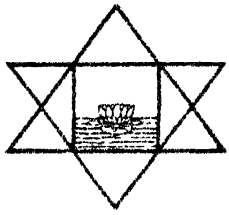
SRI AUROBINDO



ON HIMSELF

COMPILED FROM NOTES AND LETTERS

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SRI AUROBINDO

BIRTH

August 15, 1872

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MAHASAMADHI

December 5, 1950

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August 15, 1972

ON HIMSELF

COMPILED FROM NOTES AND LETTERS

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NOTE

Sri Aurobindo was very emphatic in stating that only he could write truly about himself; but he never wrote any comprehensive or systematic account of his life. Only in his correspondence with his disciples and others he sometimes explained points by incidentally referring to some event in his own life or some experience in his own Yogic development. Also on a few occasions he corrected misleading statements concerning him published in some journals and books and gave notes about some points in his life to three of his biographers who had submitted their manuscripts to him for verification. All this material has been compiled and presented in a systematic arrangement in Part One of this volume. This has been done with the specific intention of providing authentic information about Sri Aurobindo's life so as to leave no room for anyone to make doubtful or misleading statements about him. This has become particularly necessary in view of the fact that many of the books and articles that have been published about him are, even when written by well-intentioned persons, often inaccurate in their facts and misguiding in their interpretations.

In some of the letters Sri Aurobindo has written jointly about himself and the Mother after she came to India and joined him in his spiritual work. These have been separately compiled and placed in Part Two of this volume.

Some of the letters included in this volume are taken from the other volumes of Sri Aurobindo's letters on Yoga and on Poetry, Literature and Art published in the Centenary Edition, as these are also related to Sri Aurobindo himself or to the Mother. The others are being published for the first time. In some cases where the whole letter dealt with many topics, only the portion dealing with him or the Mother has been extracted for inclusion in this volume. Sometimes, in order to avoid a direct personal reference, Sri Aurobindo used to write about himself in the third person. This is the reason why at a few places in the book the reference to Sri Aurobindo is in the third person.



SRI AUROBINDO TO HIS BIOGRAPHERS

It would be only myself who could speak of things in my past giving them their true form and significance.

*

I see that you have persisted in giving a biography — is it really necessary or useful? The attempt is bound to be a failure, because neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been on the surface for men to see.

*

But why write my biography at all? Is it really necessary? In my view, a man's value does not depend on what he learns, or his position or fame, or what he does, but on what he is and inwardly becomes.



PART ONE

SRI AUROBINDO ON HIMSELF

Notes and Letters on His Life

SECTION ONE

LIFE BEFORE PONDICHERRY

This section, relating to the earlier part of Sri Aurobindo's life prior to his arrival at Pondicherry in 1910, is compiled from notes given by him during 1943-46 while reading the manuscripts of his three biographers submitted to him for correction or verification and approval. The notes were intended either to elucidate their statements by supplying the relevant facts or to correct and modify them wherever necessary.

In most cases brief references to the points in the original uncorrected manuscripts or to incomplete or erroneous statements in them are given in italics preceding Sri Aurobindo's comments on them. In some cases only small headings are given.

Some marginal notes written by Sri Aurobindo on another biography of his by a Maharashtrian author are also included here. Also notes and letters dictated by him to correct misleading or fabricated statements concerning him published in some journals and in a book are placed in this section.

A few letters written to disciples in answer to their inquiries concerning some facts of his early life are placed along with the notes on the same points.

I. EARLY LIFE IN ENGLAND: 1879-1893

AUROBINDO was born on August 15th, 1872, in Calcutta. His father, a man of great ability and strong personality, had been among the first to go to England for his education. He returned entirely anglicised in habits, ideas and ideals, — so strongly that his Aurobindo as a child spoke English and Hindustani only and learned his mother-tongue only after his return from England. He was determined that his children should receive an entirely European upbringing. While in India they were sent for the beginning of their education to an Irish nuns' school in Darjeeling and in 1879 he took his three sons to England and placed them with an English clergyman and his wife with strict instructions that they should not be allowed to make the acquaintance of any Indian or undergo any Indian influence. These instructions were carried out to the letter and Aurobindo grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, her religion and her culture.

Aurobindo never went to Manchester Grammar School. His two brothers studied there, but he himself was educated privately by Mr. and Mrs. Drewett. Drewett was an accomplished Latin scholar; he did not teach him Greek, but grounded him so well in Latin that the headmaster of St. Paul's school in London took up Aurobindo himself to ground him in Greek and then pushed him rapidly into the higher classes of the school.

Austen Leigh was not Provost at that time; the Provost's name was Prothero.

Aurobindo gave his attention to the classics at Manchester and at St. Paul's; but even at St. Paul's in the last three years he simply went through his school course and spent most of his spare time in general reading, especially English poetry, literature and fiction, French literature and the history of ancient, mediaeval and modern Europe. He spent some time also over learning Italian, some German and a little Spanish. He spent much time too in writing poetry. The school studies during this period engaged very little of his time; he was already at ease in them and did not think it necessary to labour over them any

longer. All the same he was able to win all the prizes in King's College in one year for Greek and Latin verse, etc.

He did not graduate at Cambridge. He passed high in the First Part of the Tripos (first class); it is on passing this First Part that the degree of B.A. is usually given; but as he had only two years at his disposal, he had to pass it in his second year at Cambridge; and the First Part gives the degree only if it is taken in the third year; if one takes it in the second year one has to appear for the Second Part of the Tripos in the fourth year to qualify for the degree. He might have got the degree if he had made an application for it, but he did not care to do so. A degree in English is valuable only if one wants to take up an academical career.

St. Paul's was a day school. The three brothers lived in London for some time with the mother of Mr. Drewett, but she left them after a quarrel between her and Manmohan about religion. The old Mrs. Drewett was fervently Evangelical and she said she would not live with an atheist as the house might fall down on her. Afterwards Benoybhusan and Aurobindo occupied a room in the South Kensington Liberal Club where Mr. J. S. Cotton, brother of Sir Henry Cotton, for some time Lt. Governor of Bengal, was the secretary and Benoy assisted him in his work. Manmohan went into lodgings. This was the time of the greatest suffering and poverty. Subsequently Aurobindo also went separately into lodgings until he took up residence at Cambridge.

NAME IN ENGLAND

The name given by his father was Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghose.

Sri Aurobindo dropped the "Ackroyd" from his name before he left England and never used it again.

HARDSHIPS DURING SCHOOL LIFE IN LONDON

During a whole year a slice or two of sandwich, bread and butter and a cup of tea in the morning and in the evening a penny saveloy formed the only food.

FAILURE TO APPEAR FOR THE RIDING TEST IN THE I.C.S. EXAMINATION

Nothing detained him in his room. He felt no call for the I.C.S. and was seeking some way to escape from that bondage. By certain manoeuvres he managed to get himself disqualified for riding without himself rejecting the Service, which his family would not have allowed him to do.

> *After being disqualified for the Indian Civil Service Sri Aurobindo turned his full attention to classical studies.*

These studies were already finished at that time.

> *Two years after the Indian Civil Service examination he graduated from King's College with a First Class in Classical Tripos.*

This happened earlier, not after the Civil Service failure.

> *Aurobindo, even before he was twenty years old, had mastered Greek and Latin and English and had also acquired sufficient familiarity with continental languages like German, French and Italian.*

This should be corrected as: "...mastered Greek and Latin, English and French and had also acquired some familiarity with continental languages like German and Italian."

> *In England at an early age he took the firm decision of liberating his own nation.*

Not quite that; at this age Aurobindo began first to be interested in Indian politics of which previously he knew nothing. His father began sending the newspaper *The Bengalee* with passages marked relating cases of maltreatment of Indians by Englishmen and he wrote in his letters denouncing the British Government in India

as a heartless Government. At the age of eleven Aurobindo had already received strongly the impression that a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary changes was coming in the world and he himself was destined to play a part in it. His attention was now drawn to India and this feeling was soon canalised into the idea of the liberation of his own country. But the "firm decision" took full shape only towards the end of another four years. It had already been made when he went to Cambridge and as a member and for some time secretary of the Indian Majlis at Cambridge he delivered many revolutionary speeches which, as he afterwards learnt, had their part in determining the authorities to exclude him from the Indian Civil Service; the failure in the riding test was only the occasion, for in some other cases an opportunity was given for remedying this defect in India itself.

Young Aurobindo formed the secret society — "Lotus and Dagger" — while in England.

This is not correct. The Indian students in London did once meet to form a secret society called romantically the "Lotus and Dagger" in which each member vowed to work for the liberation of India generally and to take some special work in furtherance of that end. Aurobindo did not form the society, but he became a member along with his brothers. But the society was still-born. This happened immediately before the return to India and when he had finally left Cambridge. Indian politics at that time was timid and moderate and this was the first attempt of the kind by Indian students in England. In India itself Aurobindo's maternal grandfather Raj Narayan Bose formed once a secret society — of which Tagore, then a very young man, became a member, and also set up an institution for national and revolutionary propaganda, but this finally came to nothing. Later on there was a revolutionary spirit in Maharashtra and a secret society was started in Western India with a Rajput noble as the head and this had a Council of Five in Bombay with several prominent Maharatta politicians as its members. This society was contacted and joined by Aurobindo somewhere in 1902-3, sometime after he had

already started secret revolutionary work in Bengal on his own account. In Bengal he found some very small secret societies recently started and acting separately without any clear direction and tried to unite them with a common programme. The union was never complete and did not last, but the movement itself grew and very soon received an enormous extension and became a formidable factor in the general unrest in Bengal.

> *While in London he used to attend the weekly meetings of the Fabian Society.*

Never once.

> *Young Aurobindo was sensitive to beauty in man and Nature.... He watched with pain the thousand and one instances of man's cruelty to man.*

The feeling was more abhorrence than pain; from early childhood there was a strong hatred and disgust for all kinds of cruelty and oppression, but the term 'pain' would not accurately describe the reaction.

> *He may have known a smattering of Bengali till he was five years of age. Thereafter till twenty-one he spoke only English.*

In my father's house only English and Hindustani were spoken. I knew no Bengali.

> *In much of Aurobindo's early English verse written between his eighteenth and twentieth years in England, included in "Songs to Myrtilla", the derivative element is prominent. Not only are names and lineaments and allusions foreign in their garb, but the literary echoes are many and drawn from varied sources.*

Foreign to what? He knew nothing about India or her culture,

etc. What these poems express is the education and imaginations and ideas and feelings created by a purely European culture and surroundings — it could not be otherwise. In the same way the poems on Indian subjects and surroundings in the same book express the first reactions to India and Indian culture after the return home and a first acquaintance with these things.

> *Like Macaulay's "A Jacobite's Epitaph", Aurobindo's "Hic Jacet" also achieves its severe beauty through sheer economy of words; the theme, the very rhythm and language of the poem, all hark back to Macaulay.*

If so, it must have been an unconscious influence; for after early childhood Macaulay's verse (*The Lays*) ceased to appeal. The *Jacobite's Epitaph* was perhaps not even read twice; it made no impression.

> *Sir Henry Cotton was much connected with Maharshi Raj Narayan Bose — Aurobindo's maternal grandfather. His son James Cotton was at this time in London. As a result of these favourable circumstances a meeting came about with the Gaekwar of Baroda.*

Cotton was my father's friend — they had made arrangements for my posting in Bengal; but he had nothing to do with my meeting with the Gaekwar. James Cotton was well acquainted with my elder brother, because he was Secretary of the South Kensington Liberal Club where we were living and my brother was his assistant. He took great interest in us. It was he who arranged the meeting.

> *For fourteen years young Aurobindo had lived in England divorced from the culture of his own nation and was not happy with himself. He longed to begin all again from the beginning and to try to re-nationalise himself.*

There was no unhappiness for that reason, nor at that time any

deliberate will for re-nationalisation — which came, after reaching India, by natural attraction to Indian culture and ways of life and a temperamental feeling and preference for all that was Indian.

> *He was leaving, he wished to leave, and yet there was a touch of regret as well at the thought of leaving England. He felt the flutter of unutterable misgivings and regrets; he achieved escape from them by having recourse to poetic expression.*

There was no such regret in leaving England, no attachment to the past or misgivings for the future. Few friendships were made in England and none very intimate; the mental atmosphere was not found congenial. There was therefore no need for any such escape.

> *Aurobindo was going back to India to serve under the Gaekwar of Baroda; he cast one last look at his all but adopted country and uttered his parting words in "Envoi".*

No, the statement was of a transition from one culture to another. There was an attachment to English and European thought and literature, but not to England as a country; he had no ties there and did not make England his adopted country, as Manmohan did for a time. If there was attachment to a European land as a second country, it was intellectually and emotionally to one not seen or lived in in this life, not England, but France.

DEATH OF AUROBINDO'S FATHER DUE TO FALSE REPORT OF HIS SON'S DEATH

There was no question of the two other brothers starting [from England.] It was only Aurobindo's death that was reported and it was while uttering his name in lamentation that the father died.

After his father's demise the responsibility of supporting the family devolved on him and he had to take up some appointment soon.

There was no question of supporting the family at that time. That happened some time after going to India.

II. LIFE IN BARODA: 1893-1906

APPOINTMENTS IN BARODA STATE

He was first put in the Land Settlement Department, for a short time in the Stamps Office, then in the Central Revenue Office and in the Secretariat. Afterwards without joining the College and while doing other work he was lecturer in French at the College and finally at his own request was appointed there as Professor of English. All through, the Maharaja used to call him whenever something had to be written which needed careful wording; he also employed him to prepare some of his public speeches and in other work of a literary or educational character. Afterwards Sri Aurobindo became the Vice-Principal of the College and was for some time acting Principal. Most of the personal work for the Maharaja was done in an unofficial capacity; he was usually invited to breakfast with the Maharaja at the Palace and stayed on to do this work.

Sri Aurobindo was never appointed to the post of Private Secretary. He was put first in the Settlement Department, not as an officer but to learn the work, then in the Stamps and Revenue departments; he was for some time put to work in the Secretariat for drawing up dispatches, etc. Finally, he oscillated towards the College and entered it at first as part time lecturer in French, afterwards as a regular Professor teaching English and was finally appointed Vice-Principal. Meanwhile, whenever he thought fit, the Maharaja would send for him for writing letters, composing speeches or drawing up documents of various kinds which needed special care in the phrasing of the language. All this was quite informal; there was no appointment as Private Secretary. Once the Maharaja took Sri Aurobindo as Secretary in his Kashmir tour, but there was much friction between them during the tour and the experiment was not repeated.

INVITATIONS BY THE GAEKWAR FOR MEALS

These invitations were usually for some work to be done and could not be refused.

THE MAHARAJA'S CERTIFICATE

"Diligent, serious, etc." — this valuation of Sri Aurobindo's qualities was not the Maharaja's. He gave him a certificate for ability and intelligence but also for lack of punctuality and regularity. If instead of "diligent and serious" and "a career of meritorious service" it were said that he was brilliant and quick and efficient in work, it would be more accurate. The description, as it is, gives an incorrect picture.

The authorities objected to his patriotic activities.

Is the reference to the Baroda authorities?

Sri Aurobindo is not aware that his utterances or writings were ever objected to by them. His articles in the *Indu Prakash* were anonymous, although many people in Bombay knew that he was the writer. Otherwise, except for a few speeches at functions in the Palace itself such as the reception of Dr. S. K. Mullick which had nothing to do with politics, he spoke mainly as Chairman of the Baroda College Union; there was no objection made at any time and he continued to preside over some of these debates until he left Baroda. It was in England while at Cambridge that he made revolutionary speeches at the meetings of the Indian Majlis which were recorded as a black mark against him by the India Office.

When he arrived in India, Sri Aurobindo knew no Indian language except a smattering of Bengali which was one of the subjects he had to study for the I.C.S.

Bengali was not a subject for the competitive examination for the I.C.S. It was after he had passed the competitive examina-

tion that Sri Aurobindo as a probationer who had chosen Bengal as his province began to learn Bengali. The course of study provided was a very poor one; his teacher, a retired English Judge from Bengal was not very competent, but what was learnt was more than a few words. Sri Aurobindo for the most part learnt Bengali for himself afterwards in Baroda.

STUDY OF BENGALI IN BARODA

About the learning of Bengali, it may be said that before engaging the teacher, Sri Aurobindo already knew enough of the language to appreciate the novels of Bankim and the poetry of Madhusudan. He learned enough afterwards to write himself and to conduct a weekly in Bengali, writing most of the articles himself, but his mastery over the language was not at all the same as over English and he did not venture to make speeches in his mother tongue.

Sri Aurobindo had regular lessons in Bengali from Dinendra Kumar Roy at Baroda.

No, there were no regular lessons. Dinendra lived with Sri Aurobindo as a companion and his work was rather to help him to correct and perfect his knowledge of the language and to accustom him to conversation in Bengali than any regular teaching.

Sri Aurobindo was not a pupil of Dinendra Kumar; he had learnt Bengali already by himself and only called in Dinendra to help him in his studies.

In Baroda, Sri Aurobindo engaged Pundits and started mastering both Bengali and Sanskrit.

A teacher was engaged for Bengali, a young Bengali *littérateur* — none for Sanskrit.

He studied Hindi also at Baroda.

Sri Aurobindo never studied Hindi; but his acquaintance with Sanskrit and other Indian languages made it easy for him to pick up Hindi without any regular study and to understand it when he read Hindi books or newspapers. He did not learn Sanskrit through Bengali, but direct in Sanskrit itself or through English.

> *In Baroda after making a comparative study of all literatures, history, etc., he began to realise the importance of the Veda.*

No. Started study of Veda at Pondicherry.

> *In 1895 were published, for circulation among friends only, his poems, five of which were written in England and the rest at Baroda.*

It is the other way round; all the poems in the book [*Songs to Myrtilla*] were written in England except five later ones which were written after his return to India.

> *It is not unlikely that "Baji Prabhou" and "Vidula" — two of the longer poems that belong to Sri Aurobindo's early period — had been actually written, or at least mentally sketched, during his last years in Baroda.*

No, these poems were conceived and written in Bengal during the time of political activity.

> *Sri Aurobindo was preoccupied, even when he was but a conscientious teacher or an accomplished poet...with the problem of service and of sacrifice.... From the very first the idea of personal salvation or of individual felicity was utterly repugnant to him.*

"Utterly repugnant" — this is a little too strong. It was rather that it did not seem anything like a supreme aim or worth being pursued for its own sake; a solitary salvation leaving the world to its fate was felt as almost distasteful.

While engaged in Baroda State Service Sri Aurobindo began to think incessantly if some opportunity could not be found for service in the larger life of Bengal, of the Indian nation itself.

He had already in England decided to devote his life to the service of his country and its liberation. He even began soon after coming to India to write on political matters (without giving his name) in the daily press, trying to awaken the nation to the ideas of the future. But those were not well received by the leaders of the time, they succeeded in preventing further publication and he drew back into silence. But he did not abandon either his ideas or his hope of an effective action.

THE ARTICLES IN THE "INDU PRAKASH"

The facts about the articles in the *Indu Prakash* were these. They were begun at the instance of K. G. Deshpande, Sri Aurobindo's Cambridge friend who was editor of the paper, but the first two articles made a sensation and frightened Ranade and other Congress leaders. Ranade warned the proprietor of the paper that, if this went on, he would surely be prosecuted for sedition. Accordingly the original plan of the series had to be dropped at the proprietor's instance. Deshpande requested Sri Aurobindo to continue in a modified tone and he reluctantly consented, but felt no farther interest and the articles were published at long intervals and finally dropped of themselves altogether.

The series of articles he wrote in the "Indu Prakash" were on Indian civilisation, entitled: "New Lamps for Old."

This title did not refer to Indian civilisation but to Congress politics. It is not used in the sense of the Aladdin story, but was intended to imply the offering of new lights to replace the old and faint reformist lights of the Congress.

He sent some of his friends, at Baroda and Bombay,

to Bengal to prepare for the revolutionary movement.

It was not any of his friends at Baroda and in Bombay who went to Bengal on his behalf. His first emissary was a young Bengali who had by the help of Sri Aurobindo's friends in the Baroda Army enlisted as trooper in the cavalry regiment in spite of the prohibition by the British Government of the enlistment of any Bengali in any army in India. This man who was exceedingly energetic and capable, formed a first group in Calcutta which grew rapidly (afterwards many branches were established); he also entered into relations with P. Mitter and other revolutionaries already at work in the province. He was joined afterwards by Barin who had in the interval come to Baroda.

At this time there was at Bombay a secret society headed by a Rajput prince of Udaipur.

This Rajput leader was not a prince, that is to say, a Ruling Chief but a noble of the Udaipur State with the title of Thakur. The Thakur was not a member of the Council in Bombay; he stood above it as the leader of the whole movement while the Council helped him to organise Maharashtra and the Mahratta States. He himself worked principally upon the Indian Army of which he had already won over two or three regiments. Sri Aurobindo took a special journey into Central India to meet and speak with Indian sub-officers and men of one of these regiments.

During his stay at Baroda Sri Aurobindo got into touch with men that counted, groups that counted. He went to Bengal "to see what was the hope of revival, what was the political condition of the people, and whether there was the possibility of a real movement".

It might be added that he had begun a work that was still nameless; and it was in the course of that work that he went to Bengal "to see what was the hope of revival, etc."

Since 1900 Sri Aurobindo had wished to enter the political

> *fray and to contribute his mite to the forces that were seriously working for India's redemption and rehabilitation. He held private talks, he corresponded, he put pressure on front-rank leaders; but as yet he could do little.*

This does not give a correct idea. He had already joined with some of the more advanced leaders to organise bodies for political action which would act when the time for action came;[1] it was only in public as yet that he could do little.

> *Even his own intrepid province of Bengal was in no mood to be persuaded by him and his gospel of virile nationalism.*

It was anything but intrepid at the time; it was the *mantra* of Bande Mataram and the leap into revolutionary action that changed the people of the province.

> *He found that in Bengal "the prevailing mood was apathy and despair". There was no other go except to bide his time.*

It should be added, "and to continue his political work behind the scenes in silence. The moment for public work had not yet come".

Once his work was started he continued it until circumstances made it possible to join in a public movement.

> *While in Baroda State Service he visited from time to time his grandfather in Bengal. His visits were*

[1] The programme of this organisation was at first Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott — Swaraj meaning to it complete independence. The word Swaraj was first used by the Bengali-Maratha publicist, Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, writer of *Desher Katha*, a book compiling all the details of India's economic servitude which had an enormous influence on the young men of Bengal and helped to turn them into revolutionaries. The word was taken up as their ideal by the revolutionary party and popularised by the vernacular paper *Sandhya* edited by Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya; it was caught hold of by Dadabhai Naoroji at the Calcutta Congress as the equivalent of colonial self-government but did not long retain that depreciated value. Sri Aurobindo was the first to use its English equivalent "independence" and reiterate it constantly in the *Bande Mataram* as the one and immediate aim of national politics.

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for political purposes.

This is not correct. In these visits he was not concerned with politics. It was some years afterwards that he made a journey along with Devabrata Bose, Barin's co-adjutant in the *Yugantar*, partly to visit some of the revolutionary centres already formed, but also to meet leading men in the districts and find out the general attitude of the country and the possibilities of the revolutionary movement. His experience in this journey persuaded him that secret action or preparation by itself was not likely to be effective if there were not also a wide public movement which would create a universal patriotic fervour and popularise the idea of independence as the ideal and aim of Indian politics. It was this conviction that determined his later action.

STAY AT DEOGHAR DURING DECEMBER 1906 TO APRIL 1907

Sri Aurobindo always stayed at Deoghar with the family of his maternal grandfather Raj Narayan Bose. The *beaux-parents* did not live at Deoghar.

Among the leading lights of the day was P. Mitter who was an out-and-out man of action.

P. Mitter had a spiritual life and aspiration and a strong religious feeling; he was like Bepin Pal and several other prominent leaders of the new nationalist movement in Bengal, a disciple of the famous Yogi Bejoy Goswami, but he did not bring these things into his politics.

Sri Aurobindo was influenced by the patriotic fervour of Swami Vivekananda's utterances.[1]

Sri Aurobindo was not aware of this speech or of any political action by Vivekananda. He had only heard casually of Vivekananda's intense patriotic feelings which inspired Sister Nivedita.

[1] In Vivekananda's speech "The Mission of the Vedanta" delivered at Kumbhakonam.

Allan Hume had founded the Indian National Congress to act as an intermediary for bringing together the élite of the English and the Indian peoples to promote discussions, reforms, etc.

This description of the Congress as an intermediary, etc., would hardly have been recognised or admitted by the Congress itself at that time. The British Government also would not have recognised it. It regarded the institution with dislike and ignored it as much as possible. Also, Sri Aurobindo was totally opposed to making any approach on behalf of the nation to the British Government; he regarded the Congress policy as a process of futile petition and protest and considered self-help, non-cooperation and organisation of all forces in the nation for revolutionary action as the sole effective policy.

Sri Aurobindo did not believe in, nor did he like, violent revolution.

This is incorrect. If Sri Aurobindo had not believed in the efficacy of violent revolution or had disliked it, he would not have joined the secret society whose purpose was to prepare a national insurrection. His historical studies had not taught him the lesson indicated here. On the contrary, he had studied with interest the revolutions and rebellions which led to national liberation, the struggle against the English in mediaeval France and the revolts which liberated America and Italy. He took much of his inspiration from these movements and their leaders, especially, Jeanne d'Arc and Mazzini. In his public activity he took up non-cooperation and passive resistance as a means in the struggle for independence but not the sole means and as long as he was in Bengal he maintained a secret revolutionary activity as a preparation for open revolt, in case passive resistance proved insufficient for the purpose.

SWADESHI, PARNELLISM AND THE SINN FEIN MOVEMENT

Sri Aurobindo's policy in India was not based on Parnellism. It

had more resemblance to Sinn Fein but was conceived before the Sinn Fein movement and was therefore not inspired by it.

