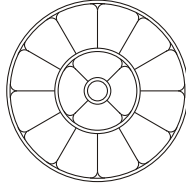


THE MOTHER

Words of Long Ago

Words of Long Ago



The Mother

**Words
of
Long Ago**

Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

VOLUME 2
COLLECTED WORKS OF THE MOTHER

Second Edition

ISBN 81-7058-670-4

Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust 1978, 2004

Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department

Pondicherry - 605 002

Website: <http://sabda.sriurobindoashram.org>

Printed at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry

PRINTED IN INDIA



The Mother in Tokyo, 1916

Publisher's Note

This volume contains all writings of the Mother from the period before 1920, with the exception of *Prayers and Meditations*. The material includes the Mother's earliest known composition, a story written in 1893; notes, stories and essays written between 1904 and 1915; miscellaneous prayers and meditations written between 1914 and 1920; letters, reflections and essays written in Japan between 1916 and 1920; and stories for children adapted from a book published in 1911.

The volume is divided into seven parts, according to the nature and date of the material. Most of the pieces were written originally in French and appear here in English translation. The texts in this edition are the same as those in the first edition. Further information is provided in the Note on the Texts.

Contents

Part 1

The Path of Later On	1
The Virtues	5
A Sapphire Tale	8
A Leader	13
To Know How to Suffer	20
On Thought	22
On Dreams	32
The Supreme Discovery	40

Part 2 Meetings

7 May 1912	49
14 May 1912	51
21 May 1912	55
28 May 1912	58
4 June 1912	62
11 June 1912	64
18 June 1912	66
25 June 1912	69
2 July 1912	71

Part 3

That Which is Speaking	77
On Thought – Introduction	78
On Thought – II	79
On Thought – III	87
The Central Thought	97
Charity	99
The Divinity Within	107
The Mother and Abdul Baha	108

Part 4

Prayers and Meditations	119
-------------------------	-----

Contents

Part 5 Notes and Reflections	
On the Mysteries of the Ascent towards God	129
Two Parallel Movements	132
Towards the Supreme Light	134
Three Dreams	135
The War	141
Part 6	
Woman and the War	147
Woman and Man	151
Impressions of Japan	152
The Children of Japan	155
To the Women of Japan	157
Remembrances	169
Myself and My Creed	170
Part 7 Tales of all times	
<i>One</i> : Self-Control	173
<i>Two</i> : Courage	179
<i>Three</i> : Cheerfulness	189
<i>Four</i> : Self-Reliance	193
<i>Five</i> : Patience and Perseverance	198
<i>Six</i> : The Simple Life	203
<i>Seven</i> : Prudence	210
<i>Eight</i> : Sincerity	214
<i>Nine</i> : Right Judgment	226
<i>Ten</i> : Order	232
<i>Eleven</i> : Building and Destroying	237
Appendix	
<i>Twelve</i> : The Giver	245
<i>Thirteen</i> : The Conquest of Knowledge	249
<i>Fourteen</i> : Modesty	254
<i>Fifteen</i> : The Family	263
<i>Sixteen</i> : Sympathy	276

Words of Long Ago

Part 1

The Path of Later On

*“The path of later-on and the road of tomorrow
lead only to the castle of nothing-at-all.”*

BY THE wayside, many-coloured flowers delight the eye, red berries gleam on small trees with knotty branches, and in the distance a brilliant sun shines gold upon the ripe corn.

A young traveller is walking briskly along, happily breathing in the pure morning air; he seems joyful, without a care for the future. The way he is following comes to a cross-roads, where innumerable paths branch off in all directions.

Everywhere the young man can see criss-crossing foot-prints. The sun shines ever bright in the sky; the birds are singing in the trees; the day promises to be very beautiful. Without thinking, the traveller takes the path that is nearest to him, which seems, after all, quite practicable; it occurs to him for a moment that he could have chosen another way; but there will always be time to retrace his steps if the path he has taken leads nowhere. A voice seems to tell him, “Turn back, turn back, you are not on the right road.” But everything around him is charming and delightful. What should he do? He does not know. He goes on without taking any decision; he enjoys the pleasures of the moment. “In a little while,” he replies to the voice, “in a little while I shall think; I have plenty of time.” The wild grasses around him whisper in his ear, “Later.” Later, yes, later. Ah, how pleasant it is to breathe the scented breeze, while the sun warms the air with its fiery rays. Later, later. And the traveller walks on; the path widens. Voices are heard from afar, “Where are you going? Poor fool, don’t you see that you are heading for your ruin? You are young; come, come to us, to the beautiful, the good, the true; do not be misled by indolence

Words of Long Ago

and weakness; do not fall asleep in the present; come to the future.” “Later, later,” the traveller answers these unwelcome voices. The flowers smile at him and echo, “Later.” The path becomes wider and wider. The sun has reached its zenith; it is a glorious day. The path becomes a road.

The road is white and dusty, bordered with slender birch-trees; the soft purling of a little stream is heard; but in vain he looks in every direction, he can see no end to this interminable road.

The young man, feeling a secret unease, cries, “Where am I? Where am I going?... What does it matter? Why think, why act? Let us drift along on this endless road; let us walk on, I shall think tomorrow.”

The small trees have disappeared; oak-trees line the road; a gully runs on either side. The traveller feels no weariness; he is borne along as if in a delirium.

The gully becomes deeper; the oaks give way to fir-trees; the sun begins to go down. In a daze, the traveller looks all around him; he sees human figures rolling into the ravine, clutching at the fir-trees, the sheer rocks, the roots jutting from the ground. Some of them are making great efforts to climb out; but as they come near to the edge, they turn their heads and let themselves fall back.

Hollow voices cry out to the traveller, “Flee this place; go back to the cross-roads; there is still time.” The young man hesitates, then replies, “Tomorrow.” He covers his face with his hands so as not to see the bodies rolling into the ravine, and runs along the road, drawn on by an irresistible urge to go forward. He no longer wonders whether he will find a way out. With furrowed brow and clothes in disorder, he runs on in desperation. At last, thinking himself far away from the accursed place, he opens his eyes: there are no more fir-trees; all around are barren stones and grey dust. The sun has disappeared beyond the horizon; night is coming on. The road has lost itself in an endless desert. The desperate traveller, worn out by his long run, wants

to stop; but he must walk on. All around him is ruin; he hears stifled cries; his feet stumble on skeletons. In the distance, the thick mist takes on terrifying shapes; black forms loom up; something huge and misshapen suggests itself. The traveller flies rather than walks towards the goal he senses and which seems to flee from him; wild cries direct his steps; he brushes against phantoms.

At last he sees before him a huge edifice, dark, desolate, gloomy, a castle to make one say with a shudder: "A haunted castle." But the young man pays no attention to the bleakness of the place; these great black walls make no impression on him; as he stands on the dusty ground, he hardly trembles at the sight of these formidable towers; he thinks only that the goal is reached, he forgets his weariness and discouragement. As he approaches the castle, he brushes against a wall, and the wall crumbles; instantly everything collapses around him; towers, battlements, walls have vanished, sinking into dust which is added to the dust already covering the ground.

Owls, crows and bats fly out in all directions, screeching and circling around the head of the poor traveller who, dazed, downcast, overwhelmed, stands rooted to the spot, unable to move; suddenly, horror of horrors, he sees rising up before him terrible phantoms who bear the names of Desolation, Despair, Disgust with life, and amidst the ruins he even glimpses Suicide, pallid and dismal above a bottomless gulf. All these malignant spirits surround him, clutch him, propel him towards the yawning chasm. The poor youth tries to resist this irresistible force, he wants to draw back, to flee, to tear himself away from all these invisible arms entwining and clasping him. But it is too late; he moves on towards the fatal abyss. He feels drawn, hypnotized by it. He calls out; no voice answers to his cries. He grasps at the phantoms, everything gives way beneath him. With haggard eyes he scans the void, he calls out, he implores; the macabre laughter of Evil rings out at last.

The traveller is at the edge of the gulf. All his efforts have been in vain. After a supreme struggle he falls... from his bed.

Words of Long Ago

A young student had a long essay to prepare for the following morning. A little tired by his day's work, he had said to himself as he arrived home, "I shall work later." Soon afterwards he thought that if he went to bed early, he could get up early the next morning and quickly finish his task. "Let's go to bed," he said to himself, "I shall work better tomorrow; I shall sleep on it." He did not know how truly he spoke. His sleep was troubled by the terrible nightmare we have described, and his fall awoke him with a start. Thinking over what he had dreamt, he exclaimed, "But it's quite clear: the path is called the path of 'later on', the road is the road of 'tomorrow' and the great building the castle of 'nothing at all'." Elated at his cleverness, he set to work, vowing to himself that he would never put off until tomorrow what he could do today.

1893

The Virtues

(A tale for young and old)

ONCE UPON a time there was a splendid palace, in the heart of which lay a secret sanctuary, whose threshold no being had ever crossed. Furthermore, even its outermost galleries were almost inaccessible to mortals, for the palace stood on a very high cloud, and very few, in any age, could find the way to it.

It was the palace of Truth.

One day a festival was held there, not for men but for very different beings, gods and goddesses great and small, who on earth are honoured by the name of Virtues.

The vestibule of the palace was a great hall, where the walls, the floor, the ceiling, luminous in themselves, were resplendent with a myriad glittering fires.

It was the Hall of Intelligence. Near to the ground, the light was very soft and had a beautiful deep sapphire hue, but it became gradually clearer towards the ceiling, from which girandoles of diamonds hung like chandeliers, their myriad facets shooting dazzling rays.

The Virtues came separately, but soon formed congenial groups, full of joy to find themselves for once at least together, for they are usually so widely scattered throughout the world and the worlds, so isolated amid so many alien beings.

Sincerity reigned over the festival. She was dressed in a transparent robe, like clear water, and held in her hand a cube of purest crystal, through which things can be seen as they really are, far different from what they usually seem, for there their image is reflected without distortion.

Near to her, like two faithful guardians, stood Humility, at

Words of Long Ago

once respectful and proud, and Courage, lofty-browed, clear-eyed, his lips firm and smiling, with a calm and resolute air.

Close beside Courage, her hand in his, stood a woman, completely veiled, of whom nothing could be seen but her searching eyes, shining through her veils. It was Prudence.

Among them all, coming and going from one to another and yet seeming always to remain near to each one, Charity, at once vigilant and calm, active and yet discrete, left behind her as she passed through the groups a trail of soft white light. The light that she spreads and softens comes to her, through a radiance so subtle that it is invisible to most eyes, from her closest friend, her inseparable companion, her twin sister, Justice.

And around Charity thronged a shining escort, Kindness, Patience, Gentleness, Solitude, and many others.

All of them are there, or so at least they think.

But then suddenly, at the golden threshold, a newcomer appears.

With great reluctance the guards, set to watch the gates, have agreed to admit her. Never before had they seen her, and there was nothing in her appearance to impress them.

She was indeed very young and slight, and the white dress which she wore was very simple, almost poor. She takes a few steps forward with a shy, embarrassed air. Then, apparently ill at ease to find herself in such a large and brilliant company, she pauses, not knowing towards whom she should go.

After a brief exchange with her companions, Prudence steps forward at their request and goes towards the stranger. Then, after clearing her throat, as people do when they are embarrassed, to give herself a moment to reflect, she turns to her and says:

“We who are gathered here and who all know each other by our names and our merits are surprised at your coming, for you appear to be a stranger to us, or at least we do not seem to have ever seen you before. Would you be so kind as to tell us who you are?”

The Virtues

Then the newcomer replied with a sigh:
“Alas! I am not surprised that I appear to be a stranger in
this palace, for I am so rarely invited anywhere.
“My name is Gratitude.”

1904

A Sapphire Tale

ONCE UPON a time, far away in the East, there was a small country that lived in order and harmony, where each one in his own place played the part for which he was made, for the greatest good of all.

Farmers, craftsmen, workmen and merchants — all had but one ambition, one concern: to do their work as best they could. This was in their own interest, firstly because, since each one had freely chosen his occupation, it suited his nature and gave him pleasure, and also because they knew that all good work was fairly rewarded, so that they, their wives and their children could lead a quiet and peaceful life, without useless luxury, but with a generous provision for their needs, which was enough to satisfy them.

The artists and scientists, few in number but each devoted to his science or art — his purpose in life — were supported by the grateful nation, which was the first to benefit from their useful discoveries and to enjoy their ennobling works. Thus sheltered from the cares of the struggle for life, these scientists had a single aim: that their experimental research, their sincere and earnest studies should serve to allay the sufferings of humanity, to increase its strength and well-being by making superstition and fear draw back as far as possible before the knowledge that brings solace and enlightenment. The artists, whose whole will was free to concentrate upon their art, had only one desire: to manifest beauty, each according to his own highest conception.

Among them, as friends and guides, were four philosophers, whose entire life was spent in profound study and luminous contemplations, to widen constantly the field of human knowledge and one by one to lift the veils from what is still a mystery.

All were content, for they knew no bitter rivalries and could each devote themselves to the occupation or the study that

pleased him. Since they were happy they had no need for many laws, and their Code was only this: a very simple counsel to all, “Be yourself”, and for all a single law to be strictly observed, the law of Charity, whose highest part is Justice, the charity which will permit no wastage and which will hinder no one in his free evolution. In this way, very naturally, everyone works at once for himself and for the collectivity.

This orderly and harmonious country was ruled by a king who was king simply because he was the most intelligent and wise, because he alone was capable of fulfilling the needs of all, he alone was both enlightened enough to follow and even to guide the philosophers in their loftiest speculations, and practical enough to watch over the organisation and well-being of his people, whose needs were well known to him.

At the time when our narrative begins, this remarkable ruler had reached a great age — he was more than two hundred years old — and although he still retained all his lucidity and was still full of energy and vigour, he was beginning to think of retirement, a little weary of the heavy responsibilities which he had borne for so many years. He called his young son Meotha to him. The prince was a young man of many and varied accomplishments. He was more handsome than men usually are, his charity was of such perfect equity that it achieved justice, his intelligence shone like a sun and his wisdom was beyond compare; for he had spent part of his youth among workmen and craftsmen to learn by personal experience the needs and requirements of their life, and he had spent the rest of his time alone, or with one of the philosophers as his tutor, in seclusion in the square tower of the palace, in study or contemplative repose.

Meotha bowed respectfully before his father, who seated him at his side and spoke to him in these words:

“My son, I have ruled this country for more than a hundred and seventy years and although, to this day, all men of goodwill have seemed content with my guidance, I fear that my great age will soon no longer allow me to bear so lightly the heavy

Words of Long Ago

responsibility of maintaining order and watching over the well-being of all. My son, you are my hope and my joy. Nature has been very generous to you; she has showered you with her gifts and by a wise and model education you have developed them most satisfactorily. The whole nation, from the humblest peasant to our great philosophers, has a complete and affectionate trust in you; you have been able to win their affection by your kindness and their respect by your justice. It is therefore quite natural that their choice should fall on you when I ask for leave to enjoy a well-earned repose. But as you know, according to age-old custom, no one may ascend the throne who is not biune, that is, unless he is united by the bonds of integral affinity with the one who can bring him the peace of equilibrium by a perfect match of tastes and abilities. It was to remind you of this custom that I called you here, and to ask you whether you have met the young woman who is both worthy and willing to unite her life with yours, according to our wish.”

“It would be a joy to me, my father, to be able to tell you, ‘I have found the one whom my whole being awaits’, but, alas, this is yet to be. The most refined maidens in the kingdom are all known to me, and for several of them I feel a sincere liking and a genuine admiration, but not one of them has awakened in me the love which can be the only rightful bond, and I think I can say without being mistaken that in return none of them has conceived a love for me. Since you are so kind as to value my judgment, I will tell you what is in my mind. It seems to me that I should be better fitted to rule our little nation if I were acquainted with the laws and customs of other countries; I wish therefore to travel the world for a year, to observe and to learn. I ask you, my father, to allow me to make this journey, and who knows? — I may return with my life’s companion, the one for whom I can be all happiness and all protection.”

“Your wish is wise, my son. Go — and your father’s blessing be with you.”

*
* *

Amid the western ocean lies a little island valued for its valuable forests.

One radiant summer's day, a young girl is walking slowly in the shade of the wonderful trees. Her name is Liane and she is fair among women; her lithe body sways gracefully beneath light garments, her face, whose delicate skin seems paler for her carmine lips, is crowned with a heavy coil of hair so golden that it shines; and her eyes, like two deep doors opening on limitless blue, light up her features with their intellectual radiance.

Liane is an orphan, alone in life, but her great beauty and rare intelligence have attracted much passionate desire and sincere love. But in a dream she has seen a man, a man who seems, from his garments, to come from a distant land; and the sweet and serious gaze of the stranger has won the heart of the girl — now she can love no other. Since then she has been waiting and hoping; it is to be free to dream of the handsome face seen in the night that she is walking amid the solitude of the lofty woods.

The dazzling sunlight cannot pierce the thick foliage; the silence is hardly broken by the light rustle of the moss beneath the footsteps of the walking girl; all sleeps in the heavy drowse of the noonday heat; and yet she feels a vague unease, as if invisible beings were hiding in the thickets, watchful eyes peeping from behind trees.

Suddenly a bird's song rings out clear and joyful; all uneasiness vanishes. Liane knows that the forest is friendly — if there are beings in the trees, they cannot wish her harm. She is seized by an emotion of great sweetness, all appears beautiful and good to her, and tears come to her eyes. Never has her hope been so ardent at the thought of the beloved stranger; it seems to her that the trees quivering in the breeze, the moss rustling beneath her feet, the bird renewing its melody — all speak to her of the One whom she awaits. At the idea that perhaps she is going to meet him she stops short, trembling, pressing her hands against her beating heart, her eyes closed to savour to the full the exquisite emotion; and now the sensation grows more and more intense

Words of Long Ago

until it is so precise that Liane opens her eyes, sure of a presence. Oh, wonder of wonders! He is there, he, he in truth as she has seen him in her dream... more handsome than men usually are. — It was Meotha.

With a look they have recognised each other; with a look they have told each other of the long waiting and the supreme joy of rediscovery; for they have known each other in a distant past, now they are sure of it.

She places her hand in the hand he offers her, and together, silent in a silence filled with thoughts exchanged, they wend their way through the forest. Before them appears the sea, calm and green beneath a happy sun. A great ship sways gently near the shore.

Meekly, trustingly, Liane follows Meotha into the boat which awaits them, drawn up on the sand. Two strong oarsmen put it to sea and soon bring them alongside the vessel.

Only as she sees the little island disappearing below the horizon does the girl say to her companion:

“I was waiting for you, and now that you have come, I have followed you without question. We are made for each other. I feel it, I know it, and I know also that now and forever you will be my happiness and my protection. But I loved my island birthplace with its beautiful forests, and I would like to know to what shore you are taking me.”

“I have sought you throughout the world, and now that I have found you, I have taken your hand without asking you anything, for in your eyes I saw that you expected me. From this moment and forever, my beloved shall be all to me; and if I have made her leave her little wooded isle, it is to lead her as a queen to her kingdom, the only land on earth that is in harmony, the only nation that is worthy of Her.”

October 1906

A Leader

IT WAS in January 1907, shortly after the sanguinary crushing of the revolutionary movement in Russia.

A few friends and I had assembled in a small group for philosophical studies, when we were informed of the presence of a mysterious visitor asking to be admitted.

We went out to meet him, and in the anteroom we saw a man whose clean but very worn clothes, arms held close to his sides, pale face steadfastly turned towards the ground and half-concealed by a black felt hat, made him look like a hunted animal.

At our approach he removed his hat and looked up to cast us a brief, frank glance.

In the half-light of the hall one could scarcely distinguish the features of his waxen face; only its sorrowful expression was clearly visible.

The silence had become embarrassing, and to break it, I asked, "Can I help you, Sir?"

"I have just come from Kiev to see you."

His voice was tired, deep, a little hollow, with a slight Slavonic accent.

From Kiev to see us! This was something indeed. We were surprised. He thought our silence indicated doubt, and after some hesitation he added in a lower tone, "Yes, in Kiev there is a group of students who are deeply interested in great philosophical ideas. Your books have fallen into our hands, and we were happy to find at last a synthetical teaching which does not limit itself to theory, but encourages action. So my comrades, my friends, told me, 'Go and seek their advice on what is preoccupying us.' And I have come."

It was clearly expressed, in correct if not elegant language, and we immediately knew that if, perhaps out of caution, he

Words of Long Ago

was withholding something from us, what he was telling us at least was the truth.

Once we had brought him in and made him sit down in the drawing-room, we saw him in full light. Oh, the poor face pallid with long vigil or seclusion far from air and sun, ravaged by suffering, lined by anxiety, and yet all shining with a fine intellectual light which haloed his brow and lit his eyes, sad, wan eyes reddened by overwork or perhaps by tears....

Perturbed, we remained silent. But after a while, to find out what he expected of us, we asked him what his occupations were in his own country. He seemed to concentrate, to take some resolve, then slowly said:

“I work for the revolution.”

The reply sounded like a knell amid the luxury of this bourgeois apartment.

However, without betraying our emotion, with great admiration for the courage of his sincerity, we replied:

“Would you tell us how we could be of service to you?”

The fact that our attitude towards him had not changed gave him confidence and he began his story:

“You have heard about recent events in Russia, so I will not say anything about that. But perhaps you do not know that at the centre of the revolutionary activity there is a small group of men who call themselves students, to which I belong. Occasionally we meet to take decisions together, but more often we are scattered, firstly so as not to attract attention to ourselves, and secondly to be able to direct the action personally at close quarters. I am their connecting link; when they want to consult together, they meet at my home.

“For a long time we fought openly, violently, hoping to conquer by terror. All means seemed justified to us in our intense and ardent desire to see the cause of Justice, Liberty and Love triumph. You might have seen me, I who feel in my soul a wealth of tenderness and pity that seeks to relieve the miseries of mankind, I who became a doctor with the sole aim of fighting its

ills and alleviating its sufferings, being forced by painful circumstances to take the bloodiest decisions. It's surprising, isn't it? Nobody could have believed that I was suffering because of that; nevertheless, it is a fact. But the others pushed me, overwhelmed me with good reasons and sometimes succeeded in convincing me.

“However, even in the heat of action, I was aware that there was something better to do, that our methods were not the best ones, that we were wasting our finest energies in vain, and that in spite of the almost fanatical enthusiasm which urged us on, we might well be defeated.

“The collapse came, mowing us down like corn in a field; and misfortune compelled us to regain possession of ourselves, to think carefully. The best of us are lost. The most intelligent, those who were most able to guide and direct us paid for their courageous self-sacrifice with exile or death. Consternation reigned in our ranks; at last I was able to make the others listen to what I thought, to what I felt.

“We are not strong enough to fight by force, for we are not united enough, not organised enough. We must develop our intelligence to understand better the deeper laws of Nature, and to learn better how to act in an orderly way, to co-ordinate our efforts. We must teach the people around us, we must train them to think for themselves and to reflect so that they can become aware of the precise aim we want to attain and thus become an effective help to us, instead of being the hindrance they most often are at the moment.

“I have told them that for a nation to win its freedom, it must first of all deserve it, make itself worthy of it, prepare itself to be able to enjoy it. This is not the case in Russia, and we shall have much to do to educate the masses and pull them out of their torpor; but the sooner we set to the task, the sooner we shall be ready for renewed action.

“I have been able to make my friends understand these things; they trusted me and we began to study. That is how we

Words of Long Ago

came to read your books. And now I have come to ask your help in adapting your ideas to our present situation and with them to draw up a plan of action, and also to write a small pamphlet which will become our new weapon and which we shall use to spread these beautiful thoughts of solidarity, harmony, freedom and justice among the people.”

He remained thoughtful a moment, then continued in a lower tone:

“And yet I sometimes wonder if my philosophical dream is only a utopia, whether I am wrong to lead my brothers along this path, whether it is only cowardice, in brief, if we would not do better to oppose violence to violence, destruction to destruction, bloodshed to bloodshed, to the very end.”

“Violence is never a good way to bring victory to a cause such as yours. How can you hope to win justice with injustice, harmony with hatred?”

“I know. This opinion is shared by nearly all of us. As for me, I have a very particular aversion to bloody actions; they horrify me. Each time we immolated a new victim, I felt a pang of regret, as if by that very act we were moving away from our goal.

“But what are we to do when we are driven by events and when we are faced with adversaries who will not shrink even from mass slaughter in the hope of overcoming us? But that they can never do. Though we may perish to the last man, we shall not falter in the sacred task that has fallen to us, we shall not betray the holy cause which we have sworn in our heart of hearts to serve to the last breath.”

These few words had been spoken with sombre determination, while the face of this obscure hero was marked with such noble mysticism that I would not have been astonished to see the martyr’s crown of thorns encircling his brow.

“But as you were telling us in the beginning,” I replied, “since you have yourselves been forced to recognise that this open struggle, this struggle of desperate men, although certainly

not without an intrepid greatness, is at the same time vain and foolish in its recklessness, you should renounce it for a time, fade into the shadows, prepare yourselves in silence, gather your strength, form yourselves into groups, become more and more united, so as to conquer on the auspicious day, helped by the organising intelligence, the all-powerful lever which, unlike violence, can never be defeated.

“Put no more weapons in the hands of your adversaries, be irreproachable before them, set them an example of courageous patience, of uprightness and justice; then your triumph will be near at hand, for right will be on your side, integral right, in the means as in the goal.”

He had been listening to me carefully, occasionally nodding in agreement. After a silence full of thoughts, in which we could feel brooding around him all the painful hopes, all the burning aspirations of his companions in strife:

“I am happy, Madame,” he said, turning towards me, “to see a woman concerned with such matters. Women can do so much to hasten the coming of better days! There, in Russia, their services have been invaluable to us. Without them we would never have had so much courage, energy and endurance. They move about among us, going from town to town, from group to group, uniting us to one another, comforting the disheartened, cheering the downcast, nursing the sick and everywhere bringing with them, in them, a hope, a confidence, an enthusiasm that never tire.

“So it was that a woman came to assist me in my work, when my eyes were overstrained by my long vigils spent writing by candle-light. For during the day I had to have some kind of occupation so as not to attract attention. It was only at night that I could prepare our plans, compose our propaganda leaflets and make numerous copies of them, draw up lists and do other work of the same kind. Little by little my eyes were burnt up. Now I can hardly see. So a young woman, out of devotion for the cause, became my secretary and writes to my dictation, as long

Words of Long Ago

as I wish, without ever showing the slightest trace of fatigue or boredom.” And his expression softened and grew tender at the thought of this humble devotion, this proof of self-abnegation.

“She came with me to Paris and we work together every evening. It is thanks to her that I shall be able to write the pamphlet we have spoken of. You know, it is courageous to link one’s destiny with a man whose life is as precarious as mine. To retain my freedom, everywhere, I must hide as if I were an outlaw.”

“At least you are safe in Paris?”

“Yes and no. They are scared of us, I don’t know why. They take us for dangerous anarchists, and we are watched, we are spied on almost as much as in our own country. Yet how can anyone imagine that men whose aim is to make justice triumph, even at the cost of their own blood, could fail to be grateful towards a country such as France, which has always protected the weak and upheld equity? And why should they disturb the peace of a city which is their refuge in the darkest days?”

“So you intend to remain here for some time?”

“Yes, as long as I can, as long as I am not useful to my brothers there, and can be of service to them here by bringing together all the elements we need to take up the struggle again; but this time the struggle will be as peaceful and intellectual as lies within our power.”

“So you will come and see us again, won’t you? Bring us your projects and the plans for your pamphlet. We shall talk about all that again in more detail.”

“Yes, I shall come back, as soon as I have started my work, as soon as possible. I shall be so happy to see you again and to continue our conversation.”

His kind, sad eyes looked at us full of confidence and hope, while he clasped our hands firmly in his.

And as we accompanied him to the door he turned and once more warmly shook our hands, saying in his grave voice:

“It is good to meet people one can trust, people who have

the same ideal of justice as we have and do not look upon us as criminals or lunatics because we want to realise it. Good-bye....”

He never returned.

He excused himself in a hastily written note. Too closely watched, under suspicion, tracked down after he had changed his lodgings many times, this gentle, just man had to return to his own country, a terrible country where perhaps a tragic end awaited him....

To Know How to Suffer

IF AT any time a deep sorrow, a searing doubt or an intense pain overwhelms you and drives you to despair, there is an infallible way to regain calm and peace.

In the depths of our being there shines a light whose brilliance is equalled only by its purity; a light, a living and conscious portion of a universal godhead who animates and nourishes and illumines Matter, a powerful and unfailing guide for those who are willing to heed his law, a helper full of solace and loving forbearance towards all who aspire to see and hear and obey him. No sincere and lasting aspiration towards him can be in vain; no strong and respectful trust can be disappointed, no expectation ever deceived.

My heart has suffered and lamented, almost breaking beneath a sorrow too heavy, almost sinking beneath a pain too strong.... But I have called to thee, O divine comforter, I have prayed ardently to thee, and the splendour of thy dazzling light has appeared to me and revived me.

As the rays of thy glory penetrated and illumined all my being, I clearly perceived the path to follow, the use that can be made of suffering; I understood that the sorrow that held me in its grip was but a pale reflection of the sorrow of the earth, of this abyss of suffering and anguish.

Only those who have suffered can understand the suffering of others; understand it, commune with it and relieve it. And I understood, O divine comforter, sublime Holocaust, that in order to sustain us in all our troubles, to soothe all our pangs, thou must have known and felt all the sufferings of earth and man, all without exception.

How is it that among those who claim to be thy worshippers, some regard thee as a cruel torturer, as an inexorable judge

To Know How to Suffer

witnessing the torments that are tolerated by thee or even created by thy own will?

No, I now perceive that these sufferings come from the very imperfection of Matter which, in its disorder and crudeness, is unfit to manifest thee; and thou art the very first to suffer from it, to bewail it, thou art the first to toil and strive in thy ardent desire to change disorder into order, suffering into happiness, discord into harmony.

Suffering is not something inevitable or even desirable, but when it comes to us, how helpful it can be!

Each time we feel that our heart is breaking, a deeper door opens within us, revealing new horizons, ever richer in hidden treasures, whose golden influx brings once more a new and intenser life to the organism on the brink of destruction.

And when, by these successive descents, we reach the veil that reveals thee as it is lifted, O Lord, who can describe the intensity of Life that penetrates the whole being, the radiance of the Light that floods it, the sublimity of the Love that transforms it for ever!

1910

On Thought

(Talk given to a women's association)

SINCE we want to learn to think better in order to live better, since we want to know how to think in order to recover our place and status in life as feminine counterparts and to become in fact the helpful, inspiring and balancing elements that we are potentially, it seems indispensable to me that we should first of all enquire into what thought is.

Thought.... It is a very vast subject, the vastest of all, perhaps.... Therefore I do not intend to tell you exactly and completely what it is. But by a process of analysis, we shall try to form as precise an idea of it as it is possible for us to do.

It seems to me that we must first of all distinguish two very different kinds, or I might say qualities, of thought: thoughts in us which are the result, the fruit, as it were, of our sensations, and thoughts which, like living beings, come to us — from where?... most often we do not know — thoughts that we perceive mentally before they express themselves in our outer being as sensations.

If you have observed yourselves even a little, you must have noticed that the contact with what is not yourselves is established first of all through the medium of your senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, etc. The impact felt in this way, whether slight or violent, pleasant or unpleasant, arouses a feeling in you — like or dislike, attraction or repulsion — which very quickly turns into an idea, an opinion you form about the object, whatever it may be, that has determined the contact.

An example: you go out and as you step out of your house you see that it is raining and at the same time you feel the damp cold seizing you; the sensation is unpleasant, you feel a dislike for the rain and inwardly, almost mechanically, you say to yourself,

“This rain is really a nuisance, especially as I have to go out! Not to mention that I am going to get dreadfully dirty; Paris is very dirty in rainy weather, especially now that all the streets have been dug up” (and so on)....

All these and many other similar thoughts about the simple fact that it is raining come to assail your mind; and if nothing else, outwardly or inwardly, comes to attract your attention, for a long while, almost without your noticing it, your brain may produce minute, trivial thoughts about this small, insignificant sensation....

This is how most human lives are spent; this is what human beings most often call *thinking* — a mental activity that is almost mechanical, unreflecting, out of our control, a reflex. All thoughts concerning material life and its many needs are of the same quality.

Here we face the first difficulty to be overcome; if we want to be able to truly think, that is, to receive, formulate and form valid and viable thoughts, we must first of all empty our brain of all this vague and unruly mental agitation. And this is certainly not the easiest part of our task. We are dominated by this irrational cerebral activity, we do not dominate it.

Only one method is worth recommending: meditation. But as I was telling you last time, there are many ways of meditating; some are very effective, others less so.

Each one should find his own by successive trial and error. However, one thing can be recommended to everyone: reflection, that is to say, concentration, self-observation in solitude and silence, a close and strict analysis of the multitude of insignificant little thoughts which constantly assail us.

During the few moments you devote each day to this preliminary exercise of meditation, avoid, if possible, the complacent contemplation of your sensations, your feelings, your states of mind.

We all have an inexhaustible fund of self-indulgence, and very often we treat all these little inner movements with the

Words of Long Ago

greatest respect and give them an importance which they certainly do not have, even relative to our own evolution.

When one has enough self-control to be able to analyse coldly, to dissect these states of mind, to strip them of their brilliant or painful appearance, so as to perceive them as they are in all their childish insignificance, then one can profitably devote oneself to studying them. But this result can only be achieved gradually, after much reflection in a spirit of complete impartiality. I would like to make a short digression here to put you on your guard against a frequent confusion.

I have just said that we always look upon ourselves with great indulgence, and I think in fact that our defects very often appear to us to be full of charm and that we justify all our weaknesses. But to tell the truth, this is because we lack self-confidence. Does this surprise you?... Yes, I repeat, we lack confidence, not in what we are at the present moment, not in our ephemeral and ever-changing outer being — this being always finds favour in our eyes — but we lack confidence in what we can become through effort, we have no faith in the integral and profound transformation which will be the work of our true self, of the eternal, the divine who is in all beings, if we surrender like children to its supremely luminous and far-seeing guidance.

So let us not confuse complacency with confidence — and let us return to our subject.

When you are able by methodical and repeated effort to objectivise and keep at a distance all this flood of incoherent thoughts which assail us, you will notice a new phenomenon.

You will observe within yourself certain thoughts that are stronger and more tenacious than others, thoughts concerning social usages, customs, moral rules and even general laws that govern earth and man.

They are your opinions on these subjects or at least those you profess and by which you try to act.

Look at one of these ideas, the one most familiar to you, look at it very carefully, concentrate, reflect in all sincerity, if

possible leaving aside all bias, and ask yourself why you have this opinion on that subject rather than any other.

The answer will almost invariably be the same, or nearly:

Because it is the opinion prevalent in your environment, because it is considered good form to have it and therefore saves you from as many clashes, frictions, criticisms as possible.

Or because this was the opinion of your father or mother, the opinion which moulded your childhood.

Or else because this opinion is the normal outcome of the education, religious or otherwise, you received in your youth. This thought is not your own thought.

For, to be your own thought, it would have to form part of a logical synthesis you had elaborated in the course of your existence, either by observation, experience and deduction, or by deep, abstract meditation and contemplation.

This, then, is our second discovery.

Since we have goodwill and endeavour to be integrally sincere, that is, to make our actions conform to our thoughts, we are now convinced that we act according to mental laws we receive from outside, not after having maturely considered and analysed them, not by deliberately and consciously receiving them, but because unconsciously we are subjected to them through atavism, by our upbringing and education, and above all because we are dominated by a collective suggestion which is so powerful, so overwhelming, that very few succeed in avoiding it altogether.

How far we are from the mental individuality we want to acquire!

We are products determined by all our past history, impelled by the blind and arbitrary will of our contemporaries.

It is a pitiful sight.... But let us not be disheartened; the greater the ailment and the more pressing the remedy, the more energetically we must fight back.

The method will always be the same: to reflect and reflect and reflect.

Words of Long Ago

We must take these ideas one after another and analyse them by appealing to all our common sense, all our reason, our highest sense of equity; we must weigh them in the balance of our acquired knowledge and accumulated experience, and then endeavour to reconcile them with one another, to establish harmony among them. It will often prove very difficult, for we have a regrettable tendency to let the most contradictory ideas dwell side by side in our minds.

We must put all of them in place, bring order into our inner chamber, and we must do this each day just as we tidy the rooms of our house. For I suppose that our mentality deserves at least as much care as our house.

But, once again, for this work to be truly effective, we must strive to maintain in ourselves our highest, quietest, most sincere state of mind so as to make it our own.

Let us be transparent so that the light within us may fully illumine the thoughts we want to observe, analyse, classify. Let us be impartial and courageous so as to rise above our own little preferences and petty personal conveniences. Let us look at the thoughts in themselves, for themselves, without bias.

And little by little, if we persevere in our work of classification, we shall see order and light take up their abode in our minds. But we should never forget that this order is but confusion compared with the order that we must realise in the future, that this light is but darkness compared with the light that we shall be able to receive after some time.

Life is in perpetual evolution; if we want to have a living mentality, we must progress unceasingly.

Moreover, this is only a preliminary work. We are still very far from true thought, which brings us into relation with the infinite source of knowledge.

These are only exercises for training ourselves gradually to an individualising control of our thoughts. For control of the mental activity is indispensable to one who wants to meditate.

I cannot speak to you in detail today about meditation;

I shall only say that in order to be genuine, to serve its full purpose, meditation must be disinterested, impersonal in the integral sense of the word.

Here is a description, taken from an old Hindu text, of a typical meditation:

“The great and magnificent King ascended to the chamber of the Great Collection and, stopping at the threshold, exclaimed with intense emotion:

“ ‘Away! Advance no further, thoughts of lust! Away! Advance no further, thoughts of bad will! Away! Advance no further, thoughts of hate!’

“And entering the chamber, he sat upon a seat of gold. Then, having rejected all passion, all feeling contrary to righteousness, he attained the first *dhāma*, a state of well-being and joy arising from solitude, a state of reflection and seeking.

“Setting aside reflection and seeking, he attained the second *dhāma*, a state of well-being and joy arising from serenity, a state void of reflection and seeking, a state of quietude and elevation of mind.

“Ceasing to delight in joy, he remained indifferent, conscious, self-controlled, and attained the third *dhāma*, experiencing the inmost contentment proclaimed by the sages, saying, ‘One who, self-controlled, dwells in indifference, experiences an inner well-being.’

“Setting aside this well-being, rejecting pain, dead to both joy and suffering, he attained the state of most pure and perfect self-mastery and serenity which constitute the fourth *dhāma*.

“Then the great and magnificent King left the chamber of the Great Collection and, entering the golden chamber, sat upon a seat of silver. He beheld the world in a thought of love and his love went forth to the four regions in turn; and then with his heart full of love, with a love growing without end or limit, he enfolded the vast world, in its entirety, to its very ends.

“He beheld the world in a thought of pity and his pity went forth to the four regions in turn; and then with his heart full of

Words of Long Ago

pity, with a pity growing without end or limit, he enfolded the vast world, in its entirety, to its very ends.

“He beheld the world in a thought of sympathy and his sympathy went forth to the four regions in turn; and then with his heart full of sympathy, with a sympathy growing without end or limit, he enfolded the vast world, in its entirety, to its very ends.

“He beheld the world in a thought of serenity and his serenity went forth to the four regions in turn; and then with his heart full of serenity, with a serenity growing without end or limit, he enfolded the vast world, in its entirety, to its very ends.”¹

One who strives in sincere quest for truth, who is ready, if necessary, to sacrifice all he had thought until then to be true, in order to draw ever nearer to the integral truth that can be no other than the progressive knowledge of the whole universe in its infinite progression, enters gradually into relation with great masses of deeper, completer and more luminous thoughts.

After much meditation and contemplation, he comes into direct contact with the great universal current of pure intellectual force, and thenceforth no knowledge can be veiled from him.

From that moment serenity — mental peace — is his portion. In all beliefs, in all human knowledge, in all religious teachings, which sometimes appear so contradictory, he perceives the deep truth which nothing can now conceal from his eyes.

Even errors and ignorance no longer disturb him, for, as an unknown master says:

“He who walks in the Truth is not troubled by any error, for he knows that error is the first effort of life towards truth.”

But to attain this state of perfect serenity is to attain to the summit of thought.

Without hoping to reach that point at once, we can strive to acquire an individual thought that is both original and as

¹ See Appendix page 29.

equitable as possible. Thus we shall have become minds of some consequence, with the right to bring to society the precious contribution of their highest intuitions.

I have several times spoken to you this evening of thought as a living and active being. This calls for an explanation. At our next meeting, I shall give you what I might call the chemical or inner structure of thought, its composition, how it is formed, how it lives, acts and transforms.

And now allow me, before concluding, to express a wish.

I would like us to make the resolution to raise ourselves each day, in all sincerity and goodwill, in an ardent aspiration towards the Sun of Truth, towards the Supreme Light, the source and intellectual life of the universe, so that it may pervade us entirely and illumine with its great brilliance our minds and hearts, all our thoughts and our actions.

Then we shall acquire the right and the privilege of following the counsel of the great initiate of the past, who tells us:

“With your hearts overflowing with compassion, go forth into this world torn by pain, be instructors, and wherever the darkness of ignorance rules, there light a torch.”

15 December 1911

Words of Long Ago

APPENDIX ²

LOVE: For the Being, because he is the Being independent of all contingencies and individuals.

PITY: One no longer feels suffering for oneself, but only for others.

SYMPATHY: To suffer with the world, to share suffering (to suffer with).

SERENITY: Perfect knowledge of the state in which all suffering disappears (individual experience).

*
* *

LOVE: For the being in his entirety without distinction of good or evil, light or darkness.

PITY: For all weakness and all bad will.

SYMPATHY: Towards effort, encouragement, collaboration.

SERENITY: Hope in the ending of suffering (knowing one's individual experience, one logically infers that it can be generalised and become the experience of all).

*
* *

LOVE: Without distinction of past, present or future.

PITY: For the life of pain.

SYMPATHY: Understanding of everything, even of evil.

SERENITY: Certitude of the final victory.

*
* *

² These notes, found among the Mother's manuscripts, seem to relate to the typical meditation described on pp. 27-28.

On Thought

Three active attitudes, one passive attitude; three external relationships with the all, one inner relationship. A state to be maintained throughout the whole meditation: Serenity in love, sympathy and pity.

