Every one ,

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

going on
There are great doings ⁱⁿ the political world now ~~and~~ every one 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 movements; over a hundred have been arrested in the last week.

- 2 -

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 -- the meeting of the Indian Congress. *This year it will be held at Ahmedabad.* 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 ~~even~~ difficult at present to get any servants or Malis (Gardener coolies). 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 ~~is~~ 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 ~~this~~ *our Shantiniketan* -- *our* "garden 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 look-

ing forward to meeting them. Two I have already heard about - Mrs. Naidu, an Indian poetess and politician, and Mr. Bhag-avan-Das, a big gun amongst the Theosophists.

We the children and the drawing master and I have been very busy lately getting on with our Play. We are getting some scenery screens painted by a professional theatrical artist. I went down to have a look at one of the Indian theatres the other day. It belongs to Mr. Sarabhai, who lets it out to different companies. It really wasn't such a bad little place at all. I should think it holds nearly a thousand persons. It is distinctly very "grubby," but if it were well spring-cleaned, and kept clean, it would be quite a useful little theatre. The lighting arrangements, and screens were much better than I had expected, here. I haven't seen an Indian Play yet; theatres don't begin till 9 p.m. and go on till 1 a.m. Our play will have to begin much earlier than that or all the performers would be asleep before the beginning of the play!

The Sarabhai family, who belong to the Jain caste, ~~are~~ ^{are a sort of very strict sect in Hinduism.} ~~broad-minded~~ ^{rather} in their views. When I first met them they seemed ~~quite~~ 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 your of the death of this friend and business partner of Mr. Sarabhai) is also staying here, and she too is very interested in Philosophy.

Poor
few months
that

rd about -
Bhag-avan

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 ~~anyhow~~. It is only a generation or two since the Government put a stop to the practice of Sutte~~e~~, but the idea of it still lingers in people's minds, and Mrs. Bakubhai was very devoted to her husband. She felt the blow so terribly that ^{at first} we almost feared for her life ^{her} or reason. She had no religious beliefs to sustain her; for she had abandoned the superstitions and the scheme of philosophy she had been brought up in, and had acquired nothing instead. I ^{lent} ~~learned~~ her Mat. McKlem's "Open Light", and have been reading it with her; and she is very interested, and is readily finding it an "Open Light."

But the most unexpected development of all has happened just the last few weeks. Finding this "treatment", seemed to agree with Nimaben (it is bad form to speak of a widow as Mrs. So-and-So, or even make any reference to her late husband) 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 an uncle of Mr. Sarabhai's, who is a baptiz^d Christian. For years he has been on the ~~xxx~~ black books of the family because of this ~~z~~ step; but now they have actually asked him to come and stay here, and go through a course of reading with Nimaben, ^{even 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.) *join on*

(He is an ardent Christian, and yet at the same time retains all that is good in his national culture. He realises 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.

N.P.

"Look at this war "they say - "That's what your Christinaity makes of you"! No thanks!" - and so they never get near "The Prince of Peace".) *join*

(Then again Christinaity comes to them bound up with an alien ^{*many of them believe*} Government, which ~~rightly or wrongly, they believe~~ (~~many of them~~) is standing in the way of their national aspirations. That is why a man like Parek, 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 Brahmo Samaj to Christianity".

^{*by the way*} The Brahmo Samaj is a very interesting religious development. It is a Reform Movement in Hinduism, which has been galvanised into being by contact with Christinaity. It has adopted many ideas from Christianity, and altogether it is a great ~~advance~~ advance on ordinary Hinduism. They believe in communal worship; have their own hymnbook and prayer book; and have discarded

idolatry and child marriages. The founder, Keshab Sunder 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 ~~the~~ ^{ed} press. I attend 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 of the Brahma Samaj. He had a really beautiful face, reminded me of what I ~~imagine~~ ^{imagine} the young John of the gospels to have looked like - at least in his expression.

I am meditating purchasing some means of locomotion, so as to be able to get about at a bit ~~more~~ ^{about two miles} more, as we live ~~some mile or~~ ~~two~~ 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} ~~says~~ 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} ~~might be~~ 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 ~~so far~~ ^{" "} at

least not yet!

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coming to -day. He says she can't speak English, and he can't speak Russian. So how they get on is more than I can understand. However I think they are coming here to lunch to-day; so I may be able to solve the mystery. Her Father was killed before her eyes by the Bolshevists, as were two of her sisters also.

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

... One is a... from the neighbouring state of... He used to be a judge, and even without his wig looks the most... He is very tall, with white flowing locks and a Father Time 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 turban etc, and wears the simple... 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... The other is a... who has signed this... of... This... his... to get... to England. I had a long talk with his... by the way, that he had a brother David who was running a hospital in... that David was a great... His wife died yesterday that she was

RS

Dec. 20th.

The Swaraj pictures I spoke of have not arrived yet, and as the mail goes to day, I am afraid they will have to wait till next time.

for the political home party to join

More guests have begun to arrive, the ones who have already appeared. If the ~~others~~ ^{new comers} are as interesting as these ~~ones~~ ^{first comers!}, we shall certainly have an entertaining time. ~~In one sense we shall have that anyhow - as our duty.~~ 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 Xmas 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~~ ^{lady} is a Mahomedan; and ~~this~~ ^{her} ~~man~~ ^{husband} has adopted this religion, chiefly I think at the command of Cupid. This man ^{as} whose name is Woodford, has had to resign his commission, ~~the~~ ^{as} the British army do not like Russians in India.

He is now at loose end, and wants to get back to England. I had a long talk with him last night, and he really seems rather a good sort. He said, by the way, that he knew my brother David, when he was running a hospital in Amara, and remarked further that David was a great "Knut!" His wife wired yesterday that she was