> *Sri Aurobindo had acquired a measure of intellectual pre-eminence as a result of his stay in England; but that was not enough, and he was certainly not happy. His deeper perplexities remained; he did not know what exactly he should do to make himself useful to his countrymen or how he should set about doing it. He turned to Yoga so that he might be enabled to clarify his own floating ideas and impulses and also, if possible, perfect the hidden instrument within.*

There was no unhappiness. "Perplexities" also is too strong. Sri Aurobindo's habit in action was not to devise beforehand and plan but to keep a fixed purpose, watch events, prepare forces and act when he felt it to be the right moment. His first organised work in politics (grouping people who accepted the idea of independence and were prepared to take up an appropriate action) was undertaken at an early age, but took a regular shape in or about 1902; two years later he began his practice of Yoga — not to clarify his ideas, but to find the spiritual strength which would support him and enlighten his way.

> *He met Brahmananda on the banks of the Narmada for advice on national education activities.*

Sri Aurobindo saw Brahmananda long before there was any question of national education activities. Brahmananda never gave him any counsel or advice nor was there any conversation between them; Sri Aurobindo went to his monastery only for *darśana* and blessings. Barin had a close connection with Ganganath and his Guru was one of the Sannyasis who surrounded Brahmananda, but the connection with Ganganath was spiritual only.

> *On commencing his silent Yoga at Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo presently outgrew the instructions that had*

been given to him by Lele and his predecessors.

That was done long before the sojourn in Pondicherry. There were no predecessors. Sri Aurobindo had some connection with a member of the governing body of the Naga Sannyasis who gave him a *mantra* of Kali (or rather a *stotra*) and conducted certain *kriyās* and a Vedic *yajña*, but all this was for political success in his mission and not for Yoga.

> *During the Baroda period Sri Aurobindo met, one by one, Sri Hamsa Swarup Swami, Sri Sadguru Brahmananda and Sri Madhavdas.... He had even exchanged spiritual pulses with his first gurus.*

He had momentary contacts with Brahmananda, but as a great Yogin, not as a Guru — only *darśana* and blessings. There was no contact with the others.

> *Aravinda Babu used to attend the lectures of the Swami — Paramahamsa Maharaj Indraswarup — with much interest...personally met him and learnt about āsanas and prāṇāyāma.*

Only heard his lecture at the [Gaekwar's] Palace, did not go to see him, did not practise *prāṇāyāma* till long afterwards.

> *He met the saint Madhavdas at Malsar on the banks of the Narmada and learnt about Yoag-āsanas.*

Visited, probably with Deshpande, one or two places on the banks of the Narmada, but no recollection of Malsar or Madhavdas, certainly no effect of the meeting, if it happened at all.

> *Thus it may be said that Aravinda Babu started taking interest in Yoga from 1898-99.*

No. I did not start Yoga till about 1904.

Sri Aurobindo began practising Yoga on his own account, starting with *prāṇāyāma* as explained to him by a friend, a disciple of Brahmananda. Afterwards faced with difficulties, he took the help of Lele who was called for the purpose from Gwalior by Barindra — this was after the Surat Congress in 1908.

> *Such guidance as he received from his earliest gurus and such partial realisation as he was then able to achieve only reinforced his faith in Yoga as the sole cure for his own "rooted sorrow" and for the manifold ills of humanity.*

(Sri Aurobindo put an interrogation mark against the word "gurus".)

There was no resort to Yoga as a cure for sorrow; there was no sorrow to cure. He had always in him a considerable equanimity in his nature in face of the world and its difficulties, and after some inward depression in his adolescence (not due to any outward circumstances, and not amounting to sorrow or melancholy, for it was only a strain in the temperament), this became fairly settled.

III. THE LEADER OF INDIAN NATIONALISM: 1906-1910

A GENERAL NOTE ON SRI AUROBINDO'S POLITICAL LIFE

There were three sides to Sri Aurobindo's political ideas and activities. First, there was the action with which he started, a secret revolutionary propaganda and organisation of which the central object was the preparation of an armed insurrection. Secondly, there was a public propaganda intended to convert the whole nation to the ideal of independence which was regarded, when he entered into politics, by the vast majority of Indians as unpractical and impossible, an almost insane chimera. It was thought that the British Empire was too powerful and India too weak, effectively disarmed and impotent even to dream of the success of such an endeavour. Thirdly, there was the organisation of the people to carry on a public and united opposition and undermining of the foreign rule through an increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance.

At that time the military organisation of the great empires and their means of military action were not so overwhelming and apparently irresistible as they now are: the rifle was still the decisive weapon, air power had not yet been developed and the force of artillery was not so devastating as it afterwards became. India was disarmed, but Sri Aurobindo thought that with proper organisation and help from outside this difficulty might be overcome and in so vast a country as India and with the smallness of the regular British armies, even a guerrilla warfare accompanied by general resistance and revolt might be effective. There was also the possibility of a general revolt in the Indian army. At the same time he had studied the temperament and characteristics of the British people and the turn of their political instincts, and he believed that although they would resist any attempt at self-liberation by the Indian people and would at the most only concede very slowly such reforms as would not weaken their imperial control, still they were not of the kind which would be ruthlessly adamantine to the end: if they found resistance and revolt becoming general and persis-

tent they would in the end try to arrive at an accommodation to save what they could of their empire or in an extremity prefer to grant independence rather than have it forcefully wrested from their hands.

In some quarters there is the idea that Sri Aurobindo's political standpoint was entirely pacifist, that he was opposed in principle and in practice to all violence and that he denounced terrorism, insurrection, etc., as entirely forbidden by the spirit and letter of the Hindu religion. It is even suggested that he was a forerunner of the gospel of Ahimsa. This is quite incorrect. Sri Aurobindo is neither an impotent moralist nor a weak pacifist.

The rule of confining political action to passive resistance was adopted as the best policy for the National Movement at that stage and not as a part of a gospel of Non-violence or pacific idealism. Peace is a part of the highest ideal, but it must be spiritual or at the very least psychological in its basis; without a change in human nature it cannot come with any finality. If it is attempted on any other basis (moral principle or gospel of Ahimsa or any other), it will fail and even may leave things worse than before. He is in favour of an attempt to put down war by international agreement and international force, what is now contemplated in the "New Order", if that proves possible, but that would not be Ahimsa, it would be a putting down of anarchic force by legal force and even then one cannot be sure that it would be permanent. Within nations this sort of peace has been secured, but it does not prevent occasional civil wars and revolutions and political outbreaks and repressions, sometimes of a sanguinary character. The same might happen to a similar world-peace. Sri Aurobindo has never concealed his opinion that a nation is entitled to attain its freedom by violence, if it can do so or if there is no other way; whether it should do so or not, depends on what is the best policy, not on ethical considerations. Sri Aurobindo's position and practice in this matter was the same as Tilak's and that of other Nationalist leaders who were by no means Pacifists or worshippers of Ahimsa.

For the first few years in India, Sri Aurobindo abstained from any political activity (except the writing of the articles in

the *Indu Prakash*) and studied the conditions in the country so that he might be able to judge more maturely what could be done. Then he made his first move when he sent a young Bengali soldier of the Baroda army, Jatin Banerji, as his lieutenant to Bengal with a programme of preparation and action which he thought might occupy a period of 30 years before fruition could become possible. As a matter of fact it has taken 50 years for the movement of liberation to arrive at fruition and the beginning of complete success. The idea was to establish secretly or, as far as visible action could be taken, under various pretexts and covers, revolutionary propaganda and recruiting throughout Bengal. This was to be done among the youth of the country while sympathy and support and financial and other assistance were to be obtained from the older men who had advanced views or could be won over to them. Centres were to be established in every town and eventually in every village. Societies of young men were to be established with various ostensible objects, cultural, intellectual or moral and those already existing were to be won over for revolutionary use. Young men were to be trained in activities which might be helpful for ultimate military action, such as riding, physical training, athletics of various kinds, drill and organised movement. As soon as the idea was sown it attained a rapid prosperity; already existing small groups and associations of young men who had not yet the clear idea or any settled programme of revolution began to turn in this direction and a few who had already the revolutionary aim were contacted and soon developed activity on organised lines; the few rapidly became many. Meanwhile Sri Aurobindo had met a member of the Secret Society in Western India, and taken the oath of the Society and had been introduced to the Council in Bombay. His future action was not pursued under any directions by this Council, but he took up on his own responsibility the task of generalising support for its objects in Bengal where as yet it had no membership or following. He spoke of the Society and its aim to P. Mitter and other leading men of the revolutionary group in Bengal and they took the oath of the Society and agreed to carry out its objects on the lines suggested by Sri Aurobindo. The special cover used by Mitter's group was association for

lathi play which had already been popularised to some extent by Sarala Ghosal in Bengal among the young men; but other groups used other ostensible covers. Sri Aurobindo's attempt at a close organisation of the whole movement did not succeed, but the movement itself did not suffer by that, for the general idea was taken up and activity of many separate groups led to a greater and more widespread diffusion of the revolutionary drive and its action. Afterwards there came the partition of Bengal and a general outburst of revolt which favoured the rise of the extremist party and the great Nationalist movement. Sri Aurobindo's activities were then turned more and more in this direction and the secret action became a secondary and subordinate element. He took advantage, however, of the Swadeshi movement to popularise the idea of violent revolt in the future. At Barin's suggestion he agreed to the starting of a paper, *Yugantar*, which was to preach open revolt and the absolute denial of the British rule and include such items as a series of articles containing instructions for guerrilla warfare. Sri Aurobindo himself wrote some of the opening articles in the early numbers and he always exercised a general control; when a member of the sub-editorial staff, Swami Vivekananda's brother, presented himself on his own motion to the police in a search as the editor of the paper and was prosecuted, the *Yugantar* under Sri Aurobindo's orders adopted the policy of refusing to defend itself in a British Court on the ground that it did not recognise the foreign Government and this immensely increased the prestige and influence of the paper. It had as its chief writers and directors three of the ablest younger writers in Bengal, and it at once acquired an immense influence throughout Bengal. It may be noted that the Secret Society did not include terrorism in its programme, but this element grew up in Bengal as a result of the strong repression and the reaction to it in that Province.

The public activity of Sri Aurobindo began with the writing of the articles in the *Indu Prakash*. These nine articles written at the instance of K. G. Deshpande, editor of the paper and Sri Aurobindo's Cambridge friend, under the caption 'New Lamps for Old' vehemently denounced the then Congress policy of pray, petition and protest and called for a dynamic leadership

based upon self-help and fearlessness. But this outspoken and irrefutable criticism was checked by the action of a Moderate leader who frightened the editor and thus prevented any full development of his ideas in the paper; he had to turn aside to generalities such as the necessity of extending the activities of the Congress beyond the circle of the bourgeois or middle class and calling into it the masses. Finally, Sri Aurobindo suspended all public activity of this kind and worked only in secret till 1905, but he contacted Tilak whom he regarded as the one possible leader for a revolutionary party and met him at the Ahmedabad Congress; there Tilak took him out of the *pandal* and talked to him for an hour in the grounds expressing his contempt for the Reformist movement and explaining his own line of action in Maharashtra.

Sri Aurobindo included in the scope of his revolutionary work one kind of activity which afterwards became an important item in the public programme of the Nationalist party. He encouraged the young men in the centres of work to propagate the Swadeshi idea which at that time was only in its infancy and hardly more than a fad of the few. One of the ablest men in these revolutionary groups was a Mahratta named Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar who was an able writer in Bengali (his family had been long domiciled in Bengal) and who had written a popular life of Shivaji in Bengali in which he first brought in the name of Swaraj, afterwards adopted by the Nationalists as their word for independence, — Swaraj became one item of the fourfold Nationalist programme. He published a book entitled *Desher Katha* describing in exhaustive detail the British commercial and industrial exploitation of India. This book had an immense repercussion in Bengal, captured the mind of young Bengal and assisted more than anything else in the preparation of the Swadeshi movement. Sri Aurobindo himself had always considered the shaking off of this economic yoke and the development of Indian trade and industry as a necessary concomitant of the revolutionary endeavour.

As long as he was in the Baroda Service, Sri Aurobindo could not take part publicly in politics. Apart from that, he preferred to remain and act and even to lead from behind the

scenes without his name being known in public; it was the Government's action in prosecuting him as editor of the *Bande Mataram* that forced him into public view. And from that time forward he became openly, what he had been for sometime already, a prominent leader of the Nationalist party, its principal leader in action in Bengal and the organiser there of its policy and strategy. He had decided in his mind the lines on which he wanted the country's action to run: what he planned was very much the same as was developed afterwards in Ireland as the Sinn Fein movement; but Sri Aurobindo did not derive his ideas, as some have represented, from Ireland, for the Irish movement became prominent later and he knew nothing of it till after he had withdrawn to Pondicherry. There was, moreover, a capital difference between India and Ireland which made his work much more difficult; for all its past history had accustomed the Irish people to rebellion against British rule and this history might be even described as a constant struggle for independence intermittent in its action but permanently there in principle; there was nothing of this kind in India. Sri Aurobindo had to establish and generalise the idea of independence in the mind of the Indian people and at the same time to push first a party and then the whole nation into an intense and organised political activity which would lead to the accomplishment of that ideal. His idea was to capture the Congress and to make it an instrument for revolutionary action instead of a centre of a timid constitutional agitation which would only talk and pass resolutions and recommendations to the foreign Government; if the Congress could not be captured, then a central revolutionary body would have to be created which could do this work. It was to be a sort of State within the State giving its directions to the people and creating organised bodies and institutions which would be its means of action; there must be an increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance which would render the administration of the country by a foreign Government difficult or finally impossible, a universal unrest which would wear down repression and finally, if need be, an open revolt all over the country. This plan included a boycott of British trade, the substitution of national schools for the Government institutions, the creation of arbitra-

tion courts to which the people could resort instead of depending on the ordinary courts of law, the creation of volunteer forces which would be the nucleus of an army of open revolt, and all other action that could make the programme complete. The part Sri Aurobindo took publicly in Indian politics was of brief duration, for he turned aside from it in 1910 and withdrew to Pondicherry; much of his programme lapsed in his absence, but enough had been done to change the whole face of Indian politics and the whole spirit of the Indian people to make independence its aim and non-cooperation and resistance its method, and even an imperfect application of this policy heightening into sporadic periods of revolt has been sufficient to bring about the victory. The course of subsequent events followed largely the line of Sri Aurobindo's idea. The Congress was finally captured by the Nationalist party, declared independence its aim, organised itself for action, took almost the whole nation minus a majority of the Mohammedans and a minority of the depressed classes into acceptance of its leadership and eventually formed the first national, though not as yet an independent, Government in India and secured from Britain acceptance of independence for India.

At first Sri Aurobindo took part in Congress politics only from behind the scenes, as he had not yet decided to leave the Baroda Service; but he took long leave without pay in which, besides carrying on personally the secret revolutionary work, he attended the Barisal Conference broken up by the police and toured East Bengal along with Bepin Pal and associated himself closely with the forward group in the Congress. It was during this period that he joined Bepin Pal in the editing of the *Bande Mataram*, founded the new political party in Bengal and attended the Congress session at Calcutta at which the Extremists, though still a minority, succeeded under the leadership of Tilak in imposing part of their political programme on the Congress. The founding of the Bengal National College gave him the opportunity he needed and enabled him to resign his position in the Baroda Service and join the College as its Principal. Subodh Mullick, one of Sri Aurobindo's collaborators in his secret action and afterwards also in Congress politics, in whose house he usually lived when he was in Calcutta, had given a lakh of rupees

for this foundation and had stipulated that Sri Aurolindo should be given a post of professor in the College with a salary of Rs.150; so he was now free to give his whole time to the service of the country. Bepin Pal, who had been long expounding a policy of self-help and non-cooperation in his weekly journal, now started a daily with the name of *Bande Mataram*, but it was likely to be a brief adventure since he began with only Rs. 500 in his pocket and no firm assurance of financial assistance in the future. He asked Sri Aurobindo to join him in this venture to which a ready consent was given, for now Sri Aurolindo saw his opportunity for starting the public propaganda necessary for his revolutionary purpose. He called a meeting of the forward group of young men in the Congress and they decided then to organise themselves openly as a new political party joining hands with the corresponding group in Maharashtra under the proclaimed leadership of Tilak and to join battle with the Moderate party which was done at the Calcutta session. He also persuaded them to take up the *Bande Mataram* daily as their party organ and a Bande Mataram Company was started to finance the paper, whose direction Sri Aurobindo undertook during the absence of Bepin Pal who was sent on a tour in the districts to proclaim the purpose and programme of the new party. The new party was at once successful and the *Bande Mataram* paper began to circulate throughout India. On its staff were not only Bepin Pal and Sri Aurobindo but some other very able writers, Shyam Sundar Chakravarty, Hemendra Prasad Ghose and Bejoy Chatterjee. Shyam Sundar and Bejoy were masters of the English language, each with a style of his own; Shyam Sundar caught up something like Sri Aurobindo's way of writing and later on many took his articles for Sri Aurobindo's. But after a time dissensions arose between Bepin Pal on one side and the other contributors and the directors of the Company because of temperamental incompatibility and differences of political views especially with regard to the secret revolutionary action with which others sympathised but to which Bepin Pal was opposed. This ended soon in Bepin Pal's separation from the journal. Sri Aurobindo would not have consented to this departure, for he regarded the qualities of Pal as a great asset to the *Bande Mataram*, since Pal, though

not a man of action or capable of political leadership, was perhaps the best and most original political thinker in the country, an excellent writer and a magnificent orator: but the separation was effected behind Sri Aurobindo's back when he was convalescing from a dangerous attack of fever. His name was even announced without his consent in the *Bande Mataram* as editor but for one day only, as he immediately put a stop to it since he was still formally in the Baroda Service and in no way eager to have his name brought forward in public. Henceforward, however, he controlled the policy of the *Bande Mataram* along with that of the party in Bengal. Bepin Pal had stated the aim of the new party as complete self-government free from British control; but this could have meant or at least included the Moderate aim of colonial self-government and Dadabhai Naoroji as President of the Calcutta session of the Congress had actually tried to capture the name of Swaraj, the Extremists' term for independence, for this colonial self-government. Sri Aurobindo's first preoccupation was to declare openly for complete and absolute independence as the aim of political action in India and to insist on this persistently in the pages of the journal; he was the first politician in India who had the courage to do this in public and he was immediately successful. The party took up the word Swaraj to express its own ideal of independence and it soon spread everywhere; but it was taken up as the ideal of the Congress much later on at the Karachi session of that body when it had been reconstituted and renovated under Nationalist leadership. The journal declared and developed a new political programme for the country as the programme of the Nationalist party, non-cooperation, passive resistance, Swadeshi, Boycott, national education, settlement of disputes in law by popular arbitration and other items of Sri Aurobindo's plan. Sri Aurobindo published in the paper a series of articles on passive resistance, another developing a political philosophy of revolution and wrote many leaders aimed at destroying the shibboleths and superstitions of the Moderate party, such as the belief in British justice and benefits bestowed by foreign government in India, faith in British law courts and in the adequacy of the education given in schools and universities in India and stressed more

strongly and persistently than had been done the emasculation, stagnation or slow progress, poverty, economic dependence, absence of a rich industrial activity and all other evil results of a foreign government; he insisted especially that even if an alien rule were benevolent and beneficent, that could not be a substitute for a free and healthy national life. Assisted by this publicity the ideas of the Nationalists gained ground everywhere, especially in the Punjab which had before been predominantly Moderate. The *Bande Mataram* was almost unique in journalistic history in the influence it exercised in converting the mind of a people and preparing it for revolution. But its weakness was on the financial side; for the Extremists were still a poor man's party. So long as Sri Aurobindo was there in active control, he managed with great difficulty to secure sufficient public support for running the paper, but not for expanding it as he wanted, and when he was arrested and held in jail for a year, the economic situation of the *Bande Mataram* became desperate: finally, it was decided that the journal should die a glorious death rather than perish by starvation and Bejoy Chatterji was commissioned to write an article for which the Government would certainly stop the publication of the paper. Sri Aurobindo had always taken care to give no handle in the editorial articles of the *Bande Mataram* either for a prosecution for sedition or any other drastic action fatal to its existence; an editor of *The Statesman* complained that the paper reeked with sedition patently visible between every line, but it was so skilfully written that no legal action could be taken. The manoeuvre succeeded and the life of the *Bande Mataram* came to an end in Sri Aurobindo's absence.

The Nationalist programme could only achieve a partial beginning before it was temporarily broken by severe government repression. Its most important practical item was Swadeshi plus Boycott; for Swadeshi much was done to make the idea general and a few beginnings were made, but the greater results showed themselves only afterwards in the course of time. Sri Aurobindo was anxious that this part of the movement should be not only propagated in idea but given a practical organisation and an effective force. He wrote from Baroda asking whether it would not be possible to bring in the industrialists and manu-

facturers and gain the financial support of landed magnates and create an organisation in which men of industrial and commercial ability and experience and not politicians alone could direct operations and devise means of carrying out the policy; but he was told that it was impossible, the industrialists and the landed magnates were too timid to join in the movement, and the big commercial men were all interested in the import of British goods and therefore on the side of the *status quo*: so he had to abandon his idea of the organisation of Swadeshi and Boycott. Both Tilak and Sri Aurobindo were in favour of an effective boycott of British goods — but of British goods only; for there was little in the country to replace foreign articles: so they recommended the substitution for the British of foreign goods from Germany and Austria and America so that the fullest pressure might be brought upon England. They wanted the Boycott to be a political weapon and not merely an aid to Swadeshi; the total boycott of all foreign goods was an impracticable idea and the very limited application of it recommended in Congress resolutions was too small to be politically effective. They were for national self-sufficiency in key industries, the production of necessities and of all manufactures of which India had the natural means, but complete self-sufficiency or autarchy did not seem practicable or even desirable since a free India would need to export goods as well as supply them for internal consumption and for that she must import as well and maintain an international exchange. But the sudden enthusiasm for the boycott of all foreign goods was wide and sweeping and the leaders had to conform to this popular cry and be content with the impulse it gave to the Swadeshi idea. National education was another item to which Sri Aurobindo attached much importance. He had been disgusted with the education given by the British system in the schools and colleges and universities, a system of which as a professor in the Baroda College he had full experience. He felt that it tended to dull and impoverish and tie up the naturally quick and brilliant and supple Indian intelligence, to teach it bad intellectual habits and spoil by narrow information and mechanical instruction its originality and productivity. The movement began well and many national schools

were established in Bengal and many able men became teachers, but still the development was insufficient and the economical position of the schools precarious. Sri Aurobindo had decided to take up the movement personally and see whether it could not be given a greater expansion and a stronger foundation, but his departure from Bengal cut short this plan. In the repression and the general depression caused by it, most of the schools failed to survive. The idea lived on and it may be hoped that it will one day find an adequate form and body. The idea of people's courts was taken up and worked in some districts, not without success, but this too perished in the storm. The idea of volunteer groupings had a stronger vitality; it lived on, took shape, multiplied its formations and its workers were the spearhead of the movement of direct action which broke out from time to time in the struggle for freedom. The purely political elements of the Nationalist programme and activities were those which lasted and after each wave of repression and depression renewed the thread of the life of the movement for liberation and kept it recognisably one throughout nearly fifty years of its struggle. But the greatest thing done in those years was the creation of a new spirit in the country. In the enthusiasm that swept surging everywhere with the cry of Bande Mataram ringing on all sides men felt it glorious to be alive and dare and act together and hope; the old apathy and timidity was broken and a force created which nothing could destroy and which rose again and again in wave after wave till it carried India to the beginning of a complete victory.

After the *Bande Mataram* case, Sri Aurobindo became the recognised leader of Nationalism in Bengal. He led the party at the session of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Midnapore where there was a vehement clash between the two parties. He now for the first time became a speaker on the public platform, addressed large meetings at Surat and presided over the Nationalist conference there. He stopped at several places on his way back to Calcutta and was the speaker at large meetings called to hear him. He led the party again at the session of the Provincial Conference at Hooghly. There it became evident for the first time that Nationalism was gaining the ascendant, for it com-

manded a majority among the delegates and in the Subjects Committee Sri Aurobindo was able to defeat the Moderates' resolution welcoming the Reforms and pass his own resolution stigmatising them as utterly inadequate and unreal and rejecting them. But the Moderate leaders threatened to secede if this was maintained and to avoid a scission he consented to allow the Moderate resolution to pass, but spoke at the public session explaining his decision and asking the Nationalists to acquiesce in it in spite of their victory so as to keep some unity in the political forces of Bengal. The Nationalist delegates, at first triumphant and clamorous, accepted the decision and left the hall quietly at Sri Aurobindo's order so that they might not have to vote either for or against the Moderate resolution. This caused much amazement and discomfiture in the minds of the Moderate leaders who complained that the people had refused to listen to their old and tried leaders and clamoured against them, but at the bidding of a young man new to politics they had obeyed in disciplined silence as if a single body.

About this period Sri Aurobindo had decided to take up charge of a Bengali daily, *Nava Shakti*, and had moved from his rented house in Scotts Lane, where he had been living with his wife and sister, to rooms in the office of this newspaper, and there, before he could begin this new venture, early one morning while he was still sleeping, the police charged up the stairs, revolver in hand, and arrested him. He was taken to the police station and thence to Alipore Jail where he remained for a year during the magistrate's investigation and the trial in the Sessions Court at Alipore. At first he was lodged for some time in a solitary cell, but afterwards transferred to a large section of the jail where he lived in one huge room with the other prisoners in the case; subsequently, after the assassination of the approver in the jail, all the prisoners were confined in contiguous but separate cells and met only in the court or in the daily exercise where they could not speak to each other. It was in the second period that Sri Aurobindo made the acquaintance of most of his fellow accused. In the jail he spent almost all his time in reading the Gita and the Upanishads and in intensive meditation and the practice of Yoga. This he pursued even in the second interval when he had

no opportunity of being alone and had to accustom himself to meditation amid general talk and laughter, the playing of games and much noise and disturbance; in the first and third periods he had full opportunity and used it to the full. In the Sessions Court the accused were confined in a large prisoner's cage and here during the whole day he remained absorbed in his meditation, attending little to the trial and hardly listening to the evidence. C. R. Das, one of his Nationalist collaborators and a famous lawyer, had put aside his large practice and devoted himself for months to the defence of Sri Aurobindo, who left the case entirely to him and troubled no more about it; for he had been assured from within and knew that he would be acquitted. During this period his view of life was radically changed; he had taken up Yoga with the original idea of acquiring spiritual force and energy and divine guidance for his work in life. But now the inner spiritual life and realisation which had continually been increasing in magnitude and universality and assuming a larger place took him up entirely and his work became a part and result of it and besides far exceeded the service and liberation of the country and fixed itself in an aim, previously only glimpsed, which was world-wide in its bearing and concerned with the whole future of humanity.