On Dreams

AT FIRST sight one might think that the subject of dreams is an altogether secondary one; this activity generally seems to have very little importance compared to the activity of our waking state.

However, if we examine the question a little more closely, we shall see that this is not at all the case.

To begin with, we should remember that more than one third of our existence is spent in sleeping and that, consequently, the time devoted to physical sleep well deserves our attention.

I say physical sleep, for it would be wrong to think that our whole being sleeps when our bodies are asleep.

A study based on certain experiments conducted according to the strictest scientific methods, was published some twenty years ago by Dr. Vaschid in a book entitled "Sleep and Dreams".

The doctors who carried out these experiments were led to the conclusion that mental activity never really ceases; and it is this activity which is more or less confusedly transcribed in our brains by what we know as dreams. Thus, whether we are aware of it or not, we always dream.

Certainly, it is possible to suppress this activity completely and to have a total, dreamless sleep; but to be able in this way to immerse our mental being in a repose similar to the repose of our physical being, we must have achieved a perfect control over it, and this is not an easy thing to do.

In most cases, this activity is even heightened, because, as the body is asleep, the internal faculties are no longer focussed on or used by the physical life.

It is sometimes said that in a man's sleep his true nature is revealed.

Indeed, it often happens that the sensory being, which throughout the whole day has been subjected to the control of

the active will, reacts all the more violently during the night when this constraint is no longer effective.

All the desires that have been repressed without being dissolved — and this dissociation can only be obtained after much sound and wide-ranging analysis — seek satisfaction while the will is dormant.

And since desires are true dynamic centres of formation, they tend to organise, within and around us, the combination of circumstances that is most favourable to their satisfaction.

In this way the fruit of many efforts made by our conscious thought during the day can be destroyed in a few hours at night.

This is one of the main causes of the resistances which our will for progress often encounters within us, of the difficulties which sometimes appear insurmountable to us and which we are unable to explain, because our goodwill seems so integral to us.

We must therefore learn to know our dreams, and first of all to distinguish between them, for they are very varied in nature and quality. In the course of one night we may often have several dreams which belong to different categories, depending on the depth of our sleep.

As a general rule, each individual has a period of the night that is more favourable for dreams, during which his activity is more fertile, more intellectual, and the mental circumstances of the environment in which he moves are more interesting.

The great majority of dreams have no other value than that of a purely mechanical and uncontrolled activity of the physical brain, in which certain cells continue to function during sleep as generators of sensory images and impressions conforming to the pictures received from outside.

These dreams are nearly always caused by purely physical circumstances — state of health, digestion, position in bed, etc.

With a little self-observation and a few precautions, it is easy to avoid this type of dream, which is as useless as it is tiring, by eliminating its physical causes.

There are also other dreams which are nothing but futile

Words of Long Ago

manifestations of the erratic activities of certain mental faculties, which associate ideas, conversations and memories that come together at random.

Such dreams are already more significant, for these erratic activities reveal to us the confusion that prevails in our mental being as soon as it is no longer subject to the control of our will, and show us that this being is still not organised or ordered within us, that it is not mature enough to have an autonomous life.

Almost the same in form to these, but more important in their consequences, are the dreams which I mentioned just now, those which arise from the inner being seeking revenge when it is freed for a moment from the constraint that we impose upon it. These dreams often enable us to perceive tendencies, inclinations, impulses, desires of which we were not conscious so long as our will to realise our ideal kept them concealed in some obscure recess of our being.

You will easily understand that rather than letting them live on unknown to us, it is better to bring them boldly and courageously to the light, so as to force them to leave us for ever.

We should therefore observe our dreams attentively; they are often useful instructors who can give us a powerful help on our way towards self-conquest.

No one knows himself well who does not know the unconfined activities of his nights, and no man can call himself his own master unless he has the perfect consciousness and mastery of the numerous actions he performs during his physical sleep.

But dreams are not merely the malignant informers of our weaknesses or the malicious destroyers of our daily effort for progress.

Although there are dreams which we should contend with or transform, there are others which should on the contrary be cultivated as precious auxiliaries in our work within and around us.

There can be no doubt that from many points of view our subconscious knows more than our habitual consciousness.

Who has not had the experience of a metaphysical, moral or practical problem with which we grapple in vain in the evening, and whose solution, impossible to find then, appears clearly and accurately in the morning on waking?

The mental enquiry had been going on throughout the period of sleep and the internal faculties, freed from all material activity, were able to concentrate solely on the subject of their interest.

Very often, the work itself remains unconscious; only the result is perceived.

But at other times, by means of a dream, we participate in all the mental activity in its smallest details. Only the cerebral transcription of this activity is often so childish that we normally pay no attention to it.

From this point of view, it is interesting to note that there is nearly always a considerable disparity between what our mental activity is in fact and the way in which we perceive it, and especially the way in which we remain conscious of it. In its own medium, this activity produces vibrations which are transmitted by repercussion to the cellular system of our organic brain, but in our sleeping brain, the subtle vibrations of the suprasensible domain can affect only a very limited number of cells; the inertia of most of the organic supports of the cerebral phenomenon reduces the number of active elements, impoverishes the mental synthesis and makes it unfit to transcribe the activity of the internal states, except into images which are most often vague and inadequate.

To make this disparity more tangible to you, I shall give you an example, one among many, which has come to my knowledge.

Recently, a writer was preoccupied with a half-written chapter which he was unable to finish.

His mind, particularly interested in this work of composition, continued the chapter during the night, and the more it phrased and rephrased the ideas making up the various

Words of Long Ago

paragraphs, it became aware that these ideas were not expressed in the most rational order and that the paragraphs had to be rearranged.

All this work was transcribed in the consciousness of our writer in the following dream: he was in his study with several armchairs which he had just brought there and was arranging and rearranging them in the room, until he found the most suitable place for each one.

In the knowledge that certain people may have had of such inadequate transcriptions, we can find the origin of the popular beliefs, the “dream-books” which are the delight of so many simple souls.

But it is easy to understand that this clumsy transcription has a particular form for each individual; each one makes his own distortion.

Consequently, an excessive generalisation of certain interpretations which may have been quite correct for the person applying them to his own case, merely gives rise to vulgar and foolish superstitions.

It is as if the writer we have just mentioned were to impart as a great secret to his friends and acquaintances that every time they saw themselves arranging armchairs in a dream, it was a sign that the next day they would at some moment reverse the order of the paragraphs in a book.

The cerebral transcription of the activities of the night is sometimes warped to such an extent that phenomena are perceived as the opposite of what they really are.

For example, when you have a bad thought against someone and when this bad thought, left to itself, gathers full force during the night, you dream that the person in question is beating you, is doing you some bad turn, or even wounding you or trying to kill you.

Moreover, as a general rule, we should take great intellectual precautions before interpreting a dream, and above all, we should review exhaustively all the subjective explanations before

we assign to it the value of an objective reality.

However, especially in those who have unlearned the habit of always directing their thoughts towards themselves, there are cases where we can observe events outside ourselves, events which are not the reflection of our personal mental constructions. And if we know how to translate into intellectual language the more or less inadequate images into which the brain has translated these events, we can learn many things that our too limited physical faculties do not allow us to perceive.

Some people, by a special culture and training, are even able to become and remain conscious of the deeper activities of their inner being, independently of their own cerebral transcription, and thus to evoke them and know them in the waking state with the full range of their faculties.

Many interesting observations could be made on this topic, but perhaps it is better to allow each one to experience for himself the many possibilities which lie within man's reach in a field of activity which he too often leaves undeveloped.

Uncultivated lands produce weeds. We do not want any weeds in ourselves, so let us cultivate the vast field of our nights.

You must not think that this can be in the least harmful to the depth of your sleep and the efficacy of a repose which is not only indispensable but beneficial. On the contrary, there are many people whose nights are more tiring than their days, for reasons which often elude them; they should become conscious of these reasons so that their will can begin to act on them and remove their effects, that is, to put a stop to these activities which in such cases are nearly always useless and even harmful.

If our night has enabled us to gain some new knowledge — the solution of a problem, a contact of our inner being with some centre of life or light, or even the accomplishment of some useful task — we shall always wake up with a feeling of strength and well-being.

The hours that are wasted in doing nothing good or useful are the most tiring.

Words of Long Ago

But how can we cultivate this field of action, how can we become conscious of our nocturnal activities?

We shall find the way to do so very broadly outlined in a passage from a book devoted to the study of our inner life:

“The same discipline of concentration which enables man not to remain a stranger to the inner activities of the waking state also provides him with a way to escape from his ignorance of the even richer activities of the various states of sleep.

“These activities usually leave behind them only a few rare and confused memories.

“However, it is noteworthy that a chance circumstance, an impression received, a word pronounced, is sometimes enough to bring suddenly back to the consciousness a whole long dream of which we had no recollection a moment before.

“We can infer from this simple fact that the conscious activity has taken only a very minor part in the phenomena of the sleeping state, since in the normal state of things they would have remained lost for ever in the subconscious memory.

“In this domain, the practice of concentration should therefore focus both on the special faculty of memory and on the participation of the consciousness in the activities of the sleeping state.

“Someone who wishes to recover the memory of a forgotten dream should first of all focus his attention on the vague impressions which the dream may have left behind it and in this way follow its indistinct trace as far as possible.

“This regular exercise will enable him to go further every day towards the obscure retreat of the subconscious where these forgotten phenomena of sleep take refuge, and thus trace out an easily followed path between these two domains of consciousness.

“One useful remark to be made from this point of view is that the absence of memories is very often due to the abruptness of the return to the waking consciousness. (The waking should not be too abrupt.)

“As a matter of fact, at that moment, the new activities breaking into the field of consciousness force out everything that is unfamiliar to them and add to the difficulty of the subsequent work of concentration needed to recall the things which have been expelled in this way. On the other hand, this work will be made easier whenever certain mental and even physical precautions are observed for a quiet transition from one state to another. (If possible, do not make any abrupt movements in bed at the time of waking.)

“However, this special training of the faculty of memory can only transform into conscious phenomena in the waking state the phenomena which have already been made conscious, even if only fleetingly, during sleep. For where there is no consciousness, there can be no memory.

“Consequently, in the second place, we must work to extend the participation of the consciousness to a greater number of activities in the sleeping state.

“The daily habit of reviewing with interest the various dreams of the night, whose traces will gradually become transformed into precise memories, as well as the habit of noting them down on waking, will be found most helpful from this point of view.

“By these habits, the mental faculties will be led to adapt their mechanism to phenomena of this kind and to exercise on them their attention, their curiosity and power of analysis.

“A kind of intellectualisation of our dreams will then occur, with the double result of making the conscious activities intervene more and more closely in the play of the formerly disorganised activities of the sleeping state, and of progressively increasing their scope by making them more and more rational and instructive.

“Dreams will then take on the nature of precise visions and sometimes of revelations, and useful knowledge of a whole important order of things will be gained.”

25 March 1912

The Supreme Discovery

IF WE want to progress integrally, we must build within our conscious being a strong and pure mental synthesis which can serve us as a protection against temptations from outside, as a landmark to prevent us from going astray, as a beacon to light our way across the moving ocean of life.

Each individual should build up this mental synthesis according to his own tendencies and affinities and aspirations. But if we want it to be truly living and luminous, it must be centred on the idea that is the intellectual representation symbolising That which is at the centre of our being, That which is our life and our light.

This idea, expressed in sublime words, has been taught in various forms by all the great Instructors in all lands and all ages.

The Self of each one and the great universal Self are one. Since all that exists from all eternity in its essence and principle, why make a distinction between the being and its origin, between ourselves and what we place at the beginning?

The ancient traditions rightly said:

“Our origin and ourselves, our God and ourselves are one.”

And this oneness should not be understood merely as a more or less close and intimate relationship of union, but as a true identity.

Thus, when a man who seeks the Divine attempts to reascend by degrees towards the inaccessible, he forgets that all his knowledge and all his intuition cannot take him one step forward in this infinite; neither does he know that what he wants to attain, what he believes to be so far from him, is within him.

For how could he know anything of the origin until he becomes conscious of this origin in himself?

It is by understanding himself, by learning to know himself,

that he can make the supreme discovery and cry out in wonder like the patriarch in the Bible, "The house of God is here and I knew it not."

That is why we must express that sublime thought, creatrix of the material worlds, and make known to all the word that fills the heavens and the earth, "I am in all things and all beings."

When all shall know this, the promised day of great transfigurations will be at hand. When in each atom of Matter men shall recognise the indwelling thought of God, when in each living creature they shall perceive some hint of a gesture of God, when each man can see God in his brother, then dawn will break, dispelling the darkness, the falsehood, the ignorance, the error and suffering that weigh upon all Nature. For, "all Nature suffers and laments as she awaits the revelation of the Sons of God."

This indeed is the central thought epitomising all others, the thought which should be ever present to our remembrance as the sun that illumines all life.

That is why I remind you of it today. For if we follow our path bearing this thought in our hearts like the rarest jewel, the most precious treasure, if we allow it to do its work of illumination and transfiguration within us, we shall know that it lives in the centre of all beings and all things, and in it we shall feel the marvellous oneness of the universe.

Then we shall understand the vanity and childishness of our meagre satisfactions, our foolish quarrels, our petty passions, our blind indignations. We shall see the dissolution of our little faults, the crumbling of the last entrenchments of our limited personality and our obtuse egoism. We shall feel ourselves being swept along by this sublime current of true spirituality which will deliver us from our narrow limits and bounds.

The individual Self and the universal Self are one; in every world, in every being, in every thing, in every atom is the Divine Presence, and man's mission is to manifest it.

In order to do that, he must become conscious of this Divine Presence within him. Some individuals must undergo a real

Words of Long Ago

apprenticeship in order to achieve this: their egoistic being is too all-absorbing, too rigid, too conservative, and their struggles against it are long and painful. Others, on the contrary, who are more impersonal, more plastic, more spiritualised, come easily into contact with the inexhaustible divine source of their being. But let us not forget that they too should devote themselves daily, constantly, to a methodical effort of adaptation and transformation, so that nothing within them may ever again obscure the radiance of that pure light.

But how greatly the standpoint changes once we attain this deeper consciousness! How understanding widens, how compassion grows!

On this a sage has said:

“I would like each one of us to come to the point where he perceives the inner God who dwells even in the vilest of human beings; instead of condemning him we would say, ‘Arise, O resplendent Being, thou who art ever pure, who knowest neither birth nor death; arise, Almighty One, and manifest thy nature.’ ”

Let us live by this beautiful utterance and we shall see everything around us transformed as if by miracle.

This is the attitude of true, conscious and discerning love, the love which knows how to see behind appearances, understand in spite of words, and which, amid all obstacles, is in constant communion with the depths.

What value have our impulses and our desires, our anguish and our violence, our sufferings and our struggles, all these inner vicissitudes unduly dramatised by our unruly imagination — what value do they have before this great, this sublime and divine love bending over us from the innermost depths of our being, bearing with our weaknesses, rectifying our errors, healing our wounds, bathing our whole being with its regenerating streams?

For the inner Godhead never imposes herself, she neither demands nor threatens; she offers and gives herself, conceals and forgets herself in the heart of all beings and things; she

never accuses, she neither judges nor curses nor condemns, but works unceasingly to perfect without constraint, to mend without reproach, to encourage without impatience, to enrich each one with all the wealth he can receive; she is the mother whose love bears fruit and nourishes, guards and protects, counsels and consoles; because she understands everything, she can endure everything, excuse and pardon everything, hope and prepare for everything; bearing everything within herself, she owns nothing that does not belong to all, and because she reigns over all, she is the servant of all; that is why all, great and small, who want to be kings with her and gods in her, become, like her, not despots but servitors among their brethren.

How beautiful is this humble role of servant, the role of all who have been revealers and heralds of the God who is within all, of the Divine Love that animates all things....

And until we can follow their example and become true servants even as they, let us allow ourselves to be penetrated and transformed by this Divine Love; let us offer Him, without reserve, this marvellous instrument, our physical organism. He shall make it yield its utmost on every plane of activity.

To achieve this total self-consecration, all means are good, all methods have their value. The one thing needful is to persevere in our will to attain this goal. For then everything we study, every action we perform, every human being we meet, all come to bring us an indication, a help, a light to guide us on the path.

Before I close, I shall add a few pages for those who have already made apparently fruitless efforts, for those who have encountered the pitfalls on the way and seen the measure of their weakness, for those who are in danger of losing their self-confidence and courage. These pages, intended to rekindle hope in the hearts of those who suffer, were written by a spiritual worker at a time when ordeals of every kind were sweeping down on him like purifying flames.

You who are weary, downcast and bruised, you who fall,

Words of Long Ago

who think perhaps that you are defeated, hear the voice of a friend. He knows your sorrows, he has shared them, he has suffered like you from the ills of the earth; like you he has crossed many deserts under the burden of the day, he has known thirst and hunger, solitude and abandonment, and the cruellest of all wants, the destitution of the heart. Alas! he has known too the hours of doubt, the errors, the faults, the failings, every weakness.

But he tells you: Courage! Hearken to the lesson that the rising sun brings to the earth with its first rays each morning. It is a lesson of hope, a message of solace.

You who weep, who suffer and tremble, who dare not expect an end to your ills, an issue to your pangs, behold: there is no night without dawn and the day is about to break when darkness is thickest; there is no mist that the sun does not dispel, no cloud that it does not gild, no tear that it will not dry one day, no storm that is not followed by its shining triumphant bow; there is no snow that it does not melt, nor winter that it does not change into radiant spring.

And for you too, there is no affliction which does not bring its measure of glory, no distress which cannot be transformed into joy, nor defeat into victory, nor downfall into higher ascension, nor solitude into radiating centre of life, nor discord into harmony — sometimes it is a misunderstanding between two minds that compels two hearts to open to mutual communion; lastly, there is no infinite weakness that cannot be changed into strength. And it is even in supreme weakness that almightiness chooses to reveal itself!

Listen, my little child, you who today feel so broken, so fallen perhaps, who have nothing left, nothing to cover your misery and foster your pride: never before have you been so great! How close to the summits is he who awakens in the depths, for the deeper the abyss, the more the heights reveal themselves!

Do you not know this, that the most sublime forces of

The Supreme Discovery

the vasts seek to array themselves in the most opaque veils of Matter? Oh, the sublime nuptials of sovereign love with the obscurest plasticities, of the shadow's yearning with the most royal light!

If ordeal or fault has cast you down, if you have sunk into the nether depths of suffering, do not grieve — for there indeed the divine love and the supreme blessing can reach you! Because you have passed through the crucible of purifying sorrows, the glorious ascents are yours.

You are in the wilderness: then listen to the voices of the silence. The clamour of flattering words and outer applause has gladdened your ears, but the voices of the silence will gladden your soul and awaken within you the echo of the depths, the chant of divine harmonies!

You are walking in the depths of night: then gather the priceless treasures of the night. In bright sunshine, the ways of intelligence are lit, but in the white luminosities of the night lie the hidden paths of perfection, the secret of spiritual riches.

You are being stripped of everything: that is the way towards plenitude. When you have nothing left, everything will be given to you. Because for those who are sincere and true, from the worst always comes the best.

Every grain that is sown in the earth produces a thousand. Every wing-beat of sorrow can be a soaring towards glory.

And when the adversary pursues man relentlessly, everything he does to destroy him only makes him greater.

Hear the story of the worlds, look: the great enemy seems to triumph. He casts the beings of light into the night, and the night is filled with stars. He rages against the cosmic working, he assails the integrity of the empire of the sphere, shatters its harmony, divides and subdivides it, scatters its dust to the four winds of infinity, and lo! the dust is changed into a golden seed, fertilising the infinite and peopling it with worlds which now gravitate around their eternal centre in the larger orbit of space — so that even division creates a richer and deeper unity, and

Words of Long Ago

by multiplying the surfaces of the material universe, enlarges the empire that it set out to destroy.

Beautiful indeed was the song of the primordial sphere cradled in the bosom of immensity, but how much more beautiful and triumphant is the symphony of the constellations, the music of the spheres, the immense choir that fills the heavens with an eternal hymn of victory!

Hear again: no state was ever more precarious than that of man when he was separated on earth from his divine origin. Above him stretched the hostile borders of the usurper, and at his horizon's gates watched jailers armed with flaming swords. Then, since he could climb no more to the source of life, the source arose within him; since he could no more receive the light from above, the light shone forth at the very centre of his being; since he could commune no more with the transcendent love, that love offered itself in a holocaust and chose each terrestrial being, each human self as its dwelling-place and sanctuary.

That is how, in this despised and desolate but fruitful and blessed Matter, each atom contains a divine thought, each being carries within him the Divine Inhabitant. And if no being in all the universe is as frail as man, neither is any as divine as he!

In truth, in truth, in humiliation lies the cradle of glory!

28 April 1912

Part 2

MEETINGS

In 1912 a small group of seekers met regularly with the aim of gaining self-knowledge and self-mastery.

At the end of each session, a general question was set, which each member was to answer individually. These answers were read out at the next meeting. Then, to close the session, a small essay was read out. Here are the essays.

7 May 1912

What is the most useful work to be done at the present moment?

The general aim to be attained is the advent of a progressing universal harmony.

The means for attaining this aim, in regard to the earth, is the realisation of human unity through the awakening in all and the manifestation by all of the inner Divinity which is One.

In other words, — to create unity by founding the Kingdom of God which is within us all.

This, therefore, is the most useful work to be done:

(1) For each individually, to be conscious in himself of the Divine Presence and to identify himself with it.

(2) To individualise the states of being that were never till now conscious in man and, by that, to put the earth in connection with one or more of the fountains of universal force that are still sealed to it.

(3) To speak again to the world the eternal word under a new form adapted to its present mentality.

It will be the synthesis of all human knowledge.

(4) Collectively, to establish an ideal society in a propitious spot for the flowering of the new race, the race of the Sons of God.

*
* *

The terrestrial transformation and harmonisation can be brought about by two processes which, though opposite in appearance, must combine — must act upon each other and complete each other:

(1) Individual transformation, an inner development leading to the union with the Divine Presence.

Words of Long Ago

(2) Social transformation, the establishment of an environment favourable to the flowering and growth of the individual.

Since the environment reacts upon the individual and, on the other hand, the value of the environment depends upon the value of the individual, the two works should proceed side by side. But this can be done only through division of labour, and that necessitates the formation of a group, hierarchised, if possible.

The action of the members of the group should be threefold:

(1) To realise in oneself the ideal to be attained: to become a perfect earthly representative of the first manifestation of the Unthinkable in all its modes, attributes and qualities.

(2) To preach this ideal by word, but, above all, by example, so as to find out all those who are ready to realise it in their turn and to become also announcers of liberation.

(3) To found a typic society or reorganise those that already exist.

*
* *

For each individual also there is a twofold labour to be done, simultaneously, each side of it helping and completing the other:

(1) An inner development, a progressive union with the Divine Light, sole condition in which man can be always in harmony with the great stream of universal life.

(2) An external action which everyone has to choose according to his capacities and personal preferences. He must find his own place, the place which he alone can occupy in the general concert, and he must give himself entirely to it, not forgetting that he is playing only one note in the terrestrial symphony and yet his note is indispensable to the harmony of the whole, and its value depends upon its justness.

14 May 1912

What is my place in the universal work?

We all have a role to fulfil, a work to accomplish, a place which we alone can occupy.

But since this work is the expression, the outer manifestation of the inmost depth of our being, we can become conscious of its definitive form only when we become conscious of this depth within ourselves.

This is what sometimes happens in cases of true conversion.

The moment we perceive the transfiguring light and give ourselves to it without reserve, we can suddenly and precisely become aware of what we are made for, of the purpose of our existence on earth.

But this enlightenment is exceptional. It is brought about within us by a whole series of efforts and inner attitudes. And one of the essential conditions if we want to achieve and maintain within ourselves these attitudes, these soul-states, is to devote part of our time each day to some impersonal action; every day, we must do something useful for others.

Until we know *the* essential thing we are intended to do, we must therefore find a temporary occupation which will be the best possible manifestation of our present capacities and our goodwill.

Then we shall give ourselves to this occupation with conscientiousness and perseverance, knowing that it may well be only a stage and that with the progress of our ideal and our energies, we shall certainly one day be led to see more clearly the work we must accomplish. To the extent that we lose the habit of referring everything to ourselves and learn more and more to give ourselves more completely, with greater love, to earth and

Words of Long Ago

men, we shall see our horizons widen and our duties become more numerous and clear.

We shall find that our action follows a general line of progression determined by our own particular temperament.

Indeed, the successive occupations we shall hold before we become conscious of the definitive form of our action will always point in the same direction, be of the same type and mode, which is the spontaneous expression of our character, our nature, our own characteristic vibration.

The discovery of this tendency, this particular orientation, should come about quite naturally; it is a matter of taste and free choice, beyond all outer selfish considerations.

People are often blamed for choosing an action for themselves which does not correspond to their abilities. There is a slight confusion here.

Those who freely set out to accomplish their own favourite work cannot, in my opinion, be on the wrong track; this work must surely be the expression of their own particular tendency. But their mistake lies in wanting to accomplish this work all at once in its entirety, in its integrality, in depth and above all on the surface, forgetting that the very conception of the work is imperfect as they are imperfect and that to be wise, they should add to the knowledge of what they *wish* to do the more immediate and practical knowledge of what they are *capable* of doing at the present moment.

By taking both these factors into account, they can employ themselves with a minimum waste of time and energy.

But few people act with so much insight and wisdom. And it very often happens that one who is seeking his way falls into one of these two possible errors:

Either he takes his desires for realities, that is, he overestimates his present strength and capacity and imagines that he is capable of immediately assuming a place and a role which he can honourably fulfil only after many years of methodical and persevering effort.

14 May 1912

Or he underestimates his latent powers and deliberately confines himself, in spite of his deeper aspirations, to a task which is far beneath his abilities and which will gradually extinguish within him the light that could have shone for others.

It seems difficult at first to steer clear of these pitfalls and find the balanced way, the middle way.

But we have a sure pointer to guide us.

Above all, whatever we undertake should not be done for the purpose of self-assertion. If we are attached to fame and glory, to the esteem of our peers, we are soon led to make concessions to them; and if we seek any opportunity to admire ourselves, it becomes easy to make ourselves out to be what we are not, and nothing more obscures the ideal within us.

We should never tell ourselves, openly or indirectly, "I want to be great, what vocation can I find for myself in order to become great?"

On the contrary, we should tell ourselves, "There must certainly be something I can do better than anyone else, since each one of us is a special mode of manifestation of the divine power which, in its essence, is one in all. However humble and modest it may be, this is precisely the thing to which I should devote myself, and in order to find it, I shall observe and analyse my tastes, tendencies and preferences, and I shall do it without pride or excessive humility, whatever others may think I shall do it just as I breathe, just as the flower smells sweet, quite simply, quite naturally, because I cannot do otherwise."

As soon as we have abolished within us, even for a moment, all egoistic desires, all personal and selfish aims, we can surrender to this inner spontaneity, this deep inspiration which will enable us to commune with the living and progressive forces of the universe.

The conception of our work will inevitably grow more perfect as we grow more perfect ourselves; and to realise this growing perfection, no effort to exceed ourselves should be

Words of Long Ago

neglected, but the work we perform must become always more and more joyful and spontaneous, like water welling from a pure spring.

21 May 1912

What is the greatest obstacle in ourselves to our consecration to impersonal work?

Regarded from the most general point of view, this obstacle is indistinguishable from the very reason for the work to be accomplished: it is the present state of imperfection of physical Matter.

Since we are made up of an imperfect substance, we cannot but share in this imperfection.

Therefore, whatever degree of perfection, consciousness or knowledge is possible to our inmost being, the very fact that it incarnates in a physical body gives rise to obstacles to the purity of its manifestation; and on the other hand, the aim of its incarnation is victory over these obstacles, the transformation of Matter. We must therefore not be surprised or saddened if we encounter obstacles within ourselves, for every single being on earth has difficulties to overcome.

The cause of this imperfection may become apparent to us from two points of view, one general, the other individual.

From the general point of view, the imperfection of Matter comes from its lack of receptivity to the more subtle forces which are to be manifested through it. But this lack of receptivity itself has many causes, and to explain them would lead us too far away from the heart of our subject. Besides, I think that, in the last analysis, all difficulties lie in the illusion of personality, that is, the illusion that one thing can be distinct from the whole.

To avoid speculating on the necessity of this illusion for the very existence of the universe as we know it, I shall consider the question solely from the terrestrial and human angle.

This illusion of a self separate from the whole brings about two tendencies within ourselves.

Words of Long Ago

The first comes from an unconscious need for identification with the whole. But by the very fact of the illusion of personality, each one conceives this identification only as an absorption into himself and seeks more or less to be the centre of this whole. As a result, in proportion to his intellectual or physical strength, each one attempts to draw to himself everything he is conscious of in order to continually increase his personality.

This is the outcome of a desire which is justified in essence — to become conscious of everything — but ignorant in expression, for if a way to become conscious of everything does exist, it certainly does not lie in trying to draw everything to oneself, which is absurd and unrealisable, but in identifying one's consciousness with the consciousness of the whole, which demands the very opposite action and attitude.

The second tendency, which is in fact a normal consequence of the first, is an excessively conservative spirit, a fixity of the whole nature — intellectual, moral and physical — which makes it impossible for us to transform ourselves as rapidly as we should in order to be always in harmony with the law of universal progress.

It is as if the individual were afraid of not being different enough from others if he encouraged too free and large an exchange with the whole.

Moreover, this fixity comes from the desire to appropriate and the error of believing that we can own something in the universe. We think that the elements we are made of are our own. Consciously or unconsciously, we want to hold on to them for ourselves while at the same time we are quite ready to add to them by drawing other elements to ourselves; but we forget that since there is no real separation, we can receive nothing if we do not give.

We must be a link in the chain: the link does not grow bigger at the expense of its neighbours. But when it faithfully transmits the current it has received, it will receive another, and the more complete and swift its transmission, the more it will

21 May 1912

be brought into contact with a great number of forces or things for it to use or manifest. And so, little by little, by taking and keeping nothing for itself, it can become aware of everything by communing with everything.

Foreseeing the objections which could be raised, I shall add this:

When I speak of the illusion of personality, I am not denying that each one has a special mode of manifestation. Differentiation does not mean division.

Why should there be so many countless links in the chain if each one did not have its own function?

And here another comparison is needed to complete the first, for any comparison is necessarily incomplete.

If we consider ourselves as cells of an immense living organism, we shall immediately understand that a cell, which is dependent for its own life on the life of the whole and can separate itself from it only at the risk of destruction, does in fact have its own special part to play in the whole.

But this role is precisely what is most profoundly spontaneous in our being; no egoistic assertion of our personality is needed to discover it. On the contrary, the more fully we give ourselves to an impersonal action, the more this role will gain in strength and clarity within us. But this role is precisely what constitutes our true individuality, since it is our own special way of manifesting the Divine Essence, which is one in everything and in all.

28 May 1912

What is the psychological difficulty which I can best study by experience?

In each one of us there is a difficulty which is more central than all the others; it is the one which, relative to the part we have to play in the world, is like the shadow of that light, a shadow which gradually dissolves, fades more and more as the light becomes more intense, more brilliant, more powerful and extends to the whole being.

This difficulty, which is particular to each one, seems to me to be the one which deserves all our attention and effort, for if we know how to observe ourselves, we shall see that it is the source of all the others which may obstruct our way.

So this evening, I shall make a brief survey of a difficulty of this kind.

Some people have an excessive sensitivity, which becomes most acute when it does not manifest itself outwardly. This sensitivity is of an affective, emotional kind.

It usually comes from a supra-nervous substance which is highly intellectualised but not spiritualised enough for its degree of intellectualisation.

It is a stage of evolution in which the being is ready for self-giving, for he is conscious of himself; but, as a result of the work of individualisation, of intellectualisation he has undergone, he has acquired the habit of considering everything in relation to himself and has carried the illusion of personality to its utmost limit.

Thus it is sometimes very difficult for him not to watch himself acting, feeling and thinking, and this results in a lack of spontaneity which verges on insincerity.

The being takes pleasure in his extreme sensitivity; he is

a delicate instrument which responds marvellously to the least vibration, and so, instead of exteriorising himself and forgetting his own self as he should, he withdraws into himself, observes and analyses and almost contemplates himself.

Thus cultivated, the emotional sensitivity goes on increasing, sharpening and refining itself. And since in life opportunities for suffering are more frequent than opportunities for joy, the need to experience and study these subtle movements of feeling develops an inclination, a taste for suffering, a true mystical aberration which is nothing but self-seeking through suffering, a refined but very pernicious form of egoism.

The practical results of this need to suffer are altogether disastrous if you add to it the intuitive but still inaccurate perception that the work you have to accomplish, your purpose in life, is to draw towards yourself, to take upon yourself, the suffering of others and change it into harmony.

As a matter of fact, on one hand this knowledge is incomplete because you do not know that the only way to relieve others, to eliminate a little suffering in this world, is not to allow any sensitivity, however painful it may seem, to arouse suffering in yourself or to disturb your peace and serenity. On the other hand the idea of the work to be accomplished is itself warped by the illusion of personality. The correct idea is not to draw all suffering to yourself, which is unrealisable, but to identify yourself with all suffering, in all others, to become in it and in them a seed of light and love which will give birth to a deep understanding, to hope, trust and peace.

Until this is well understood, the taste for sacrifice rises in the being; and each time an opportunity for it appears, since you are not *disinterested* in this matter, since you *desire* this sacrifice, it becomes something sentimental and irrational and results in absurd errors which sometimes have disastrous consequences. Even if you are in the habit of reflecting before acting, the reflections preceding the act will necessarily be biased, since they are warped by the taste for suffering, by the

Words of Long Ago

desire to have an opportunity to impose a painful sacrifice on yourself.

Thus, consciously or not, instead of sacrificing yourself for the good of others, you sacrifice yourself for the pleasure of it, which is perfectly absurd and of no benefit to anyone.

No action should be deemed good, no action should be undertaken until we know its immediate and, if possible, its distant consequences, and until it appears that they must in the end add, however little, to earthly happiness. But to be able to give a sound judgment on the matter, this judgment must in no way be disturbed by any personal preference, and this implies self-detachment.

Not the detachment which is equivalent to the annihilation of the capacity to feel, but the detachment which brings about the abolition of the capacity to suffer.

By this you should understand that for the time being I am excluding insensitive people, those who do not suffer because the substance they are made of is still too unrefined, too crude to feel, those who are not even ready for suffering.

But of those who have achieved a high development of sensitivity, it can be said that their capacity to suffer is the exact measure of their imperfection.

Indeed, the expression of a true psychic life in the being is peace, a joyful serenity.

Any suffering is therefore a precious indication to us of our weak point, of the point which demands a greater spiritual effort from us.

Thus, to cure in ourselves this attraction for suffering, we must understand the absurdity, the petty egoism of the various causes of our sufferings.

And to cure our excessive and ridiculous desire for sacrifice — too frequently for its own sake, regardless of any useful results — we must understand that if we are to remain in contact with all human sufferings through our sensitivity, we must also be vigilant and discerning enough to dissolve these

28 May 1912

sufferings as they come; to the clear-sighted, they are purely imaginary.

For, from this point of view, the only way to come to the help of men is to oppose to their suffering an immutable and smiling serenity which will be the highest human expression of Impersonal Love.

Finally, in a case such as the one I have just shown to you, even more than in any other, it is indispensable to keep in mind that true impersonality does not consist only in forgetting ourselves in our acts, but above all in the fact of not being aware that we are forgetting ourselves.

In short, to be truly impersonal, we must stop noticing that we are being impersonal.

And then the work can be accomplished with a large-hearted spontaneity, in all its perfection.

4 June 1912

What improvements can we bring to our meetings?

We said one day with regard to the numerous groups that form and disappear almost immediately, that this phenomenon of rapid decay is a result of the conventional and arbitrary factors which enter into the organisation of these groups.

In fact, they are founded upon an ideal prototype originating from one or several minds — a formula which is sometimes very beautiful in theory, but which takes no account of the individuals who with their difficulties and weaknesses must form the living cells of the group.

In my opinion, it is impossible to give an arbitrary form to any being, individual or collective; its form can only be the outer expression which perfectly reflects the quality of its constituent elements.

Because this vital law of formation is not observed, these groups follow one upon another and multiply endlessly; all are fated to the same swift destruction. For instead of being living organisms capable of normal growth, development and expansion, they are nothing but inert conglomerations without any possibility of progress.

We had decided to heed this law and carefully refrain from prematurely deciding upon the conditions of life of our little group. It is not yet born, it has hardly begun its period of gestation. Let us allow it to form and blossom very slowly before making any rules for its existence.

Consequently, it would seem disastrous to me to attempt to organise our meetings according to a preconceived plan or to conform to the ideal of one individual or another or even of all of us. We would then be entering on the way of artificial formations shaped by theory and destined to perish even more

4 June 1912

rapidly than those institutions which develop according to their own spontaneity, which is the sum total of the varied tendencies of their members.

Certainly, our meetings should progress, since that is the condition of their continuation. But this can only happen if they become an opportunity for each one of us to progress.

For if we want their progress to be sincere and in depth, it must depend on our own.

If we could all bring with us here an ardent aspiration for greater knowledge and wisdom, we would create a contemplative atmosphere, which I would like to be able to call religious, and this atmosphere would be most favourable to our self-perfection.

An atmosphere of spirituality is sometimes a far greater help than an exchange of words; the most beautiful thoughts cannot make us progress unless we have a persistent will to translate them within ourselves into higher feelings, more exact sensations and nobler actions.

Thus, to improve our meetings, the essential condition is our own self-improvement.

If we unify ourselves and identify our consciousness with the consciousness of our Divine Self, our group will become unified. If we enlighten and illumine our intellectual faculties, our group will manifest the light. If we allow impersonal love to permeate our whole being, our group will radiate love. And finally, if we bring order into ourselves, our group will become organised of itself, without our needing to intervene arbitrarily in its formation.

In short, let us become the living cells of the organism we want to bring forth, and let us not forget that on the value of its cells will depend the value of the collective being and its action, its usefulness in the work of universal harmony.

11 June 1912

How can one become master of one's thought?

First condition. To understand the full importance of this mastery by becoming aware, through observation, that our actions are the exact expression of our thoughts and that so long as we do not have perfect control over our mental activity, these thoughts are nothing but reflexes coming from every outside influence (sensations and suggestions). Thus we do not possess ourselves and can in no way be responsible for ourselves so long as we are not the masters of our thought.

Second condition. To will persistently an effective direction of our mental activity.

Third condition. To observe our thoughts in order to become familiar with them, to know their habitual course and become aware of the ones which have a special affinity with our sensorial and emotional nature.

Fourth condition. To seek in ourselves the idea which seems to be the highest, the noblest, the purest and most disinterested and, until the day we find a more beautiful idea to replace it, to make it the pivot around which our mental synthesis will be built up, the regulating idea in whose light all other thoughts can be seen and judged, that is, accepted or rejected.

Fifth condition. To undergo a regular daily mental discipline. To discover among all the teachings that have been given on this subject the method that seems to be most effective and to follow it scrupulously, rigorously, with energy and perseverance.

Some important recommendations:

11 June 1912

To know how to take enough mental rest.

Not to demand from ourselves more than we can do.

To take time into account and to know how to wait patiently for the result of our effort.

Lastly, without neglecting anything we can do ourselves, to know how to rely with childlike trust on the Great Supreme Force, the Divine Force that is One in all beings and all things.

18 June 1912

The Power of Words

It seems unnecessary to draw your attention to the quantity of useless words that are uttered each day; this evil is well known to all, although very few people think of remedying it.

But there are many other words which are spoken needlessly. That is to say, in the course of the day, we often have the opportunity of expressing a helpful wish by pronouncing one word or another, provided that we know how to put the appropriate thought behind the words.

But too often we lose this opportunity of drawing a beneficial mental atmosphere around the people we know and thus of truly helping them. It would be very useful to remedy this neglect.

To do this, we must refuse to allow our minds to remain in that state of vague and passive imprecision which is almost constant in most people.

To cure ourselves progressively of this somnolence, we can, when pronouncing a word, force ourselves to reflect upon its exact meaning, its true import, in order to make it fully effective.

In this regard, we can say that the active power of words comes from three different causes.

The first two lie in the word itself, which has become a battery of forces. The third lies in the fact of living integrally the deep thought expressed by the word when we pronounce it.

Naturally, if these three causes of effectiveness are combined, the power of the word is considerably enhanced.

1) There are certain words whose resonance in the physical world is the perfect vibratory materialisation of the more subtle vibration produced by the thought in its own domain.

If we examine closely this similarity between the vibrations of thought and sound, we can discover the limited number

of root syllables which express the most general ideas, and which are to be found in most spoken languages with an almost identical meaning. (This origin of language should not be confused with the origin of written languages, which are of an altogether different nature and correspond to different needs.)

2) There are other words which have been repeated in certain circumstances for hundreds of years and which are instinct with the mental forces of all those who have pronounced them. They are true batteries of energy.

3) Finally, there are words which assume an immediate value when they are pronounced, as a result of the living thought of the one who pronounces them.

To illustrate what I have just said with an example, here is a very powerful word, for it can combine the qualities of all three categories: it is the Sanskrit word "AUM".

It is used in India to express the divine Immanence. There, it is associated with every meditation, every contemplation, every yogic practice.

More than any other sound, this sound "AUM" gives rise to a feeling of peace, of serenity, of eternity.

Moreover, this word is instinct with the mental forces which for centuries all those who have used it have accumulated around the idea that it expresses; and, for Hindus especially, it has the true power of bringing one into contact with the divine Essence it evokes.

And as Orientals have a religious mind and the habit of concentration, few pronounce this word without putting into it the conviction that is needed to make it fully effective.

In China, a similar effect is obtained with a word of identical meaning and somewhat similar sound, the word "TAO".

Our western languages are less expressive; in their present form, they are too far removed from the root language which gave birth to them. But we can always animate a word by the power of our living and active thought.

Words of Long Ago

Besides, there are formulas which we could profitably add to all those in common use.

These formulas were used in certain ancient schools of initiation. They served as greetings, and in the mouth of one who knew how to think them, they had a very special power of action.

The disciples, the neophytes who were taking their first steps on the path, were greeted: "May the peace of equilibrium be with you."

All those who by their constant and progressive inner and outer attitude had shown their deep and lasting goodwill, were greeted: "May the highest good be yours."

And in certain instructors manifesting especially high forces, this word was endowed with the power of transmitting true gifts, for example, the gift of healing.

25 June 1912

What is the most useful idea to spread and what is the best example to set?

The question can be considered in two ways, a very general one applicable to the whole earth, and another specific one which concerns our present social environment.

From the general point of view, it seems to me that the most useful idea to spread is twofold:

1) Man carries within himself perfect power, perfect wisdom and perfect knowledge, and if he wants to possess them, he must discover them in the depth of his being, by introspection and concentration.

2) These divine qualities are identical at the centre, at the heart of all beings; this implies the essential unity of all, and all the consequences of solidarity and fraternity that follow from it.

The best example to give would be the unalloyed serenity and immutably peaceful happiness which belong to one who knows how to live integrally this thought of the One God in all.

From the point of view of our present environment, here is the idea which, it seems to me, it is most useful to spread:

True progressive evolution, an evolution which can lead man to his rightful happiness, does not lie in any external means, material improvement or social change. Only a deep and inner process of individual self-perfection can make for real progress and completely transform the present state of things, and change suffering and misery into a serene and lasting contentment.

Consequently, the best example is one that shows the first stage of individual self-perfection which makes possible all the rest, the first victory to be won over the egoistic personality: disinterestedness.

Words of Long Ago

At a time when all rush upon money as the means to satisfy their innumerable cravings, one who remains indifferent to wealth and acts, not for the sake of gain, but solely to follow a disinterested ideal, is probably setting the example which is most useful at present.

2 July 1912

Which minds are nearest to me and what is my ideal work among them?

Always, in one way or another, life puts in our path those who for some reason are near to us. Each individual creates his own environment according to what he is himself.

And, if such is our dominant preoccupation, all those whom we thus meet on our way are the very ones to whom we can be most useful.

For one who lives constantly in the spiritual consciousness, everything that happens to him takes on a special value and all is conducive to his progressive evolution. It will always be beneficial for him to observe his encounters, to investigate both the apparent and the deeper reasons for them, and, in accordance with his altruistic aspirations, he will ask himself what good he can do in each different case. And according to his own degree of spirituality, his action will always have a greater or lesser spiritualising effect.

If we observe at all attentively the causes which bring us closer to our kind, we see that these contacts occur at various levels of depth in our being, depending on our own special mode of conscious activity.

We can classify these relationships into four main categories corresponding to our four principal modes of activity: physical, vital, psychic and mental. They may have their play in one or several of these categories, simultaneously or successively, according to the quality and type of the manifestation of our activity.

Physical contact is compulsory, so to say, since it depends on the fact that we have a physical body. It inevitably occurs with those who have provided us with this body and with all

Words of Long Ago

those who are materially dependent on them. These are the relations of kinship. There are also relationships of proximity: neighbourhood in houses, in the various means of transport, in the street. (I may remark here — and this remark also applies to the other three categories — that this relationship is not necessarily exclusive: this is in fact rare, since we are seldom active on only one plane of our being; what I mean is that the physical relationship is dominant over the other three.)

Vital contact occurs between impulses and desires which are identical or liable to combine in order to complement and heighten one another.

Psychic contact occurs between converging spiritual aspirations.

Mental contact comes from similar or complementary mental capacities and affinities.

Normally, if the predominance of one category is not clearly established — and this can only happen when there is enough order in our being to organise it in all its depth and complexity — we can and should give material help to those who are near to us for physical reasons.

With certain exceptions, material help is the best assistance we can give to the members of our family or to those whom we chance to meet in the street, in trains, in ships, in buses, etc.: pecuniary help, aid in case of illness or danger.

We should assist the sensitivity of those who are attracted to us because they have identical tastes, artistic or otherwise, by rectifying, balancing or canalising their sense-energies.

We can help those who by a common aspiration for progress have been brought into contact with us, through our example, by showing them the path, and through our love, by smoothing the way for them.

Finally, we must allow the light of our intelligence to shine for those who come close to us as a result of mental affinity, so that, if possible, we may widen their field of thought and enlighten their ideal.

2 July 1912

These various affinities express themselves outwardly in slight and sometimes subtle variations in the conditions of our encounters, and because our insight is seldom alert enough, these slight variations often elude us.

But to direct our action in the right way and reduce as far as possible the causes of our wrong attitudes towards our fellowmen, we should always investigate with the greatest care the numerous reasons for our contacts and find the category of affinities which binds us to them.

A few rare beings are close to us in all four modes of existence at the same time. These are friends in the deepest sense of the word. It is on them that our actions can have their most integral, their most perfectly helpful and beneficial effect.

We should never forget that the duration of a contact between two human lives depends on the number and depth of the states of being in which the affinities that bind them have their play.

Only those who commune with the eternal essence within themselves and in all things can be eternally united.

Only those are friends forever who have been close or distant friends from all time in this or other worlds.

And whether or not we meet these friends depends on the encounter we must first experience within ourselves, in the unknown depths of our being.

Moreover, when this meeting occurs, our whole attitude is transformed.

When we become one with the inner Godhead, we become one in depth with all, and it is through Her and by Her that we must come into contact with all beings. Then, free from all attraction and repulsion, all likes and dislikes, we are close to what is close to Her and far from what is far from Her.

Thus we learn that in the midst of others we should become always more and more a divine example of integral activity both intellectual and spiritual, an opportunity which is offered to them to understand and enter upon the path of divine life.

Part 3

Between 1911 and 1913 the Mother gave a number of talks to different groups in Paris. Two of them, “On Thought” and “On Dreams”, appear in Part 1. The same talk was sometimes presented to two or more groups with suitable variations. Additions and alternative versions have been given here as footnotes.

The first piece in this part is a note found among the Mother’s manuscripts.

That Which is Speaking

THAT WHICH is speaking to you now, is a faithful servant of the Divine. From all time, since the beginning of the earth, as a faithful servant of the Divine, it has spoken in the name of its Master. And as long as earth and men exist, it will be there in a body to preach the divine word.

So, wherever I am asked to speak, I do my best, as a servant of the Divine.

But to speak in the name of a particular doctrine or of a man, however great he may be, that I cannot do!

The Eternal Transcendent forbids me.

1912

On Thought – Introduction

MLLE. MOLITOR has very kindly asked me to say a few words on thought. Since you have been good enough to come and listen to me today, I conclude that you are among those who, knowing the primary importance of thought, its master-role in life, strive to build up for themselves an ever stronger and more conscious thought.

So I hope you will excuse me if, while showing you what this primary importance of thought is, I venture to give you — to give *us* — some advice on learning how to think well.

In this, I shall act only as an interpreter for you on behalf of the great instructors, the great initiates who have come from age to age to bring to men their words of wisdom and peace.

But before translating for you as best I can their beautiful teachings on the rational, effective and just use of the marvellous faculty in us which is thought, it seems to me indispensable that we should first of all enquire a little into what thought is.

5 February 1912

On Thought—II

YOU PROBABLY remember that, last month, we made two observations.

The first is that thought is a living, active, autonomous entity.

The second is that in order to contend victoriously with the injurious effects of the polluted mental atmosphere in which we live, we must build up within ourselves a pure, luminous and powerful intellectual synthesis.

For this purpose we must bring down into ourselves the highest thoughts within our reach, that is, within the field of our mental activity, and make them our own.

But since thoughts are living beings, they have, as we do, their likes and dislikes, their attractions and repulsions.

We must therefore adopt a special attitude towards them, treat them as people, make advances and concessions to them and show them the same attentions as we would to someone we would wish to be our friend.

On this matter, a modern philosopher writes:

“Sometimes thinkers in their meditations, explorers and prospectors of the intellectual world in their discoveries, and poets — the diviners of thought — in their dreams, feel and vaguely sense that the idea is not something abstract and bodiless. It appears to them to be winged, something which soars, comes close and flees, denies and gives itself, something which must be called, pursued and won.

“To the most clairvoyant, the idea seems to be an aloof person with her whims and desires, her preferences, her queenly disdain, her virgin modesty. They know that it takes much care to win her and but a little thing to lose her, that there is a love of the mind for the idea, a love made of consecration and sacrifice, and without this the idea cannot belong to it.

Words of Long Ago

“But these are pretty symbols, and few indeed can perceive the very precise reality which lies beneath them.

“It needed a Plato to identify this thing which lives and vibrates, which moves and shines, travels and is propagated through time and space, which acts and wills and freely chooses its own time and place — in short, to know the Idea as a being.”

Let us take especially one phrase from this beautiful page: “There is a love of the mind for the idea, a love made of consecration and sacrifice, and without this the idea cannot belong to it.”

This is not an image. To enter into an intimate and conscious relation with the idea, we must consecrate ourselves to it, love it with a disinterested love, in itself, for itself.

Today we shall try to find out what this love consists of and, at the same time, what we must do for it to blossom within us.

The first attitude to be taken, the most indispensable, is the most perfect mental sincerity it is within our power to acquire.

Of all sincerities, this is perhaps the most difficult. Not to deceive oneself mentally is not an easy thing to achieve.

First of all we have, as I explained to you last December, a certain habit of thought which comes from the education we have received, from the influence of the environment, and which is most often made up of social conventions and collective suggestions. This habit naturally makes us give a far better reception to all the thoughts which are similar, if not conformable, to those which already fill our minds, than to those which could, to however small an extent, unsettle this mental structure.

For the same reason, as you probably remember, it is sometimes so difficult for us to learn to think for ourselves: we hesitate to change anything whatsoever in our customary way of thinking, which is most often made up of social conventions and collective suggestions. For our whole existence is based upon this habit. It takes a great courage and a great love of progress to consent to examine one's existence in the light of thoughts that are deeper, and consequently more independent of the customs and usages of the environment.

You can judge from this the great, the very great love of the idea that is needed to achieve such a revolution in one's habits, for the sole purpose of gaining the power to enter into a more intimate, more conscious relationship with it!

And even when our mental synthesis is made up of thoughts that we have received and made our own in the course of a constant and persevering effort of meditation, we must love the idea with a very powerful love, perhaps even more powerful still, so that we may always be in quest of a new idea, ready to give it the most eager reception if it is willing to come to us. For we are well aware that each new idea will constrain us to modify our synthesis, relegate to the background ideas which had seemed to us master-ideas, bring to the light other ideas too long disregarded, rearrange them all so that they do not clash, to the great detriment of our brain, in brief, a long and sometimes painful task. Indeed we are very seldom disinterested with regard to ideas; there are some which we prefer to others and which, consequently, occupy a place in our mental activity which they do not always deserve.

And if we must replace them with others that are more precise, more true, we often hesitate long before doing so, we cling to them as indispensable friends, and we love their defects as well as their qualities, — which is the worst way to love people, as well as the laziest and most selfish, — for we are always more highly esteemed by those we flatter than by those from whom we demand a constant effort of progress. But our difficulties do not stop there.

As a consequence of the intellectual education we have received or of some personal preference, we are also prejudiced about the way, or ways, in which ideas should be introduced to us.

These preconceptions are so many veritable superstitions that we must overcome.

They are different for each person.

Some people have the superstition of the book. For an idea

Words of Long Ago

to merit consideration in their eyes, it must have been expressed in some famous book, in one of the bibles of humanity, and any thought coming in any other way will appear suspect to them.

There are some who accept an idea only from the official sciences, and those who recognise one only in the established religions, old or new. For others, the idea must come from the mouth of a man of renown with enough honorary titles so that none can question his value.

Still others, more sentimental, in order to come into contact with thought, need a master who should be the perfect incarnation of the ideal human standard constructed by their imagination. But they are bound to be sorely disappointed, for they forget that they alone are capable of realising their own ideal, that the one in whom they have placed their confidence has a duty to realise his own ideal which, consequently, however great it may be, may very well differ considerably from their own. So, most often, when they become aware of these divergences, since they had attached themselves to the ideas only for the sake of the man, they will reject both man and ideas together.

This is absurd, for ideas are worth what they are worth regardless of the individuals who have expressed them.

Finally, there is a whole category of people enamoured of the miraculous, who will recognise a truth only if it has come to them clothed in the mystery of a supramundane revelation, in dream or trance.

For them the master must be their God, an angel or a Mahatma, and give them his precious teachings during their contemplation or their sleep.

Needless to say, this method is still more unreliable than the others. That a thought should reach us by extraordinary means is no guarantee of its correctness or its truth.¹

¹ *Paragraph added when this talk was presented to a different group:*

I do not mean that it is impossible to come into contact with an idea by these means, but they are far from being the only ones or even perhaps the best.

You see, the true lover of the idea knows that by seeking it ardently he will find it everywhere, and even more so in the subterranean and secret fountainheads than in those which have lost their pristine purity by turning into rivers that are majestic and renowned but also polluted by the waste of all kinds which they carry with them.

The lover of the idea knows that it can come to him from the mouth of a child as from the mouth of a learned man.

And it is even in this unexpected way that it can reach him most often.

That is why it is said: “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings comes forth truth.”

For if the thought of a child cannot have the precision of the thought of a man, neither does it have the fixity which results from laziness of habit and which in the adult prevents the thought from expressing itself whenever it does not belong to the categories which are familiar to him.

Moreover, it was to escape the distortion of an environment made up of habit and fixity that the schools of ancient times where the young prophets were educated were established far from the cities.

That is also why the great instructors of men began their apprenticeship in solitude. For if too many things are absent for the thought to be able to express itself in the minds of unrefined men, too many things are also absent from the mind of the cultivated man shaped by the artificial life of human societies.

How much silence is needed — not the outer, illusory and momentary silence, but on the contrary the true, profound, integral, permanent silence — to be able to hear the far-off voices of thought!

That is why the sincere lover of knowledge also knows that the greatest sages are always the most modest and the most unknown. For one who has the knowledge and the capacity prefers silence and retirement where he is free to accomplish his

Words of Long Ago

work without being disturbed by anything, to the fanfares of glory which would throw him as fodder to men.

The lover of thought knows that he will find thought everywhere around him, in the little flower as in the radiant sun; nothing and no one appears to him too humble or too obscure to be for him an intermediary of the idea he is ever seeking.

But above all he knows that the best, the most reliable contact with the idea is certainly a direct contact.

Since we are made out of the universal substance, we are this universe in miniature.

Since no phenomenon can exist without a corresponding medium, the existence of ideas implies the existence of a corresponding domain, the realm of free intelligence always in form but not subject to form, and this realm is within us as within the great universe.

If then we concentrate sufficiently, if we become conscious of our inmost being, we shall come into contact, within it and through it, with the free universal intelligence, the world of ideas.

Then, if we have taken care to polish our mirror well and to clear it of all the dust of preconception and habit, all ideas will be able to reflect themselves there with a minimum of distortion, and we shall have acquired bodhi (knowledge), we shall have acquired the power of reflecting the rays of the Sun of Truth²—such was the hope which Siddhartha Gautama held out to us. When he was asked, “How shall we obtain bodhi?”, he would reply:

“Bodhi has no distinctive signs or marks: what can be known in respect of it is of no use whatsoever; but the care

² *In a version presented to another group the paragraph ends here and is followed by these two paragraphs:*

Then will our mental actions take on their full power and effectivity. Our thought-formations will become useful and luminous messengers going forth to do their work of goodness and harmony wherever material circumstances prevent us from doing it physically.

And by a little effort of concentration we shall rapidly succeed in becoming conscious of these actions while at the same time remaining in touch with the emanated thought.

we take in practising its spirit is of great importance. It is like a cleansed and polished mirror that has become clear and bright, so that images are reflected in it sharply and vividly.”

And again:

“One who is without darkness, free from blemish, of blameless conduct, perfectly pure, that one, even though he does not know and has never heard and in short has no knowledge, however little, of any of the things that are in the world of the ten regions since time without beginning until today, none the less, he possesses the highest knowledge of the one who knows all. He is the one of whom it is said: Clarity.” You see here a panegyric of the direct relationship with the idea as opposed to the wholly external and superficial method of erudition.

The advantages of this direct relationship are incalculable.

It enables us to recover and love the idea behind all appearances, all veils, all forms, even the most barbarous, the most crude, the most superstitious.

Thus we can put into living practice the state of mind of the sage, of which I spoke to you in my first talk and which a master defines in this way:

“One who advances in Truth is not troubled by any error, for he knows that error is the first effort of life towards truth.”

Consequently, not a single fragment of an idea can ever be lost for us; wherever it is concealed, we know how to discover and cherish it.

Moreover, when we have become familiar with an idea, when we know it in itself, for itself, we recognise it behind the most diverse appearances, the most varied forms.

This faculty can even serve as a criterion to discover whether someone is in contact with the idea itself, that is to say, whether he has understood it well and made it his own or whether he is part of the mass of those who have assimilated as best they could a doctrine, a special language, and who can think only in the words of that language—outside this formula, they no longer understand anything.

Words of Long Ago

This attachment to form, which consists entirely of intellectual impotence, is one of the most powerful causes of dissension among men.

But one who penetrates deeply enough to see the thought, the naked truth, soon realises that it is the same behind its varied and more or less opaque veils.

This is the surest way to achieve true tolerance.

Indeed, how can we have an exclusive passion for one particular doctrine or school or religion when we have had the experience that each one of them contains treasures of light and truth, however varied the caskets which enclose them?

16 February 1912

On Thought—III

IT HAS always seemed to me that apart from a very few exceptions, the mental role of women is not to speculate on the metaphysical causes of the phenomena which are perceptible to us, but to draw practical conclusions from these phenomena.

Madame Martial was telling you very rightly last Friday that it would be wrong for women to want to think in the same way as men, that they would be in danger of losing their own qualities — profound intuition and practical deduction — without acquiring those of their masculine counterparts — logical reasoning and the capacity of analysis and synthesis.

That is why today I shall not attempt to demonstrate to you by logical reasoning and transcendental speculation that thoughts exist as true, autonomous, living and active entities.

Besides, if we do not want to indulge in idle talk, if, very sincerely, we want to explain the smallest phenomenon, we must always go back to the most universal general laws. The whole universe is necessary to explain a grain of sand. And this is not the programme we have chosen for the *Union de Pensée Féminine*. Those who, as a result of the teaching they have received and the cerebral gymnastics they have undertaken, are fond of taking up vast metaphysical problems, will find an excellent opportunity to do so at the *École de la Pensée* on the first Friday of each month.¹

¹ *Alternative version intended for another group:*

I do not know if you are familiar with the notion of thought as a living and autonomous entity. I shall not venture here to prove its exactitude to you, and this for two reasons.

The first is that in order to explain the smallest phenomenon (for such is our usual way of proving its reality to ourselves), it is necessary to bring in the most universal general laws. Many times we have been led to observe that the whole universe is necessary to explain a grain of sand. And this enquiry would lead us really too far tonight.

On the other hand, to do this, we would have to devote ourselves to lengthy meta-

Words of Long Ago

At the *Union de Pensée Féminine*, we shall be more modest, if you agree.

Women, by their very nature, are more capable of taking the spiritual or, in the deepest sense of the word, moral standpoint.

We are essentially realistic and formative in this spiritual domain; we want to know how to live well, and for this we must learn how to think well.

To realise the primary importance of thought, we must know it as it is, that is, as a living being; and so that you may be convinced of the autonomous existence of thought, I shall ask you only to ascertain this for yourselves, which is an easy thing to do.

A little observation will enable us to realise that very often, for example, we receive thoughts which come to us from outside, although we have not been brought into contact with them either by speech or reading.

Who has not also observed this phenomenon: a thought which is “in the air”, as we say, and which several inventors, several scientists, several literary men receive simultaneously without having been in physical communication on this matter?

One could go on giving examples indefinitely. I leave each one to reflect and find the examples which seem most conclusive to her.

Before proceeding further with our subject I shall read you a page on thought which may help you to understand it.

It is a page from an as yet unpublished philosophical volume.

“Any phenomenon implies a corresponding substance; any

physical speculations, and there is nothing I dread more than this form of mental activity.

Faithful in this matter to the teaching of the Buddha, I am convinced that we can make a far better use of our time and minds than in hazardous excursions into the intellectual realm which, in the last analysis, always eludes our enquiry and inevitably brings us face to face with the unthinkable.

The Buddha always categorically refused to answer any metaphysical question on the origin or the end of the universe, saying that only one thing matters: to advance on the Way, that is, to purify oneself inwardly, to destroy in oneself all egoistic desire.

vibration necessitates a medium of its own; and if vibrations of light require the medium which we know as ether, will not a medium be needed for the more subtle, more mysterious and also more rapid vibrations of thought?

“I am not speaking of a thought which has already assumed the form and substance provided by the materiality of the brain. Psychologists know very well that before it attains to its modes of conscious activity there, a thought must first of all have passed through remoter states, through the unknown regions of what we call the subconscious.

“It has come from the inner depths to our surface self like a meteor reaching us from inaccessible spaces.

“What was the origin of this meteor, the source of this thought? We do not know, but they exist, the one beyond our sun, the other probably beyond light.

“There is a relationship of ascendance between light and thought. To go from one to the other in the scale of imponderables, it is necessary to mount a step: conceiving (*concevoir*) is a higher way of seeing (*voir*).

“If we do not see thought, it is because its substance is more ethereal than that of light; just as, if we do not hear light, it is because its essence is more subtle than that of sound.

“Among the elements of its own order, thought moves just as our bodies do among physical objects. Just as our hands know how to shape these objects, in the same way thought also knows how to mould these elements and cast them into a myriad appropriate forms.

“Thus our intellectual gestures are no less fruitful than our physical gestures. And that is why wisdom has always taught that we must watch over our thoughts as we would over generating acts.”

So we see that thought, which is a dynamism in the highest sense of the word, acts in its own realm as a formative power in order to build a body for itself. It acts like a magnet on iron filings. It

Words of Long Ago

attracts all the elements which are akin to its own character, aim and tendencies, and it vivifies these elements — which are the constituent cells of its own body, that I shall call fluidic to avoid going into too many explanations — it animates them, moulds them, gives them the form which is best suited to its own nature.

We shall find a striking analogy between the work of thought and the work of the inventor, the builder of any kind.

Let us take as an example a steam engine. The engineer draws up a plan in its smallest details, calculates and arranges everything, then he selects the appropriate materials for the materialisation of his conception, watches over the construction, etc.

And when the engine works, becoming by its movement a real living being, it will be the most complete possible manifestation of the thought which has built it, it will give the full measure of the power of this thought. (The awakened unconsciousness of locomotives, cars, ships.) The formative thought, a living entity, animates the body which has been built for it by the hands of men. In the mental domain also, there are conscious builders.

There are people who are specially gifted or who have developed certain inner senses in themselves, who can come into direct contact with this domain, mainly through vision and touch.

When they are thus able to watch over the working of the phenomenon, they can, like chemists in their laboratories, manipulate substances, select them, mould them by their will-power and clothe their thoughts in forms that can manifest them fully.

But this is the ultimate stage of one of the many paths of individual progress. Long before achieving this full consciousness, it is possible to make powerful formations. Any person whose thought has any strength and persistence is constantly making formations without being aware of it.

If you keep in mind that these formations are living entities always acting in the direction imparted to them by the thoughts which have given them birth, you will easily perceive the considerable consequences of these mental acts.

Just as a good, kind, just and lofty thought can be eminently

beneficial, so also a malevolent, base, wicked and selfish thought can be baneful.

On this matter, I shall quote to you a passage from the Dhammapada which will give you an idea of the enormous importance attributed to thought by the wisdom of the past.

“Whatever an enemy may do to an enemy, whatever a hater may do to a hater, the harm caused by a misdirected thought is even greater still.

“Neither father nor mother nor any other kinsman can do so much good as a well-directed thought.”

If you reflect upon the incalculable number of thoughts which are emitted each day, you will see rising before your imagination a complex, mobile, quivering and terrible scene in which all these formations intercross and collide, battle, succumb and triumph in a vibratory movement which is so rapid that we can hardly picture it to ourselves.

Now you realise what the mental atmosphere of a city like Paris can be, where millions of individuals are thinking—and what thoughts! You can picture this teeming, mobile mass, this inextricable tangle. Well, in spite of all the contradictory tendencies, wills and opinions, a kind of unification or identity gets established among all these vibrations, for all of them—with a few minor exceptions—all express craving, craving in all its forms, all its aspects, on all planes.

All the thoughts of worldly-minded people whose only aim is enjoyment and physical diversion, express craving.

All the thoughts of intellectual creators or artists thirsting for esteem, fame and honour, express craving.

All the thoughts of the ruling class and the officials hankering after more power and influence, express craving.

All the thoughts of the thousands of employees and workmen, of all the oppressed, the unfortunate, the downtrodden struggling for some improvement of their cheerless existence, express craving.

All, rich or poor, powerful or weak, privileged or deprived,

Words of Long Ago

intellectual or obtuse, learned or ignorant, all want gold, always more gold to satisfy all their cravings.

If from place to place there occasionally flashes out a spark of pure and disinterested thought, of will to do well, of sincere seeking for truth, it is very soon swallowed up by this material flood that rolls like a sea of slime....

And yet we must kindle the stars that one by one will come to illumine this night.

But for the moment we are living within it, soaking it up, for in the mental as in the physical domain we are in a state of perpetual interchange with the environment.

This is to point out to you how we are contaminated each day, at each minute.

Can any one of us say that she has never felt craving and that she will never feel it again? Besides, how could we not feel craving when the atmosphere we breathe is saturated with it? How could we not feel this host of desires rising in ourselves when all the vibrations we receive are made of desires?...

And yet if we want our thought to be beneficial and effective we must free ourselves of this bondage.

With this fact in mind, let us first of all draw a practical conclusion: let us be lenient towards all, for temptation is strong and human ignorance is great indeed.

But just as we must be compassionate and kind to others, we must be exacting and strict with ourselves, since we want to become lights in the darkness, torches in the night.

We must therefore learn to resist this daily pollution victoriously.

The very fact of knowing that there is a danger of contagion is already a great step towards liberation. But it is far from sufficient.

There are two possible victories to be won, one collective, the other individual. The first is, so to say, positive and active, the second negative and passive.

To win the positive victory it is necessary to declare an open

war of idea against idea, for the thoughts that are disinterested, lofty and noble to give battle to those that are selfish, base and vulgar. This is a real hand-to-hand fight, a struggle of each minute which demands considerable mental power and clarity. For to fight against thoughts it is first of all necessary to receive them, to admit them into oneself, deliberately allow oneself to be contaminated, absorb the sickness into oneself the better to destroy the deadly germ by healing oneself. It is a real war in which one imperils one's mental balance at every minute — and a war demands warriors. I shall not recommend this practice to anyone. It belongs by right to the initiates who have prepared themselves for it by long and rigorous discipline, and we shall leave it to them.

For our part, we shall be content to asepticise ourselves so as to be safe from all infection. We shall aspire therefore for the individual victory, and if we win it we shall find out that we have done more for the collectivity in this way than we suspected at first.

To win this victory we must build up in ourselves a mentality whose quality is the opposite of that of the surrounding medium. We must, little by little, day by day, fill our minds with the loftiest, purest, most disinterested thoughts we can conceive of, and through our deliberate care they must become sufficiently living that they awaken in us each time a temptation to think wrongly comes to us from outside and rise in their dazzling splendour to face the shadow which constantly lurks in wait ready to assail us.

Let us light within ourselves the fire of the ancient vestals, the fire symbolising divine intelligence, which it is our duty to manifest.

This work cannot be achieved in a day or a month or even a year. We must will, and will with perseverance. But if you could know the benefits one reaps from this, if you could feel that peace, that perfect serenity which gradually replaces in us the agitation, the anxiety and fear which spring from desire, you would unhesitatingly set to work.

Words of Long Ago

Moreover, the building up of a synthesis of pure and powerful thoughts does not lead solely to our own happiness. The clearer and higher the flame, the more light it sheds around it.

The star we allow to shine through us will foster the birth of similar stars by its example; fortunately, not only darkness and ignorance, but also knowledge and light can be contagious.

In addition, the care we take to remain conscious of our highest thoughts will compel us to control our thoughts constantly, and this control is gradually obtained by the methods I outlined to you last month — analysis, reflection, meditation, etc. Those who have achieved the control of their mental being can emanate at will a certain portion of their intellectual power, send it wherever they think proper, while remaining perfectly conscious of it.

These emanations, which are true messengers, will take your place wherever, physically, it is for any reason impossible for you to go yourself.

The advantages of this power will be easily apparent to you.

A thought which is skilfully directed and sustained can, by affinity, awaken to consciousness a glimmer of wisdom in many minds as yet wrapt in darkness, and thus set them on their way towards progressive evolution; it can serve as an intermediary for one who is sick by drawing towards him the vital forces needed to cure him; it can watch over a dear friend and protect him from many dangers, either by warning him through mental communication and through his intuition or by acting directly on the cause of peril.

Unfortunately, the inverse is also true, and bad thoughts as well are not wanting in power of action.

We cannot imagine all the harm we do by receiving and emanating bad thoughts, thoughts of hate, vengeance, jealousy, envy, malevolent thoughts, harsh judgments, sectarian valuations....

We all know how injurious it is to listen to and repeat slanderous gossip, but it is not enough to abstain from the words,

we must also abstain from the thoughts.²

Besides, a little reflection will suffice for this, for we shall very soon understand how rash our judgments and estimations always are.

With regard to acts, to actions committed, we shall be able to tell ourselves again and again that we do not know them exactly as they are, that in any case, the motives behind these acts, the many causes which have determined them, almost completely elude us.

With regard to defects, let us not forget that those which annoy us most in others are usually those which thrive most in ourselves and that, in any case, if we did not have any seeds of these defects within us, we would not be able to perceive them anywhere. Besides, what exactly is a defect? Most often it is the reverse side of a quality, an excess of virtue which has found no outlet, something which is not in its place.

As for what concerns us personally, we must be more prudent still and follow one strict rule very scrupulously: never judge anything without first having put ourselves in the place of the other, whoever he may be, with the greatest possible impersonality; try to feel what he has felt, see what he has seen, and if we succeed in being perfectly sincere, very often we shall see our estimation becoming less strict and more just.

Besides, as a general rule, in what light shall we look at what we want to judge? What shall our criterion be? Indeed, do

² *Passage added when presented to another group:*

For nothing is more pernicious to ourselves and to others than this uncharitable state of mind. How many times have we not felt a kind of insurmountable barrier rising up between ourselves and someone we know? And yet towards this person, our words and acts have always been perfectly courteous and occasionally even very friendly.

But where this person is concerned, within ourselves, we have given rein to this spirit of analysis and criticism which lightly dismisses good qualities and fastens only on shortcomings, no doubt without any spitefulness, but with a shade of irony or malice, a feeling of our own superiority—wretched as we are! And so, little by little, drop by drop, between this person and ourselves, a veritable river is formed which separates us more and more from each other, despite whatever physical efforts we may make to come closer together.

Words of Long Ago

we fancy that we possess the supreme wisdom and the perfect justice that we are able to say with certainty, "This is good, this is bad"? Let us never forget that our notions of good and evil are wholly relative and so ignorant that, in what concerns others, we often find fault with an act which is the expression of a wisdom far greater than our own.

True science does not judge; it investigates phenomena as precisely as it can in their manifold causes and numerous effects. It says, "This will determine that" — see therefore whether *that* conforms to what you wish before doing *this*. At all events, even if in what personally concerns us we can take as a criterion our greater or lesser likeness to our highest ideal in all its intensity and progressive splendour, we have no right to demand from others that they should realise our own ideal, unless we know that our ideal is superior to theirs, in which case we would have to be quite certain that our ideal conforms in every respect to the supreme ideal, the absolute ideal, to the universal plan in its innermost essence....

But before attaining to such transcendent heights, we can always keep in mind that the malevolent or uncharitable thoughts emanating from men are the chief causes of division among them; they make their union almost impossible even when they wish to realise it.

What we constantly endeavour to achieve in our physical actions is at the same time constantly hampered or even destroyed by our mental actions.

So let us watch over our thoughts, let us strive to create for ourselves an atmosphere of beautiful and noble thoughts and we shall have done much to hasten the advent of terrestrial harmony.

19 February 1912

*The Central Thought*¹

WE ARE meeting for the last time this year — at least physically, for I hope we shall always remain united in thought, at all events in the same desire for progress, for perfection.

This desire should always be the centre of our action, animating our will, for, whatever the goal we set ourselves, whatever the duty which devolves to us, whatever the work we have to achieve, in order to attain this goal, to fulfil this duty, to accomplish this work to the best of our ability, we must progress at each moment, we must use yesterday as the stepping-stone to tomorrow.

Life is in perpetual movement, in perpetual transformation. However great or learned or wise one may be, he who does not follow the great current of universal life in an ever ascending march, inevitably moves towards downfall, towards the dissolution of his conscious being.

This has been expressed very forcefully by Pythagoras, in the eloquent words recently pronounced here by Mr. Han Byner.

And these words led me to decide against summarising in this last meeting what has been the object of our study course.

We have attempted to give you some advice on how to develop, sharpen, widen, liberate and deepen your thought, for on the value of our thought depends the value of our being and our action.

This advice has often been repeated through the ages, at all times, in all countries, by the great Instructors.

Those who have seriously studied the methods of evolution laid down in all the great centres of initiation, in Chaldea, in

¹ Originally an introduction to the talk now known as *The Supreme Discovery* (see pp. 38-44)

Words of Long Ago

Tibet, in China, in Egypt, in India, in Cappadocia, will find them everywhere identical in substance behind their varied forms.

For all these methods of development can be epitomised in one sublime teaching, the very teaching that Pythagoras gave to his disciples and which Mr. Han Byner has told us about.

The Self of each individual and the great universal Self are one; we bear God within ourselves.

19 April 1912

Charity

IN ITS most general sense, charity may be defined as the act of giving to each one what he lacks.

That is to say, in the last analysis, to put each thing in its place, which would result in the establishment of the supreme justice upon earth.

Such is the theory, but in practice charity could be considered as the path men ought to follow in their groping advance towards justice.

For, in his present state of evolution, man is incapable not only of realising justice in his earthly abode, but also of conceiving it as it is in its absolute essence. Charity is the living acknowledgment of this inability.

Indeed, in our ignorance of true justice, the justice which is one with perfect harmony, perfect equilibrium and perfect order, our wisest course is to take the path of love, the path of charity which shuns all judgment.

This is what justifies the attitude of those who always set charity against justice. Justice is, in their eyes, rigorous, merciless, and charity must come to temper its excessive severity.

Certainly, they cannot speak thus of divine justice, but more rightly of human or rather of social justice, the egoistic justice which is instituted to defend a more or less extensive grouping of interests and is as much opposed to true justice as shadow is contrary to light.

When we speak of justice as it is rendered in our so-called civilised countries, we should call it not rigorous and merciless but blind and monstrous in its ignorant pretension.

So we can never make too many amends for its fatal effects, and there charity finds an opportunity to apply itself fruitfully.

But this is only one side of the question and before delving deeper into our subject, I would like to remind you that charity,

Words of Long Ago

like all other human activities, is exercised according to four different modes which must be simultaneous if its action is to be integral and truly effective. I mean that no charity is complete if it is not at the same time material, intellectual, spiritual or moral and, above all, loving, for the very essence of charity is love.

At present charity is considered almost exclusively from the external standpoint and the word is synonymous with the sharing of part of one's possessions with life's rejects. We shall see in a moment how mean this conception is even when confined to the purely material field.

The three other modes of action of charity are admirably summed up in this counsel given by the Buddha to his disciples:

“With your hearts overflowing with compassion, go forth into this world torn by pain, be instructors, and wherever the darkness of ignorance rules, there light a torch.”

To instruct those who know less, to give to those who do evil the strength to come out of their error, to console those who suffer, these are all occupations of charity rightly understood.

Thus charity, regarded from the individual point of view, consists, for each one, of giving to others all they need, in proportion to one's means.

This brings us to two observations.

The first is that one cannot give what one does not have at one's command.

Materially this is so evident that it is unnecessary to insist upon it. But intellectually, spiritually, the same rule holds true.

Indeed, how can one teach others what one does not know? How can one guide the weak on the path of wisdom if one does not tread the path oneself? How can one radiate love if one does not possess it within oneself?

And the supreme charity, which is integral self-giving to the great work of terrestrial regeneration, implies first of all that one can command what one wants to offer, that is to say, that one is master of oneself.

Only he who has perfect self-control can consecrate himself

in all sincerity to the great work. For he alone knows that no contrary will, no unexpected impulse can ever again come to impede his action, to check his effort by setting him at variance with himself.

In this fact we find the justification of the old proverb which says: "Charity begins at home."

This maxim seems to encourage every kind of egoism, and yet it is the expression of a great wisdom for one who understands it rightly.

It is because charitable people fail to conform to this principle that their efforts so often remain unfruitful, that their goodwill is so often warped in its results, and that, in the end, they are forced to renounce a charity which, because it has not been rightly exercised, is the cause of nothing but confusion, suffering and disillusionment.

There is evidently a wrong way of interpreting this maxim, which says, "First let us accumulate fortune, intelligence, health, love, energies of all kinds, then we shall distribute them."

For, from the material standpoint, when will the accumulation stop? One who acquires the habit of piling up never finds his pile big enough.

I have even been led to make an observation about this: that in most men generosity seems to exist in inverse proportion to their pecuniary resources.

From observing the way in which workmen, the needy and all the unfortunate act among themselves, I was forced to conclude that the poor are far more charitable, far more prepared to succour their fellow-sufferers than are those more favoured by fortune. There is not enough time to go into the details of all that I have seen, but I assure you that it is instructive. I can, in any case, assure you that if the rich, in proportion to what they have, gave as much as the poor, soon there would no longer be a single starving person in the world.

Thus gold seems to attract gold, and nothing would be more fatal than wanting to accumulate riches before distributing them.

Words of Long Ago

But also, nothing would be more fatal than a rash prodigality which, from lack of discernment, would squander a fortune without benefiting anyone.

Let us never confuse disinterestedness, which is one of the conditions of true charity, with a lack of concern that springs from idle thoughtlessness.

Let us learn therefore to make judicious use of what we may have or earn while giving the least possible play to our personality and, above all, let us not forget that charity should not be confined to material aid.

Nor in the field of forces is it possible to accumulate, for receptivity occurs in proportion to expenditure: the more one expends usefully, the more one makes oneself capable of receiving. Thus the intelligence one can acquire is proportionate to the intelligence one uses. We are formed to manifest a certain quantity of intellectual forces, but if we develop ourselves mentally, if we put our brains to work, if we meditate regularly and above all if we make others benefit by the fruit, however modest, of our efforts, we make ourselves capable of receiving a greater quantity of ever deeper and purer intellectual forces. And the same holds true for love and spirituality.

We are like channels: if we do not allow what they have received to pour out freely, not only do they become blocked and no longer receive anything, but what they contain will spoil. If, on the contrary, we allow all this flood of vital, intellectual and spiritual forces to flow abundantly, if by impersonalising ourselves we know how to connect our little individuality to the great universal current, what we give will be returned to us a hundredfold.

To know how not to cut ourselves off from the great universal current, to be a link in the chain which must not be broken, this is the true science, the very key of charity.

Unfortunately there exists a very widespread error which is a serious obstacle to the practical application of this knowledge.

This error lies in the belief that a thing in the universe may

be our own possession. Everything belongs to all, and to say or think, "This is mine", is to create a separation, a division which does not exist in reality.

Everything belongs to all, even the substance of which we are made, a whirl of atoms in perpetual movement which momentarily constitutes our organism without abiding in it and which, tomorrow, will form another.

It is true that some people command great material possessions. But in order to be in accord with the universal law, they should consider themselves as trustees, stewards of these possessions. They ought to know that these riches are entrusted to them so that they may administer them for the best interests of all.

We have come a long way from the narrow conception of charity restricted to the giving of a little of what we have in excess to the unfortunate ones that life brings in our way! And what we say of material riches must be said of spiritual wealth also.

Those who say, "This idea is mine", and who think they are very charitable in allowing others to profit from it, are senseless.

The world of ideas belongs to all; intellectual force is a universal force.

It is true that some people are more capable than others of entering into relation with this field of ideas and manifesting it through their conscious cerebrality. But this is nothing other than an additional responsibility for them: since they are in possession of this wealth, they are its stewards and must see that it is used for the good of the greatest number.

The same holds true for all the other universal forces. Only the concept of union, of the perfect identity of everything and everyone, can lead to true charity.

But to come back to practice, there is one more serious pitfall in the way of its complete and fruitful manifestation.

For most people, charity consists of giving anything to anyone without even knowing whether this gift corresponds to a need.

Words of Long Ago

Thus charity is made synonymous with sentimental weakness and irrational squandering.

Nothing is more contrary to the very essence of this virtue.

Indeed, to give someone a thing he has no need of is as great a lack of charity as to deny him what he needs.

And this applies to the things of the spirit as well as to those of the body.

By a faulty distribution of material possessions one can hasten the downfall of certain individuals by encouraging them to be lazy, instead of favouring their progress by inciting them to effort.

The same holds true for intelligence and love. To give someone a knowledge which is too strong for him, thoughts which he cannot assimilate, is to deprive him for long, if not for ever, of the possibility of thinking for himself.

In the same way, to impose on some people an affection, a love for which they feel no need, is to make them carry a burden which is often too heavy for their shoulders.

This error has two main causes to which all the others can be linked: ignorance and egoism.

In order to be sure that an act is beneficial one must know its immediate or distant consequences, and an act of charity is no exception to this law.

To want to do well is not enough, one must also know.

How much evil has been done in the world in the name of charity diverted from its true sense and completely warped in its results!

I could give you many examples of acts of charity which have led to the most disastrous results because they were performed without reflection, without discernment, without understanding, without insight.

Charity, like all things, must be the result in us of a conscious and reasoned will, for impulse is synonymous with error and above all with egoism.

Unfortunately it must be acknowledged that charity is very

seldom completely disinterested.

I do not mean charity which is performed for the purpose of acquiring merit in the eyes of a personal God or to win eternal bliss.

This utterly base form is the worst of all bargainings and to call it charity would be to tarnish this name.

But I mean charity which is performed because one finds pleasure in it and which is still subject to all kinds of likes or dislikes, attractions or repulsions.

That kind of charity is very rarely completely free from the desire to meet with gratitude, and such a desire always atrophies the impartial clear-sightedness which is necessary to any action if it is to have its full value.

There is a wisdom in charity as everywhere, and it is to reduce waste to the minimum.

Thus to be truly charitable one must be impersonal.

And once more we see that all the lines of human progress converge on the same necessity: self-mastery, dying to oneself in order to be born into the new and true life.