When he came out from jail Sri Aurobindo found the whole political aspect of the country altered; most of the Nationalist leaders were in jail or in self-imposed exile and there was a general discouragement and depression, though the feeling in the country had not ceased but was only suppressed and was growing by its suppression. He determined to continue the struggle; he held weekly meetings in Calcutta, but the attendance which had numbered formerly thousands full of enthusiasm, was now only of hundreds and had no longer the same force and life. He also went to places in the districts to speak and at one of these delivered his speech at Uttarpara in which for the first time he spoke publicly of his Yoga and his spiritual experiences. He started also two weeklies, one in English and one in Bengali, the *Karmayogin* and *Dharma* which had a fairly large circulation and were, unlike the *Bande Mataram*, easily self-supporting. He attended and spoke at the Provincial Conference at Barisal in 1909: for

in Bengal owing to the compromise at Hooghly the two parties had not split altogether apart and both joined in the Conference though there could be no representative of the Nationalist Party at the meeting of the Central Moderate Body which had taken the place of the Congress. Surendra Nath Banerji had indeed called a private conference attended by Sri Aurobindo and one or two other leaders of the Nationalists to discuss a project of uniting the two parties at the session in Benares and giving a joint fight to the dominant right wing of the Moderates; for he had always dreamt of becoming again the leader of a united Bengal with the Extremist Party as his strong right arm: but that would have necessitated the Nationalists being appointed as delegates by the Bengal Moderates and accepting the constitution imposed at Surat. This Sri Aurobindo refused to do; he demanded a change in that constitution enabling newly formed associations to elect delegates so that the Nationalists might independently send their representatives to the All-India session and on this point the negotiations broke down. Sri Aurobindo began, however, to consider how to revive the national movement under the changed circumstances. He glanced at the possibility of falling back on a Home Rule movement which the Government could not repress, but this, which was actually realised by Mrs. Besant later on, would have meant a postponement and a falling back from the ideal of independence. He looked also at the possibility of an intense and organised passive resistance movement in the manner afterwards adopted by Gandhi. He saw, however, that he himself could not be the leader of such a movement.

At no time did he consent to have anything to do with the sham Reforms which were all the Government at that period cared to offer. He held up always the slogan of 'no compromise' or, as he now put it in his Open Letter to his countrymen published in the *Karmayogin*, 'no co-operation without control'. It was only if real political, administrative and financial control were given to popular ministers in an elected Assembly that he would have anything to do with offers from the British Government. Of this he saw no sign until the proposal of the Montagu Reforms in which first something of the kind seemed to appear. He foresaw that the British Government would have to begin

trying to meet the national aspiration half-way, but he would not anticipate that moment before it actually came. The Montagu Reforms came nine years after Sri Aurobindo had retired to Pondicherry and by that time he had abandoned all outward and public political activity in order to devote himself to his spiritual work, acting only by his spiritual force on the movement in India, until his prevision of real negotiations between the British Government and the Indian leaders was fulfilled by the Cripps' proposal and the events that came after.

Meanwhile the Government were determined to get rid of Sri Aurobindo as the only considerable obstacle left to the success of their repressive policy. As they could not send him to the Andamans they decided to deport him. This came to the knowledge of Sister Nivedita and she informed Sri Aurobindo and asked him to leave British India and work from outside so that his work would not be stopped or totally interrupted. Sri Aurobindo contented himself with publishing in the *Karmayogin* a signed article in which he spoke of the project of deportation and left the country what he called his last will and testament; he felt sure that this would kill the idea of deportation and in fact it so turned out. Deportation left aside, the Government could only wait for some opportunity for prosecution for sedition and this chance came to them when Sri Aurobindo published in the same paper another signed article reviewing the political situation. The article was sufficiently moderate in its tone and later on the High Court refused to regard it as seditious and acquitted the printer. Sri Aurobindo one night at the *Karmayogin* office received information of the Government's intention to search the office and arrest him. While considering what should be his attitude, he received a sudden command from above to go to Chandernagore in French India. He obeyed the command at once, for it was now his rule to move only as he was moved by the divine guidance and never to resist and depart from it; he did not stay to consult with anyone, but in ten minutes was at the river *ghāṭ* and in a boat plying on the Ganges; in a few hours he was at Chandernagore where he went into secret residence. He sent a message to Sister Nivedita asking her to take up the editing of the *Karmayogin* in his absence. This was the end

of his active connection with his two journals. At Chandernagore he plunged entirely into solitary meditation and ceased all other activity. Then there came to him a call to proceed to Pondicherry. A boat manned by some young revolutionaries of Uttarpara took him to Calcutta; there he boarded the *Dupleix* and reached Pondicherry on April 4, 1910.

At Pondicherry, from this time onwards Sri Aurobindo's practice of Yoga became more and more absorbing. He dropped all participation in any public political activity, refused more than one request to preside at sessions of the restored Indian National Congress and made a rule of abstention from any public utterance of any kind not connected with his spiritual activities or any contribution of writings or articles except what he wrote afterwards in the *Arya*. For some years he kept up some private communication with the revolutionary forces he had led, through one or two individuals, but this also he dropped after a time and his abstention from any kind of participation in politics became complete. As his vision of the future grew clearer, he saw that the eventual independence of India was assured by the march of forces of which he became aware, that Britain would be compelled by the pressure of Indian resistance and by the pressure of international events to concede independence and that she was already moving towards that eventuality with whatever opposition and reluctance. He felt that there would be no need of armed insurrection and that the secret preparation for it could be dropped without injury to the Nationalist cause, although the revolutionary spirit had to be maintained and would be maintained intact. His own personal intervention in politics would therefore be no longer indispensable. Apart from all this, the magnitude of the spiritual work set before him became more and more clear to him, and he saw that the concentration of all his energies on it was necessary. Accordingly, when the Ashram came into existence, he kept it free from all political connections or action; even when he intervened in politics twice afterwards on special occasions, this intervention was purely personal and the Ashram was not concerned in it. The British Government and numbers of people besides could not believe that Sri Aurobindo had ceased from all political action and it was sup-

posed by them that he was secretly participating in revolutionary activities and even creating a secret organisation in the security of French India. But all this was pure imagination and rumour and there was nothing of the kind. His retirement from political activity was complete, just as was his personal retirement into solitude in 1910.

But this did not mean, as most people supposed, that he had retired into some height of spiritual experience devoid of any further interest in the world or in the fate of India. It could not mean that, for the very principle of his Yoga was not only to realise the Divine and attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the Spirit and give it a spiritual meaning. In his retirement Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action; for it is part of the experience of those who have advanced far in Yoga that besides the ordinary forces and activities of the mind and life and body in Matter, there are other forces and powers that can act and do act from behind and from above; there is also a spiritual dynamic power which can be possessed by those who are advanced in the spiritual consciousness, though all do not care to possess or, possessing, to use it, and this power is greater than any other and more effective. It was this force which, as soon as he had attained to it, he used, at first only in a limited field of personal work, but afterwards in a constant action upon the world forces. He had no reason to be dissatisfied with the results or to feel the necessity of any other kind of action. Twice, however, he found it advisable to take in addition other action of a public kind. The first was in relation to the Second World War. At the beginning he did not actively concern himself with it, but when it appeared as if Hitler would crush all the forces opposed to him and Nazism dominate the world, he began to intervene. He declared himself publicly on the side of the Allies, made some financial contributions in answer to the appeal for funds and encouraged those who sought his advice to enter the army or share in the war effort. Inwardly, he put his

spiritual force behind the Allies from the moment of Dunkirk when everybody was expecting the immediate fall of England and the definite triumph of Hitler, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the rush of German victory almost immediately arrested and the tide of war begin to turn in the opposite direction. This he did, because he saw that behind Hitler and Nazism were dark Asuric forces and that their success would mean the enslavement of mankind to the tyranny of evil, and a set-back to the course of evolution and especially to the spiritual evolution of mankind: it would lead also to the enslavement not only of Europe but of Asia, and in it of India, an enslavement far more terrible than any this country had ever endured, and the undoing of all the work that had been done for her liberation. It was this reason also that induced him to support publicly the Cripps' offer and to press the Congress leaders to accept it. He had not, for various reasons, intervened with his spiritual force against the Japanese aggression until it became evident that Japan intended to attack and even invade and conquer India. He allowed certain letters he had written in support of the war affirming his views of the Asuric nature and inevitable outcome of Hitlerism to become public. He supported the Cripps' offer because by its acceptance India and Britain could stand united against the Asuric forces and the solution of Cripps could be used as a step towards independence. When negotiations failed, Sri Aurobindo returned to his reliance on the use of spiritual force alone against the aggressor and had the satisfaction of seeing the tide of Japanese victory, which had till then swept everything before it, change immediately into a tide of rapid, crushing and finally immense and overwhelming defeat. He had also after a time the satisfaction of seeing his previsions about the future of India justify themselves so that she stands independent with whatever internal difficulties.

The only telegram to the Secretary of the Viceroy was one accompanying a donation of Rs.1000/- to the War Fund which was meant as a mark of Sri Aurobindo's adhesion to the cause of the Allies against the Axis. There was also a letter to the

Governor of Madras forwarding another contribution along with a statement of his views about the War which was published. Besides this, other contributions were made direct to France. Later on, letters supporting the War were made public. As for Cripps' offer, it was supported in a long telegram sent not to the Viceroy's secretary but to Cripps himself after his broadcast in which he announced the offer.[1]

SRI AUROBINDO'S POLITICAL STANDPOINT AND PACIFISM[2]

There seems to be put forth here and in several places the idea that Sri Aurobindo's political standpoint was entirely pacifist, that he was opposed in principle and in practice to all violence and that he denounced terrorism, insurrection etc. as entirely forbidden by the spirit and letter of the Hindu religion. It is even suggested that he was a forerunner of Mahatma Gandhi and gospel of Ahimsa. This is quite incorrect and, if left, would give a wrong idea about Sri Aurobindo. He has given his ideas on the subject, generally, in the *Essays on the Gita*, First Series (Chapter VI) where he supports the Gita's idea of Dharma Yuddha and criticises, though not expressly, the Gandhian ideas of soul-force. If he had held the pacifist ideal, he would never have supported the Allies (or anybody else) in this War, still less sanctioned some of his disciples joining the Army as airmen, soldiers, doctors, electricians, etc. The declarations and professions quoted in the book are not his, at the most they may have been put forward by his lawyers or written (more prudentially than sincerely) by colleagues in the *Bande Mataram*. The rule of confining political action to passive resistance was adopted as the best policy for the National Movement at that stage and not as part of a gospel of Non-violence or Peace. Peace is part of the highest ideal, but it must be spiritual or at the very least psychological in its basis; without a change in human nature it cannot come with any finality. If it is attempted on any other basis (mental principle,

[1] See Section VIII for the telegrams and letters mentioned in this note.

[2] A portion of this note with slight modifications has been incorporated in the preceding general note on Sri Aurobindo's political life.

or gospel of Ahimsa or any other) it will fail, and even may leave things worse than before. He is in favour of an attempt to put down war by international agreement and international force, what is now contemplated in the "New Order", if that proves possible, but that would not be Ahimsa, it would be a putting down of anarchic force by legal force, and one cannot be sure that it would be permanent. Within nations this sort of peace has been secured, but it does not prevent occasional civil wars and revolutions and political outbreaks and repressions, sometimes of a sanguinary character. The same might happen to a similar world-peace. Sri Aurobindo has never concealed his opinion that a nation is entitled to attain its freedom by violence, if it can do so or if there is no other way; whether it should do so or not, depends on what is the best policy, not on ethical considerations of the Gandhian kind. Sri Aurobindo's position and practice in this matter was the same as Tilak's and that of other Nationalist leaders who were by no means Pacifists or worshippers of Ahimsa. Those of them who took a share in revolutionary activities, kept a veil over them for reasons which need not be discussed now. Sri Aurobindo knew of all these things and took his own path, but he has always remained determined not to lift the veil till the proper time comes.

It follows that the passages which convey the opposite idea must be omitted in the interests of Truth or rewritten. Nothing need be said about the side of the Nationalist activities of that time in connection with Sri Aurobindo.

BHUPENDRANATH DUTT AS THE EDITOR OF YUGANTAR

In the interests of truth this name should be omitted. Bhupen Dutt was at the time only an obscure hand in the *Yugantar* office incapable of writing anything important and an ordinary recruit in the revolutionary ranks quite incapable of leading anybody, not even himself. When the police searched the office of the newspaper, he came forward and in a spirit of bravado declared himself the editor, although that was quite untrue. Afterwards he wanted to defend himself, but it was decided that the

Yugantar, a paper ostentatiously revolutionary advocating armed insurrection, could not do that and must refuse to plead in a British court. This position was afterwards maintained throughout and greatly enhanced the prestige of the paper. Bhupen was sentenced, served his term and subsequently went to America. This at the time was his only title to fame. The real editors or writers of *Yugantar* (for there was no declared editor) were Barin, Upen Banerji, (also a sub-editor of the *Bande Mataram*) and Debabrata Bose who subsequently joined the Ramakrishna Mission (being acquitted in the Alipur case) and was prominent among the Sannyasis at Almora and was a writer in the Mission's journals. Upen and Debabrata were masters of Bengali prose and it was their writings and Barin's that gained an unequalled popularity for the paper. These are the facts, but it will be sufficient to omit Bhupen's name.

Sri Aurobindo was now in Calcutta and he was in his element. He had given up his Baroda job, its settled salary and seductive prospects without any hesitation.

Sri Aurobindo was present at the Congress in 1904 and again in 1906 and took a part in the counsels of the Extremist Party and in the formation of its fourfold programme — "Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott, National Education" — which the Moderate leaders after a severe tussle behind the scenes were obliged to incorporate in the resolutions of 1906. Bepin Pal had just started a daily paper *Bande Mataram* with only 500 rupees in his pocket. Sri Aurobindo took up the joint editorship of the Journal, edited the paper during Bepin Pal's absence and induced the Nationalist Party to take it up as their organ and finance it. He called a meeting of the party leaders at which it was decided at his instance to give up the behind-the-scenes jostlings with the Moderates, and declare an open war on Moderatism and place before the country what was practically a revolutionary propaganda. He gave up his Baroda job some time after this; he had taken indefinite leave without pay; for this reason he did not take up officially and publicly the editorship of the *Bande Mataram* although after Bepin Pal left that post, he was practically

in full control of the policy of the paper.

> *The Bengal National College was founded and Sri Aurobindo became its Principal. But owing to differences with the College authorities he resigned his position.*

At an early period he left the organisation of the College to the educationist Satish Mukherji and plunged fully into politics. When the *Bande Mataram* case was brought against him he resigned his post in order not to embarrass the College authorities but resumed it again on his acquittal. During the Alipore case he resigned finally at the request of the College authorities.

There was no difference of opinion [with the College authorities]; the resignation was because of the *Bande Mataram* case, so as not to embarrass the authorities. After the acquittal, the College recalled him to his post. The final resignation was given from the Alipur jail.

SATISH MUKHERJI

I knew Satish Mukherji when he was organising the Bengal National College (1905-07), but afterwards I had no contact with him any longer. Even at that time we were not intimate and I knew nothing about his spiritual life or attainments — except that he was a disciple of Bejoy Goswami — as were also other political co-workers and leaders, like Bepin Pal and Manoranjan Guha. I knew Satish Mukherji only as a very able and active organiser in the field of education — a mission prophetically assigned to him, I was told, by his Guru, — nothing more.

> *After resigning from the Bengal National College Sri Aurobindo was free to associate himself actively with the Nationalist Party and its organ the "Bande Mataram".*

It was done long before that as the above account will show.

SRI AUROBINDO'S POLITICAL POLICY IN THE "BANDE MATARAM" ARTICLES

As a politician it was part of Sri Aurobindo's principles never to appeal to the British people; that he would have considered as part of the mendicant policy. These articles and other items (satiric verse, parodies, etc.) in the *Bande Mataram* referred to in these pages (not of course *Vidula* and *Perseus*) were the work of Shyam Sundar Chakravarti, not of Sri Aurobindo. Shyam Sundar was a witty parodist and could write with much humour as also with a telling rhetoric; he had caught up some imitation of Sri Aurobindo's style and many could not distinguish between their writings. In Sri Aurobindo's absence from Calcutta it was Shyam Sundar who wrote most of the *Bande Mataram* editorials, those excepted which were sent by Sri Aurobindo from Deoghar.

Sri Aurobindo never brought any rancour into his politics. He never had any hatred for England or the English people; he based his claim for freedom for India on the inherent right to freedom, not on any charge of misgovernment or oppression; if he attacked persons even violently, it was for their views or political action, not from any other motive.

> *Earlier in the year 1907 he had been prosecuted in connection with his editorship of the "Bande Mataram" and the series of articles he wrote in it under the heading, "The New Path".*

No — the prosecution was for a letter written by somebody to the Editor and for the publication of articles included in the *Yugantar* case but not actually used by the prosecution. The *Bande Mataram* was never prosecuted for its editorial articles. The editor of *The Statesman* complained that they were too diabolically clever, crammed full of sedition between the lines, but legally unattackable because of the skill of the language. The Government must have shared this view, for they never ventured

to attack the paper for its editorial or other articles, whether Sri Aurobindo's or from the pen of his three editorial colleagues. There is also the fact that Sri Aurobindo never based his case for freedom on racial hatred or charges of tyranny or misgovernment, but always on the inalienable right of the nation to independence. His stand was that even good government could not take the place of national government — independence.

> *The prosecution had failed and he was acquitted, but it had succeeded, if anything, only in putting him to the forefront and making the Indian intelligentsia only more than ever eager to read the "Bande Mataram".*

Sri Aurobindo had confined himself to writing and leadership behind the scenes, not caring to advertise himself or put forward his personality, but the imprisonment and exile of other leaders and the publicity given to his name by the case compelled him to come forward and take the lead on the public platform.

> *From 1904 an extremist section had been formed in the Congress and its members were waiting for the Congress to meet at Bombay to make themselves felt.*

It is not clear to what this refers. In 1904 the Extremist Party had not been publicly formed, although there was an advanced section in the Congress, strong in Maharashtra but still small and weak elsewhere and composed mostly of young men; there were sometimes disputes behind the scenes, but nothing came out in public. These men of extremer views were not even an organised group; it was Sri Aurobindo who in 1906 persuaded this group in Bengal to take public position as a party, proclaim Tilak as their leader and enter into a contest with the Moderate leaders for the control of the Congress and of public opinion and action in the country. The first great public clash between the two parties took place in the sessions of the Congress at Calcutta where Sri Aurobindo was present but still working behind the scenes, the second at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Midnapore where he for the first time acted publicly as the leader of the

Bengal Nationalists, and the final break took place at Surat in 1907.

Muslims, the descendants of foreigners, favoured the partition of Bengal.

This would seem to indicate that all the Mohammedans in India are descendants of foreigners, but the idea of two nationalities in India is only a new-fangled notion invented by Jinnah for his purposes and contrary to the facts. More than 90% of the Indian Mussalmans are descendants of converted Hindus and belong as much to the Indian nation as the Hindus themselves. This process of conversion has continued all along; Jinnah is himself a descendant of a Hindu, converted in fairly recent times, named Jinahbhai and many of the most famous Mohammedan leaders have a similar origin.

Assam had a majority of Muslims.

The majority in Assam is made up of the Hindus and tribal people; in Assam proper the Mussalmans are only 20% of the population. The balance has been altered by the inclusion of Sylhet, a Bengali district in Assam, but even so the non-Mussalmans predominate. At present a Congress Government is in power in Assam elected by a large majority and Assam is vehemently refusing to be grouped with Mussalman Bengal in the new constitution.

SRI AUROBINDO'S PART IN THE BARISAL CONFERENCE IN 1906

Sri Aurobindo took part in the Barisal Conference and was in the front row of three persons in the procession which was dispersed by the police charge. After the breaking up of the Conference he accompanied Bepin Pal in a tour of East Bengal where enormous meetings were held, — in one district in spite of the prohibition of the District Magistrate.

THE SURAT CONGRESS OF DECEMBER 1907

This version does not represent actually the facts as Sri Aurobindo remembers them. So far as he knows there was no attempt at fire. The session of the Congress had first been arranged at Nagpur, but Nagpur was predominantly a Mahratta city and violently extremist. Gujerat was at that time predominantly Moderate, there were very few Nationalists and Surat was a stronghold of Moderatism though afterwards Gujerat became, especially after Gandhi took the lead, one of the most revolutionary of the provinces. So the Moderate leaders decided to hold the Congress at Surat. The Nationalists however came there in strength from all parts, they held a public conference with Sri Aurobindo as President and for some time it was doubtful which side would have the majority, but finally in this Moderate city that party was able to bring in a crowd of so-called delegates up to the number of 1300 while the Nationalists were able by the same method to muster something over 1100. It was known that the Moderate leaders had prepared a new constitution for the Congress which would make it practically impossible for the extreme party to command a majority at any annual session for many years to come. The younger Nationalists, especially those from Maharashtra, were determined to prevent this by any means and it was decided by them to break the Congress if they could not swamp it; this decision was unknown to Tilak and the older leaders. But it was known to Sri Aurobindo. At the sessions Tilak went on to the platform to propose a resolution regarding the presidentship of the Congress; the President appointed by the Moderates refused to him the permission to speak, but Tilak insisted on his right and began to read his resolution and speak. There was a tremendous uproar, the young Gujerati volunteers lifted up chairs over the head of Tilak to beat him. At that the Mahrattas became furious, a Mahratta shoe came hurtling across the pavilion aimed at the President, Dr. Rash Behari Ghosh, and hit Surendra Nath Banerji on the shoulder. The young Mahrattas in a body charged up to the platform, the Moderate leaders fled; after a short fight on the platform with chairs, the session broke up not to be resumed.

The Moderate leaders decided to suspend the Congress and replace it by a national conference with a constitution and arrangement which would make it safe for their party. Meanwhile, Lajpatrai came to Tilak and informed him that the Government had decided, if the Congress split, to crush the Extremists by the most ruthless repression. Tilak thought, and the events proved that he was right, that the country was not yet ready to face successfully such a repression and he proposed to circumvent both the Moderate plan and the Government plan by the Nationalists joining the Conference and signing the statement of adhesion to the new constitution demanded by the Moderates. Sri Aurobindo and some other leaders were opposed to this submission; they did not believe that the Moderates would admit any Nationalists to their conference (and this proved to be the case) and they wanted the country to be asked to face the repression. Thus the Congress ceased for a time to exist; but the Moderate Conference was not a success and was attended only by small and always dwindling numbers. Sri Aurobindo had hoped that the country would be strong enough to face the repression, at least in Bengal and Maharashtra, where the enthusiasm had become intense and almost universal; but he thought also that even if there was a temporary collapse the repression would create a deep change in the hearts and minds of the people and the whole nation would swing over to Nationalism and the ideal of independence. This actually happened and when Tilak returned from jail in Burma after six years, he was able in conjunction with Mrs. Besant not only to revive the Congress but to make it representative of a nation pledged to the Nationalist cause. The Moderate Party shrank into a small body of liberals and even these finally subscribed to the ideal of complete independence.

The Nationalists wanted to propose Lajpatrai as President, not Tilak.

No Nationalist leader was seated on the dais.

History very seldom records the things that were decisive but took place behind the veil; it records the show in front of the curtain. Very few people know that it was I (without consulting Tilak) who gave the order that led to the breaking of the Congress and was responsible for the refusal to join the new-fangled Moderate Convention which were the two decisive happenings at Surat. Even my action in giving the movement in Bengal its militant turn or founding the revolutionary movement is very little known.

SRI AUROBINDO'S IMPRESSION OF GOKHALE

After an hour's conversation with Gokhale in the train between Ahmedabad and Baroda it was impossible for Sri Aurobindo to retain any great respect for Gokhale as a politician, whatever his merits as a man.

The "political tour" on his way to Calcutta after the Surat Congress.

There was no tour. Sri Aurobindo went to Poona with Lele and after his return to Bombay went to Calcutta. All the speeches he made were at this time (except those at Bombay and at Baroda) at places on his way wherever he stopped for a day or two.

Sri Aurobindo's "mood of inexplicable serenity" before his speech at Bombay on 19.1.1908.

Not inexplicable certainly; it was the condition of silence of the mind to which he had come by his meditation for 3 days with Lele in Baroda and which he kept for many months and indeed always thereafter, all activity proceeding on the surface; but at that time there was no activity on the surface. Lele told him to make *namaskāra* to the audience and wait and speech would come to him from some other source than the mind. So, in fact, the speech came, and ever since all speech, writing, thought and out-

ward activity have so come to him from the same source above the brain-mind.

The passage bracketed should be omitted. It tends to give an incorrect impression about the nature of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and of what was happening in him at the time. The Yoga was going on in him all the time, even during all his outward action but he was not withdrawn into himself or "dazed" as some of his friends thought. If he did not reply to questions or suggestions it was because he did not wish to and took refuge in silence.