To the extent that we outgrow the habit of referring everything to ourselves, we can exercise a truly effective charity, a charity one with love.

Besides, there is a height where all virtues meet in communion: love, goodness, compassion, forbearance, charity are all one and the same in their essence.

From this point of view, charity could be considered as the tangible and practical outer action determined by the application of the virtues of love.

For there is a force which can be distributed to all, always, provided that it is given in its most impersonal form: this is love, love which contains within itself light and life, that is, all the possibilities of intelligence, health, blossoming.

Yes, there is a sublime charity, one which rises from a happy heart, from a serene soul.

One who has won inner peace is a herald of deliverance

Words of Long Ago

wherever he goes, a bearer of hope and joy. Is not this what poor and suffering humanity needs above all things?

Yes, there are certain men whose thoughts are all love, who radiate love, and the mere presence of these individuals is a charity more active, more real than any other.

Though they utter no word and make no gesture, yet the sick are relieved, the tormented are soothed, the ignorant are enlightened, the wicked are appeased, those who suffer are consoled and all undergo this deep transformation which will open new horizons to them, enable them to take a step forward which no doubt will be decisive, on the infinite path of progress.

These individuals who, out of love, give themselves to all, who become the servants of all, are the living symbols of the supreme Charity.

I invite all of you here, my brothers, who aspire to be charitable, to join your thought with mine in expressing this wish: that we may strive to follow their example a little more each day so that we may be like them, in the world, messengers of light and love.

20 May 1912

The Divinity Within

ALL IN us that is not wholly consecrated to the Divinity within is in the possession, by fragments, of the whole entirety of things that encompass us and act upon what we improperly call “ourselves”, whether through the intermediary of our senses or directly on the mind by suggestion.

The only way to become a conscious being, to be oneself, is to unite with the divine Self that is in all. For that, we must, by the aid of concentration, isolate ourselves from external influences.

When you are one with the Divinity within, you are one with all things in their depths. And it is through It and by It that you must enter into relation with them. You are then, but without attraction or repulsion, near to whatever is near to It and far from whatever is far.

Living among others you should always be a divine example, an occasion offered to them to understand and to enter on the path of the life divine. Nothing more: you should not even have the desire to make them progress; for that too would be something arbitrary.

Until you are definitively one with the Divinity within, the best way, in your relations with the outside, is to act according to the unanimous advice given by those who have themselves had the experience of this unity.

To be in a state of constant benevolence, with this as your rule, not to be troubled by anything and not to be the cause of trouble to others, not to inflict suffering upon them so far as possible.

8 June 1912

The Mother and Abdul Baha

I knew Abdul Baha very well, the successor of Baha Ullah, founder of the Bahai religion; Abdul Baha was his son. He was born in prison and lived in prison till he was forty, I believe. When he came out of prison his father was dead and he began to preach his father's religion....¹

*
* *

He was the son of the famous Baha Ullah who had been put into prison for spreading ideas that were more progressive and broad-minded than those of the Sufis, and was resented by orthodox Muslims. After his death, his son, the sole heir, became determined to preach his father's religious ideas, and for this purpose he travelled to many countries of the world. He had an excellent nature. He was as simple as his aspiration was great. I liked him very much....

His sincerity and his aspiration for the Divine were simple and very spontaneous. One day, when I went to visit him, he was to give a lecture to his disciples. But he was sick and could not get up. Perhaps the meeting would have to be postponed. When I came near to him, he said, "Go and take my place at today's lecture." I was startled, unprepared as I was to hear such a request. I said to him, "I am not a member of your sect and I know nothing about it, so how can I talk to them about anything?" But he insisted, saying, "It does not matter. Say anything at all, it will be quite all right. Go and talk.... Concentrate in the sitting-room and then speak." At last he persuaded me to do it....

Then one day he asked me to stay in Paris and take the responsibility for his disciples. But I told him that as I did not

¹ *Questions and Answers 1950-51* (14 April), pp. 316-17.

myself accept the beliefs of his sect, it was out of the question for me to do so....²

INTRODUCTION TO A TALK

All the prophets, all the instructors who have come to bring the divine word to men, have, on one point at least, given an identical teaching.

All of them have taught us that the greatest truths are sterile unless they are transformed through us into useful actions. All have proclaimed the necessity of living their revelation in daily life. All have declared that they show us the path but that we must tread it ourselves; no being, however great, can do our work in our stead.

Baha Ullah was no exception to this rule. I shall not quote the texts to you, you know them as well and better than I do. How many times Abdul Baha has said: "Do not talk, act; words are of no use without actions, we must be an example to the world."

It is indeed very necessary that each one of us should be an example to the world. For it is only by showing to men how an inner commerce with the eternal truths transforms disorder into harmony and suffering into peace, that we shall induce them to follow the way which will lead them towards liberation. But Abdul Baha is not content to give us this teaching, he is living it, and therein lies all his power of persuasion.

Indeed, who has seen Abdul Baha and not felt in his presence this perfect goodness, this sweet serenity, this peace emanating from his being?

And the revelations of Baha Ullah imparted through the mouth of his son are all the more comprehensible and convincing to us since he is living them within himself.

To some of you, perhaps, this reflection will occur: "If Abdul

² From an unpublished talk.

Words of Long Ago

Baha can realise this beauty, it is because he is the master, but for us...”

Certainly, our indolence could not formulate a better reason for refusing to make any effort, but this is merely a lazy excuse.

There is, without doubt, an almost ineradicable difference between individuals, the one arising from their special role, their place, their status in the infinite hierarchy of beings; but whatever this role or status may be, within it each one can develop his own qualities to perfection, each one can and must aspire to gain the perfect purity, the perfect sincerity, the deep harmony which bring us into accord with the laws of order in the universe.

I knew an old sage who used to compare men to minerals that were more or less crude, more or less rich, but all containing gold. Let this ore undergo the purifying flames of spiritualisation and at the bottom of the crucible will be found an ingot which is more or less heavy, but always of pure gold.

We must therefore seek to release from its matrix the pure gold that is within us.

How many methods have been recommended for this!

They are all excellent, but each one applies to a special category of mentality and character, and each individual must find the one that best suits his temperament.

That is why, unless I am mistaken, Miss Sanderson asks one person or another to set forth here his own special view of the question or else the method which he finds most effective.

I do not intend today to expound any one of these methods to you in its entirety.

I would like—since we are taught that our first duty is to act and, moreover, that our acts are for ourselves the most powerful agents of transformation—I would like only to draw your attention to two categories of action which, in my opinion, are not always accorded the full importance they have with regard to others and to ourselves.

They are purely mental actions, but nonetheless, very much

alive, very powerful and consequently very beneficial or very harmful according to the direction imparted to them.

The first is our faculty of mental formation, thought; the second is our activity in states of sleep, which is usually known as dream and is very intimately linked with the first, as you will see.³

The very ancient traditions, whether Chaldean or Hindu, have taught from all time that thoughts are formations: by his thought a human being has the power of giving birth to real, living and active entities.

And it should not be thought that this can be done only through some extraordinary and dangerous practice known as magic. Nothing of the kind.

Any thought that is at all strong and persistent, any desire that is at all intense — which is again a way of thinking — determine mechanically, so to say, in their own medium, a formation whose duration and power of action will depend on the force and intensity of the thought or desire which has given birth to it.

To make myself understood more clearly, I have brought you a few passages from an as yet unpublished philosophical volume.

“All that lives is substantial, but all that is substantial is living. Every state of substance is a world of living forces, of real forms.

“To restrict the real to the sole domain of the forms we perceive is to restrict the universal intelligence to its physical manifestation alone, all light to the one field of our vision.

“However, no space exists where there is no vibration of light, no depth exists where the essence of the intelligible does not assume appropriate forms.”

³ This introduction seems originally to have preceded the third talk on thought (pp. 83-92) and the talk on dreams (pp. 30-37).

Words of Long Ago

“So long as we imagine that the whole universal reality is confined to the one order of substance, to the one state of materiality perceived by our senses, we know nothing and can explain nothing.

“When science endeavoured to understand what light is, it had to break out of the too narrow space and too limited area of perceptible phenomena, and it postulated, under the name of ether, a subtle state of reality. But, in reaching this state, it has taken only its first steps on the path of infinite transcendence....

“Thus, we can now become aware that the realm of being which we know is merely the field of manifestation, of a more complete materialisation of its own distant and anterior modes, the last among the fields of life.”

“If we could perceive the living images which thoughts produce around us at each moment, if we could measure the force of their power of formation, we would understand what can be created by the concourse of our converging wills and the formidable concert of the collective ideas and beliefs of a people, a civilisation, a race.”

“Certainly, all ideas are not creative to the same degree. In fact, few minds are capable of thinking real thoughts; and most individual mental formations are no more than distortions, malformations of stereotypes formed by some anonymous thinker which have become common property. The forms they assume in the intellectual substance are usually crude and stupid; besides, they do not last long.

“But as soon as an idea becomes an idea-force, a true mental dynamism, it tends to produce and maintain its plastic representation in a more stable and precise form. And great thoughts, co-ordinated syntheses of intellectual force, are in actual fact, in the substance they have assumed, living creations and active entities.”

The Mother and Abdul Baha

(At this point, in this talk of 10 March, the Mother presented again some material already given in the third talk on thought, including the “description of the mental atmosphere of a city like Paris” (p. 83) — the “night” referred to in the sentence which follows.)

And yet we must kindle the stars that one by one will come to illumine this night. This is, from the mental point of view, what Abdul Baha expects from us all. This is the way to be intellectually an example to the world.

For such an action more than for any other, perhaps, the usefulness of meetings such as this one becomes clearly visible.

By uniting our thoughts for one or two hours around a very pure and lofty idea, in a common will for disinterested progress, we create a mental atmosphere that is ever more luminous and strong. But this is not enough; it would even be very little if, when leaving these meetings, we were to plunge back defenceless into this coarse and heavy atmosphere. For in the mental as in the physical domain we are in a state of perpetual interchange with the corresponding environment.⁴

10 March 1912

NOTES FOR A MEETING

What a true meeting should be.

Mr. Ber talked to us last Friday about mantras.

2 kinds of masters according to Ramakrishna:

The master who gives the mantra and who is thus an indirect means of spiritualisation.

The master who has had the deep experience of divine union and who by his presence alone transmits spirituality — Abdul Baha.

⁴ This talk continues with passages which have come already in *On Thought—III*, etc.

Words of Long Ago

What a single man can do by his spiritual power can be achieved by a group if it unites in a thought of goodwill:

Chaldean initiation:

“When you are twelve united in righteousness, you will manifest the Ineffable.”

Groups are subject to the same laws as individuals.

More favourable moments due to collective suggestions.

Renewals: the beginning of each new year, whatever date is chosen as a starting-point.

An opportunity is given to awaken in oneself the idea that all things can be new and the resolution to make them so.

Consequently, the usefulness of meeting at fixed times to make favourable resolutions together.

Reading.

3 January 1913

THE DEPARTURE OF ABDUL BAHA

Last Monday, Abdul Baha took leave of us; in a very few days he will have left Paris, and I know many hearts which will feel a great void and will grieve.

Yet only the body is leaving us, and what is the body if not precisely that in which men are most alike, be they great or small, wise or ignorant, terrestrial or divine? Yes, you may rest assured that only his body is leaving us; his thought will remain faithfully with us, and his unchanging affection will enfold us, and his spiritual influence will always be the same, absolutely the same. Whether materially he is near or far matters little, for the divine forces elude completely the laws of the material world: they are omnipresent, always at work to satisfy every receptivity, every sincere aspiration.

So although it may be pleasant for our outer being to see his physical appearance or hear his voice, to dwell in his presence, we must truly tell ourselves that, inasmuch as it seems

indispensable to us, this shows that we are still little conscious of the inner life, the true life.

Even if we do not attain to the marvellous depths of the divine life, of which only very rare individuals are constantly conscious, already in the domain of thought we escape the laws of time and space.

To think of someone is to be near him, and wherever two beings may find themselves, even if they are physically separated by thousands of kilometres, if they think of each other they are together in a very real way. If we are able to concentrate our thought sufficiently and to concentrate sufficiently in our thought, we can become integrally conscious of what we are thinking of, and if it is a man, sometimes see or hear him — in any case know his thought.

Thus separation no longer exists, it is an illusory appearance. And in France, in America, in Persia or in China, we are always near the one we love and think of.

But this fact is all the more real in a case such as ours, where we want to come into contact with an especially active and conscious thought, a thought which assumes and manifests an infinite love, a thought which enfolds the whole earth with a loving and fatherly solicitude that is only too glad to come to the help of those who entrust themselves to it.

Experience this mental communion and you will see that there is no room for sorrow.

Each morning when you get up, before you begin your day, with love and admiration and gratefulness hail this great family, these saviours of mankind who, ever the same, have come, come and will come until the end of time, as guides and instructors, as humble and marvellous servants of their brothers, in order to help them to scale the steep slope of perfection. Thus when you wake up, concentrate on them your thought full of trust and gratitude and you will soon experience the beneficial effects of this concentration. You will feel their presence responding to your call, you will be surrounded, imbued with their light and

Words of Long Ago

love. Then the daily effort to understand a little better, to love a little more, to serve more, will be more fruitful and easier at the same time. The help you give to others will become more effective and your heart will be filled with an unwavering joy.

9 June 1913

Part 4

*Prayers and meditations, some written between 1914 and 1916,
the rest undated but probably belonging to the pre-1920 period.*

Prayers and Meditations

INSO FAR as the activities of the physical organism are ego-centric, it is both legitimate and necessary to separate the consciousness from it and to regard the body as a servant to be directed, guided and made obedient. As the terrestrial being grows more receptive to the divine forces and manifests them in its illumined activities, one can identify oneself with it once more and cease to distinguish between the instrument and the Doer. But since, by the very necessity of preservation, these two modes of activity inevitably coexist, both these points of view, both these ways of feeling must also coexist.

24 July 1914

True impersonality of the nervous being does not consist in an entire and absolute surrender to the Divine Will. This submission is but a preparation. Perfect impersonality — whether in the *prana* or in the other worlds of being — lies in identification with the terrestrial *prana*, or rather with the divine bliss deep within all sensations as within all universal activities. The result is that instead of feeling the joy of a sensation, one *is* this very sensation in all those who enjoy it. Then the individual *prana* no longer exists; but there is instead a force, at once impersonal and conscious, which manifests in all the organs that are capable of perceiving it.

For example, there is a subtle joy, both sweet and profound, in the sensation one feels while walking alone or with a companion with whom one is in perfect harmony, through seldom trod or virgin tracts of countryside unspoiled by any human atmosphere, where Nature is tranquil, vast, pure like an aspiration, holy like a prayer; on mountains, in forests, along stray paths beside limpid streams, or on the shores of a boundless ocean. So long as the *prana* remains individual, this joy can

Words of Long Ago

only be experienced when certain outer conditions are fulfilled. On the other hand, when the *prana* is truly impersonalised, universalised, *one becomes this delightful bliss in all those who feel it*; one no longer needs, in order to enjoy it, to be surrounded by certain specific material conditions.

With regard to the nervous plane, one is then perfectly free from all circumstances. One has attained liberation.

30 July 1914

I listened to the voice of the waves and it told me of many marvels. It spoke to me of the joy of life and of the ecstasies of movement. O Sea, in a song without end and ever renewed, thou didst tell me again of the power of love which makes all things true. Contemplating the splendour of thy invincible action, I perceived the irresistible surge that carries the universe towards the Supreme Reality. The force that lifts thee and changes thy surface into mountains is like the force that raises the world out of its inertia and awakens in it the aspiration for the Divine.

Then as I watched thee in the silence, thou didst speak to me more deeply still, and thou didst tell me of the great mystery of eternal Love that loves itself in all forms and is self-revealed in all activities. Already in my being this ineffable Love lived self-aware, but at that hour its life took on an exceptional intensity, or perhaps the individual perception was exceptionally clear. O adorable Lord, Sovereign Master of the world, Thou who, being all, possessest and delightest in all, didst Thou in that moment of Thy eternity cast a closer glance towards us, that we were thus bathed in such a magnificence of love? Or was it that Thou didst wish, in the humble instrument of this ephemeral and limited being, to taste more strongly and fully, with more intensity and precision, Thy own delight of being and self-manifestation? Suddenly all was lit with the inexpressible beauty of Thy Truth, and in the mirror of the individual consciousness Thou didst reflect all the infinitely varied modes of self-expression of Thy

being of Love. Pain and enjoyment united and fused in an ecstasy which seemed as if it must consume the whole being in its blaze. Oh, how well it understood Thee, this portion of Thyself that has crystallised into what I call my being, how powerfully it loved Thee in those unforgettable moments! All barriers of thought and sensation had vanished, consumed by the ardour of Thy divine fire, and indeed it was Thou who at that moment didst delight in Thy eternal and infinite presence in all things. Thou wast all actions and all resistances, all sensations and all thoughts, the one who loves and the one who is loved, that which gives itself and that which receives, in an inexhaustible and ever-moving harmony.

I listened to the song of the waves, and it told me of such great marvels....

March or April 1915

To know how to renounce the satisfaction of the present moment for the sake of realising one's ideal is the great art of those who want to make their transient, total existence yield its utmost.

There are innumerable categories of "successful" people; these categories are determined by the greater or lesser breadth, nobility, complexity, purity and luminosity of their ideal. One may "succeed" as a rag-picker or "succeed" as master of the world or even as a perfect ascetic; in all three cases, although on very different levels, it is one's more or less integral and extensive self-mastery which makes the "success" possible.

On the other hand, there is only one way of being a "failure"; and that happens to the greatest, to the most sovereign intelligence, as well as to the smallest, the most limited, to all those who are unable to subordinate the sensation of the present moment to the ideal they wish to achieve, but without having the strength to take up the path — identical for all in nature if not in extent and complexity — that leads to this achievement.

Between the extreme of an individual who has fully and

Words of Long Ago

perfectly realised all he had conceived and that of one who has been incapable of realising anything at all, there is, of course, an almost unlimited range of intermediate cases; this range is remarkably complex, because not only is there a difference in the degree of realisation of the ideal, but there is also a difference between the varied qualities of the ideal itself. There are ambitions which pursue mere personal interests, material, sentimental or intellectual, others which have more general, more collective or higher aims, and yet others which are superhuman, so to say, and strive to scale the peaks that open on the splendours of eternal Truth, eternal Consciousness and eternal Peace. It is easy to understand that the power of one's effort and renunciation must be commensurate with the breadth and height of the goal one has chosen.

At any level, from the most modest to the most transcendent, one rarely finds a perfect balance between the sum of self-control, the power of sacrifice available to the individual who has chosen a goal, and the sum of renunciations of every kind and nature which the goal requires.

When the constitution of an individual permits this perfect balance, then his earthly existence yields its utmost possible result.

23 April 1915

At times Thou kindlest in the being an ardent brasier; at such moments, all seems possible to it — the most extreme and the most supreme realisations as well as the most obscure and modest.

When there is not this ardent brasier, the being is like a heap of ashes; and Thou lightest rarely the brasier. Is it to spare this frail instrument?

The mind puts questions; but the integral being is satisfied; it asks for nothing else than what Thou wilt.

But it knows itself to be poor and miserable, naked and worthless without Thy active Presence.

It is Thy Presence that always it calls and for that it waits.

9 December 1916

Silence comes and the flame of aspiration is lit, the body is suffused with warmth, and in this warmth there is a blissful impulse towards transformation; the song of divine harmony is heard, calm and smiling: it is a sweet symphony, almost imperceptible and yet full of power. Then silence returns, deeper and vaster, yes, vast unto infinity, and the being exists beyond all bounds of time or space.

O my sweet Lord, my beloved God, all my being cries out to Thee in an irresistible surge: "I love Thee! I love Thee! I love Thee!"... with a love no words can ever express. The whole being is aflame, fused in this intensity. Only my heart, so often disappointed, so cruelly deceived, murmurs timidly: "Wilt Thou not do as men have done? Wilt Thou not repulse this love as unworthy of Thee, or too heavy to bear?" O doubting heart! Dost thou not see that it is the adored One Himself who loves in thee and feeds this fire that will never die? No more timidity, no more vain reserve... the past fades away like a dream. All that remains is a marvellous Present made of sublime Eternity.... O my beloved God, Thou hast taken me into Thy arms that are so strong and so gentle, and nothing exists but Thy divine Ecstasy.

Art is the human language of the nervous plane, intended to express and communicate the Divine, who in the domain of sensation manifests as beauty.

The purpose of art is therefore to give those for whom it is meant a freer and more perfect communion with the Supreme

Words of Long Ago

Reality. The first contact with this Supreme Reality expresses itself in our consciousness by a flowering of the being in a plenitude of vast and peaceful delight. Each time that art can give the spectator this contact with the infinite, however fleetingly, it fulfils its aim; it has shown itself worthy of its mission.

Thus no art which has for many centuries moved and delighted a people can be dismissed, since it has at least partially fulfilled its mission — to be the powerful and more or less perfect utterance of that which is to be expressed.

What makes it difficult for the sensibility of a nation to enjoy the delight that another nation finds in one art or another is the habitual limitation of the nervous being which, even more than the mental being, is naturally exclusive in its ability to perceive the Divine and which, when it has entered into relation with Him through certain forms, feels an almost irresistible reluctance to recognise Him through other forms of sensation.

What is this “I” that speaks from time to time, perceiving its limitation in the very midst of the consciousness of the infinite? It is the point of concentration where the Will which is beyond becomes individually conscious so that it can manifest through the terrestrial instrument; in short, it is the individualised intermediary between the instrument and the thought of the worker, a kind of more or less skilled hand. The “I” knows itself to be completely independent of the present mode of manifestation — form, body, surroundings, education, sensory experiences; it is a constituent element of the All, an infinitesimal part of the universe; its duration as an “I” is identical to the duration of the universe and dependent on it. It knows that only That which is not an “I” can be free from this dependence, can be eternally. The “I” knows that it is perfectly surrendered to That which it cannot think, that it is moved by That, and therefore it does not say, “I want”, but “I have to want” or “I am made to

Prayers and Meditations

want”. And, surrendered to its Eternal Master, the Master of his temporary instrument, knowing that it will disappear at the same time as the work for which it was created, it accomplishes it joyfully, without impatience for its completion, nor any desire for its prolongation.

Part 5

Notes and Reflections

Found, with this title, among the Mother's manuscripts

On the Mysteries of the Ascent towards God

TO JUDGE the events of history, a certain distance is needed; similarly, if one knows how to rise high enough above material contingencies, one can see the terrestrial life as a whole. From that moment, it is easy to realise that all the efforts of mankind converge towards the same goal.

It is true that collectively or individually, men follow very different paths to reach it; some of these paths twist and turn so much that they seem at first sight to move away from the goal rather than to lead towards it; but all are going there, consciously or unconsciously, swiftly or more slowly.

What then is this goal?

It is one with the purpose of man's life and his mission in the universe.

The goal: "Call him what you will, for to the wise, he is the Possessor of all names."

The Tao of the Chinese — The Brahman of the Hindus —

The Law of the Buddhists — The Good of Hermes — That which cannot be named, according to the ancient Jewish tradition — The God of the Christians — The Allah of the Muslims — The Justice, the Truth of the materialists.

The purpose of man's life is to become conscious of That.

His mission is to manifest It.

All religions, all the teachings of all the sages are nothing other than methods to reach this goal.

They can be classified into three principal categories. First method — intellectual: The love of Truth, the search for the Absolute.

By discernment, study, reflection, analysis, control and concentration of the thought, one dispels the illusion of personality,

Words of Long Ago

a whirl of atoms in a single substance which is itself nothing but an appearance: a condensation of the ether.

When we say *myself* what do we speak of? The body? The sensations? The feelings? The thoughts? All this has no stability. The appearance of continuity comes from a rigorous determinism obtaining in each of these realms of the being; and into this determinism there enter as many external as internal agents. Where then is the self, that is to say, something permanent, constant, ever the same? In order to find it, to find this absolute, we must proceed from depth to depth, from relativity to relativity — for all that is in form is relative — until we reach That which is Unthinkable to our reason, Unutterable to our language, but knowable by identification — for we carry That in ourselves, it is the very centre and life of *our* being.

Second method — the love of God. It is the method of those who have a developed religious sense.

Aspiration towards the Divine Essence of all things that we have perceived in a moment of integral illumination.

Then self-consecration to this Divine Essence, to this Eternal Law, integral self-giving, at every moment, in all one's actions. Complete surrender: one is now only a docile instrument, a faithful servant before the Supreme Master. The Love is so complete that it causes a detachment from all that is not the Divine Absolute and perfect concentration on Him.

“Besides, it is not impossible to rise higher than that, for love itself is a veil between the lover and the Beloved.”

Identification.

Third method — the love of humanity.

As a consequence of a clear vision, an intense perception of the immense suffering of humanity, there arises the resolution to consecrate oneself entirely to making this suffering cease.

Self-oblivion in the giving of all one's thoughts, all one's energies, all one's activities to succour others, in however small a degree.

“With your hearts overflowing with compassion, go forth

On the Mysteries of the Ascent towards God

into this world torn by pain, be instructors, and wherever the darkness of ignorance rules, there light a torch.”

This consecration to humanity manifests in four domains. One can give to others in four ways:

Material gifts. Intellectual gifts: knowledge. Spiritual gifts: harmony, beauty, rhythm. The integral gift, which can be made only by those who have followed the three paths, who have synthesised within themselves all the methods of development, of becoming conscious of That which is Eternal: the gift of example. The example which is not self-conscious and which one gives because one *is*, because one lives in the Eternal Divine Consciousness.

Two Parallel Movements

THERE should be two parallel movements in the evolution of an individual; and it is because he generally neglects one or the other of these movements in order to concentrate on one alone, that his progress is so halting and so unbalanced.

One of these movements is to become conscious of all the constituent elements of the being, material and sensory as well as intellectual and spiritual; we must become acquainted with the mechanism of the life within us, with all its tendencies, qualities, faculties and varied activities, very impartially, that is, without any preconceived idea of good or evil, without any absolute or arbitrary judgment (for our judgments are inevitably lacking in clear-sightedness) about what should subsist and what should disappear, what should be encouraged and what should be suppressed. Our vision of what we are must be objective, without bias, if we want it to be sincere and integral: we are faced with a universe which we must explore down to its smallest details, know in its most obscure and infinitesimal elements, with a scientific attitude of perfect mental impersonality, that is, without any *a priori* judgments.

Whatever we may think, this work of observation, analysis and introspection is never completed. At all events, as long as we are on earth in a physical body, we should always study the immensely complex being that we are, so that no element may elude our knowledge and therefore our control: *for we can only master what we know and command what we have mastered.*

This brings us to the second movement which should exist parallel to and simultaneous with the first. It is the consecration, the constant and constantly repeated surrender of all the elements subject to our control to the Supreme and Divine Law.

Each element that has become conscious of itself, each ten-

Two Parallel Movements

dency, each faculty, must surrender to the Sovereign Guidance of the Eternal Essence of Being, with the simple trust of a child; She will order, classify and utilise all these elements in the right way; She and She alone can separate what can be used from what cannot, what must be encouraged from what must be eliminated; and, no doubt, as before Her all is of equal value, all can be used, since by Her all is transformed, illumined, transfigured: all that becomes conscious of Her and gives itself to Her becomes Herself and thus escapes all notions of good and evil, which are purely external and human.

One of these movements, one of these attitudes without the other is incomplete and one-sided. To consecrate our being in one block to the Supreme Essence is not enough: all the elements that we do not know and have not mastered elude this consecration and therefore follow their own law instead of conforming to the Eternal Law, and become the source of every disturbance, every unexpected revolt in one who had yet thought himself to be entirely a servant of The Law. But he was forgetful of all the unknown nooks in his being which also have a claim to life and activity and which are manifested in their turn, but in an activity that is disorderly and disharmonious relative to the being as a whole, since they elude the central will.

On the other hand, to become conscious of ourselves in our smallest details is vain and sterile, even dangerous, if it is not done for the sake of order, so that the Divine Essence can be made the Omnipotent ruler of all these elements, if we do not secure their unreserved surrender to Her supreme guidance, to The Sovereign Law.

Only in the balanced union of these two attitudes can one truly, integrally, call oneself a Servant of the Eternal.

Towards the Supreme Light

SOME people — nearly all — live in their sensations, to the extent of being conscious only of the present moment. They must be taught the consciousness of their whole life and shown the extent to which their feelings are transient and will be replaced, in the course of their existence, by innumerable contradictory sensations.

(The candle)

Those who have become conscious of their life in its entirety must be taught to identify their consciousness with that of the earth (to enter into a depth of their being which is one with the terrestrial destinies). What is the duration of one life compared with the duration of the earth?

(The gaslight)

Those who have become conscious of the terrestrial life must be taught to identify their consciousness with that of the universe, to find within themselves that which is one with the universe and will last as long as the universe. (What is the duration of the earth in comparison to that of the universe? One breath!)

(The electric light)

Those who have become conscious of the universal life, in all its forms, must be taught to identify their consciousness with That which is Eternal, with That which has never begun and will never end, with the Permanent, the Immutable, beyond Which there is nothing.

And for them will be kindled the undying Light.

(The Supreme Light)

Three Dreams

1

We were on the summit of a mountain, so high that the valleys were invisible. The sky was perfectly clear and colourless. The summit of the mountain was covered with rich pastures. In these pastures, four herds of cows were grazing, guarded by four cowherds. These herds were at an equal distance from one another, thus forming approximately the four corners of a square. Each guardian had his own very particular appearance and characteristics. "He" was seeking something that he wanted to express and make effective, and for this he lacked certain elements. These elements lay beyond the summit of the mountain and He was asking me if there was any way of going there to fetch them. The question was voiced aloud and all the cows of the herd that was nearest to us bounded towards Him, lowing with delight. The man who was leading them, tall, strong, stocky, clothed in animal skins, white-skinned and very hairy, with black, shaggy hair and a square face, went towards Him and said to Him in a loud voice, "I put myself entirely at your disposal, my cows want to serve you and so do I. I shall lead them to the place where the elements of knowledge you want to acquire are lying and we shall bring them to you."

While he was speaking, the herd which was on the right in the same line drew near, led by its guardian, who was interested and came to listen. He was tall, thin, sumptuously dressed, with smooth skin, an oval, elongated face and very black and silky hair falling to his shoulders. One part of his garment was red, but there were several other colours. He was friendly and well-disposed. But he did not offer his services.

2 August 1914

We were advancing along the broad white highway which led to our goal, when at a fork in the road we saw a great number of people massing and huddling together with expressions of terror. We wonder why as we proceed on our way, when we hear ourselves being called by a shepherd dressed in white, who tells us to join the people on the bank by the roadside. And in answer to our enquiry, he tells us that an enormous herd of cows and bulls has been kept prisoner until now, but that the time has come to let them loose, that the rope which is holding them back will be removed, and that they are going to charge and are likely to destroy everything in their path. I reply, "Indeed these creatures are full of vigour and sometimes even of apparently blind violence, but for people such as we two who are walking straight on our way, there is nothing to fear; bulls have never done us any harm." But the shepherd insists, saying that it is really something exceptional and unprecedented. So as not to vex him we stop and stand by the roadside in front of the crowding people. But there again he insists, saying, "Not there, not there, you will be trampled down, behind." And he makes us stand behind all the others, back from the side of the road.

At that moment, in the distance, I catch sight of the immense herd of cows and bulls; the rope that held them back is removed and they surge forward, charging straight in front of them; and if anyone had been in their path, they would certainly have trampled him down. When all have passed, the leader of the herd, who had been kept until last, is let loose. He is a splendid, enormous white bull. Instead of following the same path as the others, he turns to the right, in front of us, following the descending path. But after a moment he stops, looking for something, does not find it, retraces his steps, and finally stations himself just in front of me. Then I see that it is a triple bull, composed of three bulls closely bound together. One of the three (the middle one, I think) was a little less white than the

Three Dreams

two others. To my left there was a priest who, at the sight of this enormous creature charging upon us and halting just in front of me, is seized with a great fear. And in his fright he begins to move restlessly. Then I say to him, "Well then, what about your faith in God? If He has decided that you are to be trampled down by this bull, won't you find that His will is good?" Rather ashamed of himself, he wants to look brave, so he starts talking to the bull and giving him friendly pats on the muzzle. But the powerful creature was beginning to lose patience. And I was thinking, "With his fear, this fool will really end up by causing a disaster." "We had better go away," I said, turning towards "Him". And without any further care for the bull, we set out on our way once more. We have scarcely taken a few steps on the road when we see the bull quietly passing beside us, calm and strong. A little farther on, I see another bull coming in the opposite direction, all reddish-brown, with a wild and ferocious look, charging with its huge horns pointed forward. I look back towards "Him", walking a few steps behind me, and I say to him, "This one is the really dangerous creature, the one that is alone and going in the opposite direction to the others. This one has evil intentions. It cannot even see us because we are on the straight path and are protected. But I am much afraid for the others." Still a little farther on we hear a galloping sound behind us, as if the ferocious bull were coming back with others. I feel that it is time for us to reach the goal. At that moment the road seems to be closed; in front of us there is a door that I want to open, but my hand slips on the knob and I cannot turn it. And yet time is pressing. Then I distinctly hear the deep Voice, "Look." I look up, and right in front of us, beside the closed door, I see a wide-open door leading into a square room which is the goal. And the voice resumes, "Enter. That is where all the doors are to be found and you will be able to open them all." With a feeling of great peace and tranquil strength I woke up.

1914 (after August)

Lord, last night you gave me a dream.

This is what I remember of it:

At the top of a very high tower standing on a high mountain, in a room so vast that it seemed to be low, I was leaning against the far wall, and facing me was a window looking outside. On my left a raised throne with several steps, and on the throne sat the Lord of Nations. This I knew although I had not looked at him. To my right at the far end of the immense room, in a kind of alcove lit from above, sat a young woman — a nation. She was a small, dumpy child with very dark hair and a pale and mat complexion. She had put on a wedding-dress, with a crown of white flowers on her head (the dress was mostly white with some blue and a few touches of gold). I knew that I had helped this nation to dress in this way, and to climb the mountain and the tower to come up to the room. She had come to offer herself as a bride to the Lord of Nations, and for this purpose she was to undergo a series of ordeals that the Lord wanted to impose upon her in order to know whether she was worthy of him. These ordeals were the ordeals of Terror.

For the first ordeal he had a full glass as well as a decanter brought to her. And she was to drink the contents of both. To her they seemed to be blood — human blood newly shed. And He, from the height of his throne, was saying to her, “Drink this blood to show that you are not afraid.” The poor child was trembling with disgust and did not dare touch the ghastly beverage. But at that hour, Lord, You had given me the full consciousness and power of the Truth. From where I stood I could clearly see the transparent purity of the water which the glass and the decanter really contained. And while the child was still hesitating and the Lord was taunting her in a biting tone, “What! you are trembling already! This is yet only the first ordeal, the easiest of all, what will you do next?”...

Then, heedless of the consequences, I cried to the child *in*

a language that the Lord did not understand, “You can drink without fear, it is only water, pure water, I swear it.” And the child, trusting in my word that dispelled the suggestion, began to drink calmly....

But because of the force with which I had spoken, the Lord suspected something and turned towards me in fury, rebuking me for speaking when I should not. To which I replied — still heedless of the consequences which I knew to be inevitable — “What I say is not your concern since You cannot understand the language I have used!”...

Then the memorable thing happened....

The room suddenly grew as dark as night and in this night a still darker form appeared, a form I perceived distinctly although no one else could see it.

This form of darkness was like the shadow of the light of Truth within me. And this shadow was Terror.

Immediately the fight began. The being, whose hair was like furious serpents, moving with hideous contortions and terrible gnashing of teeth, rushed upon me. If with only one of her fingers she were to touch my breast at the place of the heart *the great calamity for the world* would occur, and this had to be avoided at all costs. It was a fearful battle. All the powers of Truth were concentrated in my consciousness; and nothing less was needed to fight against so formidable a foe as Terror!

Her endurance and strength in combat were remarkable. At last came the supreme moment of the fight. We were so close to each other that it seemed impossible that we should not touch, and her outstretched finger drew nearer, threatening my breast...

At that precise moment the Lord of Nations, who could see nothing of the tragic battle, stretched out his hand to take something from a small table at his side. This hand — unawares — passed between my opponent and myself. I was then able to take support from it and Terror, for this time definitely vanquished, sank to the ground like a dark dust without power or reality....

Then, recognising the one who sat on the throne, and doing

Words of Long Ago

homage to his power, I leant my head upon his shoulder and said to him joyfully, “Together, we have conquered Terror!”

Such was my dream — and with it You gave me the full understanding of it.

For all this I give thanks to You, as for a priceless gift.

31 January–1 February [1915?]

The War

1

I have visited trains, each one bringing between five and six hundred wounded from the front. It is a moving sight, not so much because of all that these unfortunate men are suffering, but above all because of the noble manner in which most of them bear their sufferings. Their soul shines through their eyes, the slightest contact with the deeper forces awakens it. And from the intensity, the fullness of the powers of true love which could, in their presence, be manifested in perfect silence, it was easy to realise the value of their receptivity.

Then the mentality which takes pleasure in making constructions for realisation begins to imagine all that could be accomplished with the help of this receptivity. And scenes, both vast and complex, of possible realisations follow one after another, streaming endlessly in the splendour of their light and love.

Besides, at present, the smallest incident, the slightest contact with the outside world serves as a pretext for innumerable constructions which to the mentality appear vast, luminous, full of an intense life and a great power for realisation. They are like so many outer frames or forms of manifestation offered for the approval and the choice of That which wants to manifest — but at the side of the daring constructor stands the loving and docile child who, in an ardent aspiration towards the Supreme Principle of Truth, softly murmurs: “Lord, I am ignorant of Thy Will in its entirety, I construct events which are commensurate with my paltry individual limitations and which probably fit very badly into the immensity of Thy plan. But Thou knowest that they are nothing but fleeting constructions which are dissolved as soon as they are created and which in no way mar the purity of the mental mirror ready to reflect at each moment the appropriate transcription of what Thou willest the integral instrument to

Words of Long Ago

execute.” And then the whole being, in a vast and luminous and objectless ecstasy, ceases to be “a being” and becomes the Boundless. And in the silence of contemplation the mentality knows that all these diverse constructions which present themselves to it are part of a whole which will be given to it to manifest progressively, perhaps through the medium of several bodily instruments. And the simultaneous vision of That which is and that which is becoming takes hold of this consciousness and does not leave it for many hours, hours ever more frequent and lasting.

12 May 1915

2

The entire nervous plane seems to have swept down upon earth; but in its form of power, of force, it is localised in the area of combat.

Elsewhere, behind the lines or in the neutral countries, this plane has embodied itself mainly in its form of weakness, nervous tension, feverishness, impatience, unruly imagination, frittering away all energies for action. All those who are not fighting feel bereft of the tremendous power which is driving — sometimes to the point of literally maddening them — those who are fighting and killing each other.

All those who go into the war zone — a clearly defined zone from the point of view of the active influences and atmosphere — are seized, carried away, impersonalised in a formidable current, as impetuous as a raging ocean. They are disindividualised, as it were, reduced to an elemental state, to the state of natural forces which, like the wind, the storm or the waters, accomplish their earthly work, moved by a Will of which they are unconscious. They are no longer men but masses that move and act; and even the innumerable instances which seem to spring from courage, from individual heroism, are yet akin to the heroism of bees or ants — almost mechanical gestures, instinctive gestures

— induced in an isolated element by the collective consciousness of the genius of the race.

Discarding all mental constructions, sensing them to be poor and strengthless compared to the realising, destructive power at their command, they will be invincible instruments of the transforming Will; and until they have gone to the very end of their task nothing can possibly be attempted for future reconstructions.

At present these forces, for the major part at least, are closely linked to the divine Consciousness which is guiding their surging flood, directing the flow of their seemingly untamed and untamable torrent—indeed, because it is not subject to any mental guidance, they obey its impulsion: will they know how, will they be able to obey to the very end? Will they not let themselves be carried away by their own movement? Will not Kali, the longer she dances, lose control over her dance?...

All depends on the clarity with which the divine Will can be manifested upon earth; if it has been able in time to prepare for itself instruments which are sufficiently receptive and pure, instruments which are consciously immersed in its Essence while maintaining an effective contact with the active nervous power, then this monstrous and sublime outpouring of unbridled energies will yield its utmost results for the transformation of earth and man.

Paris, 28 October 1915

Part 6

Essays, letters, etc. written in Japan between 1916 and 1920

Woman and the War

YOU HAVE asked me what I think of the feminist movement and what will be the consequences of the present war for it.

One of the first effects of the war has certainly been to give quite a new aspect to the question. The futility of the perpetual oppositions between men and women was at once made clearly apparent, and behind the conflict of the sexes, only relating to exterior facts, the gravity of the circumstances allowed the discovery of the always existent, if not always outwardly manifested fact, of the real collaboration, of the true union of these two complementary halves of humanity.

Many men were surprised to see how easily women could replace them in most of the posts they occupied before, and to their surprise was added something of regret not to have found sooner a real partner of their work and their struggles in her whom more often they had only considered as an object of pleasure and distraction, or at best as the guardian of their hearth and mother of their children. Certainly woman is that and to be it well requires exceptional qualities, but she is not only that, as the present circumstances have amply proved.

In going to tend the wounded in the most difficult material conditions, actually under the enemy's fire, the so-called weak sex has proved that its physical energy and power of endurance were equal to those of man. But where, above all, women have given proof of exceptional gifts is in their organising faculties. These faculties of administration were recognised in them long ago by the Brahmanic India of before the Mohammedan conquest. There is a popular adage there which says: "Property governed by woman means prosperous property." But in the Occident Semitic thought allied to Roman legislation has influenced

Words of Long Ago

customs too deeply for women to have the opportunity of showing their capacity for organisation.

It is true that in France one frequently sees the woman absolute mistress of the administration of her house even from the pecuniary point of view, and the proverbial riches of the French *petite bourgeoisie* proves that the system has a good side. It was rare however to see the feminine faculties utilised to direct undertakings of great importance, and until now the confidential posts of public administration had always been closed to them. The present war has shown that in refusing the co-operation of women the governments deprived themselves of precious help. I will cite you an event as example.