EARLY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES BEFORE MEETING LELE IN 1908

What Lele asked him was whether he could surrender himself entirely to the Inner Guide within him and move as it moved him; if so he needed no instructions from Lele or anybody else. This Sri Aurobindo accepted and made that his rule of Sadhana and of life. Before he met Lele, Sri Aurobindo had some spiritual experiences, but that was before he knew anything about Yoga or even what Yoga was, — e.g., a vast calm which descended upon him at the moment when he stepped first on Indian soil after his long absence, in fact with his first step on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay: (this calm surrounded him and remained for long months afterwards); the realisation of the vacant Infinite while walking on the ridge of the Takhti-Suleman in Kashmir; the living presence of Kali in a shrine on the banks of the Narmada; the vision of the Godhead surging up from within when in danger of a carriage accident in Baroda in the first year of his stay, etc. But these were inner experiences coming of themselves and with a sudden unexpectedness, not part of a Sadhana. He started Yoga by himself without a Guru, getting the rule from a friend, a disciple of Brahmananda of Ganga Math; it was confined at first to assiduous practice of *prāṇāyāma* (at one time for 6 hours or more a day) There was no conflict or wavering between Yoga and politics; when he started Yoga, he carried on

both without any idea of opposition between them. He wanted however to find a Guru. He met a Naga Sannyasi in the course of this search, but did not accept him as Guru, though he was confirmed by him in a belief in Yoga-power when he saw him cure Barin in almost a moment of a violent and clinging hill-fever by merely cutting through a glassful of water crosswise with a knife while he repeated a silent Mantra. Barin drank and was cured. He also met Brahmananda and was greatly impressed by him; but he had no helper or Guru in Yoga till he met Lele and that was only for a short time.

Bhavani Mandir — in those revolutionary days...

Bhavani Mandir was written by Sri Aurobindo but it was more Barin's idea than his. It was not meant to train people for assassination but for revolutionary preparation of the country. The idea was soon dropped as far as Sri Aurobindo was concerned, but something of the kind was attempted by Barin in the Manicktala Garden and it is to this evidently that Hemchandra refers.

Sri Aurobindo does not remember anything of this kind nor of any formal decision to abandon the Bhavani Mandir idea. This selection of a site and a head of the monastery must have been simply an idea of Barin. He had travelled among the hills trying to find a suitable place but caught hill-fever and had to abandon his search and return to Baroda. Subsequently he went back to Bengal, but Sri Aurobindo did not hear of any discovery of a suitable place. Sakaria Swami was Barin's Guru: he had been a fighter in the Mutiny on the rebel side and he showed at the breaking of the Surat Congress a vehement patriotic excitement which caused his death because it awoke the poison of the bite of a mad dog which he had reduced to inactivity by a process of his Yogic will; but Sri Aurobindo would not have chosen him for any control of the political side of such an institution. The idea of Bhavani Mandir simply lapsed of itself. Sri Aurobindo thought no more about it, but Barin who clung to the idea tried to establish something like it on a small scale in the Manicktala Garden.

Sri Aurobindo was "handcuffed" after arrest by the police on 5.5.1908.

"Handcuffed" — No, tied with a rope; this was taken off on the protest of Bhupen Bose, the Congress Moderate leader.

The hands were not tied, the cord was put round his waist, but before leaving the house it was removed on the remonstrance of Bhupendra Nath Bose, the Moderate leader, who on hearing of the arrest had come to question the police about its motive.

In the Alipore jail Sri Aurobindo started reading the Gita and learning to live its Sadhana; he fully apprehended the true inwardness and glory of "Sanātana Dharma".

It should rather be said that he had long tried to apprehend the true inwardness and glory of the Indian religious and spiritual tradition, *Sanātana Dharma*, and to accept it in its entirety.

The case commenced in the Alipore Magistrate's Court on May 19, 1908 and continued intermittently for a whole year. Mr. Beachcroft, the magistrate, had been with Sri Aurobindo in Cambridge.... The case in due course went up to the Sessions Court and the trial commenced there in October 1908.

The last sentence: "The case...in October 1908" should come after "year" at the end of the first sentence. The preliminary trial (a very long one) took place before Birley, a young man unknown to Sri Aurobindo. Beachcroft was not 'magistrate' but judge in the Sessions Court.

THE STATEMENT IN THE ALIPORE COURT

Sri Aurobindo never made a public statement in the Court.

When asked by the Court, he said he would leave the case to his lawyers, they would speak for him; he himself did not wish to make any statement or answer the Court's questions. If any such statement as the one spoken of was made, it must have been drawn up by the lawyers on his behalf, not made by himself.

While in the Alipore jail Sri Aurobindo became ill.

Sri Aurobindo did not fall ill while in prison; he was in normal health except for a superficial ailment for some time which was of no consequence.

A year's seclusion and meditation in the Alipore jail worked a great transformation in Sri Aurobindo.... Once again — now as ever — "service" was his urge to action.

The idea was "work" for the country, for the world, finally for the Divine, *niṣkāma karma*, rather than an ideal of service.

Sri Aurobindo's "An Open Letter to My Countrymen" dated July 1909 and the second letter dated December 1909.

There is some confusion here and generally with regard to the two letters. Sri Aurobindo was not relying upon any change in Government policy for the effect of the first letter. He writes clearly that the proposed reforms were false and unreal and not acceptable. All he says is that if real reforms giving real power or control were offered, even if they gave only partial and not complete self-government then the Nationalist Party might accept them as the means towards complete self-government. Till then the Nationalists would maintain the struggle and their policy of non-cooperation and passive resistance. He relied not upon this but upon an intuitive perception that the Government would not think it politic or useful to deport him if he left a programme which others could carry out in his absence. Also the

considerations about Home Rule and complete passive resistance had no connection with the first letter, because they did not occur to Sri Aurobindo at that time. It was afterwards about the period of the second signed letter that he weighed the circumstances and the situation in the country and considered whether it would not be necessary for a time to draw back a little in order to make a continued political action possible, *reculer pour mieux sauter*, as the national movement seemed otherwise threatened with a complete pause. A Home Rule movement or a movement of the South African type suggested themselves to him and he foresaw that they might be resorted to in the near future; but he decided that such movements were not for him to lead and that he must go on with the movement for independence as it was. In the second letter also he rejects the reforms as inadequate and advocates a continuance and reorganisation of the Nationalist movement.[1] This was on December 25th., five months after the first letter. Sri Aurobindo does not understand the reference to the *coup de force* and the stratagem: if by the *coup de force* is meant the proposed search and arrest, that was undertaken in connection with and as a result of the second letter which was to be made the subject of a prosecution. As Sri Aurobindo went to Chandernagore and disappeared from view the search was not made and the warrant was held back and the prosecution postponed till he should again reappear. This happened in February, a month or more after the appearance of the second letter. Sri Aurobindo wanted the police to disclose their hand and act, and the stratagem he wrote about was an answer to a letter forwarded to him at Chandernagore which he knew to be from a police spy asking him to reappear and face his trial. He replied that he had no reason to do so as there was no public warrant against him and no prosecution had been announced; he thought this would have the effect of the police coming out into the open with a warrant and prosecution and in fact it had this effect.

[1] Sri Aurobindo would have accepted Diarchy as a step if it had given genuine control. It was not till Provincial autonomy was conceded that he felt a real change in the British attitude had begun; the Cripps offer he accepted as a further progress in that change and the final culmination in the Labour Government's new policy as its consummation.

REASON FOR LEAVING POLITICS

I may also say that I did not leave politics because I felt I could do nothing more there; such an idea was very far from me. I came away because I did not want anything to interfere with my Yoga and because I got a very distinct *ādeśa* in the matter. I have cut connection entirely with politics, but before I did so I knew from within that the work I had begun there was destined to be carried forward, on lines I had foreseen, by others, and that the ultimate triumph of the movement I had initiated was sure without my personal action or presence. There was not the least motive of despair or sense of futility behind my withdrawal. For the rest, I have never known any will of mine for any major event in the conduct of the world-affairs to fail in the end, although it may take a long time for the world-forces to fulfil it. As for the possibility of failure in my spiritual work, I shall deal with that another time. Difficulties there are, but I see no cause for pessimism or for the certification of failure.

October, 1932

IV. CORRECTIONS OF WRONG STATEMENTS IN THE PRESS

[1]This is my answer to the questions arising from your letter. Except on one point which calls for some explanation, I confine myself to the plain facts.

1. I was the writer of the series of articles on the "Passive Resistance" published [in the *Bande Mataram*] in April 1907 to which reference has been made; Bepin Pal had nothing to do with it. He ceased his connection with the paper towards the end of 1906 and from that time onward was not writing any editorials or articles for it. I planned several series of this kind for the *Bande Mataram* and at least three were published of which the "Passive Resistance" was one.

2. The articles published in *Dharma* during February and March 1910 were not written by me. The actual writer was a young man on the sub-editorial staff of the paper. This is well known to all who were then in the office or connected with it, e.g., Nolini Kanta Gupta who was with me then as he is now still with me here.

3. I did not go to the Bagbazar Math on my way to Chandernagore or make *praṇāma* to Sri Saradeshwari Devi. In fact I never met her or even saw her in my life. It was not from Bagbazar but another Ghat (Ganga Ghat) that I went straight by boat to Chandernagore.

4. Neither Ganen Maharaj nor Nivedita saw me off at the Ghat. Neither of them knew anything about my going: Nivedita learned of it only afterwards when I sent a message to her asking her to conduct the *Karmayogin* in my absence. She consented and from that time to its cessation of publication was in control of the paper; the editorials during that period were hers.

[1] Girija Shankar Roy Chaudhuri, a Bengali literary critic, wrote a series of articles on Sri Aurobindo in the Bengali journal *Udbodhan*. One issue especially (*Ashadh* 1351 B.S. June, 1944) contained a number of inaccurate statements. Some points in this article were referred to Sri Aurobindo for verification by the late C. C. Dutt. This letter is Sri Aurobindo's reply to him giving right factual information on these points. Sri Aurobindo also dictated a few notes correcting some wrong statements in Girija Shankar's article referred to him. These notes along with the wrong statements (shown in italics) are placed after the letter.

5. I did not take my wife for initiation to Sri Saradeshwari Devi; I was given to understand that she was taken there by Sudhira Bose, Debabrata's sister. I heard of it a considerable time afterwards in Pondicherry. I was glad to know that she had found so great a spiritual refuge, but I had no hand in bringing it about.

6. I did not go to Chandernagore on Sister Nivedita's advice. On a former occasion when she informed me that the Government had decided to deport me, she did urge me to leave British India and do my work from outside; but I told her I did not think it necessary, I would write something that would put a stop to this project. It was in these circumstances that I wrote the signed article "My Last Will and Testament". Nivedita afterwards told me that it had served its purpose, the Government had abandoned the idea of deportation. No occasion arose for her to repeat the advice nor was it at all likely that I would have followed it: she knew nothing beforehand of the circumstances that led to my departure to Chandernagore.

7. Here are the facts of that departure. I was in the *Karmayogin* Office when I received the word, on information given by a high-placed police official, that the Office would be searched the next day and myself arrested. (The Office was in fact searched but no warrant was produced against me; I heard nothing more of it till the case was started against the paper later on, but by then I had already left Chandernagore for Pondicherry.) While I was listening to animated comments from those around on the approaching event, I suddenly received a command from above, in a Voice well known to me, in three words: "Go to Chandernagore." In ten minutes or so I was in the boat for Chandernagore. Ramachandra Majumdar guided me to the Ghat and hailed a boat and I entered into it at once along with my relative Biren Ghose and Moni (Suresh Chandra Chakravarti) who accompanied me to Chandernagore, not turning aside to Bagbazar or anywhere else. We reached our destination while it was still dark: they returned in the morning to Calcutta. I remained in secret entirely engaged in Sadhana and my active connection with the two newspapers ceased from that time. Afterwards, under the same "sailing orders" I left Chandernagore and

reached Pondicherry on April 4, 1910.

I may add in explanation that from the time I left Lele at Bombay after the Surat Sessions and my stay with him in Baroda, Poona and Bombay, I had accepted the rule of following the inner guidance implicitly and moving only as I was moved by the Divine. The spiritual development during the year in jail had turned this into an absolute law of the being. This accounts for my immediate action in obedience to the *ādeśa* received by me.

You can on the strength of this letter cite my authority for your statements on these points to the editor of the *Udbodhan*.

December 5, 1944

SRI AUROBINDO'S NOTES ON GIRIJA SHANKAR'S ARTICLE

> *Sister Nivedita was invited in 1904 to Baroda by the Maharaja and Sri Aurobindo had talks with her about Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.*

I do not remember whether she was invited but I think she was there as a State guest. Khasirao and myself went to receive her at the station.

I do not remember Nivedita speaking to me on spiritual subjects or about Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. We spoke of politics and other subjects. On the way from the station to the town she cried out against the ugliness of the College building and its top-heavy dome and praised the Dharmashala near it. Khasirao stared at her and opined that she must be at least slightly cracked to have such ideas! I was very much enamoured at the time of her book *Kali the Mother* and I think we spoke of that; she had heard, she said, that I was a worshipper of Force, by which she meant that I belonged to the secret revolutionary party like herself, and I was present at her interview with the Maharaja whom she invited to support the secret revolution; she told him that he could communicate with her through me. Sayajirao was much too cunning to plunge into such a dangerous business and never spoke to me about it. That is all I remember.

Earth of Dakshineshwara was found in Sri Aurobindo's room when the police searched his house in April, 1908.

The earth was brought to me by a young man connected with the Ramakrishna Mission and I kept it; it was there in my room when the police came to arrest me.

the "Bande Mataram" started on 7th August, 1906. The joint stock company was declared on 18th October, 1906. So from August to October 1906 Bepin Pal was the editor.

Bepin Pal started the *Bande Mataram* with Rs. 500 in his pocket donated by Haridas Haldar. He called in my help as assistant editor and I gave it. I called a private meeting of the young Nationalist leaders in Calcutta and they agreed to take up the *Bande Mataram* as their party paper with Subodh and Nirod Mullick as the principal financial supporters. A company was projected and formed, but the paper was financed and kept up meanwhile by Subodh. Bepin Pal who was strongly supported by C. R. Das and others remained as editor. Hemendra Prasad Ghose and Shyam Sundar joined the editorial staff but they could not get on with Bepin Babu and were supported by the Mullicks. Finally, Bepin Pal had to retire, I don't remember whether in November or December, probably the latter. I was myself very ill, almost to death, in my father-in-law's house in Serpentine Lane and I did not know what was going on. They put my name as editor on the paper without my consent, but I spoke to the secretary pretty harshly and had the insertion discontinued. I also wrote a strong letter on the subject to Subodh. From that time Bepin Pal had no connection with the *Bande Mataram*. Somebody said that he resumed his editorship after I was arrested in the Alipore Case. I never heard of that. I was told by Bejoy Chatterjee after I came out from jail that he, Shyam Sundar and Hemendra Prasad had carried on somehow with the paper, but the finances became impossible, so he deliberately wrote an article which made the Government come down on the paper and stop

its publication, so that the *Bande Mataram* might end with some *éclat* and in all honour.

Girija Shankar's statements about Sri Aurobindo cannot be taken as they are; they are often based on false or twisted information, tend towards misrepresentation or are only inferences or guesses.

2

[1]I am authorised by Sri Aurobindo to contradict the statement quoted in your issue of the 17th inst. from the *Hindustan Standard* that he visited Sri Saradamani Devi on the day of his departure to Pondicherry (?) and received from her some kind of *dīkṣā*. There was a story published in a Calcutta monthly some time ago that on the night of his departure for Chandernagore in February 1910 Sri Aurobindo visited her at Bagbazar Math to receive her blessings, that he was seen off by Sister Nivedita and a Brahmachari of the Math and that he took this step of leaving British India at the advice of Sister Nivedita. All these statements are opposed to the facts and they were contradicted on Sri Aurobindo's behalf by Sri Charu Chandra Dutt in the same monthly.

Sri Aurobindo's departure to Chandernagore was the result of a sudden decision taken on the strength of an *ādeśa* from above and was carried out rapidly and secretly without consultation with anybody or advice from any quarter. He went straight from the *Dharma* Office to the Ghat — he did not visit the Math, nobody saw him off; a boat was hailed, he entered into it with two young men and proceeded straight to his destination. His residence at Chandernagore was kept quite secret; it was known only to Srijut Motilal Roy who arranged for his stay and to a few

[1] *The Sunday Times*, a weekly paper of Madras, reproduced in its issue of the 17th June, 1945 a news item from the *Hindustan Standard* saying that Sri Aurobindo received initiation from Sri Sarada Devi, wife of Sri Ramakrishna, prior to his departure to Chandernagore. This was a completely baseless story and was contradicted by this statement which appeared in the issue of the 24th June of *The Sunday Times*. The statement appeared under the name of the Secretary of Sri Aurobindo Ashram but was dictated by Sri Aurobindo himself.

others. Sister Nivedita was confidentially informed the day after his departure and asked to conduct the *Karmayogin* in place of Sri Aurobindo to which she consented. In his passage from Chandernagore to Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo stopped only for two minutes outside College Square to take his trunk from his cousin and paid no visit except to the British Medical Officer to obtain a medical certificate for the voyage. He went straight to the steamship *Dupleix* and next morning was on his way to Pondicherry.

It may be added that neither at this time nor any other did Sri Aurobindo receive any kind of initiation from Sarada Devi; neither did he ever take any formal *dikṣā* from anyone. He started his Sadhana at Baroda in 1904 on his own account after learning from a friend the ordinary formula of *prāṇāyama.* Afterwards the only help he received was from the Maharashtrian Yogi, Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, who instructed him how to reach complete silence of the mind and immobility of the whole consciousness. This Sri Aurobindo was able to achieve in three days with the result of lasting and massive spiritual realisations opening to him the larger ways of Yoga. Lele finally told him to put himself entirely into the hands of the Divine within and move only as he was moved and then he would need no instructions either from Lele himself or anyone else. This henceforward became the whole foundation and principle of Sri Aurobindo's Sadhana. From that time onward (the beginning of 1909) and through many years of intensive experience at Pondicherry he underwent no spiritual influence from outside.

November, 1945

3

[1]In his reply to Suresh Chakravarty's article, my old friend Ramachandra Majumdar congratulates himself on the strength of his memory in old age. His memory is indeed so strong that

[1] Suresh Chandra Chakravarty, a disciple of Sri Aurobindo, wrote an article on Sri Aurobindo in the Bengali journal, *Prabasi* (issue of *Baisakh* 1352 B.S. April, 1945). Ramachandra Majumdar who was on the staff of the *Karmayogin* wrote a reply to this article contradicting what seemed to him to be the wrong statements in S. Chakravarty's article. Majumdar's reply was not only based on wrong memory but also included a number of entirely fictitious statements. This note was dictated by Sri Aurobindo to correct

he not only recollects, very inaccurately, what actually happened, but recalls also and gives body to what never happened at all. His account is so heavily crammed with blunders and accretions that it may provide rich material for an imaginative and romantic biography of Sri Aurobindo in the modern manner but has no other value. It is a pity to have to trample on this fine garden of flowers, but historical and biographical truth has its claim. I shall correct some of the most flagrant errors in this narrative.

First of all, Suresh Chakravarty's article about the journey to Chandernagore confined itself to inaccurate statements of the facts and denied the story of a visit to Sri Sarada Devi in the course of that journey. This point has now been practically conceded for we see that the alleged visit has been transferred to another date a few days earlier. I may say that Suresh's narrative of the facts was brought to the notice of Sri Aurobindo who certified that it was true both as a whole and in detail.

But now another story has been brought up which is full of confusions and unrealities and is a good example of how myth can be established in place of the truth. Sri Aurobindo never spoke with Sister Nivedita about any case intended to be brought against him by the Government in connection with the murder of Shamsul Alam, for the good reason that no such intention was ever reported to him by anybody. Sister Nivedita never directed or advised him to go into hiding. What actually happened had nothing to do with the departure to Chandernagore. What happened was this: Sister Nivedita on a much earlier occasion informed Sri Aurobindo that the Government intended to deport him and advised him "not to hide", but leave British India and work from outside; Sri Aurobindo did not accept the advice. He said that he would write an "Open Letter" which he thought would make the Government give up its idea; this appeared in the *Karmayogin* under the title "My Last Will and Testament". Afterwards Sister Nivedita told him that it had had the desired effect and there was no more question of deportation.

Sri Aurobindo did not see Sister Nivedita on his way to

Majumdar's wrong and fictitious statements; it was translated into Bengali by Nolini Kanta Gupta who also wrote an article in Bengali (published in *Prabasi* and *Bartika*) which was practically a translation of this note.

Chandernagore; this is only a relic of the now abandoned story of his visit to the Math at Baranagar on that occasion in which it was related that she had seen him off at the Ghat. She knew nothing whatever of his departure to Chandernagore until afterwards when he sent her a message asking her to take up the editing of the *Karmayogin* in his absence. Everything happened very suddenly. Sri Aurobindo, as he has himself related, while at the *Karmayogin* Office, heard of an approaching search and his intended arrest; he suddenly received an *ādeśa* to go to Chandernagore and carried it out immediately without informing or consulting anybody — even his colleagues and co-workers. Everything was done in fifteen minutes or so and in the utmost secrecy and silence. He followed Ram Majumdar to the Ghat, Suresh Chakravarty and Biren Ghosh following at a little distance; a boat was hailed and the three got in and went off immediately. His stay in Chandernagore also was secret and known only to a few like his later departure to Pondicherry. Sri Aurobindo never asked Ram Majumdar to arrange for a hiding place; there was no time for any such arrangement. He went unannounced, relying on some friends in Chandernagore to arrange for his stay. Motilal Roy received him first in his own house, then arranged in other places, allowing only a few to know. This is the true account of what happened according to Sri Aurobindo's own statement.

The new story now told that Devabrata Bose and Sri Aurobindo both asked to be admitted into the Ramakrishna Mission and Devabrata was accepted but Swami Brahmananda refused to accept Sri Aurobindo, is another myth. Sri Aurobindo never even dreamed of taking Sannyasa or of entering into any established order of Sannyasis. It ought to be well known to everybody that Sannyasa was never accepted by him as part of his Yoga; he has founded an Ashram in Pondicherry but its members are not Sannyasis, do not wear the ochre garb or practise complete asceticism but are Sadhaks of a Yoga of life based on spiritual realisation. This has always been Sri Aurobindo's idea and it was never otherwise. He saw Swami Brahmananda only once when he went on a boat trip to visit the Belur Math; he had then about fifteen minutes' conversation with Swami Brahmananda but there was no talk about spiritual things. The

Swami was preoccupied with a communication from the Government and consulted Sri Aurobindo as to whether there was any need of an answer. Sri Aurobindo said no, and the Swami agreed. After seeing the Math Sri Aurobindo came away and nothing else happened. He never by letter or otherwise communicated with Swami Brahmananda before or afterwards and never directly or indirectly asked for admission or for Sannyasa.

There have been hints or statements about Sri Aurobindo taking or asking for initiation from certain quarters about this time. Those who spread these legends seem to be ignorant that at this time he was not a spiritual novice or in need of any initiation or spiritual direction by anybody. Sri Aurobindo had already realised in full two of the four great realisations on which his Yoga and his spiritual philosophy are founded. The first he had gained while meditating with the Maharashtrian Yogi Vishnu Bhaskar Lele at Baroda in January 1908; it was the realisation of the silent, spaceless and timeless Brahman gained after a complete and abiding stillness of the whole consciousness and attended at first by an overwhelming feeling and perception of the total unreality of the world, though this feeling disappeared after his second realisation which was that of the cosmic consciousness and of the Divine as all beings and all that is, which happened in the Alipore jail and of which he has spoken in his speech at Uttarpara. To the other two realisations, that of the supreme Reality with the static and dynamic Brahman as its two aspects and that of the higher planes of consciousness leading to the Supermind he was already on his way in his meditations in the Alipore jail. Moreover, he had accepted from Lele as the principle of his Sadhana to rely wholly on the Divine and his guidance alone both for his Sadhana and for his outward actions. After that it was impossible for him to put himself under any other guidance and unnecessary to seek help from anyone. In fact Sri Aurobindo never took any formal initiation from anyone; he started his Sadhana on his own account by the practice of *prāṇāyāma* and never asked for help except from Lele.

One or two less important points have to be mentioned to show how little reliance can be placed on the details of Ramchandra's narrative. His statement about the automatic writing

is only an imaginative inference and in fact quite groundless. Sri Aurobindo totally denies that he used the automatic writing for any kind of moral or other edification of those around him; that would have meant that it was spurious and a sort of a trick, for no writing can be automatic if it is dictated or guided by the writer's conscious mind. The writing was done as an experiment as well as an amusement and nothing else. I may mention here the circumstances under which it was first taken up. Barin had done some very extraordinary automatic writing at Baroda in a very brilliant and beautiful English style and remarkable for certain predictions which came true and statements of fact which also proved to be true although unknown to the persons concerned or anyone else present: there was notably a symbolic anticipation of Lord Curzon's subsequent unexpected departure from India and, again, of the first suppression of the national movement and the greatness of Tilak's attitude amidst the storm; this prediction was given in Tilak's own presence when he visited Sri Aurobindo at Baroda and happened to enter first when the writing was in progress. Sri Aurobindo was very much struck and interested and he decided to find out by practising this kind of writing himself what there was behind it. This is what he was doing in Calcutta. But the results did not satisfy him and after a few further attempts at Pondicherry he dropped these experiments altogether. He did not give the same high value to his efforts as Ramchandra seems to have done, for they had none of those remarkable features of Barin's writings. His final conclusion was that though there are sometimes phenomena which point to the intervention of beings of another plane, not always or often of a high order, the mass of such writings comes from a dramatising element in the subconscious mind; sometimes a brilliant vein in the subliminal is struck and then predictions of the future and statements of things known in the present and past come up, but otherwise these writings have not a great value. I may add that Ramchandra's details are incorrect and there was no guide named Theresa, in fact no guide at all, though someone calling himself Theramenes broke in from time to time. The writings came haphazard without any spirit mentor such as some mediums claim to have.