A few months after the outbreak of the war, when the Germans had almost entirely occupied the Belgian territory, the inhabitants of the invaded regions were in indescribable misery. Fortunately, thanks to the initiative of several rich American men and women, a Society was founded to supply the most urgent needs of the sorely tried populations. As the result of certain military operations a fairly large group of small villages were suddenly deprived of all food. Famine was imminent. The American Society sent a message to some similar English Societies asking that five vans of the most indispensable supplies should be dispatched immediately. These vans must reach their destination in three days. The men to whom this request was addressed replied that it was quite impossible to comply with it. Luckily a woman heard of the matter. It seemed terrible to her that in such tragic circumstances one could use the word "impossible". She belonged to a group of women who aided the wounded and sufferers of the war. Immediately they promised the American Society they would satisfy it and in three days the numerous obstacles were overcome though some of the difficulties, especially those concerning transport, seemed truly unsurmountable. A powerful organising mind, an ardent will, had done the miracle: the provisions arrived in time and the dreadful misery of famine was thus avoided.

This is not to say that only woman's exceptional qualities have been revealed by the present war. Her weaknesses, her faults, her pettiness have also been given the opportunity of display, and certainly if women wish to take the place they claim in the governing of nations they must progress much further in the mastery of self, the broadening of ideas and points of view, in intellectual suppleness and oblivion of their sentimental preferences in order to become worthy of the management of public affairs.

It is certain that purely masculine politics have given proof of incapacity; they have foundered too often in their search of strictly personal interest, and in their arbitrary and violent action. Doubtless women's politics would bring about a tendency to disinterestedness and more humanitarian solutions. But unfortunately, in their present state, women in general are creatures of passion and enthusiastic partisanship; they lack the reasoning calm that purely intellectual activity gives; the latter is undoubtedly dangerous because hard and cold and pitiless, nevertheless it is unquestionably useful to master the overflow of sentiment which cannot hold a predominant place in the ruling of collective interests.

These faults which would be serious if the activity of women had to replace that of men, could form, on the contrary, by a collaboration of the two sexes, an element of compensation for the opposite faults of men. That would be the best means of leading them gradually to mutual perfecting. To reduce the woman's part to solely interior and domestic occupations, and the man's part to exclusively exterior and social occupations, thus separating what should be united, would be to perpetuate the present sad state of things, from which both are equally suffering. It is in front of the highest duties and heaviest responsibilities that their respective qualities must unite in a close and confident solidarity.

Is it not time that this hostile attitude of the two sexes facing one another as irreconcilable adversaries should cease? A severe, a painful lesson is being given to the nations. On the ruins piled

Words of Long Ago

up now, new constructions more beautiful and more harmonious can be erected. It is no longer the moment for frail competitions and self-interested claims; all human beings, men or women, must associate in a common effort to become conscious of the highest ideal which asks to be realised and to work ardently for its realisation. The question to be solved, the real question is then not only that of a better utilisation of their outer activities, but above all that of an inner spiritual growth. Without inner progress there is no possible outer progress.

Thus the problem of feminism, as all the problems of the world, comes back to a spiritual problem. For the spiritual reality is at the basis of all others; the divine world, the Dhammata of Buddhism, is the eternal foundation on which are built all the other worlds. In regard to this Supreme Reality all are equal, men and women, in rights and in duties; the only distinction which can exist in this domain being based on the sincerity and ardour of aspiration, on the constancy of the will. And it is in the recognition of this fundamental spiritual equality that can be found the only serious and lasting solution for this problem of the relation of the sexes. It is in this light that it must be placed, it is at this height that must be sought the focus of action and new life, around which will be constructed the future temple of Humanity.

7 July 1916

Woman and Man

LET US first take for granted that pride and impudence are always ridiculous: only stupid and ignorant people are arrogant. As soon as a human being is sufficiently enlightened to have a contact, however slight, with the all-pervading mystery of the universe, he becomes necessarily humble.

Woman, by the very fact of her passivity, having more easily than man the intuition of the Supreme Power at work in the world, is more often, more naturally humble.

But to base the fact of this humility on need is erroneous. Woman needs man not more than man needs woman; or rather, more exactly, man and woman have an equal need of one another.

Even in the mere material domain, there are as many men who depend materially upon women as there are women who depend upon men. If humility were a result of that dependency, then, in the first case, the men ought to be humble and the women to have the authority.

Besides, to say that women should be humble because it is thus that they please men, is also erroneous. It would lead one to think that woman has been put on earth only for the purpose of giving pleasure to man — which is absurd.

All the universe has been created to express the Divine Power, and human beings, men or women, have for special mission to become conscious of and to manifest that Eternal Divine Essence. Such is their object and none other. And if they knew and remembered that more often, men and women would cease to think of petty quarrels about priority or authority; they would not see a greater mark of respect in the fact of being served than of serving, for all would consider themselves equally as servitors of the Divine, and would make it their honour to serve ever more and ever better.

Impressions of Japan

YOU ASK me for my impressions about Japan. To write on Japan is a difficult task; so many things have been already written, so many silly things also... but these more on the people than on their country. For the country is so wonderful, picturesque, many-sided, unexpected, charming, wild or sweet; it is in its appearance so much a synthesis of all the other countries of the world, from the tropical to the arctic, that no artistic eye can remain indifferent to it. I believe many excellent descriptions have been given of Japan; I shall not then attempt to add mine, which would certainly be far less interesting. But the people of Japan have, in general, been misunderstood and misinterpreted, and on that subject something worth saying remains to be said.

In most cases foreigners come in touch with that part of the Japanese people which has been spoiled by foreigners, — a Japan of money-makers and imitators of the West; obviously they have proved very clever imitators, and you can easily find here a great many of those things which make the West hateful. If we judge Japan by her statesmen, her politicians and her businessmen, we shall find her a country very much like one of the Powers of Europe, though she possesses the vitality and concentrated energies of a nation which has not yet reached its zenith.

That energy is one of the most interesting features of Japan. It is visible everywhere, in everyone; the old and the young, the workmen, the women, the children, the students, all, save perhaps the “new rich”, display in their daily life the most wonderful storage of concentrated energy. With their perfect love for nature and beauty, this accumulated strength is, perhaps, the most distinctive and widely spread characteristic of the Japanese. That is what you may observe as soon as you reach that land of

the Rising Sun where so many people and so many treasures are gathered in a narrow island.

But if you have — as we have had — the privilege of coming in contact with the true Japanese, those who kept untouched the righteousness and bravery of the ancient Samurai, then you can understand what in truth is Japan, you can seize the secret of her force. They know how to remain silent; and though they are possessed of the most acute sensitiveness, they are, among the people I have met, those who express it the least. A friend here can give his life with the greatest simplicity to save yours, though he never told you before he loved you in such a profound and unselfish way. Indeed he had not even told you that he had loved you at all. And if you were not able to read the heart behind the appearances, you would have seen only a very exquisite courtesy which leaves little room for the expression of spontaneous feelings. Nevertheless the feelings are there, all the stronger perhaps because of the lack of outward manifestation; and if an opportunity presents itself, through an act, very modest and veiled sometimes, you suddenly discover depths of affection.

This is specifically Japanese; among the nations of the world, the true Japanese — those who have not become westernised — are perhaps the least selfish. And this unselfishness is not the privilege of the well-educated, the learned or the religious people; in all social ranks you may find it. For here, with the exception of some popular and exceedingly pretty festivals, religion is not a rite or a cult, it is a daily life of abnegation, obedience, self-sacrifice.

The Japanese are taught from their infancy that life is duty and not pleasure. They accept that duty — so often hard and painful — with passive submission. They are not tormented by the idea of making themselves happy. It gives to the life of the whole country a very remarkable self-constraint, but no joyful and free expansion; it creates an atmosphere of tension and effort, of mental and nervous strain, not of spiritual peace like that which can be felt in India, for instance. Indeed, nothing in

Words of Long Ago

Japan can be compared to the pure divine atmosphere which pervades India and makes of her such a unique and precious country; not even in the temples and the sacred monasteries always so wonderfully situated, sometimes on the summit of a high mountain covered with huge cedar trees, difficult to reach, far from the world below.... Exterior calm, rest and silence are there, but not that blissful sense of the infinite which comes from a living nearness to the Unique. True, here all speaks to the eyes and mind of unity — unity of God with man, unity of man with Nature, unity of man with man. But this unity is very little felt and lived. Certainly the Japanese have a highly developed sense of generous hospitality, reciprocal help, mutual support; but in their feelings, their thoughts, their actions in general, they are among the most individualist, the most separatist people. For them the form is predominant, the form is attractive. It is suggestive too, it speaks of some deeper harmony or truth, of some law of nature or life. Each form, each act is symbolical, from the arrangement of the gardens and the houses to the famous tea ceremony. And sometimes in a very simple and usual thing you discover a symbol, deep, elaborated, willed, that most of the people know and understand; but it is an exterior and learnt knowledge — a tradition, it is not living truth coming from the depth of spiritual experience, enlightening heart and mind. Japan is essentially the country of sensations; she lives through her eyes. Beauty rules over her as an uncontested master; and all her atmosphere incites to mental and vital activity, study, observation, progress, effort, not to silent and blissful contemplation. But behind this activity stands a high aspiration which the future of her people will reveal.

9 July 1917

The Children of Japan

IN MY last letter¹ I spoke of the sense of duty which gave to the Japanese people a great self-constraint, but no joyful and free expansion. I must make an exception to this rule and this exception is in favour of the children.

We could quite well call Japan the paradise of children — in no other country have I seen them so free and so happy. After months of residence in Japan I have yet never seen a child beaten by a grown-up person. They are treated as if all the parents were conscious that the children are the promise and the glory of the future. And a wonderful thing is that, environed by so much attention, so much care, — indeed, such a devotion, they are the most reasonable, good and serious children I have ever met. When they are babies, tied up in an amusing fashion on their mothers' backs, with their wide open black eyes they seem to consider life with gravity and to have already opinions on the things they look at. You scarcely hear a child cry. When, for instance, he has hurt himself and the tears burst out of his eyes, the mother or the father has but to say a few words in a low voice, and the sorrow seems to be swept away. What are those magic words which enable children to be so reasonable? Very simple indeed: "Are you not a Samurai?" And this question is sufficient for the child to call to him all his energy and to overcome his weakness.

In the streets you see hundreds of children, in their charming bright "*kimono*",² playing freely, in spite of the "*kuruma*"³ and the bicycles, at the most inventive and picturesque games, pleased with little, singing and laughing.

When older, but still very young, you may see them in the

¹ "Impressions of Japan".

² Traditional wide-sleeved gown.

³ A word applied to many vehicles, here probably a carriage or a rickshaw.

Words of Long Ago

tram cars, dressed with foreign clothes, the student cap on the head, the knapsack on the back, proud of their importance, still prouder at the idea of all they are learning and will learn. For they love their studies and are the most earnest students. They never miss an opportunity of adding something to their growing knowledge; and when the work for the school leaves them some liberty they occupy it in reading books. The young Japanese seem to have a real passion for books. In Tokyo one of the main streets is nearly entirely occupied by secondhand book-sellers. From the beginning to the end of the year these shops are full of students, and it is not often novels they are seeking for!

They are, as a rule, very anxious to learn foreign languages and when they come to meet foreigners, though they are in general very timid, they make use of that acquaintance as much as they can to...⁴

A country where such are the children and so they are treated is a country still ascending the steps of progress and of mastery.

⁴ This sentence was left incomplete.

To the Women of Japan

TO SPEAK of children to the women of Japan is, I think, to speak to them of their dearest, their most sacred subject. Indeed, in no other country in the world have the children taken such an important, such a primordial place. They are, here, the centre of care and attention. On them are concentrated — and rightly — the hopes for the future. They are the living promise of growing prosperity for the country. Therefore, the most important work assigned to women in Japan is child-making. Maternity is considered as the principal role of woman. But this is true only so long as we understand what is meant by the word maternity. For to bring children into the world as rabbits do their young — instinctively, ignorantly, machine-like, that certainly cannot be called maternity! True maternity begins with the conscious creation of a being, with the willed shaping of a soul coming to develop and utilise a new body. The true domain of women is the spiritual. We forget it but too often.

To bear a child and construct his body almost subconsciously is not enough. The work really commences when, by the power of thought and will, we conceive and create a character capable of manifesting an ideal.

And do not say that we have no power for realising such a thing. Innumerable instances of this very effective power could be brought out as proofs.

First of all, the effect of physical environment was recognised and studied long ago. It is by surrounding women with forms of art and beauty that, little by little, the ancient Greeks created the exceptionally harmonious race that they were.

Individual instances of the same fact are numerous. It is not rare to see a woman who, while pregnant, had looked at constantly and admired a beautiful picture or statue, giving birth to a child after the perfect likeness of this picture or statue. I met

Words of Long Ago

several of these instances myself. Among them, I remember very clearly two little girls; they were twins and perfectly beautiful. But the most astonishing was how little like their parents they were. They reminded me of a very famous picture painted by the English artist Reynolds. One day I made this remark to the mother, who immediately exclaimed: "Indeed, is it not so? You will be interested to know that while I was expecting these children, I had, hanging above my bed, a very good reproduction of Reynolds' picture. Before going to sleep and as soon as I woke, my last and first glance was for that picture; and in my heart I hoped: may my children be like the faces in this picture. You see that I succeeded quite well!" In truth, she could be proud of her success, and her example is of great utility for other women.

But if we can obtain such results on the physical plane where the materials are the least plastic, how much more so on the psychological plane where the influence of thought and will is so powerful. Why accept the obscure bonds of heredity and atavism — which are nothing else than subconscious preferences for our own trend of character — when we can, by concentration and will, call into being a type constructed according to the highest ideal we are able to conceive? With this effort, maternity becomes truly precious and sacred; indeed with this, we enter the glorious work of the Spirit, and womanhood rises above animality and its ordinary instincts, towards real humanity and its powers.

In this effort, in this attempt, then, lies our true duty. And if this duty was always of the greatest importance, it certainly has taken a capital one in the present turn of the earth's evolution.

For we are living in an exceptional time at an exceptional turning point of the world's history. Never before, perhaps, did mankind pass through such a dark period of hatred, bloodshed and confusion. And, at the same time, never had such a strong, such an ardent hope awakened in the hearts of the people. Indeed, if we listen to our heart's voice, we immediately perceive that we are, more or less consciously, waiting for a new reign

of justice, of beauty, of harmonious good-will and fraternity. And this seems in complete contradiction with the actual state of the world. But we all know that never is the night so dark as before the dawn. May not this darkness, then, be the sign of an approaching dawn? And as never was night so complete, so terrifying, maybe never will dawn have been so bright, so pure, so illuminating as the coming one.... After the bad dreams of the night the world will awaken to a new consciousness.

The civilisation which is ending now in such a dramatic way was based on the power of mind, mind dealing with matter and life. What it has been to the world, we have not to discuss here. But a new reign is coming, that of the Spirit: after the human, the divine.

Yet, if we have been fortunate enough to live on earth at such a stupendous, a unique time as this one, is it sufficient to stand and watch the unfolding events? All those who feel that their heart extends further than the limits of their own person and family, that their thought embraces more than small personal interests and local conventions, all those, in short, who realise that they belong not to themselves, or to their family, or even to their country, but to God who manifests Himself in all countries, through mankind, these, indeed, know that they must rise and set to work for the sake of humanity, for the advent of the Dawn.

And in this momentous, endless, many-sided work, what can be the part of womanhood? It is true that, as soon as great events and works are in question, the custom is to relegate women to a corner with a smile of patronising contempt which means: this is not your business, poor, feeble, futile creatures.... And women, submissive, childlike, lazy perhaps, have accepted, at least in many countries, this deplorable state of things. I dare to say that they are wrong. In the life of the future, there shall be no more room for such division, such disequilibrium between the masculine and the feminine. The true relation of the two sexes is an equal footing of mutual help and close collaboration. And from now, we must reassume

Words of Long Ago

our veritable position, take again our due place and assert our real importance — that of spiritual former and educator. Indeed, some men, perhaps a little vainglorious of their so-called advantages, may despise the apparent weakness of women (although even this exterior weakness is not quite certain) but: “Do what he may, the superman will have to be born of woman all the same”, someone said very rightly.

The superman shall be born of woman, this is a big unquestionable truth; but it is not enough to be proud of this truth, we must clearly understand what it means, become aware of the responsibility it creates, and learn to face earnestly the task which is put before us. This task is precisely our most important share in the present world-wide work.

For that, we must first understand — at least in their broad lines — what are the means by which the present chaos and obscurity can be transformed into light and harmony.

Many means have been suggested: political, social, ethical, even religious.... Indeed, none of these seem sufficient to face with any reliable success the magnitude of the task to be done. Only a new spiritual influx, creating in man a new consciousness, can overcome the enormous mass of difficulties barring the way of the workers. A new spiritual light, a manifestation upon earth of some divine force unknown until now, a Thought of God, new for us, descending into this world and taking a new form here.

And here we come back to our starting point, to our duty of true maternity. For this form meant to manifest the spiritual force capable of transforming the earth's present conditions, this new form, who is to construct it if not the women?

Thus we see that at this critical period of the world's life it is no longer sufficient to give birth to a being in whom our highest personal ideal is manifested; we must strive to find out what is the future type, whose advent Nature is planning. It is no longer sufficient to form a man similar to the greatest men we have heard of or known, or even greater, more accomplished and gifted than they; we must strive to come in touch mentally,

by the constant aspiration of our thought and will, with the supreme possibility which, exceeding all human measures and features, will give birth to the superman.

Once again Nature feels one of her great impulses towards the creation of something utterly new, something unexpected. And it is to this impulse that we must answer and obey.

Let us try first to discover where this impulse of Nature will lead us. And the best way for that is to look back on the lessons given to us by the Past.

We see that each progress of Nature, each manifestation of a new capacity and principle upon earth is marked by the appearance of a new species. In the same way, the progressive forms of the life of races, of peoples, of individuals, follow each other through the human cycles, ceaselessly inspired, fecundated, renewed by the efforts of the guides of humanity. And all these forms aim at the same goal, the mysterious, the glorious goal of Nature.¹

It is to this call of Nature that we must answer, to this

¹ *It seems that the following paragraphs from an earlier draft were intended for insertion here:*

Which is this goal? Toward what unexpected realisation of the future does Nature aim? What does she seek since her dark origins?

Each form that she creates is a fresh affirmation of that which through her will be born, of that which it is her mission to manifest.

Each species preparing the others, making them possible, bears witness to her untiring perseverance, is a proof of her solemn vow; in each one is a little more matter transfigured, announcing future dawns of intelligence. Through innumerable cycles how many paths has she had to follow in order to reach at last the cave of the anthropoid, the primitive man?

It is before him that will open the royal avenue leading to the palace of spirit. But how many races, how many generations will pass on the earth without discovering it, how many wrong paths will Nature follow in the footsteps of man. For, believing himself the masterpiece of the universe, he knows not that he has a further stage to pass through.

Could the idea of man be conceived, before he existed, in the obscure brain of even the nearest of his ancestors? Can the idea of the superman, before he exists, penetrate into the brain of man?

And yet, in every child of man which comes into the world, in every growing intelligence, in every effort of the emerging generations, in every attempt of human genius, Nature seeks the way which, once again, will lead her further.

Words of Long Ago

magnificent, to this grandiose work that we must devote ourselves. Let us try to make as clear as we can the steps of our advance on this difficult and as yet unexplored path.

First of all we must be careful, in our attempt to conceive the future man or superman, not to adopt an actual type of man, perfecting or aggrandising him. To avoid as much as possible this mistake we should study the teachings of life's evolution.

We have already seen that the appearance of a new species always announces the manifestation on earth of a new principle, a new plane of consciousness, a new force or power. But, at the same time, while the new species acquires this formerly unmanifested power or consciousness, it may lose one or many of the

Fifteen hundred million men since perhaps fifteen hundred centuries wander without finding this way.

Among the multitude of the ways over which all the efforts of their progress are scattered, in this domain as in all the others, only one is good: it is the way of synthetic perfections. Where to discover it?

And who among men dares to venture elsewhere than on the easy and well-beaten tracks? Who, knowing that there is another path which goes further, accepts to lose all in order to find it perhaps, to lose all in walking alone, in thinking alone, always apart among the others, not even certain of attaining what he seeks.

Try not to discover this one among the men who excel and shine, for these excel and shine only in being, somewhat more perfectly, similar to their own kind.

Precious stones also excel and shine among all the other stones, but the most beautiful gem is outside the series of chemical combinations from whence comes forth life. In the same way, ascending the series of forms, the most beautiful tree of the forest is outside the lines of evolution which lead the biological process up to the animal, up to man.

And once again, among men, the most admired, the most famous, the most artistic, the most learned, the most religious, may well find himself far off the way leading from man to superman.

Each race, each civilisation, each human society, each religion, represents a new attempt of Nature, one more effort adding to the long series of those she multiplied during countless time.

Now, as among all the animal forms there was one from which man was to come forth, so also, among the social and religious species, must one be born from which some day will come forth the superman.

For it is this which Nature seeks in all her successive attempts, from the first germination of life until man, until the God who shall be born of him.

In the multitude of men she seeks the possibility of the superman; and in each one of them, she aims towards the realisation of the divine.

perfections which were the characteristics of the immediately preceding species. For instance, to speak only of the last step of Nature's development, what are the greatest differences between man and his immediate predecessor, the ape? In the monkey we see vitality and physical ability reaching the utmost perfection, a perfection that the new species had to abandon. For man, there has been no more of that marvellous climbing up trees, somersaults over abysses, jumps from summit to summit, but in exchange he acquired intelligence, the power of reasoning, combining, constructing. Indeed with man it is the life of mind, of intellect which appeared on earth. Man is essentially a mental being; and if his possibilities do not stop there, if he feels in himself other worlds, other faculties, other planes of consciousness beyond his mental life, they are only as promises for the future, in the same way as the mental possibilities are latent in the monkey.

It is true that some men, very few, have lived in that world beyond, which we may call the spiritual; some have been, indeed, the living incarnations of that world on earth, but they are the exceptions, the forerunners showing the way to the race, leading it towards its future realisation, not the average man. But that which was the privilege of a few beings scattered through time and space, shall become the central characteristic of the new type which is to appear.

At present, man governs his life through reason; all the activities of the mind are of common use for him; his means of knowledge are observation and deduction; it is by and through reasoning that he takes his decision and chooses his way — or believes he does — in life.

The new race shall be governed by intuition, that is to say, direct perception of the divine law within. Some human beings actually know and experience intuition — as, undoubtedly, certain big gorillas of the forests have glimpses of reasoning.

In mankind, the very few who have cultivated their inner

Words of Long Ago

self, who have concentrated their energies on the discovery of the true law of their being, possess more or less the faculty of intuition. When the mind is perfectly silent, pure like a well-polished mirror, immobile as a pond on a breezeless day, then, from above, as the light of the stars drops in the motionless waters, so the light of the supermind, of the Truth within, shines in the quieted mind and gives birth to intuition. Those who are accustomed to listen to this voice out of the Silence, take it more and more as the instigating motive of their actions; and where others, the average men, wander along the intricate paths of reasoning, they go straight their way, guided through the windings of life by intuition, this superior instinct, as by a strong and unfailing hand.

This faculty which is exceptional, almost abnormal now, will certainly be quite common and natural for the new race, the man of tomorrow. But probably the constant exercise of it will be detrimental to the reasoning faculties. As man possesses no more the extreme physical ability of the monkey, so also will the superman lose the extreme mental ability of man,² this ability to deceive himself and others.

Thus, man's road to supermanhood will be open when he declares boldly that all he has yet developed, including the intellect of which he is so rightly and yet so vainly proud, is now no longer sufficient for him, and that to uncase, discover, set free this greater power within, shall be henceforward his great preoccupation. Then will his philosophy, art, science, ethics, social existence, vital pursuits be no longer an exercise of mind and life for themselves, in a circle, but a means for the discovery of a greater Truth behind mind and life and the bringing of its power into our human existence. And this discovery is that of our real, because our highest self and nature.

² *Alternative ending (from earlier draft):* perhaps all of the power of reasoning; and, even, the organ itself may become useless, disappear little by little as the monkey's tail, which was of no use for man, disappeared from his physical body.

However, that self which we are not yet, but have to become, is not the strong vital Will hymned by Nietzsche, but a spiritual self and spiritual nature. For as soon as we speak of supermanhood we must be careful to avoid all confusion with the strong but so superficial and incomplete conception of Nietzsche's superman.

Indeed, since Nietzsche invented the word superman, when someone uses it to speak of the coming race, willingly or not, it evokes at the same time Nietzsche's conception. Certainly, his idea that to develop the superman out of our present very unsatisfactory manhood is our real business, is in itself an absolutely sound idea; certainly, his formula of our aim, "to become ourselves", implying, as it does, that man has not yet found all his true self, his true nature by which he can successfully and spontaneously live, could not be bettered; nevertheless, Nietzsche made the mistake we said we ought to avoid: his superman is but a man aggrandised, magnified, in whom Force has become super-dominant, crushing under its weight all the other attributes of man. Such cannot be our ideal. We see too well at present whither leads the exclusive worshipping of Force — to the crimes of the strong and the ruin of continents.

No, the way to supermanhood lies in the unfolding of the ever-perfect Spirit. All would change, all would become easy if man could once consent to be spiritualised. The higher perfection of the spiritual life will come by a spontaneous obedience of spiritualised man to the truth of his own realised being, when he has become himself, found his own real nature; but this spontaneity will not be instinctive and subconscious as in the animal, but intuitive and fully, integrally conscient.

Therefore, the individuals who will most help the future of humanity in the new age, will be those who will recognise a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore the great need of the human being, an evolution or conversion of the present type of humanity into a spiritualised humanity, even as the animal man has been largely converted into a highly mentalised humanity.

Words of Long Ago

They will be comparatively indifferent to particular belief and form of religion, and leave men to resort to the beliefs and forms to which they are naturally drawn. They will only hold as essential the faith in the spiritual conversion. They will especially not make the mistake of thinking that this change can be effected by machinery and outward institutions; they will know and never forget that it has to be lived out by each man inwardly or it can never be made a reality.

And among these individuals, woman must be the first to realise this great change, as it is her special task to give birth in this world to the first specimens of the new race. And to be able to do this she must, more or less, conceive what will be the practical results of this spiritual conversion. For if it cannot be effected simply by exterior transformations, it can neither be realised without bringing forth such transformations.

These will certainly not be less in the moral and social domains than in the intellectual.

As religious beliefs and cults will become secondary, so also the ethical restrictions or prescriptions, rules of conduct or conventions will lose their importance.³

Actually, in human life, the whole moral problem is concentrated in the conflict between the vital will with its impulses

³ *This paragraph and the two which precede it replace the following passage of an earlier draft:*

But among these individuals woman, as we have already said, will have one special task to accomplish, that of giving birth in this world to the first specimens of the new race. And to be able to do this we must, more or less, conceive first in our thought the ideal of what the superman can be.

Of course, nothing is more difficult than to draw a picture of what will be the new race; it is an almost unrealisable attempt, and we shall certainly not try to enter into details; for we cannot ask of our mind to grasp with any certainty or accuracy this creation of the supermind, of the spirit.

But as we have already seen that the replacing of mental reason by intuitive knowledge will be one of the characteristic features of the future being, in the same way, morally and socially what can be the standard of the new race's life?

From the ethical point of view, for the individual of the new race there will certainly be no more restrictions or prescriptions, rules of conduct or conventions.

and the mental power with its decrees. When the vital will is submitted to the mental power, then the life of the individual or of the society becomes moral. But it is only when both, vital will and mental power, are equally submissive to something higher, to the supermind, that human life is exceeded, that true spiritual life begins, the life of the superman; for his law will come from within, it will be the divine law shining in the centre of each being and governing life from therein, the divine law multiple in its manifestation but one in its origin. And because of its unity this law is the law of supreme order and harmony.

Thus the individual, no more guided by egoistical motives, laws or customs, shall abandon all selfish aims. His rule will be perfect disinterestedness. To act in view of a personal profit, either in this world or in another beyond, will become an unthinkable impossibility. For each act will be done in complete, simple, joyful obedience to the divine law which inspires it, without any seeking for reward or results, as the supreme reward will be in the very delight of acting under such inspiration, of being identified in conscience and will with the divine principle within oneself.

And in this identification the superman will find also his social standard. For in discovering the divine law in himself he will recognise the same divine law in every being, and by being identified with it in himself he will be identified with it in all, thus becoming aware of the unity of all, not only in essence and substance but also in the most exterior planes of life and form. He will not be a mind, a life or a body, but the informing and sustaining Soul or Self, silent, peaceful, eternal, that possesses them; and this Soul or Self he will find everywhere sustaining and informing and possessing all lives and minds and bodies. He will be conscious of this Self as the divine creator and doer of all works, one in all existences; for the many souls of the universal manifestation are only faces of the one Divine. He will perceive each being to be the universal Divinity presenting to him many faces; he will merge himself in That and perceive his own mind,

Words of Long Ago

life and body as only one presentation of the Self, and all whom we, at present, conceive of as others will be to his consciousness his own self in other minds, lives and bodies. He will be able to feel his body one with all bodies, as he will be aware constantly of the unity of all matter; he will unite himself in mind and heart with all existences; in short, he will see and feel his own person in all others and all others in himself, realising thus true solidarity in the perfection of unity.

But we must limit to these indispensable hints our description of the superman, and push no further our attempt to picture him, as we are convinced that any endeavour to be more precise would prove not only vain but useless. For it is not a number of imaginings, more or less exact, which can help us in the formation of the future type. It is by holding firm in our heart and mind the dynamism, the irresistible impetus given by a sincere and ardent aspiration, by maintaining in ourselves a certain state of enlightened receptivity towards the supreme Idea of the new race which wills to be manifested on earth, that we can take a decisive step in the formation of the sons of the future, and make ourselves fit to serve as intermediaries for the creation of those who shall save Humanity.⁴

⁴ *Alternate ending (from an earlier draft):* of the saviours of the world.

The earlier draft closes with the following additional paragraph: For, in truth, saviours they will be, as each being of this new type will not live either for himself or for State or society, for the individual ego or the collective ego, but for something much greater, for God in himself and for God in the world.

Remembrances

WE ARE so fond of remembrances because they already belong to the Universal; they bear in themselves something of the sap of Infinitude.

That which in the daily events has been perceived by the exterior sensitiveness, egoistical and limited, — the sensitiveness which suffers and rejoices, — vanishes rapidly as a cloud of illusions. But behind that ignorant perception, — often veiled by it, — lies the other, the perception of the real Soul which communes, through all things, with the Universal Soul and enjoys in all Its perfect bliss.

These perceptions are kept in the depths of our being as remembrances, and when one of them emerges to the memory, it comes back dressed with the golden garb of Divine Felicity.

What we at first called, in our ignorant perception, suffering and pain, reappears embellished, transformed, glorified, adorned with the same dress of magnificence as that which we had called pleasure and happiness. Indeed, sometimes the splendour of the former memories is even more intense and vast than that of the latter, the joy they give us much more profound and pure.

So, little by little, we learn to distinguish between the Reality of things and the false interpretation of our blind senses.

That is why remembrances are such precious teachers; that is why we are so fond of remembrances: by them we come in touch with Eternity.

Myself and My Creed

IBELONG to no nation, no civilisation, no society, no race,
but to the Divine.

I obey no master, no ruler, no law, no social convention,
but the Divine.

To Him I have surrendered all, will, life and self; for Him I
am ready to give all my blood, drop by drop, if such is His Will,
with complete joy; and nothing in His service can be sacrifice,
for all is perfect delight.

Japan, February 1920

Part 7

Tales of all Times

These stories were written to help children to discover themselves and follow a path of right and beauty.

*The Mother
February 1950*

One

Self-Control

A WILD horse can be tamed but one never puts a bridle on a tiger. Why is that? Because in the tiger there is a wicked, cruel and incorrigible force, so that we cannot expect anything good from him and have to destroy him to prevent him from doing harm.

But the wild horse, on the other hand, however unmanageable and skittish he may be to begin with, can be controlled with a little effort and patience. In time he learns to obey and even to love us, and in the end he will of his own accord offer his mouth to the bit that is given to him.

In men too there are rebellious and unmanageable desires and impulses, but these things are rarely uncontrollable like the tiger. They are more often like the wild horse: to be broken in they need a bridle; and the best bridle is the one you put on them yourself, the one called self-control.

*
* *

Hussein was the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed. His home was beautiful and his purse well filled. Whoever offended him offended a rich man, and heavy is the anger of the rich.

One day a slave carrying a bowl of boiling hot water was passing by Hussein as he dined. By misfortune a little water fell upon the grandson of the Prophet who let out a cry of rage.

Falling to his knees, the slave had the presence of mind to recall an appropriate verse of the Koran:

“Paradise is for those who bridle their anger,” he said.

“I am not angry,” broke in Hussein, touched by these words.

“... and for those who forgive men,” continued the slave.

Words of Long Ago

“I forgive you,” said Hussein.

“... for Allah loves the merciful,” the servant added.

In the course of this exchange, all Hussein’s anger had vanished. Now wholly at peace with himself he made the slave rise and said:

“From now on you are free. Here, take these four hundred pieces of silver.”

In this way Hussein learnt how to bridle his temper which was as generous as it was hasty. Since his noble character was neither wicked nor cruel, it was worthy of being controlled.

*
* *

So if your parents or your teacher sometimes urge you to control your nature, it is not because they think that your faults, whether great or small, are incorrigible; but, on the contrary, it is because they know that your quick and fiery spirit is like a young thoroughbred which must be held in check.

If you were offered the choice of living in a sordid hut or in a palace, which would you choose? The palace, most likely.

We are told that when Lord Mohammed visited Paradise, he saw great palaces built on a height overlooking the entire countryside.

“O Gabriel,” said Mohammed to the angel who was showing him all these things, “for whom are these palaces?” The angel replied:

“For those who control their anger and know how to forgive offences.”

Well, a mind at peace and free from rancour is indeed like a palace, but not so a vindictive and turbulent mind. Our thought is a dwelling-place that we can, if we choose, make clean, sweet and serene, full of harmonious notes; but we can also make it into a dark and dreadful lair filled with mournful sounds and discordant cries.

*
* *

In a town in the North of France I once knew a boy who was frank by nature but impetuous and always liable to lose his temper. I said to him one day:

“Which do you think is more difficult for a strong boy like you, to give blow for blow and to let fly your fist in the face of a friend who insults you or at that moment to keep your fist in your pocket?”

“To keep it in my pocket,” he replied.

“And which do you think is more worthy of a brave boy like you, to do the easier or the more difficult thing?”

“The more difficult thing,” he said after a moment’s hesitation.

“Well then, try to do it the next time you get an opportunity.”

Some time later, the young boy came to tell me, not without legitimate pride, that he had been able to do “the more difficult thing”. He said:

“One of my work-mates, who is known for his bad temper, struck me in a moment of anger. Since he knows that normally I am not one to forgive and that I have a strong arm, he was preparing to defend himself when I remembered what you had told me. It was harder for me than I thought, but I put my fist in my pocket. And as soon as I did that, I felt no more anger in me, I only felt sorry for my friend. So I held out my hand to him. That surprised him so much that he stood looking at me for a moment, open-mouthed, without speaking. Then he seized my hand, shook it vigorously and said with emotion: “Now you can do what you like with me, I am your friend for ever.”

This boy had controlled his anger as Caliph Hussein had done.

But there are many other things that also need to be bridled.

*
* *

Words of Long Ago

The Arabian poet, Al Kosai, lived in the desert. One day he came across a fine Naba tree and from its branches he made a bow and some arrows.

At nightfall he set out to hunt wild asses. Soon he heard the hoof-beats of a moving herd. So he shot his first arrow. But he had bent the bow with such strength that the arrow, passing right through the body of one of the animals, dashed against a nearby rock. When he heard the sound of wood on stone Al Kosai thought he had missed his mark. So then he shot his second arrow and once more the arrow passed through an ass and struck the rock. Again Al Kosai thought he had missed his mark. In the same way he shot a third arrow, and a fourth, and a fifth, and each time he heard the same sound. When it happened for the fifth time, he broke his bow in rage.

At dawn he saw five asses in front of the rock.

If he had been more patient and waited until daybreak, he would have kept his peace of mind and his bow as well.

*
* *

It should not be thought, however, that we have a high regard for a training which weakens the character by depriving it of all its drive and vigour. When we put a bridle on a wild horse, we do not want the bit to tear his mouth and break his teeth. And if we want him to do his work well, we must tighten the reins to guide him, but we must not pull on them so hard that he can no longer move forward.

Unfortunately there are only too many weak characters who can, like sheep, be driven by a mere bark.

There are slavish and insensitive natures, lacking in spirit and more forbearing than they should be.

Abu Otman al-Hiri was known for his excessive patience. One day he was invited to a feast. When he arrived, the host told him: "You must excuse me, I cannot receive you. So please go back home, and may Allah have mercy on you."

Abu Otman went back home. No sooner was he there than his friend appeared and invited him once more.

Abu Otman followed his friend as far as his doorstep, but there the friend stopped and again asked to be excused. Abu Otman went away without a murmur.

A third time and a fourth the same scene was repeated, but in the end his friend received him and said to him before the whole company:

“Abu Otman, I behaved in this way in order to test your good temper. I admire your patience and forbearance.”

“Do not praise me,” replied Abu Otman, “for dogs practise the same virtue: they come when they are called and go when they are sent away.”

Abu Otman was a man and not a dog. And it could do no one any good that he should thus, of his own accord, without dignity or good cause, submit to the mockery of his friends.

Did then this man who was so meek have nothing in him to control? Oh, yes he did! It was the most difficult thing of all to control — the weakness of his character. And it was because he did not know how to control himself that everyone controlled him as they pleased.

*
* *

A young Brahmacharin was clever and knew it. He wished to add to his talents more and more so that everyone would admire him. So he travelled from land to land.

With an arrow-maker he learned to make arrows.

Further on he learnt how to build and sail ships.

In another place he learnt how to build houses.

And in other places he acquired various other skills.

In this way he visited sixteen different countries. Then he returned home and proudly declared, “What man on earth is as skilful as I?” The Lord Buddha saw him and wanted to teach him a nobler art than any he had learnt before. Assuming the

Words of Long Ago

appearance of an old Shramana he presented himself before the young man with a begging bowl in his hand.

“Who are you?” asked the Brahmacharin.

“I am a man who is able to control his own body.”

“What do you mean?”

“The archer can aim his arrows,” the Buddha replied. “The pilot guides the ship, the architect supervises the construction of buildings, but the wise man controls himself.”

“In what way?”

“If he is praised his mind remains unmoved, if he is blamed his mind remains equally unmoved. He loves to follow the Right Law and he lives in peace.”

Children of goodwill, you too should learn to control yourselves, and if a tough bridle is needed to control your nature, do not complain.

A spirited young horse which will gradually become well-behaved is of much more value than a placid wooden horse which will always remain placid whatever you may do, and on which you put a bridle only for the fun of it.

Two

Courage

YOU FALL into the water. You are not daunted by the great watery mass. You make good use of your arms and legs, grateful to the teacher who taught you how to swim. You grapple with the waves and you escape. You have been brave.

You are asleep. "Fire!" The cry of alarm has awakened you. You leap from your bed and see the red glare of the blaze. You are not stricken with mortal fear. You run through the smoke, the sparks, the flames, to safety. This is courage.

Some time ago I visited an infant school in England. The little school-children were between three and seven years old. There were both boys and girls, who were busy knitting, drawing, listening to stories, singing.

The teacher told me, "We are going to try the fire-alarm. Of course there is no fire, but they have been taught to get up and go out promptly at the alarm-signal."

He blew his whistle. Instantly the children left their books, pencils and knitting-needles, and stood up. On a second signal they filed out into the open air. In a few moments the classroom was empty. These little children had learned to face the danger of fire and to be brave.

For whose sake did you swim? For your own.

For whose sake did you run through the flames? For your own.

For whose sake would the children resist the fear of fire? For their own.

The courage shown in each case was for the sake of self. Was this wrong? Certainly not. It is right to take care of your life and to defend it bravely. But there is a greater courage, the

Words of Long Ago

courage which is shown for the sake of others.

*
* *

Let me tell you the story of Madhava as it was recorded by Bhavabhuti.

He is kneeling outside a temple and hears a cry of distress.

He finds a way to enter and looks into the sanctuary of the goddess Chamunda.

A victim is about to be slain in honour of this terrible goddess. It is poor Malati. The girl has been carried away in her sleep. She is all alone with the priest and priestess, and the priest raises his knife just as Malati is thinking of Madhava whom she loves:

*O Madhava! Lord of my heart,
Oh, may I after death live in thy memory.
They do not die whom love embalms in long and fond
remembrance.*

With a shout, brave Madhava leaps into the chamber of sacrifice and engages the priest in mortal combat. Malati is saved.

For whom did Madhava show courage? Was he fighting for himself? Yes — but that was not the only reason for his courage. He was fighting also for the sake of another. He had heard a cry of distress and it had touched the brave heart in his breast.

*
* *

If you give it some thought, you will recall having seen similar deeds. You have surely seen a man, woman or child helped by another human being who came running in response to the cry of alarm.

You must also have read in the newspapers or in history about similar acts of bravery. You have heard about firemen who

rescue people from blazing houses; of miners who go down into deep shafts to bring out their companions imperilled by flood, fire or poisonous gas; of men who venture into houses shaken by earthquake and who in spite of the danger from crumbling walls, pick up and carry out the helpless people who would otherwise die beneath the ruins; and of citizens who for the sake of their town or their country confront the enemy and undergo hunger, thirst, wounds or death.

So we have seen what is courage to help oneself and what is courage to help others.

*
* *

I shall tell you the story of Vibhishan the hero. He braved a danger that was greater than the danger of death: he braved the fury of a king and gave him the wise advice that others dared not voice.

The demon-king of Lanka was Ravana of the Ten Heads.

Ravana had stolen lady Sita away from her husband and carried her off in his chariot to his palace on the island of Lanka.

Sumptuous was the palace and delightful the garden in which he imprisoned the princess Sita. Yet she was unhappy and every day she would shed tears, not knowing whether she would ever see her Lord Rama again.

Glorious Rama learnt from Hanuman the monkey-king where his wife Sita was held captive. He set out with noble Lakshman, his brother, and a great army of heroes to the rescue of the prisoner.

When the demon Ravana learnt of the arrival of Rama, he trembled with fear.

The advice he received was of two kinds. A crowd of courtiers thronged around his throne saying:

“All is well; have no fear, O Ravana. Gods and demons you have conquered: you will have no difficulty in conquering Rama and his companions, the monkeys of Hanuman.”