A smaller but more amazing myth presents Sri Aurobindo as a poet in Tamil — and this apparently after only a few days of study. Far from writing Tamil poetry Sri Aurobindo never wrote a single sentence even of Tamil prose and never spoke a single phrase in the Tamil language. He listened for a few days to a Nair from Malabar who read and explained to him articles in a Tamil newspaper; this was a short time before he left Bengal. At Pondicherry he took up the study of Tamil, but he did not go very far and his studies were finally interrupted by his complete retirement.

ABOUT SRI AUROBINDO'S QUESTION OF BECOMING A KING

Ramchandra's whole account is crammed with reckless inaccuracies and unreal details. Srish Goswami has pointed out in a letter that the astrological writings of Sri Aurobindo of which Ramchandra speaks were only some elementary notes and had no importance. Sri Aurobindo drew them at Baroda to refresh his memory when he was studying the subject with the idea of finding out what truth there might be in astrology. He had never any intention of figuring as an astrologer or writer on astrology. These notes did not form a book and no book of Sri Aurobindo on this subject appeared from the Arya Publishing House.

It is not a fact that Sri Aurobindo's wife, Mrinalini Devi, was residing at Sj. K. K. Mitra's house in College Square; Sri Aurobindo himself lived there constantly between the Alipore trial and his departure to French India. But she lived always with the family of Girish Bose, Principal of Bangabasi College. One is unable to understand the meaning of the saying attributed to Sri Aurobindo that he was a man rising to humanity unless we suppose that he was only the animal man rising towards the status of a thinking being; certainly Sri Aurobindo never composed such a resonant and meaningless epigram. If it had been to a Divine Humanity it might have had some meaning but the whole thing sounds unlike what Sri Aurobindo might have said. In fact all that Ramchandra puts into Sri Aurobindo's mouth

is of a character foreign to his habits of speech, e.g., his alleged Shakespearean and Polonius-like recommendation to Ramchandra himself while departing to Chandernagore. He may have enjoined silence on Ramchandra but not in that flowery language.

This should be enough; it is unnecessary to deal with all the inaccuracies and imaginations. But I think I have said enough to show that anyone wanting the truth about Sri Aurobindo would do well to avoid any reliance on Ramchandra's narrative. It can be described in the phrase of Goethe, "poetic fictions and truths", for the element of truth is small and that of poetic fiction stupendous. It is like the mass of ale to the modicum of bread in Falstaff's tavern bill. In fact it is almost the whole.

1945

4

[1]The account which seems to have been given to X and recorded by her on pages 317-324 of her book is, I am compelled to say, fiction and romance with no foundation in actual facts. I spent the first part of my imprisonment in Alipore jail in a solitary cell and again after the assassination of Noren Gossain to the last days of the trial when all the Alipore case prisoners were similarly lodged each in his own cell. In between for a short period we were all put together. There is no truth behind the statement that while I was meditating they gathered around me, that I recited the Gita to them and they sang the verses, or that they put questions to me on spiritual matters and received instructions from me; the whole description is quite fanciful. Only a few of the prisoners had been known to me before I met them in prison; only a few who had been with Barin had practised Sadhana and these were connected with Barin and would have turned to him for any help, not to me. I was carrying on my Yoga during these days, learning to do so in the midst of much

[1] A French lady, interested in Indian spirituality, published a book in French on Sister Nivedita's life — *Nivedita, fille de l'Inde* — in which she made some statements about Sri Aurobindo and his contacts with Sister Nivedita. A French disciple of Sri Aurobindo, who brought these statements to his notice, received from him this reply.

noise and clamour but apart and in silence and without any participation of the others in it. My Yoga begun in 1904 had always been personal and apart; those around me knew I was a Sadhak but they knew little more as I kept all that went on in me to myself. It was only after my release that for the first time I spoke at Uttarpara publicly about my spiritual experiences. Until I went to Pondicherry I took no disciples; with those who accompanied me or joined me in Pondicherry I had at first the relation of friends and companions rather than of a Guru and disciples; it was on the ground of politics that I had come to know them and not on the spiritual ground. Afterwards only there was a gradual development of spiritual relations until the Mother came back from Japan and the Ashram was founded or rather founded itself in 1926. I began my Yoga in 1904 without a Guru; in 1908 I received important help from a Mahratta Yogi and discovered the foundations of my Sadhana; but from that time till the Mother came to India I received no spiritual help from anyone else. My Sadhana before and afterwards was not founded upon books but upon personal experiences that crowded on me from within. But in the jail I had the Gita and the Upanishads with me, practised the Yoga of the Gita and meditated with the help of the Upanishads; these were the only books from which I found guidance; the Veda which I first began to read long afterwards in Pondicherry rather confirmed what experiences I already had than was any guide to my Sadhana. I sometimes turned to the Gita for light when there was a question or a difficulty and usually received help or an answer from it, but there were no such happenings in connection with the Gita as are narrated in the book. It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail in my solitary meditation and felt his presence, but this had nothing to do with the alleged circumstances narrated in the book, circumstances that never took place, nor had it anything to do with the Gita. The voice spoke only on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it had finished saying all that it had to say on that subject.

Then about my relations with Sister Nivedita — they were

purely in the field of politics. Spirituality or spiritual matters did not enter into them and I do not remember anything passing between us on these subjects when I was with her. Once or twice she showed the spiritual side of her but she was then speaking to someone else who had come to see her while I was there. The whole account about my staying with her for 24 hours and all that is said to have passed between us then is sheer romance and does not contain a particle of fact. I met Sister Nivedita first at Baroda when she came to give some lectures there. I went to receive her at the station and to take her to the house assigned to her; I also accompanied her to an interview she had sought with the Maharaja of Baroda. She had heard of me as one who "believed in strength and was a worshipper of Kali" by which she meant that she had heard of me as a revolutionary. I knew of her already because I had read and admired her book *Kali the Mother*. It was in these days that we formed our friendship. After I had started my revolutionary work in Bengal through certain emissaries, I went there personally to see and arrange things myself. I found a number of small groups of revolutionaries that had recently sprung into existence but all scattered and acting without reference to each other. I tried to unite them under a single organisation with the barrister P. Mitra as the leader of the revolution in Bengal and a central council of five persons, one of them being Nivedita. The work under P. Mitra spread enormously and finally contained tens of thousands of young men and the spirit of revolution spread by Barin's paper *Yugantar* became general in the young generation; but during my absence at Baroda the council ceased to exist as it was impossible to keep up agreement among the many groups. I had no occasion to meet Nivedita after that until I settled in Bengal as Principal of the National College and the chief editorial writer of the *Bande Mataram*. By that time I had become one of the leaders of the public movement known first as extremism, then as nationalism, but this gave me no occasion to meet her except once or twice at the Congress, as my collaboration with her was solely in the secret revolutionary field. I was busy with my work and she with hers, and no occasion arose for consultations or decisions about the conduct of the revolutionary movement.

Later on I began to make time to go and see her occasionally at Bagbazar.

In one of these visits she informed me that the Government had decided to deport me and she wanted me to go into secrecy or to leave British India and act from outside so as to avoid interruption of my work. There was no question at that time of danger to her; in spite of her political views she had friendly relations with high Government officials and there was no question of her arrest. I told her that I did not think it necessary to accept her suggestion; I would write an open letter in the *Karmayogin* which, I thought, would prevent this action by the Government. This was done and on my next visit to her she told me that my move had been entirely successful and the idea of deportation had been dropped. The departure to Chandernagore happened later and there was no connection between the two incidents which have been hopelessly confused together in the account in the book. The incidents related there have no foundation in fact. It was not Gonen Maharaj who informed me of the impending search and arrest, but a young man on the staff of the *Karmayogin*, Ramchandra Mazumdar, whose father had been warned that in a day or two the *Karmayogin* Office would be searched and myself arrested. There have been many legends spread about on this matter and it was even said that I was to be prosecuted for participation in the murder in the High Court of Shamsul Alam, a prominent member of the C.I.D., and that Sister Nivedita sent for me and informed me and we discussed what was to be done and my disappearance was the result. I never heard of any such proposed prosecution and there was no discussion of the kind; the prosecution intended and afterwards started was for sedition only. Sister Nivedita knew nothing of these new happenings till after I reached Chandernagore. I did not go to her house or see her; it is wholly untrue that she and Gonen Maharaj came to see me off at the Ghat. There was no time to inform her; for almost immediately I received a command from above to go to Chandernagore and within ten minutes I was at the Ghat; a boat was hailed and I was on my way with two young men to Chandernagore. It was a common Ganges boat rowed by two boatmen, and all the picturesque

details about the French boat and the disappearing lights are pure romance. I sent someone from the office to Nivedita to inform her and to ask her to take up editing of the *Karmayogin* in my absence. She consented and in fact from this time onward until the suspension of the paper she had the whole conduct of it; I was absorbed in my Sadhana and sent no contributions nor were there any articles over my signature. There was never my signature to any articles in the *Karmayogin* except twice only, the last being the occasion for the prosecution which failed. There was no arrangement for my staying in Chandernagore at a place selected by Nivedita. I went without previous notice to anybody and was received by Motilal Roy who made secret arrangements for my stay; nobody except himself and a few friends knew where I was. The warrant of arrest was suspended, but after a month or so I used a manoeuvre to push the police into open action; the warrant was launched and a prosecution commenced against the printer in my absence which ended in acquittal in the High Court. I was already on my way to Pondicherry where I arrived on April 4. There also I remained in secrecy in the house of a prominent citizen until the acquittal, after which I announced my presence in French India. These are all the essential facts and they leave no room for the alleged happenings related in the book. It is best that you should communicate my statement of facts to X so that she may be able to make the necessary corrections or omissions in a future edition and remove this wrong information which would otherwise seriously detract from the value of her life of Nivedita.

13-9-1946

Section Two

BEGINNINGS OF YOGA

BEGINNINGS OF YOGA

AN EARLY EXPERIENCE

Q: X says that it is written somewhere that you had a realisation in 1890. Is it true?

A: A realisation in 1890? It does not seem possible. There was something, though I was not doing Yoga and knew nothing about it, in the year of my departure from England; I don't remember which it was but probably 1892-93.... I don't remember anything special in 1890. Where did he see this written?

22-8-1936

GLIMPSES OF SPIRITUAL POSSIBILITY

Q: Is it true that only those who had, before beginning their Sadhana, a clear knowledge of their spiritual possibility through a definite glimpse received by the Divine Grace are able to stick to their path till the end, while those who had no such glimpse may get some experience but will not be able to stick to their Sadhana?

A: At least I had no such glimpse before I started Yoga. I can't say about others — perhaps some had — but the glimpse could only bring faith, it could not possibly bring knowledge; knowledge comes by Yoga, not before it.

I repeat that all one needs to know is whether the soul in one has been moved to the Yoga or not.

5-5-1933

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Do you think that Buddha or Confucius or myself were born with a prevision that they or I would take to the spiritual life? So long as one is in the ordinary consciousness, one lives the ordinary life. When the awakening and the new consciousness come, one leaves it — nothing puzzling in that.

27-4-1936

THE ONE THING ESSENTIAL

I do not know what X said or in which article, I do not have it with me. But if the statement is that nobody can have a successful meditation or realise anything till he is pure and perfect, I fail to follow it: it contradicts my own experience. I have always had realisation by meditation first and the purification started afterwards as a result. I have seen many get important, even fundamental realisations by meditation who could not be said to have a great inner development. Are all Yogis who have meditated with effect and had great realisations in their inner consciousness perfect in their nature? It does not look like it to me. I am unable to believe in absolute generalisations in this field, because the development of spiritual consciousness is an exceedingly vast and complex affair in which all sorts of things can happen and one might almost say that for each man it is different according to his nature and that the one thing that is essential is the inner call and aspiration and the perseverance to follow always after it, no matter how long it takes, what are the difficulties or impediments, because nothing else will satisfy the soul within us.

If absolute surrender, faith, etc. from the beginning were essential for Yoga, then nobody could do it. I myself could not have done it if such a condition had been demanded of me.

8-3-1935

THE FIRST CONCRETE REALISATION

In a more deep and spiritual sense a concrete realisation is that which makes the thing realised more real, dynamic, intimately present to the consciousness than any physical thing can be. Such a realisation of the personal Divine or of the impersonal Brahman or of the Self does not usually come at the beginning of a Sadhana or in the first years or for many years. It comes so to a very few; mine came fifteen years after my first pre-

yogic experience in London and in the fifth year after I started Yoga. That I consider extraordinarily quick, an express train speed almost, although there may no doubt have been several quicker achievements. But to expect and demand it so soon would be taken in the eyes of any experienced Yogi or Sadhak as a rather rash and abnormal impatience. Most would say that a slow development is the best one can hope for in the first years and only when the nature is ready and fully concentrated towards the Divine can the definitive experience come.

June, 1934

PERSONAL EFFORT AND ACTION OF GRACE

By the way, what is this story about my four or five hours' concentration a day for several years before anything came down? Such a thing never happened, if by concentration you mean laborious meditation. What I did was four or five hours a day *prāṇāyāma* — which is quite another matter. And what flow do you speak of? The flow of poetry came down while I was doing *prāṇāyāma*, not some years afterwards. If it is the flow of experiences, that did come after some years, but after I had stopped the *prāṇāyāma* for a long time and was doing nothing and did not know what to do or where to turn once all my efforts had failed. And it came not as a result of years of *prāṇāyāma* or concentration, but in a ridiculously easy way, by the grace either of a temporary Guru (but it was not that, for he was himself bewildered by it) or by the grace of the eternal Brahman and afterwards by the grace of Mahakali and Krishna. So don't try to turn me into an argument against the Divine, that attempt will be perfectly ineffective.

22-1-1936

What is the use of saying things if you deliberately misinterpret what I write? I said clearly that the *prāṇāyāma* brought me nothing of any kind of spiritual realisation. I had stopped it long before. The Brahman experience came when I was groping for a way, doing no Sadhana at all, making no effort because I didn't

know what effort to make, all having failed. Then in three days I got an experience which most Yogis get only at the end of a long Yoga, got it without wanting or trying after it, got it to the surprise of Lele who was trying to get me something quite different. But I don't suppose you are able to understand, so I say no more.

24-1-1936

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Why did not everything open up in me like the painting vision and some other things? All did not. As I told you I had to plod in many things. Otherwise the affair would not have taken so many years (30). In this Yoga one can't take a short cut in everything. I had to work on each problem and on each conscious plane to solve or to transform and in each I had to take the blessed conditions as they were and do honest work without resorting to miracles. Of course if the consciousness grows all of itself, it is all right, things will come with the growth, but not even then pell-mell in an easy gallop.

4-4-1935

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It is not that there is anything peculiar to you in these difficulties; every Sadhak entering the Way has to get over similar impediments. It took me four years of inner striving to find a real Way, even though the divine help was with me all the time, and even then, it seemed to come by an accident; and it took me ten more years of intense Yoga under a supreme inner guidance to trace it out and that was because I had my past and the world's past to assimilate and overpass before I could find and found the future.

5-5-1932

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I think you have made too much play with my phrase "an accident", ignoring the important qualification, "it *seemed* to come by an accident". After four years of *prāṇāyāma* and other practices on my own, with no other result than an increased health and outflow of energy, some psycho-physical phenomena, a great outflow of poetic creation, a limited power of subtle sight (luminous patterns and figures, etc.) mostly with the waking

eye, I had a complete arrest and was at a loss. At this juncture I was induced to meet a man without fame whom I did not know, a Bhakta with a limited mind but with some experience and evocative power. We sat together and I followed with an absolute fidelity what he instructed me to do, not myself in the least understanding where he was leading me or where I was myself going. The first result was a series of tremendously powerful experiences and radical changes of consciousness which he had never intended — for they were Adwaitic and Vedantic and he was against Adwaita Vedanta — and which were quite contrary to my own ideas, for they made me see with a stupendous intensity the world as a cinematographic play of vacant forms in the impersonal universality of the Absolute Brahman. The final upshot was that he was made by a Voice within him to hand me over to the Divine within me enjoining an absolute surrender to its will — a principle or rather a seed force to which I kept unswervingly and increasingly till it led me through all the mazes of an incalculable Yogic development bound by no single rule or style or dogma or Shastra to where and what I am now and towards what shall be hereafter. Yet he understood so little what he was doing that when he met me a month or two later, he was alarmed, tried to undo what he had done and told me that it was not the Divine but the devil that had got hold of me. Does not all that justify my phrase "it seemed to come by an accident"? But my meaning is that the ways of the Divine are not like those of the human mind or according to our patterns and it is impossible to judge them or to lay down for Him what He shall or shall not do, for the Divine knows better than we can know. If we admit the Divine at all, both true reason and Bhakti seem to me to be at one in demanding implicit faith and surrender. I do not see how without them there can be *avyabhicāriṇī bhakti* (one-pointed adoration).

May, 1932

DEFICIENCIES OF THE HUMAN GURU

It is not the human defects of the Guru that can stand in the way when there is the psychic opening, confidence and surrender.

The Guru is the channel or the representative or the manifestation of the Divine, according to the measure of his personality or his attainment; but whatever he is, it is to the Divine that one opens in opening to him; and if something is determined by the power of the channel, more is determined by the inherent and intrinsic attitude of the receiving consciousness, an element that comes out in the surface mind as simple trust or direct unconditional self-giving, and once that is there, the essential things can be gained even from one who seems to others than the disciple an inferior spiritual source, and the rest will grow up in the Sadhak of itself by the Grace of the Divine, even if the human being in the Guru cannot give it. It is this that X appears to have done perhaps from the first; but in most nowadays this attitude seems to come with difficulty, after much hesitation and delay and trouble. In my own case I owe the first decisive turn of my inner life to one who was infinitely inferior to me in intellect, education and capacity and by no means spiritually perfect or supreme; but, having seen a Power behind him and decided to turn there for help, I gave myself entirely into his hands and followed with an automatic passivity the guidance. He himself was astonished and said to others that he had never met anyone before who could surrender himself so absolutely and without reserve or question to the guidance of the helper. The result was a series of transmuting experiences of such a radical character that he was unable to follow and had to tell me to give myself up in future to the Guide within with the same completeness of surrender as I had shown to the human channel. I give this example to show how these things work; it is not in the calculated way the human reason wants to lay down, but by a more mysterious and greater law.

23-3-1932

EXPERIENCE OF THE ADWAITIC SELF

Q: I have read what you wrote to X the other day about the way in which you had the experience of the Self; that such a thing could have happened seems to me almost unthinkable!

A: I can't help that. It happened. The mind's canons of the rational and the possible do not give spiritual life and experience.

Q: But can you not tell us what the experience was like? Was it by any chance like the one you speak of in your Uttarpara Speech — the Vasudeva experience?

A: Great jumble-Mumble! What has Vasudeva to do with it? Vasudeva is the name of Krishna, and in the Uttarpara I was speaking of Krishna, if you please.

Q: By the Self, I suppose, you mean the individual Self!

A: Good Lord, no. I mean the Self, sir, the Self, the Adwaita, Vedantic, Shankar Self. Atman, Atman! A thing I knew nothing about, never bargained for, didn't understand either.

Q: But didn't you begin Yoga later on in Gujerat?

A: Yes. But this began in London, sprouted the moment I set foot on Apollo Bunder, touching Indian soil, flowered one day in the first year of my stay in Baroda, at the moment when there threatened to be an accident to my carriage. Precise enough?

31-10-1935

REALISATION OF THE SELF AND LOVE FOR THE DIVINE

Q: Don't you think your realisation of the Self helped you in your crucial moments, kept up your faith and love?

A: That has nothing to do with love. Realisation of Self and love of the personal Divine are two different movements.

My struggle has never been about the Self. All that is perfectly irrelevant to the question which concerns the Bhakta's love for the Divine.

Q: But the sweet memory of that experience of the Self must have sustained you.

A: There was nothing sugary about it at all. And I had no need to have any memory of it, because it was with me for months and years and is there now though in fusion with other realisations. My point is that there are hundreds of Bhaktas who have the love and seeking without any concrete experience, with only a mental conception or emotional belief in the Divine to support them. The whole point is that it is untrue to say that one must have a decisive or concrete experience before one can have love for the Divine. It is contrary to the facts and the quite ordinary facts of the spiritual experience.

14-3-1936

THE EXPERIENCE OF NIRVANA

I have never said that things (in life) are harmonious now — on the contrary, with the human consciousness as it is harmony is impossible. It is always what I have told you, that the human consciousness is defective and simply impossible — and that is why I strive for a higher consciousness to come and set right the disturbed balance. I don't want to give you Nirvana (on paper) immediately because Nirvana only leads up to Harmony in my communication. I am glad you are getting converted to silence, and even Nirvana is not without its uses — in my case it was the first positive spiritual experience and it made possible all the rest of the Sadhana; but as to the positive way to get these things, I don't know if your mind is quite ready to proceed with it. There are in fact several ways. My own way was by rejection of thought. "Sit down," I was told, "look and you will see that your thoughts come into you from outside. Before they enter, fling them back." I sat down and looked and saw to my astonishment that it was so; I saw and felt concretely the thought approaching as if to enter through or above the head and was able to push it back concretely before it came inside.

In three days — really in one — my mind became full of an

eternal silence — it is still there. But that I don't know how many people can do. One (not a disciple — I had no disciples in those days) asked me how to do Yoga. I said: "Make your mind quiet first." He did and his mind became quite silent and empty. Then he rushed to me saying: "My brain is empty of thoughts, I cannot think. I am becoming an idiot." He did not pause to look and see where these thoughts he uttered were coming from! Nor did he realise that one who is already an idiot cannot become one. Anyhow I was not patient in those days and I dropped him and let him lose his miraculously achieved silence.

The usual way, the easiest if one can manage it at all, is to *call down* the silence from above you into the brain, mind and body.

FREEDOM AND MASTERY OF MIND

All developed mental men, those who get beyond the average, have in one way or other or at least at certain times and for certain purposes to separate the two parts of the mind, the active part which is a factory of thoughts and the quiet masterful part which is at once a Witness and a Will, observing them, judging, rejecting, eliminating, accepting, ordering corrections and changes, the Master in the House of Mind, capable of self-empire, *sāmrājya.*

The Yogi goes still farther; he is not only a master there, but even while in mind in a way, he gets out of it as it were, and stands above or quite back from it and free. For him the image of the factory of thoughts is no longer quite valid; for he sees that thoughts come from outside, from the universal Mind or universal Nature, sometimes formed and distinct, sometimes unformed and then they are given shape somewhere in us. The principal business of our mind is either a response of acceptance or a refusal to these thought-waves (as also vital waves, subtle physical energy waves) or this giving a personal-mental form to thought-stuff (or vital movements) from the environing Nature-Force. It was my great debt to Lele that he showed me this. "Sit in meditation," he said, "but do not think, look only at your mind; you will see thoughts *coming into it*; before they can

enter throw these away from your mind till your mind is capable of entire silence." I had never heard before of thoughts coming visibly into the mind from outside, but I did not think either of questioning the truth or the possibility, I simply sat down and did it. In a moment my mind became silent as a windless air on a high mountain summit and then I saw one thought and then another coming in a concrete way from outside; I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three days I was free. From that moment, in principle, the mental being in me became a free Intelligence, a universal Mind, not limited to the narrow circle of personal thought as a labourer in a thought factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and free to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire and thought-empire. I mention this only to emphasise that the possibilities of the mental being are not limited and that it can be the free Witness and Master in its own house. It is not to say that everybody can do it in the way I did it and with the same rapidity of the decisive movement (for, of course, the latter fullest developments of this new untrammelled mental power took time, many years) but a progressive freedom and mastery of one's mind is perfectly within the possibilities of anyone who has the faith and the will to undertake it.

5-8-1932

SILENCE OF MIND BY DESCENT OF STILLNESS

I find nothing to object to in Prof. Sorley's comment on the still, bright and clear mind, for it adequately indicates the process by which the mind makes itself ready for the reflection of the higher Truth in its undisturbed surface or substance. One thing perhaps needs to be kept in view — this pure stillness of the mind is always the required condition, the desideratum, but to bring it about there are more ways than one. It is not, for instance, only by an effort of the mind itself to get clear of all intrusive emotion or passion or of its own characteristic vibrations or of the obscuring fumes of a physical inertia which brings about the sleep or torpor of the mind instead of its wakeful silence that the thing can be done — for this is only the ordinary process of the Yogic path

of knowledge. It can happen also by a descent from above of a great spiritual stillness imposing silence on the mind and heart and the life stimuli and the physical reflexes. A sudden descent of this kind or a series of descents accumulative in force and efficacy is a well-known phenomenon of spiritual experience. Or, again, one may start a process of one kind or another for the purpose which would normally mean a long labour and be seized, even at the outset, by a rapid intervention or manifestation of the Silence with an effect out of all proportion to the means used at the beginning. One commences with a method, but the work is taken up by a Grace from above, from That to which one aspires or an irruption of the infinitudes of the Spirit. It was in this last way that I myself came by the mind's absolute silence, unimaginable to me before I had its actual experience.

THE REAL DIFFICULTY[1]

Sri Aurobindo has no remarks to make on Huxley's comments with which he is in entire agreement. But in the phrase "to its heights we can always reach", very obviously "we" does not refer to humanity in general but to those who have a sufficiently developed inner spiritual life. It is probable that Sri Aurobindo was thinking of his own experience. After three years of spiritual effort with only minor results he was shown by a Yogi the way to silence his mind. This he succeeded in doing entirely in two or three days by following the method shown. There was an entire silence of thought and feeling and all the ordinary movements of consciousness except the perception and recognition of things around without any accompanying concept or other reaction. The sense of ego disappeared and the movements of the ordinary

[1] These remarks were dictated by Sri Aurobindo apropos of the phrase "to its heights we can always reach" occurring in the following passage in *The Life Divine* quoted and commented upon by Aldous Huxley in his book, *The Perennial Philosophy* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1946), p. 74:

"The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge. It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness — to its heights we can always reach — when we keep our feet firmly on the physical. 'Earth is His footing,' says the Upanishad whenever it images the Self that manifests in the universe."

The Life Divine (Centenary Edition, 1972), Ch. II, p. 11.

life as well as speech and action were carried on by some habitual activity of Prakriti alone which was not felt as belonging to oneself. But the perception which remained saw all things as utterly unreal; this sense of unreality was overwhelming and universal. Only some undefinable Reality was perceived as true which was beyond space and time and unconnected with any cosmic activity, but yet was met wherever one turned. This condition remained unimpaired for several months and even when the sense of unreality disappeared and there was a return to participation in the world-consciousness, the inner peace and freedom which resulted from this realisation remained permanently behind all surface movements and the essence of the realisation itself was not lost. At the same time an experience intervened: something else than himself took up his dynamic activity and spoke and acted through him but without any personal thought or initiative. What this was remained unknown until Sri Aurobindo came to realise the dynamic side of the Brahman, the Ishwara and felt himself moved by that in all his Sadhana and action. These realisations and others which followed upon them, such as that of the Self in all and all in the Self and all as the Self, the Divine in all and all in the Divine, are the heights to which Sri Aurobindo refers and to which he says we can always rise; for they presented to him no long or obstinate difficulty. The only real difficulty which took decades of spiritual effort to work out towards completeness was to apply the spiritual knowledge utterly to the world and to the surface psychological and outer life and to effect its transformation both on the higher levels of Nature and on the ordinary mental, vital and physical levels down to the subconscience and the basic Inconscience and up to the supreme Truth-Consciousness or Supermind in which alone the dynamic transformation could be entirely integral and absolute.

4-11-1946

INTELLECTUAL STATEMENT OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

I do not think, however, that the statement of supra-intellectual things necessarily involves a making of distinctions in the terms of the intellect. For, fundamentally, it is not an expression of

ideas arrived at by speculative thinking. One has to arrive at spiritual knowledge through experience and a consciousness of things which arises directly out of that experience or else underlies or is involved in it. This kind of knowledge, then, is fundamentally a consciousness and not a thought or formulated idea. For instance, my first major experience — radical and overwhelming, though not, as it turned out, final and exhaustive — came after and by the exclusion and silencing of all thought — there was, first, what might be called a spiritually substantial or concrete consciousness of stillness and silence, then the awareness of some sole and supreme Reality in whose presence things existed only as forms but forms not at all substantial or real or concrete; but this was all apparent to a spiritual perception and essential and impersonal sense and there was not the least concept or idea of reality or unreality or any other notion, for all concept or idea was hushed or rather entirely absent in the absolute stillness. These things were known directly through the pure consciousness and not through the mind, so there was no need of concepts or words or names. At the same time this fundamental character of spiritual experience is not absolutely limitative; it can do without thought, but it can do with thought also. Of course, the first idea of the mind would be that the resort to thought brings one back at once to the domain of the intellect — and at first and for a long time it may be so; but it is not my experience that this is unavoidable. It happens so when one tries to make an intellectual statement of what one has experienced; but there is another kind of thought that springs out as if it were a body or form of the experience or of the consciousness involved in it — or of a part of that consciousness — and this does not seem to me to be intellectual in its character. It has another light, another power in it, a sense within the sense. It is very clearly so with those thoughts that come without the need of words to embody them, thoughts that are of the nature of a direct seeing in the consciousness, even a kind of intimate sense or contact formulating itself into a precise expression of its awareness (I hope this is not too mystic or unintelligible); but it might be said that directly the thoughts turn into words they belong to the kingdom of intellect — for words are a coinage of the intellect. But

is it so really or inevitably? It has always seemed to me that words came originally from somewhere else than the thinking mind, although the thinking mind secured hold of them, turned them to its use and coined them freely for its purposes. But even otherwise, is it not possible to use words for the expression of something that is not intellectual? Housman contends that poetry is perfectly poetical only when it is non-intellectual, when it is nonsense. That is too paradoxical, but I suppose what he means is that if it is put to the strict test of the intellect, it appears extravagant because it conveys something that expresses and is real to some other kind of seeing than that which intellectual thought brings to us. Is it not possible that words may spring from, that language may be used to express — at least up to a certain point and in a certain way — the supra-intellectual consciousness which is the essential power of spiritual experience? This, however, is by the way — when one tries to explain spiritual experience to the intellect itself, then it is a different matter.

14-1-1934

SILENCE AND ACTION

Since 1908 when I got the silence, I never think with my head or brain — it is always in the wideness generally above the head that the thoughts occur.

17-10-1933

What you describe is not at all a drawing away of life-energy; it is simply the effect of voidness and stillness caused in the lower parts by the consciousness being located above. It is quite consistent with action, only one must get accustomed to the idea of the possibility of action under these conditions. In a greater state of emptiness I carried on a daily newspaper and made a dozen speeches in the course of three or four days — but I did not manage that in any way; it happened. The force made the body do the work without any inner activity. The drawing away of the life-energy leaves the body lifeless, helpless, empty and impotent,

but it is attended by no experience except a great suffering.

13-5-1936

It ought to be possible to read with the inner consciousness looking on and, as it were, seeing at the act of reading. In the condition of absolute inner silence I was making speeches and conducting a newspaper, but all that got itself done without any thought entering my mind or the silence being in the least disturbed or diminished.

27-10-1934

When I got the emptiness, it lasted for years. Whatever else came, came in the emptiness, and I could at any time withdraw from the activity into the pure silent peace.

21-9-1934

SELF-REALISATION AND SENSE OF THE BODY

Q: During the state of self-realisation very little sense remains of my body. I do not know what it does or holds or even where it lies.

A: That is usual. I was in that way unconscious of the body for many years.

15-10-1934

YOGIC EXPERIENCE AND SCIENTIFIC OBJECTIONS

Your bells etc., mentioned by you as recent experiences were already enumerated as long ago as the time of the Upanishads as signs accompanying the opening to the larger consciousness, *brahmaṇyabhivyaktikarāṇi yoge*. If I remember right your sparks come in the same list. The fact has been recorded again and again in Yogic literature. I had the same experience hun-

dreds of times in the earlier part of my Sadhana. So you see you are in very honourable company in this matter and need not trouble yourself about the objections of physical science.

13-3-1931

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I remember when I first began to see inwardly (and outwardly also with the open eye), a scientific friend of mine began to talk of after-images — "these are only after-images"! I asked him whether after-images remained before the eye for two minutes at a time — he said, "no", to his knowledge only for a few seconds; I also asked him whether one could get after-images of things not around one or even not existing upon this earth, since they had other shapes, another character, other hues, contours and a very differnt dynamism, life-movements and values — he could not reply in the affirmative. That is how these so-called scientific explanations break down as soon as you pull them out of their cloudland of mental theory and face them with the actual phenomena they pretend to decipher.

19-2-1932

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I suppose I have had myself an even more completely European education than you, and I have had too my period of agnostic denial, but from the moment I looked at these things I could never take the attitude of doubt and disbelief which was for so long fashionable in Europe. Abnormal, otherwise supraphysical experiences and powers, occult or Yogic, have always seemed to me something perfectly natural and credible. Consciousness in its very nature could not be limited by the ordinary physical human-animal consciousness, it must have the other ranges. Yogic or occult powers are no more supernatural or incredible than is supernatural or incredible the power to write a great poem or compose great music; few people can do it, as things are, — not even one in a million; for poetry and music come from the inner being and to write or to compose true and great things one has to have the passage clear between the outer mind and something in the inner being. That is why you got the poetic power as

soon as you began Yoga, — Yogic force made the passage clear. It is the same with Yogic consciousness and its powers; the thing is to get the passage clear, — for they are already within you. Of course, the first thing is to believe, aspire and, with the true urge within, make the endeavour.

You ask me whether you have to give up your predilection for testing before accepting and to accept everything in Yoga *a priori* — and by testing you mean testing by the ordinary reason. The only answer I can give to that is that the experiences of Yoga belong to an inner domain and go according to a law of their own, have their own method of perception, criteria and all the rest of it which are neither those of the domain of the physical senses nor of the domain of rational or scientific enquiry. Just as scientific enquiry passes beyond that of the physical senses and enters the domain of the infinite and infinitesimal about which the senses can say nothing and test nothing — for one cannot see and touch an electron or know by the evidence of the sense-mind whether it exists or not or decide by that evidence whether the earth really turns round the sun and not rather the sun round the earth as our senses and all our physical experience daily tell us — so the spiritual search passes beyond the domain of scientific or rational enquiry and it is impossible by the aid of the ordinary positive reason to test the data of spiritual experience and decide whether those things exist or not or what is their law and nature. As in Science, so here you have to accumulate experience on experience, following faithfully the methods laid down by the Guru or by the systems of the past, you have to develop an intuitive discrimination which compares the experiences, see what they mean, how far and in what field each is valid, what is the place of each in the whole, how it can be reconciled or related with others that at first might seem to contradict it, etc., etc., until you can move with a secure knowledge in the vast field of spiritual phenomena. That is the only way to test spiritual experience. I have myself tried the other method and I have found it absolutely incapable and inapplicable. On the

other hand, if you are not prepared to go through all that yourself, — as few can do except those of extraordinary spiritual stature, — you have to accept the leading of a Master, as in Science you accept a teacher instead of going through the whole field of Science and its experimentation all by yourself — at least until you have accumulated sufficient experience and knowledge. If that is accepting things *a priori*, well, you have to accept *a priori*. For I am unable to see by what valid tests you propose to make the ordinary reason the judge of what is beyond it.

You quote the sayings of X and Y. I would like to know before assigning a value to these utterances what they actually did for the testing of their spiritual perceptions and experiences. How did X test the value of his spiritual experiences — some of them not easily credible to the ordinary positive mind any more than the miracles attributed to some famous Yogis? I know nothing about Y, but what were his tests and how did he apply them? What were his methods? his criteria? It seems to me that no ordinary mind will accept the apparition of Buddha out of a wall or the half hour's talk with Hayagriva as valid facts by any kind of testing. It would either have to accept them *a priori* or on the sole evidence of X, which comes to the same thing, or to reject them *a priori* as hallucinations or mere mental images accompanied in one case by an auditive hallucination. I fail to see how it could "test" them. Or how was I to test by the ordinary mind my experience of Nirvana? To what conclusion could I come about it by the aid of the ordinary positive reason? How could I test its validity? I am at a loss to imagine. I did the only thing I could — to accept it as a strong and valid truth of experience, let it have its full play and produce its full experiential consequences until I had sufficient Yogic knowledge to put it in its place. Finally, how without inner knowledge or experience can you or anyone else test the inner knowledge and experience of others?

18-11-1934

Section Three

HIS PATH AND OTHER PATHS

HIS PATH AND OTHER PATHS

SRI AUROBINDO'S TEACHING AND METHOD OF SADHANA

The teaching of Sri Aurobindo starts from that of the ancient sages of India that behind the appearances of the universe there is the Reality of a Being and Consciousness, a Self of all things, one and eternal. All beings are united in that One Self and Spirit but divided by a certain separativity of consciousness, an ignorance of their true Self and Reality in the mind, life and body. It is possible by a certain psychological discipline to remove this veil of separative consciousness and become aware of the true Self, the Divinity within us and all.

Sri Aurobindo's teaching states that this One Being and Consciousness is involved here in Matter. Evolution is the method by which it liberates itself; consciousness appears in what seems to be inconscient, and once having appeared is self-impelled to grow higher and higher and at the same time to enlarge and develop towards a greater and greater perfection. Life is the first step of this release of consciousness; mind is the second; but the evolution does not finish with mind, it awaits a release into something greater, a consciousness which is spiritual and supramental. The next step of the evolution must be towards the development of Supermind and Spirit as the dominant power in the conscious being. For only then will the involved Divinity in things release itself entirely and it become possible for life to manifest perfection.

But while the former steps in evolution were taken by Nature without a conscious will in the plant and animal life, in man Nature becomes able to evolve by a conscious will in the instrument. It is not, however, by the mental will in man that this can be wholly done, for the mind goes only to a certain point and after that can only move in a circle. A conversion has to be made, a turning of the consciousness by which mind has to change into the higher principle. This method is to be found through the ancient psychological discipline and practice of

Yoga. In the past, it has been attempted by a drawing away from the world and a disappearance into the height of the Self or Spirit. Sri Aurobindo teaches that a descent of the higher principle is possible which will not merely release the spiritual Self out of the world, but release it in the world, replace the mind's ignorance or its very limited knowledge by a supramental Truth-Consciousness which will be a sufficient instrument of the inner Self and make it possible for the human being to find himself dynamically as well as inwardly and grow out of his still animal humanity into a diviner race. The psychological discipline of Yoga can be used to that end by opening all the parts of the being to a conversion or transformation through the descent and working of the higher still concealed supramental principle.

This, however, cannot be done at once or in a short time or by any rapid or miraculous transformation. Many steps have to be taken by the seeker before the supramental descent is possible. Man lives mostly in his surface mind, life and body, but there is an inner being within him with greater possibilities to which he has to awake — for it is only a very restricted influence from it that he receives now and that pushes him to a constant pursuit of a greater beauty, harmony, power and knowledge. The first process of Yoga is therefore to open the ranges of this inner being and to live from there outward, governing his outward life by an inner light and force. In doing so he discovers in himself his true soul which is not this outer mixture of mental, vital and physical elements but something of the Reality behind them, a spark from the one Divine Fire. He has to learn to live in his soul and purify and orientate by its drive towards the Truth the rest of the nature. There can follow afterwards an opening upward and descent of a higher principle of the Being. But even then it is not at once the full supramental Light and Force. For there are several ranges of consciousness between the ordinary human mind and the supramental Truth-Consciousness. These intervening ranges have to be opened up and their power brought down into the mind, life and body. Only afterwards can the full power of the Truth-Consciousness work in the nature. The process of this self-discipline or Sadhana is therefore long and difficult, but even a little of it is so much gained because it makes the ultimate

release and perfection more possible.

There are many things belonging to older systems that are necessary on the way — an opening of the mind to a greater wideness and to the sense of the Self and the Infinite, an emergence into what has been called the cosmic consciousness, mastery over the desires and passions; an outward asceticism is not essential, but the conquest of desire and attachment and a control over the body and its needs, greeds and instincts are indispensable. There is a combination of the principles of the old systems, the way of knowledge through the mind's discernment between Reality and the appearance, the heart's way of devotion, love and surrender and the way of works turning the will away from motives of self-interest to the Truth and the service of a greater Reality than the ego. For the whole being has to be trained so that it can respond and be transformed when it is possible for that greater Light and Force to work in the nature.

In this discipline, the inspiration of the Master, and in the difficult stages his control and his presence are indispensable — for it would be impossible otherwise to go through it without much stumbling and error which would prevent all chance of success. The Master is one who has risen to a higher consciousness and being and he is often regarded as its manifestation or representative. He not only helps by his teaching and still more by his influence and example but by a power to communicate his own experience to others.

This is Sri Aurobindo's teaching and method of practice. It is not his object to develop any one religion or to amalgamate the older religions or to found any new religion — for any of these things would lead away from his central purpose. The one aim of his Yoga is an inner self-development by which each one who follows it can in time discover the One Self in all and evolve a higher consciousness than the mental, a spiritual and supramental consciousness which will transform and divinise human nature.

August, 1934

THIS-WORLDLINESS, OTHER-WORLDLINESS AND SRI AUROBINDO'S YOGA

One thing I feel I must say in connection with your remark about the soul of India and X's observation about "this stress on this-worldliness to the exclusion of other-worldliness". I do not quite understand in what connection his remark was made or what he meant by this-worldliness, but I feel it necessary to state my own position in the matter. My own life and my Yoga have always been, since my coming to India, both this-worldly and other-worldly without any exclusiveness on either side. All human interests are, I suppose, this-worldly and most of them have entered into my mental field and some, like politics, into my life, but at the same time, since I set foot on the Indian soil on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, I began to have spiritual experiences, but these were not divorced from this world but had an inner and infinite bearing on it, such as a feeling of the Infinite pervading material space and the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies. At the same time I found myself entering supraphysical worlds and planes with influences and an effect from them upon the material plane, so I could make no sharp divorce or irreconcilable opposition between what I have called the two ends of existence and all that lies between them. For me all is Brahman and I find the Divine everywhere. Everyone has the right to throw away this-worldliness and choose other-worldliness only, and if he finds peace by that choice he is greatly blessed. I, personally, have not found it necessary to do this in order to have peace. In my Yoga also I found myself moved to include both worlds in my purview — the spiritual and the material — and to try to establish the Divine Consciousness and the Divine Power in men's hearts and earthly life, not for a personal salvation only but for a life divine here. This seems to me as spiritual an aim as any and the fact of this life taking up earthly pursuits and earthly things into its scope cannot, I believe, tarnish its spirituality or alter its Indian character. This at least has always been my view and experience of the reality and nature of the world and things and the Divine: it seemed to me as nearly as possible the integral truth about them and I have therefore

spoken of the pursuit of it as the integral Yoga. Everyone is, of course, free to reject and disbelieve in this kind of integrality or to believe in the spiritual necessity of an entire other-worldliness altogether, but that would make the exercise of my Yoga impossible. My Yoga can include indeed a full experience of the other worlds, the plane of the Supreme Spirit and the other planes in between and their possible effects upon our life and the material world; but it will be quite possible to insist only on the realisation of the Supreme Being or Ishwara even in one aspect, Shiva, Krishna as Lord of the world and Master of ourselves and our works or else the Universal Sachchidananda, and attain to the essential results of this Yoga and afterwards to proceed from them to the integral results if one accepted the ideal of the divine life and this material world conquered by the Spirit. It is this view and experience of things and of the truth of existence that enabled me to write *The Life Divine* and *Savitri*. The realisation of the Supreme, the Ishwara, is certainly the essential thing; but to approach Him with love and devotion and *bhakti*, to serve Him with one's works and to know Him, not necessarily by the intellectual cognition, but in a spiritual experience, is also essential in the path of the integral Yoga.

28-4-1949

YOGA OF DIVINE LIFE

You have apparently a call and may be fit for Yoga; but there are different paths and each has a different aim and end before it. It is common to all the paths to conquer the desires, to put aside the ordinary relations of life, and to try to pass from uncertainty to everlasting certitude. One may also try to conquer dream and sleep, thirst and hunger, etc. But it is no part of my Yoga to have nothing to do with the world or with life or to kill the senses or entirely inhibit their action. It is the object of my Yoga to transform life by bringing down into it the Light, Power and Bliss of the divine Truth and its dynamic certitudes. This Yoga is not a Yoga of world-shunning asceticism, but of divine life. Your object, on the other hand, can only be gained by entering into

Samadhi and ceasing in it from all connection with world-existence.

THE WAY OUT AND THE WAY TO CONQUER

The universe is certainly or has been up to now in appearance a rough and wasteful game with the dice of chance loaded in favour of the Powers of darkness, the Lords of obscurity, falsehood, death and suffering. But we have to take it as it is and find out—if we reject the way out of the old sages—the way to conquer. Spiritual experience shows that there is behind it all a wide terrain of equality, peace, calm, freedom, and it is only by getting into it that we can have the eye that sees and hope to gain the power that conquers.

MAYAVADA, NIRVANA AND SRI AUROBINDO'S YOGA

About Nirvana:

When I wrote in the *Arya*, I was setting forth an overmind view of things to the mind and putting it in mental terms, that was why I had sometimes to use logic. For in such a work—mediating between the intellect and the supra-intellectual—logic has a place, though it cannot have the chief place it occupies in purely mental philosophies. The Mayavadin himself labours to establish his point of view or his experience by a rigorous logical reasoning. Only, when it comes to an explanation of Maya, he, like the scientist dealing with Nature, can do no more than arrange and organise his ideas of the process of this universal mystification; he cannot explain how or why his illusionary mystifying Maya came into existence. He can only say, "Well, but it is there."

Of course, it is there. But the question is, first, what is it? Is it really an illusionary Power and nothing else, or is the Mayavadin's idea of it a mistaken first view, a mental imperfect reading, even perhaps itself an illusion? And next, "Is illusion the sole or the highest Power which the Divine Consciousness or Super-

consciousness possesses?" The Absolute is an absolute Truth free from Maya, otherwise liberation would not be possible. Has then the supreme and absolute Truth no other active Power than a power of falsehood and with it, no doubt, for the two go together, a power of dissolving or disowning the falsehood, — which is yet there for ever? I suggested that this sounded a little queer. But queer or not, if it is so, it is so — for, as you point out, the Ineffable cannot be subjected to the laws of logic. But who is to decide whether it is so? You will say, those who get there. But get where? To the Perfect and the Highest, *pūrṇam param*? Is the Mayavadin's featureless Brahman that Perfect, that Complete — is it the very Highest? Is there not or can there not be a higher than that highest, *parātparam*? That is not a question of logic, it is a question of spiritual fact, of a supreme and complete experience. The solution of the matter must rest not upon logic, but upon a growing, ever heightening, widening spiritual experience — an experience which must of course include or have passed through that of Nirvana and Maya, otherwise it would not be complete and would have no decisive value.

Now to reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my own Yoga. It threw me suddenly into a condition above and without thought, unstained by any mental or vital movement; there was no ego, no real world — only when one looked through the immobile senses, something perceived or bore upon its sheer silence a world of empty forms, materialised shadows without true substance. There was no One or many even, only just absolutely That, featureless, relationless, sheer, indescribable, unthinkable, absolute, yet supremely real and solely real. This was no mental realisation nor something glimpsed somewhere above, — no abstraction, — it was positive, the only positive reality, — although not a spatial physical world, pervading, occupying or rather flooding and drowning this semblance of a physical world, leaving no room or space for any reality but itself, allowing nothing else to seem at all actual, positive or substantial. I cannot say there was anything exhilarating or rapturous in the experience, as it then came to me, — (the ineffable Ananda I had years afterwards), — but what it brought was an inexpressible Peace, a stupendous silence, an infinity of release and freedom. I lived in

that Nirvana day and night before it began to admit other things into itself or modify itself at all, and the inner heart of experience, a constant memory of it and its power to return remained until in the end it began to disappear into a greater Superconsciousness from above. But meanwhile realisation added itself to realisation and fused itself with this original experience. At an early stage the aspect of an illusionary world gave place to one in which illusion[1] is only a small surface phenomenon with an immense Divine Reality behind it and a supreme Divine Reality above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow. And this was no reimprisonment in the senses, no diminution or fall from supreme experience, it came rather as a constant heightening and widening of the Truth; it was the spirit that saw objects, not the senses, and the Peace, the Silence, the freedom in Infinity remained always with the world or all worlds only as a continuous incident in the timeless eternity of the Divine.

Now, that is the whole trouble in my approach to Mayavada. Nirvana in my liberated consciousness turned out to be the beginning of my realisation, a first step towards the complete thing, not the sole true attainment possible or even a culminating finale. It came unasked, unsought for, though quite welcome. I had no least idea about it before, no aspiration towards it, in fact my aspiration was towards just the opposite, spiritual power to help the world and to do my work in it, yet it came—without even a "May I come in" or a "By your leave". It just happened and settled in as if for all eternity or as if it had been really there always. And then it slowly grew into something not less but greater than its first self. How then could I accept Mayavada or persuade myself to pit against the Truth imposed on me from above the logic of Shankara?

But I do not insist on everybody passing through my experience or following the Truth that is its consequence. I have no objection to anybody accepting Mayavada as his soul's truth or his mind's truth or their way out of the cosmic difficulty. I object

[1] In fact it is not an illusion in the sense of an imposition of something baseless and unreal on the consciousness, but a misinterpretation by the conscious mind and sense and a falsifying misuse of manifested existence.

to it only if somebody tries to push it down my throat or the world's throat as the sole possible, satisfying and all-comprehensive explanation of things. For it is not that at all. There are many other possible explanations; it is not at all satisfactory, for in the end it explains nothing; and it is — and must be unless it departs from its own logic — all-exclusive, not in the least all-comprehensive. But that does not matter. A theory may be wrong or at least one-sided and imperfect and yet extremely practical and useful. This has been amply shown by the history of Science. In fact, a theory whether philosophical or scientific, is nothing else than a support for the mind, a practical device to help it to deal with its object, a staff to uphold it and make it walk more confidently and get along on its difficult journey. The very exclusiveness and one-sidedness of the Mayavada make it a strong staff or a forceful stimulus for a spiritual endeavour which means to be one-sided, radical and exclusive. It supports the effort of the Mind to get away from itself and from Life by a short cut into superconscience. Or rather it is the Purusha in Mind that wants to get away from the limitations of Mind and Life into the superconscient Infinite. Theoretically, the way for that is for the mind to deny all its perceptions and all the preoccupations of the vital and see and treat them as illusions. Practically, when the mind draws back from itself, it enters easily into a relationless peace in which nothing matters, — for in its absoluteness there are no mental or vital values, — and from which the mind can rapidly move towards that great short cut to the superconscient, mindless trance, *suṣupti*. In proportion to the thoroughness of that movement all the perceptions it had once accepted become unreal to it — illusion, Maya. It is on its road towards immergence.

Mayavada therefore with its sole stress on Nirvana, quite apart from its defects as a mental theory of things, serves a great spiritual end and, as a path, can lead very high and far. Even, if the Mind were the last word and there were nothing beyond it except the pure Spirit, I would not be averse to accepting it as the only way out. For what the mind with its perceptions and the vital with its desires have made of life in this world, is a very bad mess, and if there were nothing better to be hoped for, the shortest cut to an exit would be the best. But my experience is

that there is something beyond Mind; Mind is not the last word here of the Spirit. Mind is an ignorance-consciousness and its perceptions cannot be anything else than either false, mixed or imperfect — even when true, a partial reflection of the Truth and not the very body of Truth herself. But there is a Truth-Consciousness, not static only and self-introspective, but also dynamic and creative, and I prefer to get at that and see what it says about things and can do rather than take the short cut away from things offered as its own end by the Ignorance.