Words of Long Ago

When these noisy counsellors had left the king, his brother Vibhishan entered, knelt and kissed his feet. Then he rose and sat at the right hand of the throne.

“O my brother,” he said, “if you wish to live happily and keep the throne of this beautiful island of Lanka, give back the lovely Sita, for she is the wife of another. Go to Rama and ask his forgiveness, and he will not turn away his face. Be not arrogant and foolhardy.”

A wise man, Malyavan, heard these words and was glad. He exclaimed to the king of demons:

“Take your brother’s words to heart, for he has spoken the truth.”

“Both of you have evil designs,” replied the king, “for you take the side of my foes.”

And the eyes of his ten heads flashed with such fury that Malyavan fled from the room in terror. But Vibhishan, in the bravery of his soul, remained.

“Sire,” he said, “in the heart of each man there is both wisdom and foolishness. If wisdom dwells in his breast, life goes well with him; if it is foolishness, all goes ill. I fear that you harbour foolishness in your breast, O my brother, for you give ear to those who give bad advice. They are not your true friends.”

He fell silent and kissed the feet of the king.

“Wretch!” cried Ravana. “You too are one of my enemies. Speak no more senseless words to me. Talk to the hermits in the woods but not to one who has been victorious over all the enemies he has fought.”

And as he shouted he kicked his brave brother Vibhishan.

So, with a heavy heart, his brother rose and left the king’s house.

Knowing no fear, he had spoken frankly to Ravana; and since the ten-headed one would not listen, Vibhishan had no choice but to leave.

Vibhishan’s act was one of physical courage, for he did not

fear his brother's blows; but it was also an act of mental courage, for he did not hesitate to utter words that the other courtiers, physically as brave as he, would not have let fall from their lips. This courage of the mind is known as moral courage.

*
* *

Such was the courage of Moses, the leader of Israel, who demanded from the Pharaoh of Egypt the freedom of the oppressed Jewish people.

Such was the courage of Mohammed, the Prophet, who imparted his religious thought to the Arabs, and who refused to be silenced even though they threatened him with death.

Such was the courage of Siddhartha, the Blessed One, who taught the people of India a new and noble path, and was not terrified by the evil spirits who assailed him under the Bo-tree.

Such was the courage of Christ, who preached to the people: "Love one another," and was not intimidated by the pontiffs of Jerusalem who forbade him to teach, nor by the Romans who crucified him.

So we have noted three kinds, three degrees of courage:

Physical courage for oneself.

Courage for the near one, the friend, the neighbour in distress, the threatened motherland.

Finally, the moral courage that enables one to stand up to unjust men, however powerful they may be, and to make them listen to the voice of right and truth.

*
* *

The Rajah of Almora, in order to repel some invaders who had raided his mountain country, enrolled a number of men in a new regiment and provided each one with a good sword.

"Forward, march!" commanded the Rajah.

Instantly the men unsheathed their swords with a great clang

Words of Long Ago

and flourished them with loud cries.

“What is this?” demanded the Rajah.

“Sire,” they replied, “we want to be ready so that the enemy does not take us by surprise.”

“You can be of no use to me, you nervous and excitable men,” he told them. “Go home, all of you.”

You will notice that the Rajah was not impressed by all this noise and waving of swords. He knew that true bravery needs no clamour and clash.

*
* *

In the following story, on the other hand, you will observe how calmly the people behaved and yet how brave they were in face of mortal peril at sea.

Towards the end of March 1910, a Scottish vessel was carrying passengers from Australia to the Cape of Good Hope. There was no trace of a cloud in the sky and the sea was calm and blue.

Suddenly the ship struck a reef six miles off the west coast of Australia.

Immediately the whole crew was on the move, each man hurrying as whistles were blown. But this noise was not the result of confusion and panic.

An order rang out: “Man the boats!”

The passengers put on their life-belts.

A blind man led by his servant walked across the deck. Everyone made way for him. He was helpless and all wanted him to be the first to be saved.

A short time later the ship had been evacuated, and soon it sank.

On one of the life-boats a woman began to sing. And in spite of the sound of the waves which at times drowned her voice, the oarsmen could hear the refrain which put strength into their arms:

*Pull for the shore, sailors,
Pull for the shore.*

The shipwrecked people reached the shore at last and were taken in by some good fishing folk.

Not one passenger had been lost. In this way four hundred and fifty people had saved themselves by their quiet courage.

*
* *

Let me tell you more about this calm courage that accomplishes useful and noble things without show or flourish.

A deep river ran past an Indian village of five hundred houses.

The people of this village had not yet heard the teachings of Lord Siddhartha, and the Blessed One decided to go to them and speak to them of the Noble Path.

He sat beneath a great tree which spread its branches over the riverside, and the villagers gathered on the opposite bank. Then he began to speak and preached his message of love and purity. And his words were carried over the flowing waters as if by miracle. Yet the people of the village refused to believe in what he taught them, and murmured against him.

Only one of them wanted to know more and wished to come closer to the Blessed One.

There was neither bridge nor ferry. And the old legend tells that, strong in his courage, the man began to walk upon the deep water of the river. And so he reached the Master, greeted him and listened to his words with great joy.

Did this man really cross the river, as we are told? We do not know. But in any case he had the courage to take the path that leads towards progress. And the people of his village, touched by his example, then paid heed to the teachings of the Buddha; and their minds were opened to nobler thoughts.

*
* *

Words of Long Ago

There is a courage which can make you cross rivers and another that enables you to take the right path; but even more courage is needed to stay on the right path than to enter it.

Listen to the parable of the hen and her chicks:

Siddhartha, the Blessed One, used to instruct his disciples to do their best and then to trust that the best would bear its fruit.

“Just as,” he said, “a hen lays eggs and broods on them and never thinks of fretting: ‘Will my little chicks be able to break out of their shells with their beaks and see the light of day?’ you too should have no fear: if you are persistent in the Noble Path, you also will come to the light.”

And this is true courage: to walk the straight path, to brave storm, darkness and suffering and to persevere, moving ever forward, in spite of everything, towards the light.

*
* *

Long, long ago, when Brahmadata ruled in Benares, one of his enemies, king of another land, trained an elephant to wage war on him.

War was declared. The splendid elephant bore the king his master up to the walls of Benares.

From the top of the walls, the people of the besieged city hurled down boiling hot liquids and shot stones with their slings. At first the elephant retreated before this terrifying rain.

But the man who had trained him ran towards him crying:

“O elephant, you are a hero! Act like a hero and pull the gates to the ground!”

Encouraged by these words, the great creature charged and burst through the gates, leading his king to victory.

This is how courage triumphs over obstacles and difficulties and opens the gates to victory.

*
* *

And see how an encouraging word can give help to man and animal alike.

A good Muslim book gives us an example of this in the story of Abu Saïd, the poet with a brave heart.

His friends, who had learnt that he lay sick with fever, came one day to ask for news of his health. His son received them at the door of the house, a smile on his lips, for the patient was feeling better.

They came in and sat down in the sick man's room and were surprised to hear him chatting with his usual good humour. Then, as it was a hot day, he fell asleep, and so did all the others.

Towards evening, they all awoke. Abu Saïd ordered refreshments to be served to his guests and incense to be lit so that the room might be filled with fragrance.

Abu Saïd prayed for a while, then he rose and recited a little poem of his own composition:

*Despair not in your grief, for a joyous hour will come
and take it all away;
The burning simoon may blow, and yet change into a
gentle breeze;
A dark cloud may rise, but it passes away and brings
no flood;
A fire may kindle and yet be smothered, leaving chest
and casket untouched;
Pain comes but also goes.
Therefore be patient when troubles come, for Time is
the father of wonders;
And from the peace of God hope for many blessings to
come.*

They all returned to their homes delighted and strengthened by this beautiful poem of hope. And so it was that a sick man helped his friends in good health.

Whosoever is courageous can give courage to others, just as

Words of Long Ago

the flame of one candle can light another.

Brave boys and girls who read this story, learn how to encourage others, and be courageous yourselves.

Three

Cheerfulness

ONE AFTERNOON, in a large town in a rainy country, I saw seven or eight vehicles full of children. That morning, they had been taken into the country to play in the fields, but the bad weather had made them return home early in the rain.

And yet they were singing, laughing and waving merrily to the passers-by.

They had kept their cheerfulness in this gloomy weather. If one of them had felt sad, the songs of the others would have cheered him. And for the people hurrying by, who heard the children's laughter, it seemed that the sky had brightened for a moment.

*
* *

Amir was a prince of Khorasan, and he lived in a grand style. When he set out to war, three hundred camels would carry the pots and pans and plates for his kitchen.

One day he was taken prisoner by the Caliph Ismail. But misfortune does not exempt a man from hunger. So when Amir saw his chief cook nearby, he asked the good man to prepare him a meal.

The cook had one piece of meat left which he put in a pot on the fire. Then he went to find some vegetables to give a little taste to the stew.

A passing dog sniffed at the meat and put his nose in the pot. Then, feeling the heat of the fire, he drew back sharply. But he was so clumsy that the pot stuck on his head and he ran off in a panic, unable to get rid of it.

Amir burst out laughing at the sight.

Words of Long Ago

“Why,” demanded the officer on guard, “are you laughing when you have every reason to be sad?”

But Amir showed him the dog streaking away from the camp and said, “I am laughing at the thought that this very morning it took three hundred camels to transport my kitchen and now one dog is enough to carry it all away!”

Amir took pleasure in being cheerful though he took no trouble to bring cheerfulness to others. However, we should give him credit for his light-heartedness. If he was able to joke in the midst of such serious difficulties, is it not in our power to smile in the face of lesser worries?

*
* *

In Persia, there was a woman who used to sell honey. She had a very pleasant manner, and customers thronged around her stall. And the poet who tells her story declares that even if she had sold poison, people would still have bought it from her as if it were honey.

A sour-tempered man saw what a great profit she made from her sweet wares and decided to take up the same trade.

So he set up a stall, but behind the rows of honey-pots his face was like vinegar. All those who came near were sullenly treated. And so everyone passed by, leaving him his wares. “Not even a fly ventured on his honey,” says the poet. By evening he had still earned nothing. A woman noticed him and said to her husband, “A bitter face makes bitter honey.”

Did the woman who sold honey smile only to attract customers? Let us rather hope that her cheerfulness came from her good nature. We are not in this world only to buy or sell; we should be here as comrades one to another. The good woman’s customers felt that she was something more than a honey-seller: she was a cheerful citizen of the world.

*
* *

In the next story I shall tell you, the joyous spirit bubbles up like water from a beautiful spring. The person it tells of had nothing to do with the desire for custom or gain: he was the famed and glorious Rama.

Rama slew Ravana the ten-headed and twenty-armed demon-king. I have already told you the beginning of the story. It had been the most terrible of all battles. Thousands of monkeys and bears had been killed in the service of Rama, and the corpses of their demon enemies were piled one upon another. Their king lay lifeless on the ground. But how hard it had been to fell him! Time and again Rama had cut off his ten heads and his twenty arms, but they all grew back immediately so that he had to cut them off many times over; they were so numerous that at last it seemed as if the sky was raining down arms and heads.

When the terrible war was ended the monkeys and bears who had been slain were brought back to life, and all stood like a great army awaiting orders.

Glorious Rama whose manner remained simple and calm after the victory, looked kindly upon his faithful friends.

Then Vibhishan, who was to succeed Ravana on the throne, had a chariot-load of jewels and rich robes brought for the warriors who had fought so valiantly.

“Listen, friend Vibhishan,” said Rama, “rise high in the air and scatter your gifts before the army.”

The king did as he was told, and from his chariot in midair strewed glittering jewels and brightly coloured robes.

The monkeys and bears tumbled over one another as they rushed to seize the falling treasures. It was a merry scuffle.

And Rama laughed heartily and his wife, the lady Sita, and his brother Lakshman laughed with him.

For those who are courageous know how to laugh like this. There is nothing more cordial than a good and hearty cheerfulness. And the word ‘cordial’ has the same origin as the word ‘courage’. In difficult moments, the cheerfulness that comes from

Words of Long Ago

a cordial spirit is truly a kind of courage.

Surely it is not necessary to be always laughing; but liveliness, serenity, good humour are never out of place. And how helpful they are! With them the mother makes the home happy for her children; the nurse hastens the recovery of her patient; the master lightens the task of his servants; the workman inspires the goodwill of his comrades; the traveller helps his companions on their hard journey; the citizen fosters hope in the hearts of his countrymen.

And you, happy boys and girls, is there anything your cheerfulness cannot accomplish?

Four

Self-Reliance

HATIM Tai had a great reputation among the Arabs of old for the lavishness of his gifts and alms. “Have you ever met anyone more excellent than yourself?” his friends once asked him.

“Yes,” replied Hatim Tai.

“Who was he?”

“One day I had forty camels sacrificed and I offered a feast to whoever would like to come and share in it. Then I set out with several chiefs to invite guests from far and wide. On the way we came across a woodcutter who had just cut a bundle of thorns. This was the way he earned his livelihood. Seeing that he was poor, I asked him why he did not go to the many feasts given by Hatim Tai. ‘Those who earn their living,’ he answered me, ‘have no need of the bounty of Hatim Tai.’ ”

Why then did Hatim Tai declare that the woodcutter was a better man than himself?

It was because he thought it nobler to work and to provide for oneself than to give others gifts which cost no effort or sacrifice and which, moreover, discourage them from being self-reliant.

Of course it is quite natural that friends should give presents to their friends; it is good that strong arms should come to the help of the poor and the needy; but an able-bodied man should work with his hands, not hold them out for alms. Of course this implies no reflection on those who consecrate themselves entirely to the contemplative life and the search for wisdom.

*
* *

Words of Long Ago

Though the woodcutter's conduct was noble, yet it was less so than that of the Persian prince whose story I shall tell you.

He was a prince of ancient times and his name was Gushtasp.

He was much annoyed that his father did not treat him as heir to the throne, so he left his native land and wandered to the West. Alone and hungry, he realised that from then on he would have to work for his living. So he went to the sovereign of the land and said to him:

"I am a skilled writer and I should be happy to be employed as a scribe."

He was told to wait for a few days, for no scribes were needed at the moment. But he was too hungry to wait, so he went to the camel-drivers to ask for work. They did not need any new helper; however, seeing his dire need, they gave him something to eat.

A little further on, Gushtasp stopped at the door of a forge and offered his services to the smith.

"Here," said the man to him, "you can help me to hammer this piece of iron." And he placed a hammer in Gushtasp's hands.

The prince had tremendous strength. He lifted the heavy hammer, brought it down on the anvil and smashed it at the first stroke. The smith was furious and immediately turned him out.

And so Gushtasp started wandering once more in great distress.

Whichever way he turned, there was no way in which he could show his usefulness.

At last he met a farmer working in a cornfield, who took pity on him and gave him food and shelter.

One day there came the news that the daughter of the king of Rum was of an age to marry and that all young men of princely family were invited to the royal banquet. Gushtasp decided to go there and sat at table among all the others. Princess Kitaban saw him, loved him and gave him a bunch of roses as a token of her favour.

The king took a violent dislike for Gushtasp in his poverty. He dared not forbid his daughter to marry him, but as soon as they were married he drove them out of his palace. So they went to live in the heart of the forest and built their hut not far from a river.

Gushtasp was a great hunter. Each day he would cross the river by boat, catch an elk or a wild ass, give half to the boatman and take the rest home to his wife.

One day the boatman brought a young man named Mabrin to see Gushtasp.

“My Lord,” said Mabrin, “I wish to marry the second daughter of the king, your wife’s sister, but I cannot unless I kill the wolf who is ravaging the king’s lands. And I do not know how to do it.”

“I will do it for you,” said Gushtasp the hunter.

He went out into the desert and when he found the monster, he shot it down with two arrows and then cut off its head with his hunting knife.

The king came to see the dead beast, and in his joy gave his second daughter to Mabrin.

Some time later, the boatman brought another young man named Ahrun to see Gushtasp. Ahrun wished to marry the third daughter of the king, but first he had to kill a dragon. Gushtasp promised that he would accomplish this new feat.

He took some knives and made them into a ball bristling with sharp points. Then he set out on his quest and found the dragon with fiery breath. He shot many arrows at the body of the monster, leaping from side to side to avoid its claws. Then he fastened the ball of knives to the end of a pike and thrust it down the dragon’s throat. The dragon closed its jaws and fell. Then the prince dispatched it with his sword.

Thus Ahrun married the third daughter of the king.

You will not be surprised to hear that in the course of time such a valiant prince became the king of Persia in succession to his father. It was during the reign of Gushtasp that the holy

Words of Long Ago

prophet Zerdusht, or Zoroaster, taught the Persians faith in Ormazd, Lord of light and sun and fire and of righteousness and justice.

*
* *

However, you can see that Gushtasp did not immediately find his place and work in the world.

He tried many things without success, and even at first incurred the enmity of many men, for example that of the good smith.

At last, however, he gained his true station in life and was able to help others until the time came for him to govern them wisely. And it was precisely in helping others that he was better than the woodcutter of whom we have just spoken; for, according to the story, the woodcutter was content to work for himself. Gushtasp was also better than the generous Hatim Tai, for instead of giving from the excess of his wealth, the Persian prince gave the strength of his arm and even risked his life for the sake of others.

None is more worthy of respect than one who, relying on himself, is able by his own effort not only to provide for all his needs, but to increase the well-being and the prosperity of those around him.

Respect the father, engineer or woodcutter, writer or labourer, tradesman, smith or explorer, who by his work, whatever it may be, earns a good living and increases the well-being of his family.

Respect the worker who, in order to serve both his own interests and those of his comrades, joins with them to organise co-operative stores or workshops, or trade-unions which enable each one to assert his rights by raising the powerful voice of the many instead of the weak and pleading voice of an isolated individual.

These workers' associations teach workmen to rely on their own strength and to help one another.

And you too, school-children, learn to enrich your intelligence by concentrating on the task your master gives you. And, while you mount the steps of knowledge as best you can, learn also to help, when need arises, the friend who is less alert and skilful than yourself.

In fairy-tales, one has only to utter a word or rub a lamp or wave a wand for genies to appear and carry people through the air, build palaces in the twinkling of an eye and cause armies of elephants and horsemen to spring from the ground.

But personal effort brings about still greater marvels: it covers the soil with rich harvests, tames wild beasts, tunnels through mountains, erects dykes and bridges, builds cities, launches ships on the ocean and flying machines in the air; in short it gives more well-being and security to all.

By personal effort man becomes more noble, more just, more kind: this is the true progress.

Five

Patience and Perseverance

THE PEOPLE of the Punjab have a song which goes like this:

*The bulbul does not always sing in the garden,
And the garden is not always in bloom;
Happiness does not always reign,
And friends are not always together.*

The conclusion to be drawn from this song is that we cannot expect to be always happy, and that to know how to be patient is most useful. For there are few days in our lives which do not give us the opportunity to learn greater patience.

You want to see a very busy man to ask him something. You go to his house. Already many visitors are there and he keeps you waiting a very long time before seeing you. You stay there quietly, perhaps for several hours. You are patient.

Another time, the person you wish to see is not at home when you arrive. You return again the next day, but his door is still closed. You go back a third time, but he is sick and cannot see you. You let a few days go by and then return once more. And if something new again prevents you from meeting him, nevertheless you are not discouraged, but renew the attempt until at last you see him. This kind of patience is called perseverance.

Perseverance is an active patience, a patience that marches on.

*
* *

The famous Genoese sailor Columbus set sail from Spain to cross the unknown seas of the West.

Patience and Perseverance

For days and weeks on end, in spite of the murmurs of his companions, he persisted in his will to reach a new land; in spite of delays and difficulties, he would not give up until he had reached the first American islands. Thus he discovered the New World.

What did he ask of his companions? He asked them only to have patience, for they had simply to rely on him and quietly allow him to lead them. But what did he himself need to reach his goal? He needed the sustained energy and the unremitting will that we call perseverance.

*
* *

The celebrated potter, Bernard Palissy, wanted to recover the lost secret of beautiful old glazed china enamelled in rich colours.

For months and years on end, he untiringly pursued his experiments. His attempts to find the glaze remained fruitless for a long time. He devoted all he had to his search; and for days and nights together he watched over the kiln he had built, endlessly trying out new processes for preparing and firing his pottery. And not only did no one give him any help or encouragement, but his friends and his neighbours called him a madman, and even his wife reproached him for what he was doing.

Several times he had to suspend his experiments for lack of resources, but as soon as he could, he would take them up again with renewed courage. Finally one day he did not even have the wood he needed to stoke his kiln; so, disregarding the cries and threats of his household, he threw his own furniture, to the very last stick, into the fire. And when everything was burnt, he opened the kiln and found it full of the brightly glazed pottery which made him famous and which he had sacrificed so many years to discover.

What was it that his wife and friends lacked that they could not wait for his hour of success to come, without harassing him and making his task more difficult? Simply patience. And what

Words of Long Ago

was the only thing he himself never lacked, the only thing that never failed him and which enabled him in the end to triumph over all difficulty and scorn? It was precisely perseverance, that is to say, the mightiest force of all.

For nothing in the world can prevail against perseverance. And even the greatest things are always an accumulation of small and untiring efforts.

Enormous boulders have been completely destroyed, worn by raindrops falling one after another on the same spot.

A grain of sand is nothing very powerful, but when many come together, they form a dune and check the ocean.

And when you learn about natural history, you will hear how mountains have been formed under the sea by little animal-cules piled one upon another, who by their persistent efforts have made magnificent islands and archipelagos rise above the waves.

Don't you think that your small, repeated efforts could also achieve great things?

*
* *

The famous sage Shankara whose name brought glory to the land of Malabar, and who lived about 1200 years ago, had resolved from childhood to become a Sannyasi.

For a long time his mother, although she appreciated the nobility of his wish, did not allow him to devote himself to that way of life.

One day mother and child went to bathe in a river. Shankara dived in and felt his foot suddenly seized by a crocodile. Death seemed close at hand. But even at that dreadful moment the brave child thought only of his great project and cried out to his mother, "I am lost! A crocodile is dragging me down. But let me at least die a Sannyasi!"

"Yes, yes, my son," his mother sobbed in despair.

Shankara felt such joy that he found the strength to free his foot and throw himself ashore.

Patience and Perseverance

From that moment he grew in learning as in years. He became a guru, and remained true to his great work of teaching philosophy to the very end of his wonderful life.

*
* *

All who love India know the beautiful poem of the Mahabharata.

It was written in Sanskrit many hundreds of years ago. Until recent times, no European could read it unless he knew Sanskrit, and that was rare. A translation into one of the European languages was needed.

Babu Pratap Chandra Rai decided to devote himself to this work. In his own land he was able to find a learned friend, Kishori Mohan Ganguly, who could translate the Sanskrit book into English, and its hundred parts were published one by one.

For twelve years Pratap Chandra Rai went on with the task he had set himself. He devoted all his resources to the publication of the book. And when he had nothing left he travelled all over India to ask help from all who were willing to give. He received help from princes and peasants, from scholars and simple folk, from friends in Europe and America.

In the course of one of his journeys he caught the pernicious fever from which he died. During his sickness all his thoughts were turned towards the completion of his work. And even when it became painful for him to speak, he would still say to his wife:

“The book must be finished. Don’t spend money on my funeral rites if it is needed for the printing. Live as simply as you can so as to save money for the Mahabharata.”

He died full of love for India and her great poem.

His widow, Sundari Bala Rai, faithfully carried out his great wish. One year later the translator completed his work, and the eleven volumes of the Mahabharata were presented to the European public who could now know and admire the eighteen Parvas of the splendid epic poem. And reading it, they would

Words of Long Ago

learn to respect the great skill and wisdom of the profound thinkers who were the poets of ancient India.

Such are the fruits borne by the efforts of all those who, like Pratap Chandra Rai and so many other useful men, know how to persevere.

And you, brave children, will you not join the great army of men and women who never tire of doing good and never abandon their task until they have completed it?

In this wide world, there is no lack of noble work to be accomplished, nor is there any lack of good people to undertake it; but what is very often lacking is the perseverance which alone can carry it through to the end.

The Simple Life

THE PROPHET Mohammed, who devoted his life to teaching the Arab people, cared not for ease or riches.

One night he slept on a hard mat, and when he awoke his skin bore the marks of the knots and fibres of his bed.

A friend said to him, "O Messenger of Allah! This bed was too hard for you, and if you had asked me I would joyfully have prepared a softer one, so that your rest might have been better."

The Prophet replied, "A soft bed is not for me. I have a work to do in the world. When my body needs rest, I give it rest, but only as a horseman who ties his horse for a little while under the shade of a tree, to spare him from the heat of the sun, and soon sets off once more."

"I have a work to do in the world," said the Prophet. That is why his noble life was a simple one. Believing in his mission, he wanted to instruct the whole of Arabia. He did not care for luxuries: his heart was set on loftier thoughts.

*
* *

The following story from Arabia shows that to a healthy soul the simple life offers more happiness than any other.

Maisun was a daughter of the tribe of Kalb; she had spent her early years in tents in the desert.

One day, she was married to Caliph Muawiyah, but although he was rich and had many slaves, she was not happy with him; and in spite of all the luxury around her, she could find no peace of mind. Often when she was alone, she would sing softly to herself verses she had composed in Arabic:

Words of Long Ago

*Brown garments of camel's hair are fairer in my eyes
than the robes of a queen.*

*The desert tent is lovelier to dwell in than the grand
chambers of a palace.*

*The young colts that run about the Arab camp are
lovelier than the mules weighed down by their rich
trappings.*

*The voice of the watch-dog who barks at an approach-
ing stranger sounds sweeter than the ivory horn of
the palace-guard.*

Her song was heard by the Caliph and he banished her from his court. So the poetess returned to her tribe, happy to see no more of the rich dwelling that made her sad.

*
* *

In all countries, many people are beginning to understand that a simple life is more desirable than a life of extravagance, vanity and show.

There are more and more men and women who though they can afford to buy costly things for themselves, feel that their money can be put to a better use. They take a healthy diet instead of rich foods, and prefer to decorate their homes with furniture that is simple, strong and in good taste, rather than with cumbersome, ornate and useless articles meant only for display.

In every age, the best and most energetic servitors of earth's progress have known how to lead a quiet and frugal life, which keeps the body in good health and enables man to take a more active part in working for the common good. Their example will always put to shame all those who pile up useless treasures and become slaves to their vast quantities of servants, clothes and furniture.

You cannot make a heap without making a hole; and too often the luxury of some represents the poverty of many others.

There are too many beautiful, great and useful things to be done in the world for those who are not wholly devoid of intelligence to be allowed to waste their time, money and thought in futile pastimes.

*
* *

Saint Francis was an apostle of the Good Life. He did not teach in order to earn money. His life was simple and his greatest joy was to instruct the people by his example and his preaching. And he was content with whatever food he was given.

One day, as he and his companion, Brother Masseo, were passing through a town, Masseo went down one street while Francis took another. Masseo was tall and handsome, whereas the saint was short and plain-looking. People gave generously to Masseo, but Francis collected only very little.

When they met outside the gates of the town, they sat by a large stone on the bank of a clear stream that ran nearby, and put together the alms they had received.

“O Brother Masseo,” cried Saint Francis with a joyful face, “we are not worthy of so great a feast.”

“Indeed,” replied Masseo, “but what is there to call a feast in these few pieces of bread? We have no knife, no dishes, no cloth, no servant.”

“Is it not a feast,” replied the saint, “to have good bread on a good table when one is hungry, and fresh water from a limpid spring to drink when one is thirsty?”

This does not mean to say that poor people should always be resigned to their miserable fare. But in any case it shows how the contentment that comes from a noble life and the cheerfulness native to beautiful souls can make up for the absence of material possessions and outer riches.

*
* *

Words of Long Ago

One thing is certain, that a simple life has never harmed anyone, while the same cannot be said for luxury and over-abundance. Most often, the things which are of no use to men are also those which cause them harm.

In the reign of the famous Akbar, there lived at Agra a Jain saint named Banarasi Das. The Emperor summoned the saint to his palace and told him:

“Ask of me what you will, and because of your holy life, your wish shall be satisfied.”

“Parabrahman has given me more than I could wish for,” replied the saint.

“But ask all the same,” Akbar insisted.

“Then, Sire, I would ask that you do not call me again to your palace, for I want to devote my time to the divine work.”

“Let it be so,” said Akbar. “But I in my turn have a favour to ask you.”

“Speak, Sire.”

“Give me some good counsel that I may bear in mind and act upon.”

Banarasi Das thought for a moment and said:

“See that your food is pure and clean, and take good care, especially at night, over your meat and drink.”

“I will not forget your advice,” said the Emperor.

In truth the advice was good, for healthy food and drink make a healthy body, fit to be the temple of a pure mind and life.

But it so happened that the very day on which the saint visited the Emperor was a fast-day. And therefore Akbar would only have his meal several hours after midnight. The palace cooks had prepared the dishes in the evening and had placed them in plates of gold and silver, until the time of fasting should be over.

It was still dark when Akbar had them brought before him. Despite his haste to take some nourishment, he suddenly remembered the words of Banarasi Das: “Take care over your meat and

drink.” So he examined the plate before him carefully and found that the food was covered with brown ants. In spite of all precautions, these ants had crept in and spoiled the Emperor’s meal.

Akbar had to send away the dishes, and this incident strongly impressed on his mind the useful advice he had received.

For you will understand that Banarasi Das had not intended to warn Akbar merely against brown ants, but against anything in his diet that might not be good for the health of his body or mind.

Many diseases come from an unhealthy diet.

One who knowingly sells unwholesome products is in fact making an attack on the lives of his fellow-citizens. And unwholesome products are not only those that are adulterated or spoilt but all those that may be in any way harmful to eat.

*
* *

The story does not tell us that Akbar found brown ants in his cup as well, and yet Banarasi Das advised him to be careful about his drink. For there are indeed cups which look bright to the eye and which seem to contain a pleasant and cheering drink but which are nevertheless full of danger for men. Foremost among them are those which contain alcohol.

The Prophet Mohammed taught that there was sin in wine and gambling; and therefore all who respect the words of the Koran abstain from wine and gambling to their profit.

But on the other hand there are many good people all over the world who find it right to take spirits. We respect their opinions. But these same people cannot assert that it is wrong not to take alcohol.

If, then, there are people who think that it is wrong to take fermented drinks, and others, on the contrary, who think that it is good, yet there is no one to maintain that it is wrong not to take any. It is also debatable whether or not it is useful to drink, but no one would dream of claiming that it is harmful not to do

Words of Long Ago

so. And everyone would agree that in any case it is cheaper.

In every country there are societies for temperance or even total abstinence, whose members undertake not to touch spirits. And in certain towns it is even forbidden to sell them.

But in other places, the use of alcohol, formerly unknown, is spreading. In India, for example, where abstinence had reigned for so many centuries, alcohol has been introduced, more terrible than any demon in the ancient legends. For the terrible Rakshasas of which they speak could be harmful only to the body, whereas alcohol has even the power to kill thought and destroy character. So first of all it hurts the body. It hurts the children of parents who drink to excess. It hurts the intelligence of man and enslaves those who should be the servitors of humanity.

For every one of us should be a servant of humanity; and if by our food or our drink we weaken our minds or bodies, we are then only bad servants unable to perform their task.

What happens to the soldier when his weapon is broken, to the sailor when his ship has lost its masts, to the horseman when his horse is lamed? And what can a man do if he loses possession of his most precious faculties?

He no longer even has the worth of a good animal, for the animal at least avoids eating and drinking things that may harm it.

The Roman poet Virgil liked to live in the countryside. He admired the powerful bullock that draws the plough and cuts the furrow where the next harvest will spring up. Strong is his body, powerful his muscles and hard is his labour year in and year out.

And Virgil adds: "Wine and too much feasting are unknown to him. He feeds on grass, quenches his thirst from running rivers and crystal streams; and no care disturbs his peaceful slumber."

Be temperate to be strong.

You would be offended if someone were to tell you, "Be weak."

Moderation increases the strength of the strong and preserves the strength of the weak.

Remember the advice of Banarasi Das:

Take good care over the dish.

Take good care over the glass.

Seven

Prudence

“GOOD shot!” The cry rang out as the young Indian let fly his arrow and hit his mark.

“Yes,” someone said, “but it is broad daylight. The archer can see his target. He is not so skilled as Dasaratha.”

“And what does Dasaratha do?”

“He is Sabdabhedhi.”

“What is that?”

“He shoots by sound.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, he can shoot in the dark. At night he goes out into the jungle and listens, and when he has judged, from the sound of wings or footsteps, what kind of game he has encountered he lets fly his arrow and hits it as surely as if he had shot by day.”

Thus the reputation of Dasaratha, prince of the city of Ayodhya, was noised abroad.

He was proud of his skill as Sabdabhedhi, and pleased with the praise of the people. At dusk he would go out alone in his chariot to lie in wait in the heart of the forest. Now he would hear the tread of a buffalo or an elephant coming to drink at the river, now the light-footed deer or the stealthy approach of a tiger.

One night as he lay among the bushes, listening for the sound of leaves or water, he suddenly heard something moving on the shore of the lake. He could see nothing in the darkness, but was not Dasaratha a Sabdabhedhi? The sound was enough for him: it was most certainly an elephant. He shot an arrow. Immediately a cry rang out which made him leap up.

“Help! Help! Someone has shot me!”

The bow fell from Dasaratha's hands; he suddenly felt dizzy with horror. What had he done? Wounded a human being instead of a wild beast? He rushed through the jungle towards the lake. On the bank a young man was lying in his own blood, all dishevelled, holding in his hand a pitcher which he had just been filling.

"O sir," he groaned, "was it you who shot the fatal arrow? What harm have I done you that you should treat me so? I am a hermit's son. My aged parents are blind; I look after them and provide for their needs. I came to draw water for them, and now I shall no longer be able to serve them! Follow this path to their hut and tell them what has happened. But first pull out this shaft from my breast, for it gives me great pain."

Dasaratha removed the arrow from the wound. The young man breathed a last sigh and died.

Then the prince filled the pitcher with water and followed the path the dying youth had shown him. As he came near, the father called out:

"My son, why have you taken so long? Was it to swim in the lake? We feared that some harm had befallen you. But why do you not answer?"

With a trembling voice Dasaratha said:

"I am not your son, O holy hermit. I am a Kshatriya, and until now I was proud of my skill with a bow. This night as I lay in wait I thought I heard an elephant drinking at the water's edge. I shot my arrow. Alas! It was your son I struck. Oh, tell me how to atone for my fault."

Then the old couple cried out and wept. They bade the prince lead them to the spot where their son lay, their only son. They recited sacred hymns over his body and sprinkled the water of the funeral rites. Then the hermit said:

"Listen, Dasaratha! Through your fault we shed tears over our dear son. One day, you also shall weep over a beloved son. Before that many years will pass; but the punishment shall surely come."

Words of Long Ago

They made a pyre to burn the dead body, then threw themselves into the flames and perished also.

Time passed. Dasaratha became king of Ayodhya and married the lady Kausalya. And his son was the glorious Rama.

Rama was loved by all in the city, except Queen Kaikeyi, the king's second wife, and her maid. These two women plotted the downfall of noble Rama, and because of them he was sent into exile for fourteen years.

Then Dasaratha mourned his son, as the aged parents had mourned in the jungle for the young man who had died at midnight by the lakeside.

Dasaratha had once been so proud of his skill that he had lacked prudence and given no thought to the risk of wounding someone in the darkness. It would have been better for him only to draw his bow in full daylight than to trust so rashly in his skill as Sabdabhedhi. He meant no harm, but he lacked foresight.

*
* *

A merchant of the city of Benares once took pity on two old vultures who were poor and miserable. He took them to a dry place, lit a fire and fed them with pieces of meat from the pyre where people burnt dead cattle.

When the rainy season came, the vultures, now strong and well, flew away towards the mountains.

But in their gratitude to the merchant of Benares, they decided to pick up all the clothes they could find lying about so as to give them to their kindly friend. They flew from house to house, from village to village, snatched up all the garments drying out in the open and took them to the merchant's house.

He appreciated their good intentions, but he neither used nor sold the stolen clothes; he simply put them away carefully.

However, traps had been set everywhere for the two vultures, and one of them was caught. He was brought before the king, who asked him:

“Why are you robbing my subjects?”

“One day a merchant saved the lives of my brother and myself; in order to repay our debt, we have collected these clothes for him,” the bird replied.

The merchant was summoned before the king and questioned in his turn.

“Sire,” he said, “the vultures did indeed bring me many clothes, but I have kept them all safely and I am ready to give them back to their owners.”

The king pardoned the vultures, for they had acted out of gratitude, though without discernment; and thanks to his prudence, the merchant too was spared.

*
* *

The Japanese have a picturesque way of expressing their idea of prudence.

They have in one of their temples an image of a meditating Buddha seated on a lotus-blossom. In front of him are three little monkeys, one with its hands over its eyes, another over its ears, and the third covering its mouth. What do these three monkeys signify? By its gesture the first one says:

“I do not see evil and folly.”

The second one says:

“I do not hear them.”

And the third:

“I do not speak them.”

In the same way, the wise man is prudent in what he looks at, in what he listens to, and in what he says.

He considers the consequences, thinks of the morrow, and if he does not know his way, he asks.

Eight

Sincerity

ALION, a wolf and a fox went out hunting together. They killed an ass, a gazelle and a hare.

Seeing this catch, the lion said to the wolf:

“Kindly tell me, friend wolf, how we should divide this game.”

“There is no need,” replied the wolf, “to cut up the three animals. You take the ass, let the fox take the hare, and for my part I shall be content with the gazelle.”

The lion’s only answer was a roar of fury, and with a single blow, as reward for his advice, he crushed the wolf’s head with his claw. Then the lion turned to the fox and said:

“And, my dear friend, what do you suggest?”

“Oh, Sire,” the fox replied with a deep bow, “it is a very simple matter. You should have the ass for your breakfast, the gazelle for your evening meal, and eat the hare as a light snack in between.”

“Very well,” said the lion, pleased to have all the game for himself. “And who taught you to speak with such wisdom and justice?”

“The wolf,” the fox replied slyly.

Why did the fox speak in this way? Was it to say what he really thought? Oh, certainly not! Was it then a sincere wish to please the lion? Certainly not that either. He spoke like that because he was afraid, and we can surely make allowances for him. But nevertheless we must admit that his words were not truthful — merely artful. And if the lion approved of them, it was because he loved meat, not truth.

*
* *

A Muslim writer, Abu Abbas, tells us of the glory of King Solomon, who reigned in Jerusalem, the holy city of the Hebrews.

In his throne room there were six hundred seats, half of which were occupied by sages, the other half by Jinns or genies who assisted Solomon by their magic power.

Throughout the sittings of the Council, a multitude of great birds would appear at a word from the king and spread their wings to shade the people in the six hundred seats. And at his command, each morning and evening, a powerful wind would arise, lifting up the whole palace and instantaneously transporting it a month's journey away. In this way, the king was at hand to govern the distant lands that belonged to him.

Besides, Solomon made the most marvellous throne one could ever dream of. And this throne was designed in such a way that no one would dare to utter an untruth in the presence of the king.

It was made of ivory, inlaid with pearls, emeralds and rubies, and around it stood four golden date-palms on which the dates were also emeralds and rubies. At the top of two of these palms were golden peacocks, and on the two others were golden vultures. On each side of the throne there were also two golden lions between two pillars of emerald. And golden vines bearing ruby grapes twined around the trunks of the trees.

The elders of Israel were seated at Solomon's right hand and their seats were of gold, the genies sat at his left hand and their seats were of silver.

When the king held his court of justice the people were allowed into his presence. And each time that a man bore witness on another, if he deviated ever so little from the truth, an amazing thing would happen. At the sight of him, the throne bearing the king, the lions, the palm-trees, the peacocks and the vultures, would instantly turn round on itself. Then the lions would thrust forward their claws, lashing the ground with their tails; the vultures and the peacocks would flap their wings.

Words of Long Ago

And so the witnesses would tremble with terror and would not dare to tell a single lie.

And this was no doubt very convenient, and must have considerably lightened the king's task. But fear is always a wretched thing, which consorts ill with truth.

Even when by chance, as in the story of Abu Abbas, it forces a man to speak the truth, that does not make him truthful; for, at the very next moment, fear may drive him to speak without frankness, as did the fox in our previous tale. And that is what most often happens.

An honest man does not need the marvels of Solomon's throne to learn to speak the truth. The throne of truth dwells within his own heart; the rectitude of his soul cannot but inspire him with words of rectitude. He speaks the truth not because he is afraid of a teacher, a master or a judge, but because truth is the characteristic of an upright man, the stamp of his nature.

Love of truth makes him face all fears. He speaks as he should, no matter what happens to him.

*
* *

A rich and mighty king named Vishwamitra, who longed for greater esteem, resolved to practise Tapasya (austerities) in order to rise from his own caste of Kshatriya to the highest of all, that of a Brahmin.

He did all that he thought was needed and led a life of apparent austerity which made everyone say, "The king deserves to be a Brahmin."

But the Brahmin Vasishtha did not think so, for he knew that Vishwamitra had acted out of vanity; his renunciation was not sincere. And so he refused to address him as a Brahmin.

In his fury the king had a hundred children of Vasishtha's family put to death. But in spite of all his grief, Vasishtha persisted in his refusal to say what he did not think was true.

So the king resolved to kill this truthful man as well. One

night he went to Vasishtha's hut to carry out the evil deed.

When he came near to the door, he heard the Brahmin talking with his wife, and as his own name was mentioned, he stopped to listen. Saintly and pure, full of forgiveness for him were the words he heard. This touched the king's heart. Full of repentance he threw away his weapon, then went in and bowed at the hermit's feet.

"Brahmarshi," Vasishtha welcomed him affectionately, when seeing the king's present state of mind.

"Why did you not acknowledge my Tapasya before?" Vishwamitra asked humbly.

"Because," replied Vasishtha, "you claimed the title of Brahmin in the name of an arrogant power, but now that you are repentant, you come in the true spirit of a Brahmin."

Vasishtha knew how to speak the truth without fear. And he also spoke it without rancour.

*
* *

Is it not noble to speak the truth in this way, even when there is some danger in doing it?

Besides, very often, things turn out better for those who brave this danger than it might have seemed at first. The success of falsehood is only short-lived, whereas in most cases, to be sincere is the cleverest thing to do.

One morning, the Emperor of Delhi sat on his throne to confer honours on those he considered worthy. As the ceremony was drawing to a close, he noticed that one of the people he had summoned, a young man named Syed Ahmed, had not yet made his appearance.