SHANKARA'S MAYAVADA AND INTEGRAL YOGA

I do not base my Yoga on the insufficient ground that the Self (not soul) is eternally free. That affirmation leads to nothing beyond itself, or, if used as a starting-point, it could equally well lead to the conclusion that action and creation have no significance or value. The question is not that but of the meaning of creation, whether there is a Supreme who is not merely a pure undifferentiated Consciousness and Being, but the source and support also of the dynamic energy of creation and whether the cosmic existence has for It a significance and a value. That is a question which cannot be settled by metaphysical logic which deals in words and ideas, but by a spiritual experience which goes beyond Mind and enters into spiritual realities. Each mind is satisfied with its own reasoning, but for spiritual purposes that satisfaction has no validity, except as an indication of how far and on what line each one is prepared to go in the field of spiritual experience. If your reasoning leads you towards the Shankara idea of the Supreme, that might be an indication that the Vedanta Adwaita (Mayavada) is your way of advance.

This Yoga accepts the value of cosmic existence and holds it to be a reality; its object is to enter into a higher Truth-Consciousness or Divine supramental Consciousness in which action and creation are the expression not of ignorance and imperfection, but of the Truth, the Light, the Divine Ananda. But for that, surrender of the mortal mind, life and body to that Higher Consciousness is indispensable, since it is too difficult

for the mortal human being to pass by its own effort beyond mind to a supramental Consciousness in which the dynamism is no longer mental but of quite another power. Only those who can accept the call to such a change should enter into this Yoga.

2-10-1938

THE REALISTIC AND THE ILLUSIONIST ADWAITA

There is possible a realistic as well as an illusionist Adwaita. The philosophy of *The Life Divine* is such a realistic Adwaita. The world is a manifestation of the Real and therefore is itself real. The reality is the infinite and eternal Divine, infinite and eternal Being, Consciousness-Force and Bliss. This Divine by his power has created the world or rather manifested it in his own infinite Being. But here in the material world or at its basis he has hidden himself in what seem to be his opposites, Non-Being, Inconscience and Insentience. This is what we nowadays call the Inconscient which seems to have created the material universe by its inconscient Energy, but this is only an appearance, for we find in the end that all the dispositions of the world can only have been arranged by the working of a supreme secret Intelligence. The Being which is hidden in what seems to be an inconscient void emerges in the world first in Matter, then in Life, then in Mind and finally as the Spirit. The apparently inconscient Energy which creates is in fact the Consciousness-Force of the Divine and its aspect of consciousness, secret in Matter, begins to emerge in Life, finds something more of itself in Mind and finds its true self in a spiritual consciousness and finally a supramental Consciousness through which we become aware of the Reality, enter into it and unite ourselves with it. This is what we call evolution which is an evolution of Consciousness and an evolution of the Spirit in things and only outwardly an evolution of species. Thus also, the delight of existence emerges from the original insentience, first in the contrary forms of pleasure and pain, and then has to find itself in the bliss of the Spirit or, as it is called in the Upanishads, the bliss of the Brahman. That is the central idea in the explanation of the universe put forward in *The Life Divine*.

SHANKARA AND ILLUSIONISM

Q: In an article on Shankara's philosophy in "Prabuddha Bharata", the writer mentions, "not as understood by Sri Aurobindo". They think that Shankara's philosophy is so much misunderstood. Perhaps it is some Brahmavada or Bhaktivada that Shankara brings in at places in his writings that he thinks have been missed. But I don't think Vivekananda or Ramakrishna were so much for Shankara's philosophy in toto.

A: They want to show that Shankara was not so savagely illusionist as he is represented — that he gave a certain temporary reality to the world, admitted Shakti, etc. But these (supposing he made them) are concessions inconsistent with the logic of his own philosophy which is that only the Brahman exists and the rest is ignorance and illusion. The rest has only a temporary and therefore an illusory reality in Maya. He further maintained that Brahman could not be reached by works. If that was not his philosophy, I should like to know what was his philosophy. At any rate that was how his philosophy has been understood by people. Now that the general turn is away from the rigorous Illusionism, many of the Adwaitins seem to want to hedge and make Shankara hedge with them.

Vivekananda accepted Shankara's philosophy with modifications, the chief of them being Daridra-Narayan-Seva which is a mixture of Buddhist compassion and modern philanthropy.

8-2-1935

NEW ELEMENTS IN SRI AUROBINDO'S YOGA

By transformation I do not mean some change of the nature — I do not mean, for instance, sainthood or ethical perfection or Yogic Siddhis (like the Tantrik's) or a transcendental (*cinmaya*) body. I use transformation in a special sense, a change of consciousness radical and complete and of a certain specific kind which is so conceived as to bring about a strong and assured step forward in the spiritual evolution of the being of a greater and higher kind and of a larger sweep and completeness than what

took place when a mentalised being first appeared in a vital and material animal world. If anything short of that takes place or at least if a real beginning is not made on that basis, a fundamental progress towards this fulfilment, then my object is not accomplished. A partial realisation, something mixed and inconclusive, does not meet the demand I make on life and Yoga.

Light of realisation is not the same thing as Descent. Realisation by itself does not necessarily transform the being as a whole; it may bring only an opening or heightening or widening of the consciousness at the top so as to realise something in the Purusha part without any radical change in the parts of Prakriti. One may have some light of realisation at the spiritual summit of the consciousness but the parts below remain what they were. I have seen any number of instances of that. There must be a descent of the light not merely into the mind or part of it but into all the being down to the physical and below before a real transformation can take place. A light in the mind may spiritualise or otherwise change the mind or part of it in one way or another, but it need not change the vital nature; a light in the vital may purify and enlarge the vital movements or else silence and immobilise the vital being, but leave the body and the physical consciousness as it was, or even leave it inert or shake its balance. And the descent of Light is not enough, it must be the descent of the whole higher consciousness, its Peace, Power, Knowledge, Love, Ananda. Moreover, the descent may be enough to liberate, but not to perfect, or it may be enough to make a great change in the inner being, while the outer remains an imperfect instrument, clumsy, sick or unexpressive. Finally, transformation effected by the Sadhana cannot be complete unless it is a supramentalisation of the being. Psychicisation is not enough, it is only a beginning; spiritualisation and the descent of the higher consciousness is not enough, it is only a middle term; the ultimate achievement needs the action of the supramental Consciousness and Force. Something less than that may very well be considered enough by the individual, but it is not enough for the earth-consciousness to take the definitive stride forward it must take at one time or another.

I have never said that my Yoga was something brand new

in all its elements. I have called it the integral Yoga and that means that it takes up the essence and many processes of the old Yogas — its newness is in its aim, standpoint and the totality of its method. In the earlier stages which is all I deal with in books like the "Riddle"[1] or the "Lights"[2] or in the new book to be published[3] there is nothing in it that distinguishes it from the old Yogas except the aim underlying its comprehensiveness, the spirit in its movements and the ultimate significance it keeps before it — also the scheme of its psychology and its working: but as that was not and could not be developed systematically or schematically in these letters, it has not been grasped by those who are not already acquainted with it by mental familiarity or some amount of practice. The detail or method of the later stages of the Yoga which go into little known or untrodden regions, I have not made public and I do not at present intend to do so.

I know very well also that there have been seemingly allied ideals and anticipations — the perfectibility of the race, certain Tantric Sadhanas, the effort after a complete physical Siddhi by certain schools of Yoga, etc., etc. I have alluded to these things myself and have put forth the view that the spiritual past of the race has been a preparation of Nature not merely for attaining the Divine beyond the world, but also for this very step forward which the evolution of the earth-consciousness has still to make. I do not therefore care in the least, — even though these ideals were, up to some extent parallel, yet not identical with mine, — whether this Yoga and its aim and method are accepted as new or not; that is in itself a trifling matter. That it should be recognised as true in itself by those who can accept or practise it and should make itself true by achievement is the one thing important; it does not matter if it is called new or a repetition or revival of the old which was forgotten. I laid emphasis on it as new in a letter to certain Sadhaks so as to explain to them that a repetition of the aim and idea of the old Yogas was not enough in my eyes, that I was putting forward a thing to be achieved that has not yet been achieved, not yet clearly visualised, even though

[1] *The Riddle of This World* [2] *Lights on Yoga* [3] *The Bases of Yoga.* Sri Aurobindo's letters compiled in these three books are now incorporated in *Letters on Yoga* (Centenary Edition, 1972), Vols. 22, 23 & 24.

it is the natural but still secret outcome of all the past spiritual endeavour.

It is new as compared with the old Yogas:

1. Because it aims not at a departure out of world and life into Heaven or Nirvana, but at a change of life and existence, not as something subordinate or incidental, but as a distinct and central object. If there is a descent in other Yogas, yet it is only an incident on the way or resulting from the ascent — the ascent is the real thing. Here the ascent is the first step, but it is a means for the descent. It is the descent of the new consciousness attained by the ascent that is the stamp and seal of the Sadhana. Even the Tantra and Vaishnavism end in the release from life; here the object is the divine fulfilment of life.

2. Because the object sought after is not an individual achievement of divine realisation for the sake of the individual, but something to be gained for the earth-consciousness here, a cosmic, not solely a supra-cosmic achievement. The thing to be gained also is the bringing in of a Power of Consciousness (the Supramental) not yet organised or active directly in earth-nature, even in the spiritual life, but yet to be organised and made directly active.

3. Because a method has been preconized for achieving this purpose which is as total and integral as the aim set before it, viz., the total and integral change of the consciousness and nature, taking up old methods but only as a part action and present aid to others that are distinctive. I have not found this method (as a whole) or anything like it professed or realised in the old Yogas. If I had, I should not have wasted my time in hewing out a road and in thirty years of search and inner creation when I could have hastened home safely to my goal in an easy canter over paths already blazed out, laid down, perfectly mapped, macadamised, made secure and public. Our Yoga is not a retreading of old walks, but a spiritual adventure.

5-10-1935

TRANSFORMATION AND PURIFICATION

"Transformation" is a word that I have brought in myself (like

"Supermind") to express certain spiritual concepts and spiritual facts of the integral Yoga. People are now taking them up and using them in senses which have nothing to do with the significance which I put into them. Purification of the nature by the "influence" of the Spirit is not what I mean by transformation; purification is only part of a psychic change or a psycho-spiritual change — the word besides has many senses and is very often given a moral or ethical meaning which is foreign to my purpose. What I mean by the spiritual transformation is something dynamic (not merely liberation of the Self or realisation of the One which can very well be attained without any descent). It is a putting on of the spiritual consciousness dynamic as well as static in every part of the being down to the subconscient. That cannot be done by the influence of the Self leaving the consciousness fundamentally as it is with only purification, enlightenment of the mind and heart and quiescence of the vital. It means a bringing down of the Divine Consciousness static and dynamic into all these parts and the entire replacement of the present consciousness by that. This we find unveiled and unmixed above mind, life and body. It is a matter of the undeniable experience of many that this can descend and it is my experience that nothing short of its *full* descent can thoroughly remove the veil and mixture and effect the full spiritual transformation. No metaphysical or logical reasoning in the void as to what the Atman "must" do or can do or needs or needs not to do is relevant here or of any value. I may add that transformation is not the central object of other paths as it is of this Yoga — only so much purification and change is demanded by them as will lead to liberation and the beyond-life. The influence of the Atman can no doubt do that — a full descent of a new consciousness into the whole nature from top to bottom to transform life here is not needed at all for the spiritual escape from life.

The words Supermind and supramental were first used by me, but since then people have taken up and are using the word supramental for anything above mind. Psychic is ordinarily used

in the sense of anything relating to the inner movements of the consciousness or anything phenomenal in the psychology; in this case I have made a special use of it, relating it to the Greek word psyche meaning soul; but ordinarily people make no distinction between the soul and the mental-vital consciousness; for them it is all the same. The ascent of the Kundalini — not its descent, so far as I know — is a recognised phenomenon, there is one that corresponds in our Yoga, the feeling of the consciousness ascending from the vital or physical to meet the higher consciousness. This is not necessarily through the *cakras* but is often felt in the whole body. Similarly the descent of the higher consciousness is not felt necessarily or usually through the *cakras* but as occupying the whole head, neck, chest, abdomen, body.

18-6-1937

SPIRITUAL CHANGE AND SUPRAMENTAL TRANSFORMATION

If spiritual and supramental were the same thing, as you say my readers imagine, then all the sages and devotees and Yogis and Sadhaks throughout the ages would have been supramental beings and all I have written about the Supermind would be so much superfluous stuff, useless and otiose. Anybody who had spiritual experiences would then be a supramental being; the Ashram would be chock-full of supramental beings and every other Ashram in India also. Spiritual experiences can fix themselves in the inner consciousness and alter it, transform it, if you like; one can realise the Divine everywhere, the Self in all and all in the Self, the universal Shakti doing all things; one can feel merged in the Cosmic Self or full of ecstatic Bhakti or Ananda. But one may and usually does still go on in the outer parts of Nature thinking with the intellect or at best the intuitive mind, willing with a mental will, feeling joy and sorrow on the vital surface, undergoing physical afflictions and suffering from the struggle of life in the body with death and disease. The change then only will be that the inner self will watch all that without getting disturbed or bewildered, with a perfect equality, taking

it as an inevitable part of Nature, inevitable at least so long as one does not withdraw to the Self out of Nature. That is not the transformation I envisage. It is quite another power of knowledge, another kind of will, another luminous nature of emotion and aesthesis, another constitution of the physical consciousness that must come in by the supramental change.

PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATION AND SIDDHIS

The physical Nature does not mean the body alone but the phrase includes the transformation of the whole physical mind, vital, material nature — not by imposing Siddhis on them, but by creating a new physical nature which is to be the habitation of the supramental being in a new evolution. I am not aware that this has been done by any Hathayogic or other process. Mental or vital occult power can only bring Siddhis of the higher plane into the individual life — like the Sannyasi who could take any poison without harm, but he died of a poison after all when he forgot to observe the conditions of the Siddhi. The working of the supramental power envisaged is not an influence on the physical giving it abnormal faculties but an entrance and permeation changing it wholly into a supramentalised physical. I did not learn the idea from Veda or Upanishad, and I do not know if there is anything of the kind there. What I received about the Supermind was a direct, not a derived knowledge given to me; it was only afterwards that I found certain confirmatory revelations in the Upanishad and Veda.

11-9-1936

ABSENCE OF DESCENT IN OLD YOGAS

Q: In other Yogas does the silence descend *or rather the mind goes into silence? It does not seem that there is anything like a process of anything descending in Rajayoga or Vedantic Jnanayoga. Moreover, in Rajayoga there is nowhere mention of silence in the waking consciousness — always it is a question of going into samādhi*

In the Jnanayoga, however, it seems as if the waking state becomes illumined and full of peace and brahmānanda.

A:- I never heard of silence descending in other Yogas — the mind goes into silence. Since however I have been writing of ascent and descent, I have been told from several quarters that there is nothing new in this Yoga — so I am wondering whether people were not getting ascents and descents without knowing it! or at least without noticing the process. It is like the rising above the head and taking the station there — which I and others have experienced in this Yoga. When I spoke of it first, people stared and thought I was talking nonsense. Wideness must have been felt in the old Yogas because otherwise one could not feel the universe in oneself or be free from the body consciousness or unite with the Anantam Brahman. But generally as in Tantric Yoga one speaks of the consciousness rising to the *brahmarandhra*, top of the head, as the summit. Rajayoga of course lays stress on Samadhi as the means of the highest experience. But obviously if one has not the *brāhmisthiti* in the waking state, there is no completeness in the realisation. The Gita distinctly speaks of being *samāhita* (which is equivalent to being in Samadhi) and the *brāhmisthiti* as a waking state in which one lives and does all actions.

9-6-1936

Q: Such a concrete process of ascent and descent cannot escape notice if the other Yogis had it — they do mention a rising of kuṇḍalinī to brahmarandhra. Why do they not then mention a coming down of, say, a current of brahmānanda or of light from the brahmarandhra into kuṇḍalinī to mulādhara? Supposing they did not mention because it was a secret then how could they mention that of kuṇḍalinī risinīg up?

If there is nothing new in this Yoga, they ought to quote something which is similar to descent — either in Patanjali or Hathayoga Pradipika or in Panchadasi and

other Vedantic books wherein experiences are mentioned.

A: So I have always thought. I explain this absence of the descent experiences myself by the old Yogas having been mainly confined to the psycho-spiritual-occult range of experience — in which the higher experiences come into the still mind or the concentrated heart by a sort of filtration or reflection — the field of this experience being from the *brahmarandhra* downward. People went above this only in Samadhi or in a condition of static *mukti* without any dynamic descent. All that was dynamic took place in the region of the spiritualised mental and vital-physical consciousness. In this Yoga the consciousness (after the lower field has been prepared by a certain amount of psycho-spiritual-occult experience) is drawn upward above the *brahmarandhra* to ranges above belonging to the spiritual consciousness proper and instead of merely receiving from there has to live there and from there change the lower consciousness altogether. For there is a dynamism proper to the spiritual consciousness whose nature is Light, Power, Ananda, Peace, Knowledge, infinite Wideness and that must be possessed and descend into the whole being. Otherwise one can get *mukti* but not perfection or transformation (except a relative psycho-spiritual change). But if I say that, there will be a general howl against the unpardonable presumption of claiming to have a knowledge not possessed by the ancient saints and sages and pretending to transcend them. In that connection I may say that in the Upanishads (notably the Taittiriya) there are some indications of these higher planes and their nature and the possibility of gathering up the whole consciousness and rising into them. But this was forgotten afterwards and people spoke only of the Buddhi as the highest thing with the Purusha or Self just above, but there was no clear idea of these higher planes. Ergo, ascent possibly to unknown and ineffable heavenly regions in Samadhi, but no descent possible — therefore no resource, no possibility of transformation here, only escape from life and *mukti* in Goloka, Brahmaloka, Shivaloka or the Absolute.

11-6-1936

Q: Was there not anything like descents of peace in Ramakrishna or Chaitanya? It seems as if they had intense realisations and visions and depths of samādhi but we do not read of their having descents of peace. Perhaps the realisations etc. themselves brought with them the peace and Light during samādhi or intense emotional moments, so that it was not particularly noted — and for supporting and stabilising all that, there must have been a basis of calm and peace.

A: It happens that people may get the descent without noticing that it is a descent because they feel the result only. The ordinary Yoga does not go beyond the spiritual mind — people feel at the top of the head the joining with the Brahman, but they are not aware of a consciousness above the head. In the same way in the ordinary Yoga one feels the ascent of the awakened lower consciousness (Kundalini) to the *brahmarandhra* where the Prakriti joins the Brahman-consciousness, but they do not feel the descent. Some may have had these things, but I don't know that they understood their nature, principle or place in a complete Sadhana. At least I never heard of these things from others before I found them out in my own experience. The reason is that the old Yogins when they went above the spiritual mind passed into Samadhi, which means that they made no attempt to be conscious in these higher planes — their aim being to pass away into the Superconscient and not to bring the Superconscient into the waking consciousness, which is that of my Yoga.

26-7-1935

NECESSITY OF OVERHEAD ASCENSION IN INTEGRAL YOGA

One may ask, first, why not then say that the Jivatman which can be realised in this way [without the overhead ascension] is the pure "I" of which the lower self has the experience and through which it gets its salvation; and, secondly, what need is there of going into the overhead planes at all? Well, in the first place, this pure "I" does not seem to be absolutely necessary as

an intermediary of the liberation whether into the impersonal Self or Brahman or into whatever is eternal. The Buddhists do not admit any soul or self or any experience of the pure "I"; they proceed by dissolving the consciousness into a bundle of *saṁskāras*, get rid of the *saṁskāras* and so are liberated into some Permanent which they refuse to describe, or some Shunya. So the experience of a pure "I" or Jivatman is not binding on everyone who wants liberation into the Eternal but is content to get it without rising beyond the spiritualised mind into a higher Light above. I myself had my experience of Nirvana and silence in the Brahman, etc. long before there was any knowledge of the overhead spiritual planes; it came first simply by an absolute stillness and blotting out as it were of all mental, emotional and other inner activities — the body continued indeed to see, walk, speak and do its other business, but as an empty automatic machine and nothing more. I did not become aware of any pure "I" nor even of any self, impersonal or other, — there was only an awareness of That as the sole Reality, all else being quite unsubstantial, void, non-real. As to what realised that Reality, it was a nameless consciousness which was not other than That;[1] one could perhaps say this, though hardly even so much as this, since there was no mental concept of it, but not more. Neither was I aware of any lower soul or outer self called by such and such a personal name that was performing this feat of arriving at the consciousness of Nirvana. Well, then what becomes of your pure "I" and lower "I" in all that? Consciousness (not this or that part of consciousness or an "I" of any kind) suddenly emptied itself of all inner contents and remained aware only of unreal surroundings and of Something real but ineffable. You may say that there must have been a consciousness aware of some perceiving existence, if not of a pure "I", but, if so, it was something for which these names seem inadequate.

I have said the overhead ascension is not indispensable for the usual spiritual purposes, — but it is indispensable for the purposes of this Yoga. For its aim is to become aware of and

[1] Mark that I did not think these things, there were no thoughts or concepts nor did they present themselves like that to any Me; it simply just was so or was self-apparently so.

liberate and transform and unite all the being in the light of a Truth-Consciousness which is above and cannot be reached if there is no entirely inward-going and no transcending and upward-going movement. Hence all the complexity of my psychological statements as a whole, not new in essence — for much of it occurs in the Upanishads and elsewhere, but new in its fullness of collective statement and its developments directed towards an integral Yoga. It is not necessary for anyone to accept it unless he concurs in the aim; for other aims it is unnecessary and may very well be excessive.

22-7-1937

THE SUPRAMENTAL AND THE TRUTH

The Truth manifesting on all the planes is one thing, the Supramental is another, although it is the source of all Truth.

29-8-1936

INTERPENETRATION OF THE PLANES

The interpenetration of the planes is indeed for me a capital and fundamental part of spiritual experience without which Yoga as I practise it and its aim could not exist. For that aim is to manifest, reach or embody a higher consciousness upon earth and not to get away from earth into a higher world or some supreme Absolute. The old Yogas (not quite all of them) tended the other way — but that was, I think, because they found the earth as it is a rather impossible place for any spiritual being and the resistance to change too obstinate to be borne; earth-nature looked to them in Vivekananda's simile like the dog's tail which, every time you straighten it, goes back to its original curl. But the fundamental proposition in this matter was proclaimed very definitely in the Upanishads which went so far as to say that Earth is the foundation and all the worlds are on the earth and to imagine a clean-cut or irreconcilable difference between them is ignorance: here and not elsewhere, not by going to some other

world, the divine realisation must come. This statement was used to justify a purely individual realisation, but it can equally be the basis of a wider endeavour.

14-1-1934

DIFFERENT STATUSES OF TRANSFORMATION

There are different statuses (*avasthā*) of the Divine Consciousness. There are also different statuses of transformation. First is the psychic transformation, in which all is in contact with the Divine through the individual psychic consciousness. Next is the spiritual transformation in which all is merged in the Divine in the cosmic consciousness. Third is the supramental transformation in which all becomes supramentalised in the divine gnostic consciousness. It is only with the latter that there can begin the *complete* transformation of mind, life and body — in my sense of completeness.

You are mistaken in two respects. First, the endeavour towards this achievement is not new and some Yogis have achieved it, I believe — but not in the way I want it. They achieved it as a personal Siddhi maintained by Yoga-Siddhi — not a Dharma of the nature (physical transformation). Secondly, the supramental transformation is not the same as the spiritual-mental. It is a change of mind, life and body which the mental or overmental-spiritual cannot achieve. All whom you mention were spirituals, but in different ways. Krishna's mind, for instance, was overmentalised, Ramakrishna's intuitive, Chaitanya's spiritual-psychic, Buddha's illumined higher mental. I don't know about Bejoy Goswami — he seems to have been brilliant but rather chaotic. All that is different from the supramental. Then about the vital of the Paramhansas. It is said that their vital behaves either like a child (Ramakrishna) or like a madman or like a demon or like something inert (cf. Jadabharata). Well, there is nothing supramental in all that.

One can be an instrument of the Divine in any of the transformations. The question is, an instrument for what?

April, 1935

The Paramhansa is a particular grade of realisation, there are others supposed to be lower or higher. I have no objection to them in their own place. But I must remind you that in my Yoga all vital movements must come under the influence of the psychic and of the spiritual calm, knowledge, peace. If they conflict with the psychic or spiritual control, they upset the balance and prevent the forming of the base of transformation. If unbalance is good for other paths, that is the business of those who follow them. It does not suit mine.

May, 1935

TRADITIONAL PATHS AND SUPRAMENTAL TRANSFORMATION

You appeal to the Vaishnava-Tantric traditions; to Chaitanya, Ramprasad, Ramakrishna. I know something about them and, if I did not try to repeat them, it is because I do not find in them the solution, the reconciliation I am seeking. Your quotation from Ramprasad does not assist me in the least — and it does not support your thesis either. Ramprasad is not speaking of an embodied, but of a bodiless and invisible Divine — or visible only in a subtle form to the inner experience. When he speaks of maintaining his claim or case against the Mother until she lifts him into her lap, he is not speaking of any outer vital or physical contact, but of an inner psychic experience; precisely, he is protesting against her keeping him in the external vital and physical nature and insists on her taking him on the psycho-spiritual plane into spiritual union with her.

All that is very good and very beautiful, but it is not enough: the union has indeed to be realised in the inner psycho-spiritual experience first, because without that nothing sound or lasting can be done; but also there must be a realisation of the Divine in the outer consciousness and life, in the vital and physical planes on their own essential lines. It is that which, without your mind understanding it or how it is to be done, you are asking for, and I too; only I see the necessity of a vital transformation, while you seem to think and to demand that it should be done without

any radical transformation, leaving the vital as it is. In the beginning, before I discovered the secret of the Supermind, I myself tried to seek the reconciliation through an association of the spiritual consciousness with the vital, but my experience and all experience show that this leads to nothing definite and final, — it ends where it began, midway between the two poles of human nature. An association is not enough, a transformation is indispensable.