The Emperor stepped down from his throne and got into a sedan chair which was used to carry him through his vast palace.

Just at that moment the young man hurried in.

"Your son is late," said the Emperor to Syed's father, who was his friend.

Words of Long Ago

“Why?” asked the Emperor, looking sternly at the young man.

“Sire,” Syed replied frankly, “it is because I overslept.”

The courtiers looked at the young man in amazement. How dare he admit so shamelessly to the Emperor that he had no better excuse? How tactless of him to speak like that!

But the Emperor, after pondering a moment, felt respect for the young man because of his sincerity; and he gave him the necklace of pearls and the jewel of honour to place on his brow.

Such was the reward of Syed Ahmed, who loved the truth and spoke it to all, prince or peasant.

*
* *

It is quite certain that to be able to tell the truth without difficulty, it is best always to act in such a way that we have no need to conceal anything we do. And for that, in our actions of every moment, we should remember that we are in the presence of the Divine.

For straightforwardness of speech also demands straightforwardness of actions; and a sincere man is one who shuns all falsehood in what he says and all hypocrisy in what he does.

At Amroha a special kind of pottery is made, known as Kagazi pottery, decorated with silver designs. These pots are very pretty, but they are so light and fragile that they break with the slightest use. Although they look just as serviceable as any other earthenware, they are only good to look at.

Many people are like Kagazi pottery. They have a beautiful appearance; but if you try to put them to any kind of test, you will see that everything about them is ornament. Do not put the slightest trust in them, for this would be too heavy a weight for their fragile nature to bear.

A Brahmin sent his son to Benares to study under the guidance of a Pundit.

Twelve years later the young man returned to his home town, and many people hurried to see him, thinking that he had become a very profound scholar. They placed before him a book written in Sanskrit and said:

“Explain the doctrine to us, honourable Pundit.”

The young man stared at the book. In truth, he did not understand a single word of it. In Benares he had learnt nothing but the alphabet. And even then the letters had been written very large on the blackboard, so that by seeing them every day he might get them little by little into his head.

So he remained silent in front of the book, his eyes brimming with tears.

“O Pundit,” said the visitors, “something has touched your heart. Tell us what you have found in the book.”

“The letters,” he said at last, “were big in Benares, but here they are small!”

Was not this Pundit like the Kagazi pots?

*
* *

A wolf had his den in the rocks on the bank of the river Ganges. When the snows melted, the water began to rise. It rose so high that it surrounded the wolf’s rock on every side. So one day he was unable to go out in search of food.

“Oh well!” he said when he saw that he had nothing left to eat, “today shall be a holy day, in honour of which I proclaim a fast.”

He sat on the edge of the rock and put on a very solemn air to celebrate the holy day and the fast.

But no sooner had he done this than a wild goat came bounding across the water, from rock to rock, and reached the place where the wolf was sitting full of devotion.

“Oho!” he exclaimed when he saw it. “Here is something to eat.”

He pounced on the goat and missed it, he pounced once

Words of Long Ago

more and missed it again. Finally the goat escaped by leaping across the stream.

“Oh well!” said the wolf, resuming his saintly pose, “I shall not be so impious as to eat goat’s flesh on a holy day. No, no — no meat for me on a fast day!”

What do you think of the wolf, his devotion and his respect for the holy day? You laugh at his roguery. But how many people there are whose sincerity is like this, who adorn themselves with fine sentiments because it suits their interests, and pose as little saints because they are unable to give free rein to their vices. But in spite of all their cunning, do you think that these tricksters can prevail for very long against one who is right and just?

*
* *

The monkeys and bears of Hanuman’s army fought for Lord Rama and his brother Lakshman against Ravana the ten-headed demon.

Weakening under the blows of the warriors who were attacking him from every side, Ravana made use of his magic power.

Suddenly, at his side, among the demons, many Ramas and many Lakshmans magically appeared. They were in truth nothing but false and deceptive appearances, but the monkeys and the bears, taking them for real people, halted in confusion: how could they continue the fight and go on throwing trees and rocks against Rama and Lakshman, their beloved leaders? Seeing their dismay, the demon Ravana gave a smile of cruel delight. Rama smiled too: what pleasure he would take in destroying such a falsehood, in exposing the trickery, in gaining victory for the truth! He fitted an arrow to his mighty bow and shot. The arrow whizzed through the misleading shadows, which immediately dissolved. At last Hanuman’s army could see clearly and their courage revived.

Similarly, every straight word from a sincere man is like an

arrow that can destroy much falsehood and hypocrisy.

*
* *

There is a legend in South India which tells of a prince, the Jasmine King, whose laugh alone would fill the land for leagues around with the sweet fragrance of jasmine. But for that his laugh must come from the joyful and spontaneous gaiety of his heart. It would have been no use if he had tried to laugh without true merriment. When his spirit was full of joy, his laughter would bubble up like a fragrant spring.

The quality of this laughter came wholly from its sincerity.

The tables in Duryodhana's palace were laid with an extremely rich display of vessels of gold and silver, ornamented with rubies and emeralds and diamonds sparkling with many colours. Lord Krishna was invited to the feast but did not go. Instead he went that night to the house of a poor Sudra, who had also invited him. The meal was simple, the dishes were plain. And yet Krishna chose this one in preference to the other, for the feast which the Sudra offered him was full of sincere love, whereas the sumptuous banquet of King Duryodhana had been given only for show.

It is also said that the glorious Rama once sat at the table of a very humble woman, whose husband was a fowler. All she could put before the famous hero was a few fruits, for she had nothing else. But she gave the best she had with such a good heart that Rama was touched and wished that the memory of this gift from a sincere soul should not be forgotten, and that is why it is still spoken of after so many centuries.

Jalal was a wise and famous teacher. One day two Turks who wished to hear his teachings came to see him with an offering. As they were very poor, their gift was small — only a handful of lentils. Some of the sage's disciples looked at this present with scorn. But Jalal told them:

Words of Long Ago

“Once the Prophet Mohammed needed riches to carry out one of his undertakings. So he asked his followers to give him what they could spare. Some brought half of their possessions, others a third. Abu Bakar gave all his wealth. In this way Mohammed got a large quantity of animals and weapons. Then came a poor woman who in her turn offered the Prophet three dates and a wheat-cake; and that was all she had. Many smiled at this sight, but the Prophet told them that he had had a dream in which he had seen the angels take a pair of scales and put the gifts of all the people in one of the pans and into the other only the dates and the bread of the poor woman. And the scale stood balanced, for this pan was as heavy as the other.” And Jalal added:

“A small gift offered with a sincere heart has as much value as costly presents.”

On hearing this the two Turks were full of joy and no one dared laugh any more about the handful of lentils.

*
* *

A poor man of low caste hunted for a whole day to feed his family, but could not catch anything. At nightfall he was still in the forest, alone, hungry and worn out by his vain attempts. In the hope of finding a nest he climbed up a Bel tree, whose three-lobed leaves are offered to the great Shiva by his devotees. But he found no nest. He thought of his wife and his little children waiting at home for their father and their food, and wept for them.

Tears of pity, the legend says, are very heavy. They are far more precious than the tears shed by those who are sorry for their own pain.

The hunter's tears fell upon the leaves of the Bel tree and bore them down towards the stone of offering standing at the foot of the tree in honour of Shiva. At that moment the man was bitten by a snake and died. The spirits immediately carried

his soul to the house of the gods and brought it before the great Shiva.

“There is no place here for this man’s soul,” the dwellers in heaven cried out together. “For he was of low caste, he did not know the holy laws, he ate impure food and did not offer the customary gifts to the gods.”

But Shiva said to them:

“He gave me Bel leaves, and above all, he offered me sincere tears. There is no low caste for hearts that are true.” And he received him into his heaven.

*
* *

All these stories show us that in every age and in every land, both men and gods have given honour to sincerity; they love honesty and truth in all things.

One who lives in falsehood is an enemy of mankind.

All human sciences — philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, chemistry, physics — are seekings for truth. But in the smallest things as in the greatest, truth is necessary.

Little children, do not wait to be grown up before you learn to be truthful: that cannot be done too early; and to remain truthful, it is never too soon to acquire the habit.

Sometimes it is so difficult for men to speak the truth even if they want to, for to do so, it must first of all be known and sought out, and that is not always so easy.

There were four young princes of Benares who were brothers. Each one of them said to their father’s charioteer:

“I want to see a Kimsuka tree.”

“I will show you,” said the charioteer, and he invited the eldest to go for a ride.

In the jungle he showed the prince a Kimsuka. It was the time of year when there are neither buds, nor leaves, nor flowers. So the prince saw only a trunk of dark wood.

A few weeks later, the second prince was taken for a drive

Words of Long Ago

in the chariot and he also saw the Kimsuka tree. He found it covered with leaves.

A little later in the season, the third brother saw it in his turn; it was all pink with flowers.

At last the fourth saw it; its fruits were ripe.

One day when the four brothers were together, someone asked:

“What does the Kimsuka tree look like?”

The eldest said: “Like a bare trunk.”

The second: “Like a flourishing banana-tree.”

The third: “Like a pink and red bouquet.”

And the fourth: “Like an acacia laden with fruit.”

Being unable to agree, they went together to their father the king for him to decide between them. When he heard how one after the other the young princes had seen the Kimsuka tree, the king smiled and said:

“All four of you are right, but all four of you forget that the tree is not the same in all seasons.”

Each one was describing what he had seen and each one was ignorant of what the others knew.

In this way, most often, men know only a fraction of the truth, and their error comes precisely from the fact that they think they know it all.

How much less this error would be if they had learnt at an early age to love truth so much that they would always seek it more and more.

*
* *

The King of Kumaon, in the region of the Himalaya mountains, was hunting one day on the hill of Almora, which at that time was covered by thick forest.

A hare ran out of the thickets and the king began to chase it. But this hare suddenly changed into a tiger and soon disappeared from his sight.

Struck by this strange occurrence, the king assembled the wise men in his palace and asked them what such a thing might mean.

“It means,” they replied, “that on the spot where you lost sight of the tiger, you should build a new city. For tigers only flee from places where men come to live in great numbers.”

So workmen were engaged to build the new town. A thick iron rod was driven into the earth to test the firmness of the ground. By chance, at that very moment a slight earth-tremor occurred.

“Stop!” cried the wise men. “The point has pierced the body of Seshanaga, the world-serpent. The town must not be built here.”

And, indeed, the legend tells that when the iron rod was drawn out of the ground, it was found to be all red with the blood of Seshanaga.

“This is most unfortunate,” said the king, “but since we have decided to build the city there, we shall build it all the same.”

The wise men were furious and they predicted dire misfortunes for the city, and the early end of the king’s race.

The soil was fertile and the water abundant. For six hundred years, the town of Almora has stood on its rock, and the surrounding fields produce rich harvests.

Thus, in spite of their wisdom, the wise men were mistaken in their predictions. Doubtless they were sincere and thought they were speaking the truth, but men are very often mistaken in this way and take for realities what is nothing but superstition.

Little children, the world is full of superstitions, and the best means given to man to discover more of the truth is to remain always sincere and to become always more so in thought, deed and word; for it is when we avoid deceiving others in all things that we also learn to deceive ourselves less and less.

Nine

Right Judgment

CHOOSE a good straight stick and dip it half-way into some water: the stick will appear to be bent in the middle. But that is an illusion, and if you were to think that the stick was actually bent, your judgment would be wrong. Pull out the stick and you will see that in fact it is still straight.

On the other hand, it is possible for a stick that is actually bent in the middle to appear straight if it is carefully placed in a particular way in the water.

Well, men are often like sticks. If you look at them from a certain angle, you may not see them as straight as they are, and sometimes too, they may have a deceptive appearance and seem straight when they are crooked. That is why you should trust appearances as little as possible and never judge anyone lightly.

In India, a mendicant monk was going across the country asking for alms. In a meadow he met a ram. The furious animal got ready to rush at him, and to do so, took a few steps back and lowered its head.

“Ah!” said the monk, “here is a good and intelligent animal. He has recognised that I am a man full of merit, and he is bowing down before me to greet me.”

Just then the ram rushed forward and knocked the virtuous man to the ground with one blow of its head.

So it can happen that one judges too respectfully and trustingly those who least deserve it. For sometimes there are people who are like the wolf that the good La Fontaine speaks of—the wolf whom the sheep took for the shepherd because it had put on his cape; or else like the ass who was taken at first for a

dangerous animal because it had put on a lion's skin.

*
* *

But if one can make mistakes like this by trusting to appearances, it more often happens, on the contrary, that one is tempted to make hasty and uncharitable judgments on others.

The Shah of Persia Ismail Sefevi had just conquered the land of Khorasan and was returning to his capital.

As he was passing by the home of the poet Hatifi, he thought he would visit him. He did not have the patience to go as far as the gate of the house, so great was his desire to see the famous man, so, catching sight of the branch of a tree overhanging the wall, he caught hold of it, jumped over the enclosure and into the poet's garden.

What would you have thought if someone had suddenly entered your house like this? You would probably have taken him for a thief and given him a very poor welcome.

Hatifi did well not to judge by appearances or according to the first impression of the moment. He gave a warm welcome to his odd visitor. And later he wrote new poems on the exploits that the Shah had been so eager to tell him.

*
* *

In general nothing is easier than to see in others what is least to their advantage; each one has his faults, to which his neighbours give more attention than he does. But what we should look for in every man, if we do not want to judge him too unjustly, is what is best in him. "If your friend has but one eye," says the proverb, "look at his good side."

A friend of yours may seem awkward or slow, and yet be the most hardworking student of the class.

And your teacher whom you find strict and severe probably loves you much and desires only your progress.

Words of Long Ago

A friend who sometimes seems so boring or so surly to you, may after all be the best friend you have.

And how many people who are looked upon as wicked and are treated harshly, carry deep in their hearts something which no one has been able to perceive.

A great wolf was causing terror in the woods and fields around the town of Gubbio, so that the people dared not even venture on the roads. The monster was killing men and animals alike.

At last the good Saint Francis decided to face the frightful creature. He went out of the town, followed at a distance by many men and women. As he drew near to the forest, the wolf suddenly sprang at the saint with wide open jaws. But Francis calmly made a sign and the wolf lay down peacefully at his feet like a lamb.

“Brother Wolf,” Saint Francis told him, “you have done much harm in this land, and you deserve a murderer’s death. All men hate you. But I would gladly make peace between you and my friends of Gubbio.”

The wolf bowed his head and wagged his tail.

“Brother Wolf,” Francis went on, “I promise you that if you will keep peace with these people, they will be kind to you and give you food every day. So, will you promise to do no more harm from now on?”

Then the wolf bowed his head very low and put his right paw in the saint’s hand. In this way they made a pact together, in good faith.

Then Francis led the wolf into the marketplace of Gubbio and repeated before the assembled citizens what he had just said to the wolf, and once more the wolf put his paw in the saint’s hand as a pledge of his good behaviour for the future.

The wolf lived in the town for two years and did no harm to anyone. Each day the townsfolk would bring him his food, and they all mourned him when he died.

However bad the wolf may have seemed, in truth there was

something in him which no one had discovered until the saint had called him his brother. In this legend the wolf no doubt represents some great offender much hated by other men. It is intended to show that even in those who seem lost beyond hope, there still remain some seeds of good that can be awakened with a little love.

All good cabinet-makers know that there is no plank, however rotten, in which one cannot find some sound fibres. The bad workman will throw away the plank in ignorance and contempt, but the good workman will take it up, remove what is worm-eaten and carefully plane the rest. And out of the hardest knots in the wood, the artist can shape the most heart-stirring figures.

*
* *

In the cheerless land of Guiana, which is so fatal to Europeans, prisons have been established for convicts sentenced to hard labour or transportation. Some years ago, a military warder was taking a working party to Cayenne when by accident he fell into the harbour just as the tide was coming in.

At certain times, at low tide, this harbour is almost completely covered with sand, so that it is impossible to disembark. On the other hand, at full tide, it is flooded by extremely swift currents, bringing the sharks, which infest the entire coast, in great numbers.

The warder who had fallen into the water was in a very critical situation, for he hardly knew how to swim. Every second that passed increased his danger of being snapped up by one of these voracious creatures. Suddenly one of the convicts, heeding only his nobler feelings, threw himself into the water. He was able to catch hold of the warder and after a great effort, to save him.

This man was a criminal, and normally those who saw him pass by in his convict's uniform, marked with ignominious letters and the number which now took the place of his name, would turn away in contempt, thinking him unworthy of a single glance

Words of Long Ago

or word of compassion. And yet their judgment was quite unjust, for in him there was compassion. In spite of all his faults, there was nobility in his heart: he was ready to sacrifice himself for the sake of the very man who was bound by duty never to show him any mercy.

*
* *

Here is yet another story about convicts that will show you how mistaken one can be if one judges men by appearances.

Two released convicts had been hired by a gold-pro prospector from the Upper Maroni. Every year he would entrust them with the gold grains and the nuggets obtained by “placer mining”, which they were to take to the nearest gold-market, thirty days’ journey by canoe down river.

One day the two ex-convicts decided to escape.

For when convicts have completed their sentence, they are not free to return home, but have to stay in the penal colony, usually for the rest of their lives. However, as Guiana is a wild and uninhabited country, full of virgin forests and swamps, where the ex-convicts are in continual danger of dying of fever or starvation, most of them try to escape as soon as the opportunity arises.

So, wishing to take advantage of the canoe at their disposal, the two hired convicts decided to make for the Dutch colony on the opposite bank of the river.

But first, they placed the stock of gold belonging to their master in a safe spot, and sent him a letter indicating the place where his property lay.

“You have always been good to us,” they said, “and while we are escaping, we feel some scruples about robbing you of what you entrusted to our care.”

These two convicts had once been sentenced for theft. The gold they were carrying meant quite a small fortune for them, but something in them was honest and straightforward. To everyone

Right Judgment

who knew their story and judged them according to their past, they were nothing but vile and worthless criminals; but for the sake of the man who was able to trust them, they could, in spite of everything, become trustworthy once more.

Little children, let us be prudent and charitable in our thoughts; let us be careful not to judge our fellow-men too hastily; and even let us refrain from judging them at all when we can avoid it.

Ten

Order

MEN IN ancient India had a very poetic idea about the earth and the world—an idea intended to express order.

The land inhabited by men was called Jambu Dvipa and it was surrounded by a sea of salt. Then came a ring of land and then a sea of milk. Another ring of land, and a sea of butter. More land, and a sea of curds. Land again, and a sea of wine. More land, and after that a sea of sugar. Still more land, and at last, the seventh and final ring of pure water: the sweet, the sweetest of all seas!

If you look at a map of the world like the ones we now use in schools, you will not find the sea of sugar, or the sea of milk, or the others. Nor did the Indians think that these seas really existed, but for them it was an original way of expressing a profound idea.

The ancient legend meant among other things that everything in the world is made to be arranged in an orderly way; that the earth will truly become a place of rest, a reasonable place, and a dwelling fit to live in, only when each thing has found its right place. Indeed, how could one enjoy even the best things, salt, milk, butter, wine, sugar, water, if instead of being kept apart in an orderly way they were to form the frightful mixture you can imagine?

*
* *

All the religious books of mankind, by means of the most varied images, teach this law of order.

The Hebrew Book of Genesis, in its own way, also tells a story of order.

In the beginning there was chaos, that is, disorder and darkness. And the first act of God was to throw light upon this disorder, just as a man shines the light of his lamp into the gloom of the dark and dirty cellar he wants to enter.

After that the Bible tells how, day by day, things emerged from the chaos in an orderly way until at last the human race appeared.

It is the glory of man to create order and to discover it everywhere.

The astronomer looks up towards the stars and makes a map of the heavens; he studies the regular paths of the heavenly bodies and names them, he calculates the motions of the planets around the sun and forecasts the moment when the moon, passing between the earth and the sun, will cause what we call an eclipse. The whole science of astronomy depends on a knowledge of order.

Arithmetic is also a science of order. Even a very small child takes delight in repeating numbers in the right order. He soon discovers that there is no meaning in saying: one, five, three, ten, two, as he counts his fingers or his marbles. He counts: one, two, three, four; and all mathematics comes from that.

And without order, what would become of that lovely thing, music? There are seven notes in the scale: do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si. If you play these notes one after another, it is all right, but if you strike them all together, and mix their sounds, it will make a frightful noise. They can produce a harmonious sound together only when they are played in a certain order. Do, mi, sol, do, for example, sounded together, form what is known as a "chord". The whole science of music is based on that order.

And it could be shown that order is also the basis of every other science and of all the arts that man can invent.

*
* *

But is it not equally indispensable in everything?

Words of Long Ago

If you went into a house and found the furniture and ornaments all topsyturvy and scattered about, and covered with a thick layer of dust, you would exclaim, "What dirt and disorder!" For dirt itself is nothing but disorder. There is a place for dust in the world, but not on the furniture.

Similarly, the place for ink is in the ink-pot and not on your fingers or on the carpet.

Everything is clean when each thing is in its place. And your books at school, your clothes and toys at home should each have a place which is really its own and which no other thing can claim. Otherwise, battles will follow and your books will get torn, your clothes stained and your toys lost. Then it will cost you much trouble and patience to find your way in this muddle and put everything right. Whereas it is so convenient when things are kept in order.

The life and work of men, and even the wealth and prosperity of nations, all depend on this same principle of order.

And that is why one of the main occupations of the government of a country is to maintain good order. From the emperor, king or president, down to the ordinary policeman, each one must contribute to this task as best he can. And all the citizens, whatever their occupations may be, should also take part in this work of maintaining order; for in this way each one can contribute to the organisation of a strong and prosperous nation.

Think of the serious consequences that the slightest disorder can sometimes have.

What regularity and precision there must be among the multitude of railwaymen, gate-keepers, engine-drivers and points-men so that the numerous trains which run in all countries can leave and arrive on time, at the exact minute calculated to avoid all congestion. And if by accident or negligence this order is disrupted even for a moment, what unfortunate incidents can happen! How many things can be upset by a simple delay: friends miss each other, employees and businessmen arrive late at their offices or for their appointments, passengers miss their

boats. And you cannot imagine all the other troubles that will follow.

Think of the sad state things would be in if order and regularity suddenly ceased to exist in the world.

See how the whole routine of the house is disturbed simply when a clock stops giving its charming example of regularity and begins to go slow or else to go madly fast. If it cannot be put right, then the best thing to do is to get rid of it.

*
* *

In the parlour of an old farmhouse there was an antique grandfather clock which for more than a hundred and fifty years had never ceased ticking faithfully. Every morning at daybreak when the farmer came down, the first thing he would do was to visit the clock to be sure that it was right. Now it happened one morning that as he went into the parlour as usual, the clock began to speak:

“For more than a century and a half,” it said, “I have been working without a stop and keeping perfect time. Now I am tired; don’t I deserve to take a rest and stop ticking?”

“Your complaint is unjustified, my good clock,” the shrewd farmer replied, “for you are forgetting that between each tick you have a second’s rest.”

After a moment’s thought, the clock began to work again as usual.

Children, what does this story show? That in orderly work fatigue and rest balance each other, and that regularity avoids much pain and effort.

*
* *

How greatly orderliness increases the power in each thing! Are not the most powerful machines the ones in which each part, each cog, each lever fulfils its function with order and precision?

Words of Long Ago

And in a machine like that, even the smallest screw, when it keeps to its proper place, can claim to be as useful as the majestic flywheel.

Similarly a little child who carefully carries out his task makes a useful contribution to the order of his school, of his home, of his own small world within the greater world.

At first it may take some pains to acquire order. Nothing can be learnt without an effort; nor is it easy to learn to swim, to row, to do gymnastics; but success comes little by little. In the same way, after a certain time, we can learn to do things in an orderly way without the least difficulty. And more and more, we find disorder painful and disagreeable.

When you first learnt to walk, you often stumbled, you fell, you bumped yourself, you cried. Now you walk without giving it a thought and you run skilfully. Well, the movements of walking and running are a splendid example of the orderly functioning of your nerves, your muscles and all your organs.

Thus order always in the end becomes a habit.

And above all, don't imagine that being orderly, regular, punctual, must prevent you from being happy and smiling. It is not necessary to pull a long face when carrying out a task exactly. And to prove it to you, we shall end this lesson on order with a little laughter.

Listen to this example of punctuality, which should not be copied.

An Arab lady had a servant. She sent him to a neighbour's house to fetch some embers to light her fire.

The servant met a caravan going towards Egypt. He began talking with the men and decided to go with them. And he stayed away a whole year.

On his return, he went into the neighbour's house to fetch the embers. But as he was carrying them, he tripped and fell. The burning coals dropped and went out. Then he cried:

“What a nuisance to be in a hurry!”

Eleven

Building and Destroying

CHILDREN, you all know what it is to build and to destroy.

Weapon in hand, the warrior goes forth to destroy.

The builder draws up plans, digs foundations, and the toiling hands of men build a farmhouse for the peasant or a palace for a prince.

It is better to build than to destroy, and yet destroying is sometimes necessary.

You, children, who have strong arms and hands, do you only build? Do you never destroy? And if you do, what do you destroy?

Listen to this account of an Indian legend:

A new-born baby lay in a grove. You might think that he was sure to die, for his mother had laid him there and gone away never to return. But it so happened that honey-sweet drops fell from the beautiful flowers of the Illupay tree and nourished the tiny child until a good woman passed on her way to worship great Shiva in the temple near the grove.

At the sight of the infant, her heart was moved with pity; she took him up and carried him to her husband who welcomed him gladly, for he had no son of his own.

The couple adopted the unknown child from the Illupay grove. But very soon the neighbours began to mock them, reproaching them for taking care of a child without caste. So, for fear of displeasing them by looking after the baby themselves, they put him in a hammock hung from the beams of a stable, and entrusted him to an outcaste family.

A few years later the boy, strong in body and bright in mind, said farewell to those who had showed him kindness and set out

Words of Long Ago

alone to travel. After walking for some time, he sat down to rest at the foot of a palm-tree. And it happened that the tree took care of him and seemed to love him like the woman who had once taken him up in the Illupay grove. For though it might seem impossible that a tree with such a tall trunk could shelter someone in the shade of its leaves throughout one whole day, the story tells that the shadow did indeed keep still and shield the boy with its coolness for as long as he wished to sleep.

*
* *

Now why should it have happened like that?

Why was the child saved from his very birth and why did the palm-tree shelter him from the heat of the sun? Because his life was precious: this child was one day to become the noble Tiruvalluvar, the famous Tamil poet and author of the sweet verses of the Kural.

Thus there are things and beings who must be protected, for they bring messages to the world.

Let us be glad to have strong arms so that we can enfold with their strength what is beautiful, good, true, and guard it from evil and death.

And it is to guard these things that we must sometimes fight and destroy.

*
* *

Tiruvalluvar, who gave golden words to the people, could also fight and kill. He slew the demon of Kaveripakam.

In Kaveripakam there lived a farmer who owned a thousand head of cattle and vast fields of corn. But a demon had been terrifying the countryside; he uprooted the crops from the soil, and slew cattle and men. And the hearts of the people of Kaveripakam were distressed.

“I will give house, land and money to the hero who will rid

us of this demon,” said the wealthy farmer.

For a long time no hero appeared, and the farmer asked the sages who lived on the mountain what he ought to do.

“Go to Tiruvalluvar,” said the sages of the mountain.

So he went to visit the young poet and asked for his help. Then Tiruvalluvar took some ashes and spread them on the palm of his hand and on it wrote five sacred letters, uttered some mantras, then threw the ashes into the air. And the power of the letters and the mantras fell upon the demon, so that he died. This filled the people of Kaveripakam with joy.

Later, when Tiruvalluvar came to the town of Madura, many people gathered together to hear him recite lines from his beautiful poem, and they were enchanted by the verses composed by the child from the Illupay grove:

*Hard it is to find in this world
A greater good than kindness.*

But on a bench, beside a pool where lotus flowers floated on the tranquil waters, some very learned poets were sitting in a row.

These men on the bench had no intention of making room for a fellow-poet of low birth, but they tried to confound him with their questions and to catch him out in some mistake. At last they said:

“O Pariah, put your poem on this bench, and if it is truly a work of beauty, the bench will hold nothing but the Kural.”

Tiruvalluvar placed his writings next to them, and the legend says that the bench at once shrank until it was just large enough to hold only the poem. So the proud and jealous poets of Madura tumbled into the water of the pool! Yes, the forty-nine envious men fell into the pool amid the lotuses. They came out dripping and ashamed. And from that day, all who speak the Tamil language have a great love for the Kural.

*
* *

Words of Long Ago

Children, do you find it sad that the demon of Kaveripakam was slain? And do you think it was a pity that the forty-nine bad poets of Madura fell into the water?

In this world there are both good and evil things; and we should cherish and defend only the good, fight and undermine the evil.

All wise men, like Tiruvalluvar the noble poet, know and are able to do this. And the wiser they are, the better they do it. But even little children who are not yet very wise or very strong can emulate them and thus grow in valour.

This is how Avvai, the sister of Tiruvalluvar, emulated her brother.

One day as she was sitting on the ground in a narrow street of Urayur, three men passed by: one was a king and the other two were poets.

As the king approached, she drew up one of her feet as a mark of respect.

When the first poet came, out of regard for him, Avvai drew back her other foot.

But when the second poet came near, however, she suddenly stretched out both her legs, barring his way.

This behaviour seemed rude, but Avvai knew very well what she was doing, for the second poet was a pretentious man who claimed talent though he had none.

And since he seemed irritated and asked why she had treated him so, she replied:

“Then make me a couplet in which the word ‘wit’ occurs thrice!”

Seeing that people had gathered round, the poet wanted to show his skill, but he was quite unable to make the prescribed word fit into the lines more than twice.

“What have you done then,” laughed Avvai, “with the last wit you have left, which cannot find a place in your lines?” And so she put the pretentious man to shame.

Do you think that she took pleasure in being rude? Certainly

Building and Destroying

not. But to her, pretension did not seem worthy of respect. She knew how to distinguish between what should be respected and what should not.

“Good people,” she would say, “go towards what is good, just as the swan goes towards the lake where the lotus blooms. But the wicked seek what is bad, just as the vulture, attracted by the smell, swoops down upon its dreadful food.”

*
* *

So, brave children of every land, what are the evil things that you should learn to fight? What are the things that man must master or destroy?

All that threatens his life and is harmful to his progress, all that weakens or degrades him, all that makes him unhappy.

Let him harness the power of the flood by bridging the raging torrents and building dykes along the swelling rivers.

Let him build strong ships able to withstand the fury of the wind and waves.

Let him drain and dry the fatal swamps where the demon of fever hides in the damp.

Let him make war on wild beasts wherever they are a danger to him.

Let him train skilful doctors to drive out pain and sickness everywhere.

Let him strive to conquer poverty, the cause of hunger, which makes so many mothers grieve because their children have no bread.

Let him abolish wickedness, envy, injustice, which make life miserable for all.

*
* *

And what are the things that man should cherish and defend? All those that give him life and make him better, stronger and more joyful.

Words of Long Ago

So let him watch over every child that comes into the world,
for its life is precious.

Let him protect the friendly trees and grow plants and
flowers for his food and his delight.

Let him build dwellings that are strong, clean and spacious.

Let him preserve with care the holy temples, statues, pic-
tures, vases, embroidery, as well as beautiful songs and poems,
and all that increases his happiness with its beauty.

But above all, children of India and other lands, let men
cherish the heart that loves, the mind that thinks honest thoughts
and the hand that accomplishes loyal deeds.

Appendix

Stories not published in previous editions of Tales of All Times

Twelve

The Giver

RANTIDEVA who was a king, became a hermit in the forest. He had given his wealth to the poor and lived a simple life in the solitude of the jungle. He and his family had only the bare necessities of life.

One day, after a fast of forty-eight hours, a light meal of rice with milk and sugar was prepared for him.

A poor Brahmin came up to the door of the hut and asked for food. Rantideva gave him half of his rice. Then came a Sudra begging for help and Rantideva gave him half of what remained.

Then he heard a dog barking; the poor beast seemed to be starving. Rantideva gave him what was left. Last of all came a Pariah who stopped at the hermit's door and asked for help. Rantideva gave him the milk and the sugar, and continued to fast.

Then came four gods who said to him:

"It was to us, Rantideva, that you gave food, for we assumed the forms of a Brahmin, a Sudra, a dog and a poor outcaste. You were good to us all and we praise you for your loving thoughts."

A kind heart treats all men and even animals as members of one family, one humanity.

*
* *

Do we not meet people every day who know less than we do? It is in our power to tell them things which may be useful on matters such as food, clothing, exercise, work and recreation.

It is our duty to give them knowledge as it is our duty to give bread to the hungry.

An ignorant man does harm to himself and he does harm to

Words of Long Ago

those around him, just as the bad flute-player made the Brahmin suffer. Did you ever hear how that happened?

One day a Brahmin was walking through the countryside when he was surprised to hear a voice coming from a pipal-tree. The voice spoke to him several times bidding him not to bathe in a tank, not to perform his evening worship, not to eat and not to go away.

So he cried out:

“Who are you to forbid me to do things which have no harm in them?”

The voice from the pipal-tree replied:

“I am a Brahma-Rakshasa. In my last life I was a Brahmin and very learned in the art of music, but I was unwilling to impart my learning to others. I kept my knowledge to myself. And now I am doomed to be a Brahma-Rakshasa and every day I have to listen to a piper, and I cannot tell you how badly he plays. It is terrible. How often I have wished I could come out of the tree, snatch away his instrument and show him how to use it, where to place his fingers, how to use his breath. But it is not possible and I am forced to hear his awful tunes.... ”

I cannot tell you the rest of the story here, except to add that fortunately a way was found to rescue him from his torment. But you see how miserable we can be as a result of the bad work, the bad art, the bad music of people around us.

*
* *

If a man is hungry, what is the only thing that will relieve him? Food. If a man is thirsty, what will relieve him? Water. If a man is ignorant, what is the only thing that will help him? Knowledge.

It is good to give bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, knowledge to the ignorant.

The five sons of Pandu, the five noble Pandavas, were staying in a palace which at first sight seemed beautiful and comfortable. But it had been built by an enemy, Purochana, and he had made

the floors and the walls and the roofs of very inflammable material; he intended to set fire to it one night while the Pandavas were asleep, so as to be rid of the five princes whom he hated.

Such was his villainy. For this wicked purpose, he made use of his skill in building and his cleverness in plotting.

One day a very skilful miner came to the palace. He said secretly to the princes:

“One of your friends sends me here to serve you. I am a miner. Tell me how I can help you. I know for sure that your enemy, Purochana himself, will try to burn you all alive in this house.”

Then the eldest of the Pandavas said to the miner:

“Use your skill in mining, good sir, to make us an underground passage so that even if the gates are guarded we may escape, for we shall get away through the secret passage dug by your spade and made passable by your art.”

In the floor at the very centre of the palace the miner began to dig. The Pandavas kept planks ready to place over the hole and covered the planks with carpets whenever Purochana came near. So the deceiver was deceived.

At last the five princes were informed that the passage was ready. It led from the house to a lovely spot in the forest.

One night the princes set fire to the palace and then with their mother Kunti, they made their escape through the underground passage. It was dark but safe. When strong Bhima noticed that his companions were not fleeing fast enough, he put his mother on his shoulders, took two of his brothers on his hips and the other two under his arms, and with this burden ran like a wind that cannot be stopped, away from the deadly fire.

Purochana’s trick had been foiled by the good miner’s skill. The miner was not content merely to dig the ground to discover treasures for himself alone; he dug for others. He helped others with his knowledge; he shared his science.

*
* *

Words of Long Ago

Even the greatest people on earth does not know everything. We should learn from one another, man from man, nation from nation, one part of the world from another; each nation, each man should be glad to teach what he knows.

The peoples of the West bring to the East their knowledge of science, technology, economics, etc.

From all time the peoples of the East have given to the West their philosophical and ethical knowledge. Thus India has given to other countries the knowledge contained in the Vedas and the teachings of the Buddha on the Noble Path as well as in all her sacred books.

Even a child can give knowledge. One child can teach the alphabet to another. One child can teach another how to do simple arithmetic, or to tell the North from the South, the East from the West, or to tie a knot, to play a game, to sow a seed, etc.

We can all be givers. A holy book says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Thirteen

The Conquest of Knowledge

THE GREAT Rishi, Bhrigu, shining in splendour, sat on the summit of Mount Kailas, and Bharadwaja questioned him:

“Who made the world?

How wide is the sky?

Who gave birth to water? To fire? To the wind? To the earth?

What is life?

What is good?

What is there beyond the world?”

And so on. Great were the questions and great must be the Rishi who could answer them all!

But Bharadwaja’s mind was the mind of a man who asks and asks ever and again, and never knows enough.

The child is the supreme questioner, he is always asking, “What is this? What is that? How is it made? What makes this thing move? What makes the lightning flash? Why are there tides? Where does gold come from? And coal? And iron? How is a book printed?... ” And many more questions besides.

Both children and men ask questions. They also reply. When we know something, we can answer questions. We can teach, we can spread knowledge.

What shall we learn? What shall we teach? Shall we try to learn everything that has happened throughout the ages? Shall we attempt to learn every word that man can pronounce?

In the poem of the Mahabharata, the following words are used to describe the various kinds of arrows shot by the Pandava brothers and other warriors: sara, ishu, sayaka, patri, kanda, vishikha, naracha, vishatha, prushatka, bhalla, tomara, ishika, silimukha, anjalika. We certainly do not need to learn all these

The Conquest of Knowledge

beauty, things that teach man how noble is the world of life.

So we agree that there are words and things and certain kinds of news that are not worth hearing and repeating. But other things, on the contrary, are worth hearing and repeating, even though it may cost us much time, trouble and effort to find them out.

Man's power lies within his thought. The limbs, the hands that are so skilful, are the slaves of his thought which decides and directs.

And since the human race first dwelt on earth, how great have been man's conquests over Nature!

We can see this power pictured in the tale of Rama's crossing over the sea.

When he reached the shores of India, and learned that his dear wife Sita was a captive in the island of Ceylon, he prepared to cross the waters. Vast was his army, but it was made up of monkeys and bears. How could they cross the turbulent waters?

Rama's intelligence was profound, his sagacity keen and his heart full of courage.

First he spoke gently to the old Ocean and said:

"Great Sea, I beseech you, let my army pass." But after he had waited three days, there was still no reply from the waves.

Then Rama called his brother:

"Lakshman, bring me my bow and arrows. I have wasted my words on this sea, just as a man wastes good seeds by sowing them in sand."

Rama, the divine hero, shot an arrow into the deep waters and the shaft gave a fiery pain to the ocean, and all the fish were full of fear. Then the spirit of the ocean took the form of a Brahmin who knelt before the Lord with a golden dish full of jewels as an offering.

The Ocean clasped the lotus-feet of Rama and said:

"Great Lord, forgive my sin. I am like my kin of the air, the earth and the fire. They are heavy and slow and so accustomed to power that they do not answer the call of a Lord like you. No

Words of Long Ago

hero before you has ever made me obey his will. In you I see my master. Do what seems good to you.”

Lord Rama smiled:

“Tell me,” he said, “how my army may cross over your realm of waves and storms.”

“My waters,” said the sea, “will bear on their breast the rocks which your soldiers will throw on them and in that way a bridge will be built between India and Lanka.”

Rama turned to his army:

“Let the bridge be built,” he said.

“Glory to Rama,” shouted all the warriors.

They uprooted trees and rocks and even great cliffs, and brought them to the two master-builders, Nala and Nila. And Nala and Nila fastened the wood and stone together so that everything floated firmly on the surface of the sea. Then the army marched across it.

Rama sat on a mountain of India and watched the countless troops moving across the bridge.

Just as Rama forced the spirit of the ocean to obey him, so does man’s thought, the glory of humanity, conquer the sea, and many other things besides. Man masters the wind, since he makes it blow his sailing ships and turn his windmills. He conquers the ice and the snow, for explorers have travelled to the frozen lands of the North Pole and the South Pole and have climbed the highest mountains. He conquers the beasts, for all over the world he slays the animals that are a danger to him and his family: lions, tigers, wolves, snakes and even sharks. Although he has less power over the great ocean, he has made his strength felt on land. And while he has rid himself of the animals that are harmful to him, he has kept and bred the animals that are useful to him: the ox, the horse, the sheep, the elephant, etc.

But all this is the conquest of things by his hands and by his tools and weapons. And hands and tools and weapons are the servants of his thought.

The Conquest of Knowledge

Man conquers by knowledge. And he conquers knowledge: he asks and asks again and again, and perseveres until he really knows.

Some men of whom history tells are known as conquerors: Alexander the Great who conquered Western Asia and Egypt, Julius Caesar who conquered France and England, the emperor Baber who conquered the North of India, Napoleon who became for a time the master of Europe.

But there are other ways of being a conqueror.

You also can be a conqueror. There are things in the world which need to be known and learnt. Ask, seek, learn and conquer. Then you can call yourself a conqueror.

Fourteen

Modesty

WHO IS this coming to the door of this Japanese house? It is the flower-artist, the man who is skilled in arranging flowers.

The master of the house brings a tray with some flowers, a pair of scissors, a knife, a little saw, and a beautiful vase.

“Sir,” he says, “I cannot make a bouquet beautiful enough for such a beautiful vase.”

“I am sure you can,” replies the master politely as he leaves the room.

Left alone, the artist sets to work, cutting, snipping, twisting and tying until a beautiful bunch of flowers fills the vase—a delight to the eyes.

The master and his friends enter the room; the artist stands to one side and murmurs, “My bouquet is too poor, let it be taken away.”

“No,” replies the master, “it is good.”

To one side of the table, near the vase, the artist has left a pair of scissors. By this he means that if there is any flaw in the bouquet, anyone can take the scissors and cut away what offends the eye.

The artist has done a fine piece of work, but he would not dream of exalting its merits. He admits that he may have made mistakes. He is modest.

Perhaps the Japanese artist really thinks that his work deserves compliments. I cannot tell his thoughts. But at any rate he does not boast and his behaviour is pleasing.

On the other hand, we smile at people who are vain.

Suleiman, Caliph of Damascus, was like that. One Friday, coming out of his hot bath, he dressed himself in green clothes,

put on a green turban, sat on a green couch, and even the carpet all around was green. And then looking into a mirror and feeling pleased with himself, he said, "The Prophet Mohammed was an apostle, Ali Bakr was a faithful servant of the truth, Omar could distinguish the true from the false, Otman was modest, Ali was brave, Muawiyah was merciful, Yazid was patient, Abdul-Malik a good governor, Walid a powerful master, but I am young and handsome."

The flowers in the vase are beautifully arranged and our eyes are delighted. But it is for us and not for the artist to praise them.

Suleiman is handsome. It is true that there is no harm in his knowing it, but we laugh at his vanity when he gazes at himself in a mirror and tells himself that his good looks make him a finer man than Omar the truthful or Yazid the patient.

*
* *

Still more absurd was the vanity of the man who thought that the earth was not large enough for his glory and that he must soar into higher regions.

This is the story.

A king of Persia named Kai Kaus had waged many wars and won many battles. He was so rich with the spoils of his enemies that he built two palaces in the Elburz mountains; and the gold and silver in the chambers were so plentiful that the brightness of the polished metal rivalled the light of day.

Kai Kaus was filled with presumptuous pride; he thought that he was the greatest king on earth.

Iblis, the evil spirit, observing the high opinion the king had of himself, resolved to trick him. He sent a demon disguised as a servant to the palace, with a bunch of flowers to present to the king.

The servant kissed the ground before Kai Kaus and said:

"Sire, no king in the world is like unto you. And yet one realm remains for you to conquer, the upper world, the kingdom

Words of Long Ago

of the sun, the moon, the planets and the secret corners of the heavens. Follow the birds, O King, and ascend to the sky.”

“But how can I ascend without wings?” asked the king.

“Your wise men will tell you, Sire.”

So King Kai Kaus asked the astrologers how he might fly to the upper regions, and they invented a novel plan. They suggested ordinary methods but the king would not hear of them.

They took four young eagles from a nest, fed and trained them until they were big and strong.

They made a square wooden frame; at each corner they fixed a pole and on each pole a piece of goat’s meat. One of the four eagles was tied to each corner.

The king’s throne was attached to the frame and a jar of wine was placed at the side of the throne. The king sat down.

The four eagles tried to catch hold of the meat and in order to do so flew upwards, at the same time lifting up the frame, which rose into the air to the amazement of the crowd. The eagles went up and up, nearer and nearer to the moon, until, wearied by their flight, they stopped beating their wings. Then the frame, the throne, the king, the wine-jar and all fell with a crash into the wilderness of China. The king lay all alone, bruised, hungry and wretched, until messengers came and took him back to the palace.

The king himself now saw how stupid and vain he had been. He decided not to attempt any more flights beyond his power. He settled down to the work of his kingdom and ruled it so justly that all men praised him.

This is how he came down from the high places of vanity to the honesty of the good, firm earth.

*
* *

Sometimes we feel contempt for vain people who not only admire themselves too much, but boast. No one likes a braggart; even braggarts despise braggarts.

We are not surprised to learn that Ravana the terrible foe of Rama, whose wife Sita he had stolen away, was a braggart; it was quite natural for such a monster.

In the last great battle between Rama and the demons of Lanka, the glorious lord stood in his chariot face to face with the demon king, also in his chariot. It was a single combat. The army of demons and the army of monkeys and bears watched the fight.

Then with a dreadful voice, Ravana the king of Lanka cried:

“Today, O Rama, this war will come to an end unless you save yourself by running away from the battlefield. Today, wretch, I shall give you over to death. It is with Ravana that you must fight.”

Rama smiled calmly. He knew that Ravana’s doom was near and he said:

“Yes, I have heard of all your might, O Ravana, but now I want to see as well as hear. I beg you to remember that there are three kinds of men in this world, who are like three kinds of trees: the dhak, the mango and the bread-fruit. The dhak tree bears flowers. It is like the man who only speaks. The mango tree has both flowers and fruits. It is like a man who both speaks and acts. The bread-fruit tree bears only fruit. It is like the man who speaks not but acts.”

The demon laughed at these wise words. But before long his boasting tongue was silent for ever.

*
* *

You have heard of great Solomon who was the King of Israel many years ago. There are many stories in the Bible and in other books which tell of his glory and his majesty. I shall tell you one story about him.

He was very rich. He had a magnificent throne, his plates were of gold, and in his palace silver was as common as stones in the city of Jerusalem. Merchants were constantly bringing him gold, silver, ivory, peacocks, monkeys, beautiful clothes, armour,

Words of Long Ago

spices, horses, mules and many other riches. King Solomon built a splendid temple in honour of the God of his fathers and his nation. But before the temple was built, while the timber for it was still growing in the form of cedar-trees on the mountains, Solomon had a dream in which his God appeared to him and said:

“Ask of me what you wish me to give you.”

Solomon answered:

“My father David was a just and truthful man and now I have succeeded to his throne. The work that lies before me is great. I feel like a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. I do not even know how to rule this people of which I am king. Therefore my desire is to have knowledge, so that I may know good from evil.”

And God replied:

“Because you have not asked for long life or riches but have desired knowledge and a heart which can distinguish justice from injustice, I will give you this wise mind so that none shall surpass you in understanding; and long life and riches will be yours also.”

You will notice the modest words spoken by the king, “I am but a little child.”

Do we think less of Solomon because he spoke humbly of himself?

On the contrary, it is a real joy to see greatness that is modest.

*
* *

I shall tell you three stories about the modesty of the Prophet Mohammed.

It is said that the Prophet of Islam was always willing to ride on an ass, while prouder men would only be content with a horse. And sometimes he would invite someone to ride behind him. And he would say:

“I sit at meals as servants do and I eat like a servant, for in truth I am a servant.”

Here is the second story. One day the Prophet was at a meeting-place where many people were gathered, and there was not much room to sit. So he sat with his legs folded under him.

An Arab of the desert was present, and knowing that Mohammed was a great leader of men, he was surprised that the Prophet was not seated like a lord upon a throne.

“Is this the way to sit?” he scoffed.

“Verily,” said Mohammed, “Allah has made me a humble servant and not a proud king.”

Here is the third story. Mohammed was deep in conversation with the chief of a tribe of Quraish, when a blind man named Abdullah, not knowing that someone was with the Prophet, suddenly interrupted the conversation and asked to hear some verses from the Koran.

Mohammed spoke to him very roughly and ordered him to be silent. But afterwards he felt sorry that he had been so harsh and very humbly apologised for it. And from that time he treated Abdullah with great respect and even conferred honorable posts on him.

*
* *

After these stories of the king and the prophet, I shall tell you one about a famous man of science, the Englishman Isaac Newton.

Newton was born in 1642 and died in 1727. In the course of his long life he studied Nature; the universal force of attraction called gravitation, the effect of the sun and the moon on the tides; the light of the sun and how its white ray is broken up into the seven colours of the rainbow; and many other things besides. Everyone marvelled at the wisdom of this man who was so skilled in reading the works and wonders of Nature. One day a lady spoke to Newton of his learning and knowledge and he replied:

Words of Long Ago

“Alas! I am only like a little child picking up pebbles on the shore of the great ocean of truth.”

You will understand that the ocean of truth means the laws of Nature which even the most learned men hardly know at all. A little child collects pebbles on the sea-shore, but how much vaster is the sea than the child thinks! And how much vaster still is the universe compared to our little thoughts!

And do we think less of Newton because he compared himself to a little child? Certainly not. We honour him for his modesty.

*
* *

Many years ago a great singer, who had won a world-wide reputation for her wonderful voice and outstanding talent, happened to be at a party. There, a little girl with a beautiful voice was asked to sing. The piece she was ready to sing was a duet, a piece of music for two voices. The child was to sing the main part, but no one wanted to sing the accompaniment. All the grown-ups thought that it was beneath them to sing the second voice to a child. There was a pause; no one offered to accompany the child.

Then the famous singer said:

“I will sing the second voice if you wish.”

And she did so. The duet was sung to the audience; the little girl’s voice rose high and clear, with the voice of the most famous singer of her time following sweetly, making a lovely harmony.

Noble was the heart of the modest lady who was willing to give her service to a child.

*
* *

In 1844 the Sanskrit College of Calcutta needed a teacher of grammar, and the post was offered to Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. At that time he was earning fifty rupees a month, and in this new

position he could earn ninety. But he thought that his friend Tarkavachaspati was a better grammar teacher than himself and he said so. So it was decided that his friend should take the post. Vidyasagar was very happy. He walked some distance from Calcutta to find his friend and tell him the news.

Tarkavachaspati was struck by the noble modesty of the scholar and exclaimed, "You are not a man, Vidyasagar, but a god in human form!"

*
* *

Now here is the story of a conceited glow-worm.

A man looked up at the glorious sun and exclaimed:

"How bright!"

"Like all the rest of us shining ones," answered a voice.

The man looked all around him and saw a glow-worm in the shade of a bush.

"Was it you who spoke?"

"Yes," replied the glow-worm. "I said that the sun and I are shining ones."

"The sun and you, really!" laughed the man.

"Yes, the sun, the moon, the stars, and me," insisted the glow-worm complacently.

*
* *

Four men were climbing a mountain in Italy. All four of them were monks: St. Francis was leading three brothers of his order. The mountain-side was covered with trees, and at the top there was an open flat space where St. Francis wished to pray, in the hope of having a new vision of things divine. The saint was well known and revered by rich lords and poor villagers alike.

The day was hot and the path steep. Francis was too tired to walk. So one of the monks went to a peasant and asked him to lend his ass for Francis to ride.

Words of Long Ago

The peasant willingly agreed; the saint mounted the ass and the monks walked by his side while the peasant followed behind.

“Tell me,” asked the peasant, “are you Brother Francis?”

“Yes,” he replied.

“Then,” said the peasant, “try to be as good as people think you are, so that men may keep their faith in you.”

When he heard this, St. Francis was not at all displeased, for he would take advice from anyone, whether prince or poor peasant. He got down from the ass, bowed down before the countryman and thanked him for his good advice.

Fifteen

The Family

A TRAVELLER in Morocco noticed that in the evening when the flocks of ewes and the flocks of lambs were brought together after having been separated all day, the good creatures ran eagerly here and there as if they were looking for something. In fact, each ewe was looking for its lamb, each lamb was looking for its mother.

A monkey had young ones and she loved them, but her love was like a fountain, giving drink not only to her own children, but pouring out on all. She found other little monkeys and was kind to them. Not only that, she took puppies and kittens with her as if she had adopted them. And when she had food to give, she shared it between her own little ones and the ones she had adopted.

The mother bird sits on her eggs to keep them warm and the father bird goes in search of food for her and her brood.

The gorilla of Africa lives with his mate and his offspring as a real family. Chimpanzees do the same and the father makes a rough nest in a tree to shelter the mother and her children, and he watches through the night to protect his family from the prowling leopard.

If our animal kindred can show affection for their young and protect them, it is no wonder that even primitive men form groups or families consisting of a man, a woman and children.

When does the mother begin to love her child? At the beginning of his life.

When does the child begin to love his mother? Not at the same time. First he must learn to feel, to think and act. Then he learns to love his mother and his father as well.

We are told about a little girl of seventeen months who ran

Words of Long Ago

to meet her father when he returned after a few days' absence, and stroked and kissed his face and gave him all her toys.

People are always happy to receive gifts. We read in the history of the Muslims that Caliph Mamun gave his wife a golden carpet on which he poured a heap of pearls; and after her ladies had each taken a pearl there still remained a sparkling pile of these precious gems.

And what does the mother give to her child? She gives him good health, straight limbs, the power of speech, the power to love what is right.

For if a mother neglects her child, his health will suffer, his legs will be crooked, his tongue will not speak good words and he will not learn to behave well and think well. And are not all these gifts infinitely more precious than a golden carpet and many pearls?

The mother who gives these beautiful presents to her child feels that her own life is in her son or daughter. And just as her heart is full of joy when her child is well, so it is full of sorrow when he is sick or when he dies. Listen to the voice of a mother in a Tamil song:

He lives in my heart; where has he fled?

Alas, my child, my child!

Who has taken my idol of gold?

Alas, my child, my child!

In a pretty voice he called me Amma,

Alas, my child, my child!

I have never seen such a pretty face,

Alas, my child, my child!

He played gracefully on my lap,

Alas, my child, my child!

His father lifted him up with delight,

Alas, my child, my child!

On his brow were the lines of good fortune,

Alas, my child, my child!

Oh, evil on the evil eye that looked at him!
Alas, my child, my child!
Stay, my child, or let me go with you,
Alas, my child, my child!
Come back, come back, do not leave me alone,
Alas, my child, my child!

The good father's heart also lives in the life of his child and is wounded by his death.

How cruelly Mohammed suffered when he lost his little son Ibrahim. The old books say that the child died at the age of fifteen or sixteen months.

But there is a very famous play called *Hasan and Husain* in which Ibrahim seems older. In this play, Azrael the Angel of Death comes to Mohammed's house and asks for the child.

"I beg," says the Prophet in deep distress, "that he may stay with me until tomorrow."

So the angel waits a little. And just then the little boy's voice is heard at school, reading these words from the Koran:

"I fly unto Allah for refuge from the evil one. In the name of Allah the All-Merciful, O thou soul who art at rest, return unto thy Lord well-pleased and well-pleasing, enter among my servants and enjoy my paradise."

How sweet to the ears of Mohammed is the voice of his child!

How sweet to parents are the voices of boys and girls who repeat their lessons! I shall not describe the rest of the scene of Ibrahim's death. I only wish to tell how his mother Mary watches over him lovingly, how affectionately his sister Fatimah speaks to Ibrahim, how Husain, the Prophet's grandson, places the child's head on his lap, and how his father weeps when Ibrahim is no more.

*
* *

Words of Long Ago

Do parents only love bright and clever children? No, their arms enfold them all.

One day I went into a village shop. The father, a cobbler, was nailing a sole on to an old shoe. The mother was cleaning the kitchen. They paused in their work to speak to me about their son. The poor boy was almost dumb. I could not understand what he was saying, but his parents knew the meaning of his inarticulate cries. He had so little reason that he could neither dress nor feed himself alone. His parents had to watch over him all day lest he should hurt himself or hurt other children. They had done this for seven or eight years; and they loved him in spite of all this trouble.

In the Ramayana the poet speaks of the father's love for all his children: "The father has a number of children, each different in temperament and character. One is a student, another a teacher who fasts, another a doctor, another a soldier, or a skilful worker, or a monk. The father feels the same affection for them all. Another, who may be very slow to learn, is yet devoted in word, thought and deed to his father, and this is the son whom the father loves as his own soul."

The dear mother has eyes that see more deeply than other eyes. She will often see the gift and the skill of her child where others see nothing.

Thus Queen Kausalya, the mother of Rama, had a vision of her son's glory. For one day he was changed in her eyes. The moment before he was a small child, and suddenly ten thousand stars shone on every hair of his body, suns and moons glittered on his limbs, and around him were high mountains, rivers, oceans, and many lands, and all the powers of Nature were gathered upon the wonderful boy.

Joining her hands in prayer, the queen said not a word. With closed eyes, she knelt at his feet until he resumed the form of a little child.

We have seen that parental love exists in a simple way in animals, that the father and mother love their child from

the beginning of his life, that they love him whether he is healthy or sick, clever or deficient, and that the mother especially has a penetrating eye which detects the good qualities of his soul.

The family is something very precious to mankind. It is the true home. For neither wood nor stone nor the cloth of a tent nor the marble of a palace make a home, but the love that unites young and old in the family just as the hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

*
* *

A pious Muslim used to kiss his mother's feet every day before going out to join his companions.

One day he arrived late and they asked him why.

"I lingered with pleasure," he said, "in the gardens of Paradise, for I have heard that Paradise lies at the feet of the Mother."

It is also written in the book of Al-Mostatraf that when Moses spoke with God, the Most High uttered 3500 words. At the end of the conversation, Moses said, "O my Lord God, give me a rule of conduct."

The Lord replied:

"I bid you be good to your mother."

These words were repeated seven times, and Moses assured him that he would remember them.

Then the Lord added:

"Yes, Moses. When your mother is happy with you, I am also happy, and if she is angry, I am angry."

The love of the mother and father expresses itself to the child in charming words.

An Arab woman caressed her child and said, "I love him as the miser loves his money."

But if the parents' love goes out towards the child, will not the child's love go towards his parents?

Words of Long Ago

Shall we not return love for love?

There are countless sons and daughters all over the world who lavish affection on their good parents and help them. It would need a book bigger than all the books written by the poets of India to tell of all the affection shown by children to their fathers and mothers.

Here I shall tell you only of one of these countless examples. It is a story from ancient Greece.

Old King Oedipus was blind. He had offended the gods and had to lead the life of a traveller wandering from village to village, from town to town. Kind folk would give him shelter and food, but no one could give him back his sight. And who was to lead him from place to place? Who but his daughter Antigone? She guided his steps along the roads; she begged the strangers whom they met to take pity on him. She carried his messages. When Antigone left him for a moment, old Oedipus was sad. Great was his joy when she returned; and when he touched her hand again he said:

*I have all
That's precious to me; were I now to die
Whilst you are here, I should not be unhappy.*

At last the gods looked kindly on him. He felt that the time had come for him to die, but he was to go to the dwelling-place of the Shining Ones. Blind as he was, he made his way alone to a valley surrounded by high rocks. There he took a bath and dressed himself in fine garments. A clap of thunder was heard. And old Oedipus disappeared from sight. He had joined the gods. Antigone wept at his departure:

*Oh, I was fond of misery with him:
E'en what was most unlovely grew beloved
When he was with me.*

He had indeed lived in misery, but how much more he would

have suffered if he had not been comforted by his daughter's love.

*
* *

We have spoken of the love of parents for their children and of children for their parents. If someone asked you what makes a family, what would you reply?

I asked a child the other day and he replied, "Two." He meant the husband and the wife.

I asked another child and he replied, "Three," thinking of the father, the mother and the child.

And yet we can see that the family is very often larger than these three. Suppose, for example, that there are four: father, mother and two children. Then a new idea, a new friendship comes into play, the friendship of brother and sister. In this friendship, we do not look up, as to a parent, or down, as to a child. We are attached to a friend who is more on our own level, who is in a way our equal, or nearly our equal in age. And so brotherly affection adds a new gem to the wealth of the household.

*
* *

When Rama returned to the city of Ayodhya with his bride Sita of the lotus eyes, his brother Lakshman shared in the joy. Tents were set up for entertainments, the streets were planted with mango, betel-nut and banana-trees. The bazaars were bright with flowers and drapery; flags waved; drums rolled; all kinds of music played sweetly. People cheered, "Rama, Rama!" and Rama's heart was happy.

And so was the heart of Lakshman; brother shared the joy of brother.

A day came when the sky of life was clouded and no music was heard. The old king of Ayodhya had made known the terrible decree that Rama must go into exile for fourteen years.

Words of Long Ago

When Lakshman heard this cruel order his body shook with sorrow, his eyes filled with tears; he ran and kissed Rama's feet, and for a moment he could not speak a word.

"Brother," said noble Rama, "let not your soul be troubled. All will be well in the end. You cannot come with me. You must stay in Ayodhya to help my father and the people."

"No," replied Lakshman, "no, my brother, not so. I am devoted to you alone. I tell you with all my heart that where you go, there I too must go."

Then Rama raised up his brother, embraced him and said:

"Go and say farewell to your mother, and then come with me to the forest and to exile."

And Lakshman was full of joy.

Brothers and sisters protect each other.

In the Bhratriditiya festival, sisters in Hindu families mark the foreheads of their brothers with sandalwood powder, give them sweetmeats and if they can, a gift of cloth. In this way they hope to ward off the coming of Yama, the Lord of Death. And they recite:

*On my brother's brow I have made the mark,
On Yama's door the bolt has fallen.*

It is not sandalwood but love that protects and blesses, the love of sister for brother and brother for sister.

*
* *

But we can widen the limits of the family and include in it the dear grandparents, the uncles and aunts and cousins.

We can widen it still further.

I mean the men and women who are not of the same blood as the family, but who help in the house by washing, cleaning, cooking and in many other ways. I mean the servants. They also form part of the family. In ancient Rome, when a patrician spoke

of his family, he was not thinking only of his wife and children, but also of his slaves.

Let me tell you a scene from the play *Hasan and Husain* which is so much admired by the Muslims of Persia.

Noble Husain, who was killed on the battlefield of Karbala in Babylonia, was about to fight his last combat. All his comrades of war were slain. He stood alone like the last palm-tree standing in an oasis. The women of his family were mourning their dead and also Husain, who was surely about to die at the hands of the enemy.

One by one he bade farewell to all, to his wife Umm Lailah, to Zainab his sister, to his other sister Kulsum and his daughter Sukainah.

An old negress approached the great captain. "Master," she said, "my heart grieves at the thought that I shall be separated from you. I am very old and I have nothing more to live for. I wish only one thing: forgive me, I beg you, for all the faults I have committed.

Husain, the warrior in his coat of mail, who in a few short hours would lie martyred on the plain of Karbala, looked gently at the old negress and said:

"Yes, you have served us a very long time. You have toiled at the household tasks for my mother. You have threshed the corn. How often you have rocked me in your arms! Your face is black, but you have a pure white heart. Today I shall leave you. I owe you many more thanks than I can count. I beg your forgiveness for any action which may have been thoughtless or unkind."

*
* *

But we have not yet found out how wide the family circle is. Are there not other servants, both two-footed and four-footed, who add to the pleasure of the home? Are there not birds who entertain us with their chirping and singing? Are there not pets

Words of Long Ago

who play in our rooms and domestic animals who work for us on our farms? Should not animals, the tame helpers, be counted as members of the family?

The whole world knows that the people of India are friendly with the animals who live in the same land. But they are not the only ones who have kindly feelings towards our brothers the animals. In the North where the sea is frozen into thick ice and the ground is nearly always white with snow, lives a people known as the Eskimos.

In this land, a white or polar bear once saved the lives of three men. They had fallen into the sea and had caught hold of a bear as he swam, and he carried them to the shore. They were very grateful and wished to repay their debt.

“Thank you,” said the bear, “I don’t need anything for the moment. But if ever you are out hunting with other men and you catch me, would you please ask them to spare my life? You will recognise me by my bald head.”

So saying, he dived into the sea and swam away.

Next winter, the Eskimos of the same tribe saw a bear on the ice and set off in pursuit. Among the hunters were the three men whose lives had been saved by the bald-headed bear. They discovered that it was the same animal. They begged their companions to leave him alone. What is more, they prepared a good meal for him and spread it out in front of him on the ice. He ate heartily and lay down on the ice to sleep; no one harmed him and the children played around him without fear. When he awoke he went down towards the sea, dived in and swam away. The Eskimos never saw him again, but they always remembered their friend the bear.

*
* *

So in our idea of the family let us include father, mother, child, brother, sister, grandparents, servants, and the animals that help man.

Of course, the ways and customs of families are not the same in every country of the world. You will find it interesting to hear from travellers or read in books or learn from your teachers about the family customs of Japan, China, Persia, Egypt, Europe and America. And you will find many differences. But in all of them, love rules in their hearts and affection is the law. It may happen that the members of a family do not love one another, but then they are not a true family.

A man may act in an inhuman way, but then he is not a true man.

*
* *

Rangananda and his father

In the year 1831 a twelve-year old Hindu boy knocked at the door of the district judge of Chittur. He was the son of a farmer who had been put in prison for not paying his rent. The farmer had taken some Government land, but the harvest failed and under the law which was then in force, he had to go to prison.

While the father was in jail, his birthday came and the mother wept because he could not be at home. That is why his son Rangananda ran to Chittur and knocked at the judge's door.

The judge listened to the boy's story and said:

"I cannot let your father go unless I have some security, some pledge that he will return to finish his sentence."

"We have no money," the boy replied, "but I shall be the pledge myself and I shall stay in prison in my father's place."

The judge's heart was touched. He signed an order for the father's release. Swift as a deer, Rangananda ran to the prison. Father and son joyfully set out for their home and reached it that night.

Rangananda was later known as Rangananda Shastri. He could read and speak fifteen languages.

*
* *

Words of Long Ago

The white elephant (A fable)

A herd of 80,000 elephants roamed the jungles of the Himalayas, led by a mighty white beast whom they were proud to acknowledge as their king.

The king's mother was blind.

If ever he wandered with the herd into remote parts of the forest, he still had loving thoughts for his mother and sent her messengers with fruit.

Alas, the messengers ate the fruit themselves and the loving gifts never reached the blind mother. When he discovered this deceit the king resolved to leave the herd and to feed and protect his mother himself. So he led her to a cave in Mount Chandorana, near to a lake, and they lived together in peace.

One day a man from the city of Benares lost his way in the jungle and wandered in despair for seven days.

The elephant-king knelt down and invited the lost man to climb on to his back; then he took him to the path which led to Benares and showed him the way.

Alas, the man's heart was wicked. He told the King of Benares what a fine white elephant was to be found in the cave of Chandorana, and the King sent him with many helpers to catch the royal elephant. The hunters saw the white king standing in a lake. They seized him and he did not resist, they took him to Benares.

The blind mother was sad when her son did not return.

"Ah," she sighed, "the frankincense tree still grows and the Kutaja, grass and ferns, lilies and bluebells; but my son, where is he?"

The white elephant was in a stable all bright with flowers, and the King himself came to feed him. But the elephant would eat nothing.

"My mother is not here," he said.

"Come, come," said the King of Benares, "eat and let us be friends."

“Ah, the poor blind one mourns in the cave of Chandorana.”

“Whom do you mean?” asked the King.

“My mother mourns for me.”

So the King commanded his people to set the elephant free, and the great creature ran swiftly away from the city into the jungle; he drew water from a pool, hurried to the cave and showered his blind mother with the cool water.

She cried, “It is raining! Alas, my son is not here to take care of me.”

“Mother,” he said, “it is I, your son. The King has sent me home.”

Then they were happy together.

The mother died and was burnt, and in time the white elephant also died. The King made a stone image of him; and from every part of India people gathered each year for the Festival of the Elephant.

Sixteen

Sympathy

WHEN is sorrow accompanied by sorrow?
When one heart feels it and our heart feels it at the same time.

Duryodhana, the famous warrior, fell on the plain of Kurukshetra and his friends were so full of grief that when he lay on the ground and died, all Nature seemed in disorder. Headless creatures with many arms and legs danced dreadful dances over the earth; in lakes and wells the water was turned to blood; rivers flowed upstream instead of downstream; women looked like men, and men like women.

Here the poet teaches us that the suffering undergone by one being spreads through a wide, wide world. There was sympathy between the fallen king and thousands of living creatures.

Is this sympathy shown only in sorrow? No, it is shown both in joy and suffering.

Listen to the story of Nandiya the deer who was kind to his parents in times of peace and contentment and also in times of darkness and peril.

The King of Kosala often used to hunt in the forest where Nandiya lived with his father and mother in peace and mutual love. When he hunted, the King galloped through a wide stretch of country and many people from Kosala had to follow him as attendants; so many people were taken away from their work and they murmured at the loss they suffered.

Therefore they made a park with fences and gates and a pool in the middle, and went into the jungle to drive the deer into the park so that the King might have all the game at hand and would not need to go hunting with so many followers.

Nandiya saw the people coming, armed with sticks, as he

was feeding with his parents in a little wood.

“Stay here,” he said to his parents. “I shall go and meet these people.”

He came out of the wood alone and the people, assuming that there were no more deer beneath the trees, took him away and passed on.

All the deer, except the two old ones who had stayed in the wood, were now gathered in the park. The King was pleased, and from time to time he shot one of the herd with his bow and arrow. Nandiya’s turn, however, did not come for a very long time.

When at last it did come, Nandiya stood still before the king and did not try to run away.

The King was so struck by this unusual behaviour that he did not shoot. Lowering his bow, he paused.

“Shoot, O King,” said Nandiya.

“I cannot. There is merit in you, O deer. I grant you your life.”

“Will you not, O King, give freedom to the rest of the deer in this park?”

“I will.”

“And will you not, O King, show your favour to the birds of the air and the fish in the water?”

“I will.”

This deer, the old story says, was the Lord Buddha; he spoke to the King and taught him the Law of Mercy for all living things. And afterwards the King sent a messenger with a drum throughout the country to proclaim his protection for deer, birds and fish.

You will readily agree that Nandiya was right to protect his parents. It would also be good to help a brother or a sister. But you will notice in the next story that a noble Arab spoke of a man as his brother, even though he was not really his brother.

*
* *

Words of Long Ago

A caravan was crossing the desert, and water ran short. The Arab travellers were compelled to measure out the water so that each might have a small but equal share.

For measuring they used a cup with a stone in it. They poured the water from a water-skin until it covered the stone. This was the share of each one.

Only the chief men in the caravan had a share of water.

The first time that the water was measured out like this, Kab-ibn-Mamah was about to take the cup when he saw a man of the Namir tribe looking at him longingly. Kab said to the man who was giving out the water, "Give my share to this brother," and pointed to the man of Namir.

The man drank eagerly. Kab had no water.

The next day, the time came again to share the water.

Once more the man of Namir looked on with longing. Once more Kab gave the cup to the "brother" as he called him.

But when the caravan was about to move on, Kab no longer had the strength to mount his camel.

He remained lying on the sand.

The others dared not stay lest they should all die of thirst. They covered him with blankets to protect him from beasts of prey and left him to die.

*
* *

You will have noticed that when sorrow is felt, it is soon felt by the heart of someone near. When Duryodhana fell, at once Nature grieved. When danger threatened his parents, Nandiya went out to protect them. When the man of Namir looked on in his thirst, the noble Arab chief immediately offered him his water.

Sorrow quickly follows sorrow and joy goes with joy.

When sympathy is slow to arise we do not value it so highly.

The famous poet Firdausi wrote the history of the kings of Persia and recited it to Sultan Mahmud; the Sultan was

delighted and for some time he held the poet in great favour. The poem Shah-Namah was the work of thirty years, and the Sultan had promised to give the poet 60,000 pieces of gold on its completion.

Firdausi was disliked by the Sultan's Vizier. This man persuaded his master that the treasury was depleted and that it would be only sensible to give the poet silver instead of gold. Mahmud heeded this advice and sent Firdausi some bags containing 60,000 pieces of silver.

Firdausi was at the bath when the bags arrived. He was so infuriated by the Sultan's avarice that he would not even take the gift. He gave 20,000 pieces to the messenger who had brought the money, 20,000 to the proprietor of the baths, and 20,000 to a beer-seller who happened to be there.

Mahmud was informed of this insult and ordered the poet to be trampled to death by elephants. Firdausi was warned and fled to a distant city; at last he settled at Tus, his birth-place.

Soon the Sultan felt sorry that he had treated Firdausi so shamefully and wished to regain the poet's respect. He sent a messenger to Tus, bearing him many presents: 60,000 pieces of gold, silks, brocades, velvets....

Alas! The presents arrived too late.

As the king's messenger passed through one of the gates of the city, leading camels laden with Mahmud's costly gifts, a bier with the remains of the poet passed out of another gate, carrying them to the resting-place of the dead.

*
* *

"Our Emperor is a just man," said the people of China, "for he is always ready to lend an ear to the complaints of the poor."

But a day came when the ear could hear no more. The Emperor suddenly became deaf. He could no longer listen to the song of the birds, the murmur of the wind or the voices of men.

The Emperor wept, and the nobles and officers who met

Words of Long Ago

with him in council made signs to him and wrote him words of consolation begging him not to be so sad.

“Do not think,” he told them, “that I am sad for myself or for any trouble that this infirmity will cause me. I am sad because now I shall no longer be able to hear the prayers of the afflicted.”

There was silence, for no one knew how to comfort him.

“Ah,” he exclaimed suddenly, “I have found a way. Order my people to stop wearing red clothes unless they have need of my help. So whenever I see a man or a woman dressed in red, I shall know that it is an appeal to me; my deaf ears will hear it and I shall take care that help is given to the distressed.”

The kind-hearted Emperor did not cease to do his work when he became deaf. He immediately thought of a new way of seeking out the poor and the needy. To seek them out — for the noble man does not wait for suffering to come to him, he tries to seek it out.

*
* *

A number of Hindus formed the Dev Samaj Association in order to do good works. In their monthly journal, things like these were reported:

From Peshawar: Two ladies taught Hindi to women and children two hours a day. Some men looked after sick people at home or in hospital, took care of cows and picked up pieces of broken glass from the road.

From Moga: Two ladies taught Hindi to girls. Men fed animals and planted trees. One member of the Samaj gave free lessons to a poor working-man.

From Ferozepore: Eight ladies cared for the sick. Boys went about helping old and crippled cows, guided the blind, and watered plants. Another member found a friendless man lying in the road, seriously hurt in a carriage accident. He took him to the hospital. Another member visited villages and taught poor people of low caste how to be more clean.

From Sialkot: A widow visited another widow who had lost her only son, read to her and spoke comforting words.

You will notice that in some of these cases kindness took the form of teaching. The heart of a teacher is moved by ignorance: another being needs knowledge and he is ready to give it. And knowledge, like bread or water or clothing, is a gift that can be transmitted from man to man.

*
* *

Lord Rama was strong and skilful in hunting, and strong and skilful in the art of teaching. When he set out to hunt animals in the jungle, he took one of his brothers with him as a companion. When he rested and ate, his younger brother sat at his side and shared the meal. When the hero went to the house of his Guru to study, he learnt the four Vedas as others might learn a game or a song. Having filled his mind with the Vedas and the Puranas, he had no wish to keep the sacred words in the secrecy of his heart. He taught them to his brother.

Just as kindness loves to share good knowledge, it also loves to share good news. For example, how great was Hanuman's joy when he could give joy to others. Listen:

Noble Bharata, Lord Rama's brother, waited fourteen years while Rama was in exile from the city of Ayodhya. Rama, the all-beautiful, wandered in the forest and knew the perils of war. But Bharata did not know his brother's fate. As the end of the fourteenth year drew near, he pined in grief, fearing that he would never see Rama's face again, for he had no news of him.

One day more and the fourteen years would have passed.

Bharata was sitting on a seat of sacred grass, his hair was braided, his body was thin, and he was sighing to himself:

“O Rama, Rama, Raghupati!”

Then there stood before him the monkey-king Hanuman, noble Hanuman who had served the hero Rama so faithfully in the wars.

Words of Long Ago

He brought good news, and he was so happy to bring it that his eyes were full of tears and in his heart he felt a world of joy at being able to change Bharata's sorrow into joy. He said:

"The one for whom you mourn day and night has returned safe and sound. He has conquered his enemy in battle and heard the gods singing hymns in his praise, and now the Lord is on his way home with Sita and his brother."

Bharata thought no more of his past sorrow.

"Who are you, who bring me such glad tidings?"

"I am Hanuman, the son of the Wind, and though I am a monkey, I am a servant of Raghupati, of Rama."

Bharata embraced Hanuman.

"Tell me more," he said, "yes, tell me all."

And Hanuman told him all, and he was happy beyond words to be the bearer of good news, and to see the life come back to the haggard face of the once sorrowful Bharata.

*
* *

Does the human heart show mercy only to human beings? No, it feels sorrow for the sorrow of an animal and joy for its joy.

People passed by a certain woman in scorn. They called her a sinner.

This sinner saw a dog whose tongue hung out in terrible thirst. It was dying. Without a cry, the poor creature was begging for something to drink.

The sinner took off her boot and let it down into a nearby well; in this way she brought up a little water and gave it to the dog, and so its life was saved.

People changed their minds about her.

"The Lord," they said, "has forgiven this woman's sins."

She may have been a sinner, but she understood the meaning of human kindness.

*
* *

And again:

A man came to the Prophet Mohammed and showed him a nest full of young birds wrapped up in a piece of carpet.

“I found these birds, my Lord,” he said, “as I came through the wood. Hearing the chirps of the nestlings, I looked into a tree and found this nest.”

“Put the nest on the ground,” said the Prophet.

Then the mother bird swooped down and perched on the edge of the nest, delighted to have found her children.

“Put the family back where you found them,” said Mohammed. And he added:

“Be kind to animals. Ride them when they are strong enough to carry you. Dismount from them when they are tired. Give them to drink when they are thirsty.”

In the records of Islam it is said that one day the angels of heaven said to God:

“O God, is there anything in the world stronger than rock?”

“Yes,” God replied, “iron is stronger, for it breaks rock.”

“Is there anything stronger than iron?”

“Yes, fire, for it melts iron.”

“And is there anything stronger than fire?”

“Water, for it quenches fire.”

“And what is stronger than water?”

“Wind, for it can move the waves.”

“And is there anything even stronger?”

“Yes, the kind heart that gives alms in secret, not letting the left hand know what the right hand is doing.”

Not that today giving alms is the chief way of being kind. Of course, we may help our neighbour with a kind-hearted gift. But the story means that, by a gift or in any other way, the power of kindness is the greatest power in the world for winning the affection and friendship of others.

Suffering is aroused by the suffering of others, and joy by their joy.

Such is the glorious nature of sympathy.

Note on the Texts

This volume contains all the writings of the Mother from the period before 1920, the year she settled in Pondicherry, with the exception of *Prayers and Meditations*. The book is divided into seven parts, according to the nature and date of the material. Most of the pieces were written originally in French and appear here in English translation. The texts of this (second) edition are the same as those of the first edition, which was published in 1978 as Volume 2 of the Collected Works of the Mother (Centenary Edition). Details about the texts and their publication follow.

Part 1. The essays and stories in this part were written by the Mother between 1893 and 1912. All the texts were written in French. All but two were first published in 1946 in the first part of a book entitled *Paroles d'autrefois*. This book was reprinted in 1955. An English translation, entitled *Words of Long Ago*, was published in 1946 and reprinted in 1952 and 1974. In the 1978 edition of *Words of Long Ago*, the contents of Part 1 of the previous editions were rearranged according to date and two new pieces added: "A Sapphire Tale" and an unpublished note related to "On Thought". "A Sapphire Tale" was first published in the original French and in English translation in the monthly journal *Mother India* in February 1957. At the time of its publication the Mother remarked to the journal's editor that the story expressed "the ideal of the overmind creation". The original translations of all the contents of Part 1 were revised for publication in 1978 in *Words of Long Ago*, Volume 2 of the Collected Works of the Mother. The same contents were brought out in the original French in 1983 in *Paroles d'autrefois*, the French counterpart of Volume 2 of the Collected Works.

Part 2. The essays in this part were written by the Mother for the meetings of "a small group of seekers" in 1912. All the texts were written in French. All but one were published in 1946 in the second part

Words of Long Ago

of *Paroles d'autrefois*. This book was reprinted in 1955. An English translation, entitled *Words of Long Ago*, was brought out in 1946 and reprinted in 1952 and 1974. In the 1978 edition of *Words of Long Ago*, one new piece was added: the essay for the meeting of 7 May 1914. This essay, which was restored to its original position in the series, was first published in 1939 in *Quelques paroles, quelques prières* and in English translation as the Foreword to the 1940 edition of *Words of the Mother*. The question at the beginning of this essay, taken from the Mother's handwritten manuscript, was published for the first time in the 1978 edition of *Words of Long Ago*. The original translations of all the contents of Part 2 were revised for publication in that edition. The same contents were brought out in the original French in 1983 in *Paroles d'autrefois*.

Part 3. Between 1911 and 1913 the Mother gave a number of talks to different groups in Paris. Two of these talks, "On Thought" and "On Dreams", appear in Part 1 of this book. Several other talks never published in the Mother's lifetime are published here as Part 3. The Mother sometimes presented the same talk to different groups, with suitable additions and alterations. These variants, if significant and non-repetitive, have been given here in footnotes. A note relating to the Mother's talks, which was found among her manuscripts, has been placed before the other items. The talks, notes and reflections in this part, all from the period 1912-13, were first published in English translation in 1978 as Part 3 of *Words of Long Ago*. The original French texts were first brought out in 1983 as Part 3 of *Paroles d'autrefois*.

Part 4. The writings in this part, similar to *Prayers and Meditations*, were not published in the Mother's lifetime. Several of the pieces are dated between 1914 and 1916; the remainder seem clearly to belong to the period before 1920. These writings first appeared in English translation in 1978 as Part 4 of *Words of Long Ago*. The original French texts were first brought out in 1983 as Part 4 of *Paroles d'autrefois*.

Part 5. This part comprises several short essays and notes entitled by the Mother “Notes and Reflections”, and a few related writings. Several of the pieces are dated between 1914 and 1915; the rest appear to have been written around the same time. None of the writings were published during the Mother’s lifetime. They first appeared in English translation in 1978 as Part 5 of *Words of Long Ago*. The original French texts were first brought out in 1983 as Part 5 of *Paroles d’autrefois*.

Part 6. The letters, essays, etc. comprising this part were written in Japan between 1916 and 1920. “Woman and the War”, written originally in French, was published in an English translation seen and revised by the Mother, in the *Fujoshimbun* on 7 July 1916. “Woman and Man”, written in French around the same time and translated into English by the Mother, was never published in either language during her lifetime. “Reminiscences” also appears to have been written first in French and translated subsequently into English, very likely by the Mother herself. The other pieces in this part appear to have been written originally in English. They are among the Mother’s first compositions in the English language. “Impressions of Japan”, dated 9 July 1915, was written in Akakura and published in the form reproduced here in the *Modern Review* (Calcutta) in January 1918. “The Children of Japan”, an incomplete letter, was written shortly after “Impressions of Japan”. “Myself and My Creed” was written in February 1920. “To the Women of Japan” is undated. It exists in several versions, one of which has been chosen as the principal text; to this, passages from other versions have been added. Part of this talk was published as “To the Women of the World” in the annual *Sri Aurobindo Circle* of 1947. Some revisions, made by the Mother for this publication, have been included in the present text. A greater portion of the talk was published as “Talk to the Women of Japan” in 1967. The last part of “To the Women of Japan” incorporated passages from Sri Aurobindo’s *Human Cycle*, *Synthesis of Yoga*, etc. The pieces in this part were published together in English in 1978 as Part 6 of *Words of Long Ago*. The same pieces were brought out in French in 1983 as Part 6 of *Paroles d’autrefois*.

Words of Long Ago

Part 7. The Mother translated and adapted some stories written by F. J. Gould which had been published in his *Youth's Noble Path* in 1911. The Mother's versions, written in French, were first published under the title *Belles Histoires* in 1946. English translations of the stories were first brought out in 1951 under the title *Tales of All Times*. These translations were revised for inclusion in Part 7 of the 1978 edition of *Words of Long Ago*. Several hitherto unpublished stories were translated and added as an appendix to that volume. All the stories were published in the original French in 1983 in Part 7 of *Paroles d'autrefois* and its appendix.