The tradition of later Vaishnava Bhakti is an attempt to sublimate the vital impulses through love by turning human love towards the Divine. It made a strong and intense effort and had many rich and beautiful experiences; but its weakness was just there, that it remained valid only as an inner experience turned towards the inner Divine, but it stopped at that point. Chaitanya's *prema* was nothing but a psychic divine love with a strong sublimated vital manifestation. But the moment Vaishnavism before or after him made an attempt at greater externalisation, we know what happened — a vitalistic deterioration, much corruption and decline. You cannot appeal to Chaitanya's example as against psychic or divine love; his was not something merely vital-human; in its essence, though not in its form, it was very much the first step in the transformation, which we ask of the Sadhaks, to make their love psychic and use the vital not for its own sake, but as an expression of the soul's realisation. It is the first step and perhaps for some it may be sufficient, for we are not asking everybody to become supramental; but for any full manifestation on the physical plane the supramental is indispensable.

In the later Vaishnava tradition the Sadhana takes the form of an application of human vital love in all its principal turns to the Divine; *viraha*, *abhimāna*, even complete separation (like the departure of Krishna to Mathura) are made prominent elements of this Yoga. But all that was only meant — in the Sadhana itself, not in the Vaishnava poems — as a passage of which the end is *milana* or complete union; but the stress laid on the untoward elements by some would almost seem to make strife, separation, *abhimāna*, the whole means, if not the very object of this kind of *prema-yoga*. Again, this method was only

applied to the inner, not to a physically embodied Divine and had a reference to certain states and reactions of the inner consciousness in its seeking after the Divine. In the relations with the embodied Divine Manifestation, or, I may add, of the disciple with the Guru, such things might rise as a result of human imperfection, but they were not made part of the theory of the relations. I do not think they formed a regular and authorised part of the relations of the Bhaktas to the Guru. On the contrary, the relation of the disciple to the Guru in the Guruvada is supposed always to be that of worship, respect, a complete happy confidence, an unquestioning acceptance of the guidance. The application of the unchanged vital relations to the embodied Divine may lead and has led to movements which are not conducive to the progress of the Yoga.

Ramakrishna's Yoga was also turned only to an inner realisation of the inner Divine, — nothing less, but also nothing more. I believe Ramakrishna's sentence about the claim of the Sadhak on the Divine for whom he has sacrificed everything was the assertion of an inner and not an outer claim, on the inner rather than on any physically embodied Divine: it was a claim for the full spiritual union, the God-lover seeking the Divine, but the Divine also giving himself and meeting the God-lover. There can be no objection to that; such a claim all seekers of the Divine have; but as to the modalities of this divine meeting, it does not carry us much farther. In any case, my object is a realisation on the physical plane and I cannot consent merely to repeat Ramakrishna. I seem to remember too that for a long time he was withdrawn into himself, all his life was not spent with his disciples. He got his Siddhi first in retirement and when he came out and received everyone, well, a few years of it wore out his body. To that, I suppose, he had no objection; for he even pronounced a theory, when Keshav Chandra was dying, that spiritual experience ought to wear out the body. But at the same time, when asked why he got illness in the throat, he answered that it was the sins of his disciples which they threw upon him and he had to swallow. Not being satisfied, as he was, with an inner liberation alone, I cannot accept these ideas or these results, for that does not sound to me like a successful

meeting of the Divine and the Sadhak on the physical plane, however successful it might have been for the inner life. Krishna did great things and was very clearly a manifestation of the Divine. But I remember a passage of the Mahabharata in which he complains of the unquiet life his followers and adorers gave him, their constant demands, reproaches, their throwing of their unregenerate vital nature upon him. And in the Gita he speaks of this human world as a transient and sorrowful affair and, in spite of his gospel of divine action, seems almost to admit that to leave it is after all the best solution. The traditions of the past are very great in their own place, in the past, but I do not see why we should merely repeat them and not go farther. In the spiritual development of the consciousness upon earth the great past ought to be followed by a greater future.

There is the rule that you seem all to ignore entirely — the difficulties of the physical embodiment and the divine realisation on the physical plane. For most it seems to be a simple alternative, either the Divine comes down in full power and the thing is done, no difficulty, no necessary conditions, no law or process, only miracle and magic, or else, well, this cannot be the Divine. Again you all (or almost all) insist on the Divine becoming human, remaining in the human consciousness and you protest against any attempt to make the human Divine. On the other hand, there is an outcry of disappointment, bewilderment, distrust, perhaps indignation if there are human difficulties, if there is strain in the body, a swaying struggle with adverse forces, obstacles, checks, illness and some begin to say, "Oh, there is nothing Divine here!" — as if one could remain vitally and physically in the untransformed individual human consciousness, in unchanged contact with it, satisfy its demands, and yet be immune under all circumstances and in all conditions against strain and struggle and illness. If I want to divinise the human consciousness, to bring down the Supramental, the Truth-Consciousness, the Light, the Force into the physical to transform it, to create there a great fullness of Truth and Light and Power and Bliss and Love, the response is repulsion or fear or unwillingness — or a doubt whether it is possible. On one side there is the claim that illness and the rest should be impossible, on the

other a violent rejection of the only condition under which these things can become impossible. I know that this is the natural inconsistency of the human vital mind wanting two inconsistent and incompatible things together; but that is one reason why it is necessary to transform the human and put something a little more luminous in its place.

But is the Divine then something so terrible, horrible or repellent that the idea of its entry into the physical, its divinising of the human should create this shrinking, refusal, revolt or fear? I can understand that the unregenerate vital attached to its own petty sufferings and pleasures, to the brief ignorant drama of life, should shrink from what will change it. But why should a God-lover, a God-seeker, a Sadhak fear the divinisation of the consciousness? Why should he object to become one in nature with what he seeks, why should he recoil from *sādṛśya-mukti*? Behind this fear there are usually two causes: first, there is the feeling of the vital that it will have to cease to be obscure, crude, muddy, egoistic, unrefined (spiritually), full of stimulating desires and small pleasures and interesting sufferings (for it shrinks even from the Ananda which will replace this); next there is some vague ignorant idea of the mind, due, I suppose, to the ascetic tradition, that the divine nature is something cold, bare, empty, austere, aloof, without the glorious riches of the egoistic human vital life. As if there were not a divine vital and as if that divine vital is not itself and, when it gets the means to manifest, will not make the life on earth also infinitely more full of beauty, love, radiance, warmth, fire, intensity and divine passion and capacity for bliss than the present impotent, suffering, pettily and transiently excited and soon tired vitality of the still so imperfect human creation.

But you will say that it is not the Divine from which you recoil, rather you accept and ask for it (provided that it is not too divine), but what you object to is the Supramental — grand, aloof, incomprehensible, unapproachable, a sort of austere Nirakar Brahman. The Supramental so described is a bogey created by this part of your vital mind in order to frighten itself and justify its attitude. Behind this strange description there seems to be an idea that the Supramental is a new version of the

Vedantic featureless and incommunicable Parabrahman, vast, grand, cold, empty, remote, devastating, overwhelming; it is not quite that, of course, since it can come down, but for all practical purposes it is just as bad! It is curious that you admit your ignorance of what the Supramental can be, and yet you in these moods not only pronounce categorically what it is like, but reject emphatically my experience about it as of no practical validity or not valid for anybody but myself! I have not insisted, I have answered only casually because I am not asking you now to be non-human and divine, much less to be supramental; but as you are always returning to this point when you have these attacks and making it the pivot — or at least a main support — of your depression, I am obliged to answer. The Supramental is *not* grand, aloof, cold and austere; it is not something opposed to or inconsistent with a full vital and physical manifestation; on the contrary, it carries in it the only possibility of the full fullness of the vital force and the physical life on earth. It is because it is so, because it was so revealed to me and for no other reason that I have followed after it and persevered till I came into contact with it and was able to draw down some power of it and its influence. I am concerned with the earth, not with worlds beyond for their own sake; it is a terrestrial realisation that I seek and not a flight to distant summits. All other Yogas regard this life as an illusion or a passing phase; the supramental Yoga alone regards it as a thing created by the Divine for a progressive manifestation and takes the fulfilment of the life and the body for its object. The Supramental is simply the Truth-Consciousness and what it brings in its descent is the full truth of life, the full truth of consciousness in Matter. One has indeed to rise to high summits to reach it, but the more one rises, the more one can bring down below. No doubt, life and body have not to remain the ignorant, imperfect, impotent things they are now; but why should a change to fuller life-power, fuller body-power be considered something aloof, cold and undesirable? The utmost Ananda the body and life are now capable of is a brief excitement of the vital mind or the nerves or the cells which is limited, imperfect and soon passes: with the supramental change all the cells, nerves, vital forces, embodied mental forces can be-

come filled with a thousandfold Ananda, capable of an intensity of bliss which passes description and which need not fade away. How aloof, repellent and undesirable! The supramental love means an intense unity of soul with soul, mind with mind, life with life, and an entire flooding of the body consciousness with the physical experience of oneness, the presence of the Beloved in every part, in every cell of the body. Is that too something aloof and grand but undesirable? With the supramental change, the very thing on which you insist, the possibility of the free physical meeting of the embodied Divine with the Sadhak without conflict of forces and without undesirable reactions becomes possible, assured and free. That too is, I suppose, something aloof and undesirable? I could go on — for pages, but this is enough for the moment.

14-1-1932

THE PAST AND THE FUTURE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

I have no time to read books usually. I seldom had and none at all now. I have had no inspirations from the Sadhana of Bejoy Goswami, though a good deal at one time from Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. My remarks simply meant that I regard the spiritual history of mankind and especially of India as a constant development of a divine purpose, not a book that is closed, the lines of which have to be constantly repeated. Even the Upanishads and the Gita were not final though everything may be there in seed. In this development the recent spiritual history of India is a very important stage and the names I mentioned had a special prominence in my thought at the time — they seemed to me to indicate the lines from which the future spiritual development had most directly to proceed, not staying but passing on. I do not know that I would put my meaning exactly in the language you suggest. I may say that it is far from my purpose to propagate any religion, new or old, for humanity in the future. A way to be opened that is still blocked, not a religion to be founded, is my conception of the matter.

18-8-1935

THE GITA AND SRI AUROBINDO'S MESSAGE

It is not a fact that the Gita gives the whole base of Sri Aurobindo's message; for the Gita seems to admit the cessation of birth in the world as the ultimate aim or at least the ultimate culmination of Yoga; it does not bring forward the idea of spiritual evolution or the idea of the higher planes and the supramental Truth-Consciousness and the bringing down of that consciousness as the means of the complete transformation of earthly life.

The idea of the Supermind, the Truth-Consciousness is there in the Rig Veda according to Sri Aurobindo's interpretation and in one or two passages of the Upanishads, but in the Upanishads it is there only in seed in the conception of the being of knowledge, *vijñānamaya puruṣa*, exceeding the mental, vital and physical being; in the Rig Veda the idea is there but in principle only, it is not developed and even the principle of it has disappeared from the Hindu tradition.

It is these things among others that constitute the novelty of Sri Aurobindo's message as compared with the Hindu tradition — the idea that the world is not either a creation of Maya or only a play, *līlā*, of the Divine, or a cycle of births in the ignorance from which we have to escape, but a field of manifestation in which there is a progressive evolution of the soul and the nature in Matter and from Matter through Life and Mind to what is beyond Mind till it reaches the complete revelation of Sacchidananda in life. It is this that is the basis of the Yoga and gives a new sense to life.

Our Yoga is not identical with the Yoga of the Gita although it contains all that is essential in the Gita's Yoga. In our Yoga we begin with the idea, the will, the aspiration of the complete surrender; but at the same time we have to reject the lower nature, deliver our consciousness from it, deliver the self involved in the lower nature by the self rising to freedom in the higher nature. If we do not do this double movement, we are in danger of

making a tamasic and therefore unreal surrender, making no effort, no Tapas and therefore no progress; or else we may make a rajasic surrender not to the Divine but to some self-made false idea or image of the Divine which masks our rajasic ego or something still worse.

The language of the Gita in many matters seems sometimes contradictory because it admits two apparently opposite truths and tries to reconcile them. It admits the ideal of departure from *saṁsāra* into the Brahman as one possibility; also it affirms the possibility of living free in the Divine (in Me, it says) and acting in the world as the Jivanmukta. It is this latter kind of solution on which it lays the greatest emphasis. So Ramakrishna put the "divine souls" (Ishwarakoti) who can descend the ladder as well as ascend it higher than the Jivas (Jivakoti) who, once having ascended, have not the strength to descend again for divine work. The full truth is in the supramental consciousness and the power to work from there on life and Matter.

KARMA AND INTEGRAL YOGA

I have never disputed the truth of the old Yogas — I have myself had the experience of Vaishnava Bhakti and of Nirvana in the Brahman; I recognise their truth in their own field and for their own purpose — the truth of their experience so far as it goes — though I am in no way bound to accept the truth of the mental philosophies founded on the experience. I similarly find that my Yoga is true in its own field — a larger field, as I think — and for its own purpose. The purpose of the old is to get away from life to the Divine — so, obviously, let us drop Karma. The purpose of the new is to reach the Divine and bring the fullness of what is gained into life — for that, Yoga by works is indispensable. It seems to me that there is no mystery about that or anything to perplex anybody — it is rational and inevitable. Only you say that the thing is impossible; but that is what is

said about everything before it is done.

I may point out that Karmayoga is not a new but a very old Yoga; the Gita was not written yesterday and Karmayoga existed before the Gita. Your idea that the only justification in the Gita for works is that it is an unavoidable nuisance, so better make the best use of it, is rather summary and crude. If that were all, the Gita would be the production of an imbecile and I would hardly have been justified in writing two volumes on it or the world in admiring it as one of the greatest scriptures, especially for its treatment of the problem of the place of works in spiritual endeavour. There is surely more in it than that. Anyhow, your doubt whether works can lead to realisation or rather your flat and sweeping denial of the possibility contradicts the experience of those who have achieved this supposed impossibility. You say that work lowers the consciousness, brings you out of the inner into the outer — yes, if you consent to externalise yourself in it instead of doing works from within; but that is what one has to learn not to do. Thought and feeling can also externalise one in the same way; but it is a question of linking thought, feeling and act firmly to the inner consciousness by living there and making the rest an instrument. Difficult? Even Bhakti is not easy and Nirvana for most men more difficult than all.

I do not know why you drag in humanitarianism, activism, philanthropical *sevä*, etc. None of these are part of my Yoga or in harmony with my definition of works, so they don't touch me. I never thought that politics or feeding the poor or writing beautiful poems would lead straight to Vaikuntha or the Absolute. If it were so, Romesh Dutt on one side and Baudelaire on the other would be the first to attain the Highest and welcome us there. It is not the form of the work itself or mere activity but the consciousness and Godward will behind it that are the essence of Karmayoga; the work is only the necessary instrumentation for the union with the Master of works, the transit to the pure Will and power of Light from the will and power of the Ignorance.

Finally, why suppose that I am against meditation or Bhakti? I have not the slightest objection to your taking either

or both as the means of approach to the Divine. Only I saw no reason why anyone should fall foul of works and deny the truth of those who have reached, as the Gita says, through works perfect realisation and oneness of nature with the Divine, *saṁsiddhiṁ sādharmyam* (as did Janaka and others) — simply because he himself cannot find or has not yet found their deeper secret — hence my defence of works.

23-12-1934

I may say, however, that I do not regard business as something evil or tainted, any more than it is so regarded in ancient spiritual India. If I did, I would not be able to receive money from X or from those of our disciples who in Bombay trade with East Africa; nor could we then encourage them to go on with their work but would have to tell them to throw it up and attend to their spiritual progress alone. How are we to reconcile X's seeking after spiritual light and his mill? Ought I not to tell him to leave his mill to itself and to the devil and go into some Ashram to meditate? Even if I myself had had the command to do business as I had the command to do politics I would have done it without the least spiritual or moral compunction. All depends on the spirit in which a thing is done, the principles on which it is built and the use to which it is turned. I have done politics and the most violent kind of revolutionary politics, *ghoram karma*, and I have supported war and sent men to it, even though politics is not always or often a very clean occupation nor can war be called a spiritual line of action. But Krishna calls upon Arjuna to carry on war of the most terrible kind and by his example encourage men to do every kind of human work, *sarvakarmāṇi*. Do you contend that Krishna was an unspiritual man and that his advice to Arjuna was mistaken or wrong in principle? Krishna goes further and declares that a man by doing in the right way and in the right spirit the work dictated to him by his fundamental nature, temperament and capacity and according to his and its Dharma can move towards the Divine. He validates the function and Dharma of the Vaishya as well as of

the Brahmin and Kshatriya. It is in his view quite possible for a man to do business and make money and earn profits and yet be a spiritual man, practise Yoga, have an inner life. The Gita is constantly justifying works as a means of spiritual salvation and enjoining a Yoga of Works as well as of Bhakti and Knowledge. Krishna, however, superimposes a higher law also that work must be done without desire, without attachment to any fruit or reward, without any egoistic attitude or motive, as an offering or sacrifice to the Divine. This is the traditional Indian attitude towards these things, that all work can be done if it is done according to the Dharma and, if it is rightly done, it does not prevent the approach to the Divine or the access to spiritual knowledge and the spiritual life.

There is, of course, also the ascetic idea which is necessary for many and has its place in the spiritual order. I would myself say that no man can be spiritually complete if he cannot live ascetically or follow a life as bare as the barest anchorite's. Obviously, greed for wealth and money-making has to be absent from his nature as much as greed for food or any other greed and all attachment to these things must be renounced from his consciousness. But I do not regard the ascetic way of living as indispensable to spiritual perfection or as identical with it. There is the way of spiritual self-mastery and the way of spiritual self-giving and surrender to the Divine, abandoning ego and desire even in the midst of action or of any kind of work or all kinds of work demanded from us by the Divine. If it were not so, there would not have been great spiritual men like Janaka or Vidura in India and even there would have been no Krishna or else Krishna would have been not the Lord of Brindavan and Mathura and Dwarka or a prince and warrior or the charioteer of Kurukshetra, but only one more great anchorite. The Indian scriptures and Indian tradition, in the Mahabharata and elsewhere, make room both for the spirituality of the renunciation of life and for the spiritual life of action. One cannot say that one only is the Indian tradition and that the acceptance of life and works of all kinds, *sarvakarmāṇi*, is un-Indian, European or western and unspiritual.

KARMA AND MEDITATION

Concentration and meditation are not the same thing. One can be concentrated in work or Bhakti as well as in meditation.... If I devoted 9/10 of my time to concentration and none to work, the result would be equally unsatisfactory. My concentration is for a particular work — it is not for meditation divorced from life. When I concentrate, I work upon others, upon the world, upon the play of forces. What I say is that to spend all the time reading and writing letters is not sufficient for the purpose. I am not asking to become a meditative Sannyasi.

....It does not mean that I lose the higher consciousness while doing the work of correspondence. If I did that, I would not only not be supramental, but would be very far even from the full Yogic consciousness....

If I have to help somebody to repel an attack, I can't do it by only writing a note. I have to send him some Force or else concentrate and do the work for him. Also I can't bring down the Supramental by merely writing neatly to people about it. I am not asking for leisure to meditate at ease in a blissful indolence. I said distinctly I wanted it for concentration in other more important work than correspondence.

The ignorance underlying this attitude is in the assumption that one must necessarily do only work or only meditation. Either work is the means or meditation is the means, but both cannot be! I have never said, so far as I know, that meditation should not be done. To set up an open competition or a closed one between work and meditation is a trick of the dividing mind and belongs to the old Yoga. Please remember that I have all along been declaring an integral Yoga in which Knowledge, Bhakti, Works — light of consciousness, Ananda and love, will and power in works — meditation, adoration, service of the Divine have all their place. Have I written seven volumes of the *Arya* all in vain? Meditation is not greater than Yoga of works nor works greater than Yoga by knowledge — both are equal.

Another thing — it is a mistake to argue from one's own very limited experience, ignoring that of others and build on it

large generalisations about Yoga. This is what many do, but the method has obvious demerits. You have no experience of major realisations through works, and you conclude that such realisations are impossible. But what of the many who have had them — elsewhere and here too in the Ashram? That has no value? You hint to me that I have failed to get anything by works? How do you know? I have not written the history of my Sadhana — if I had, you would have seen that if I had not made action and work one of my chief means of realisation — well, there would have been no Sadhana and no realisation except that, perhaps, of Nirvana.

I shall perhaps add something hereafter as to what works can do, but no time to-night.

Don't conclude, however, that I am exalting works as the sole means of realisation. I am only giving it its due place.

You will excuse the vein of irony or satire in all this — but really when I am told that my own case disproves my own spiritual philosophy and accumulated knowledge and experience, a little liveliness in answer is permissible.

19-12-1934

INSUFFICIENCY OF VEDANTIC PANTHEISTIC EXPERIENCE

I have not read Ramdas's writings nor am I at all acquainted with his personality or what may be the level of his experience. The words you quote from him could be expressions either of a simple faith or of a pantheistic experience; evidently, if they are used or intended to establish the thesis that the Divine is everywhere and is all and therefore all is good, being Divine, they are very insufficient for that purpose. But as an experience, it is a very common thing to have this feeling or realisation in the Vedantic Sadhana — in fact, without it there would be no Vedantic Sadhana. I have had it myself on various levels of consciousness and in numerous forms and I have met scores of people who had had it very genuinely — not as an intellectual theory or perception, but as a spiritual reality which was too concrete for them to deny whatever paradoxes it may entail for the ordinary intelligence.

Of course it does not mean that all here is good or that in the estimation of values a brothel is as good as an Ashram, but it does mean that all are part of one manifestation and that in the inner heart of the harlot as in the inner heart of the sage or saint there is the Divine.

15-4-1934

ABSURDITY OF DEPRECIATING OLD YOGAS

As for the depreciation of the old Yogas as something quite easy, unimportant and worthless and the depreciation of Buddha, Yajnavalkya and other great spiritual figures of the past, is it not evidently absurd on the face of it?

14-4-1936

Wonderful! The realisation of the Self which includes the liberation from ego, the consciousness of the One in all, the established and consummated transcendence out of the universal Ignorance, the fixity of the consciousness in the union with the Highest, the Infinite and Eternal is not anything worth doing or recommending to anybody — is "not a very difficult stage"!

Nothing new! Why should there be anything new? The object of spiritual seeking is to find out what is eternally true, not what is new in Time.

From where did you get this singular attitude towards the old Yogas and Yogis? Is the wisdom of the Vedanta and Tantra a small and trifling thing? Have then the Sadhaks of the Ashram attained to self-realisation and are they liberated Jivanmuktas, free from ego and ignorance? If not, why then do you say, "it is not a very difficult stage", "their goal is not high", "is it such a long process?"

I have said that this Yoga is "new" because it aims at the integrality of the Divine in this world and not only beyond it and at a supramental realisation. But how does that justify a superior contempt for the spiritual realisation which is as much the aim of this Yoga as of any other?

3-4-1936

ESTIMATE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

I would have been surprised to hear that I regard (in agreement with an "advanced" Sadhak) Ramakrishna as a spiritual pigmy if I had not become past astonishment in these matters. I have said, it seems, so many things that were never in my mind and done too not a few that I have never dreamed of doing! I shall not be surprised or perturbed if one day I am reported to have declared, on the authority of "advanced" or even unadvanced Sadhaks, that Buddha was a *poseur* or that Shakespeare an over-rated poetaster or Newton a third-rate college Don without any genius. In this world all is possible. Is it necessary for me to say that I have never thought and cannot have said anything of the kind, since I have at least some faint sense of spiritual values? The passage you have quoted[1] is my considered estimate of Sri Ramakrishna.

3-2-1932

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE VEDIC RISHIS

Q: In an article written by a Swami on your book "The Riddle of this World", he has remarked that you have the boldness to say that you have done what the Vedic Rishis could not do. What is the truth in this criticism?

A: It is not I only who have done what the Vedic Rishis did not do. Chaitanya and others developed an intensity of Bhakti which is absent in the Veda and many other instances can be given. Why should the past be the limit of spiritual experience?

19-12-1934

[1] "And in a recent unique example, in the life of Ramakrishna Paramhansa, we see a colossal spiritual capacity, first driving straight to the divine realisation, taking, as it were, the kingdom of heaven by violence, and then seizing upon one Yogic method after another and extracting the substance out of it with an incredible rapidity, always to return to the heart of the whole matter, the realisation and possession of God by the power of love, by the extension of inborn spirituality into various experience and by the spontaneous play of an intuitive knowledge." *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Centenary Edition, 1972), p. 36.

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE PAST SEERS

Well, I don't suppose the new race can be created by or according to logic or that any race has been. But why should the idea of the creation of a new race be illogical?... As for the past seers, they don't trouble me. If going beyond the experiences of past seers and sages is so shocking, each new seer or sage in turn has done that shocking thing — Buddha, Shankara, Chaitanya, etc. all did that wicked act. If not, what was the necessity of their starting new philosophies, religions, schools of Yoga? If they were merely verifying and meekly repeating the lives and experiences of past seers and sages without bringing the world some new things, why all that stir and pother? Of course, you may say, they were simply explaining the old truth but in the right way — but this would mean that nobody had explained or understood it rightly before — which is again "giving the lie etc." Or you may say that all the new sages (they were not among X's cherished past ones in their day), e.g. Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva were each merely repeating the same blessed thing as all the past seers and sages had repeated with an unwearied monotony before them. Well, well, but why repeat it in such a way that each "gives the lie" to the others? Truly, this shocked reverence for the past is a wonderful and fearful thing! After all, the Divine is infinite and the unrolling of the Truth may be an infinite process or at least, if not quite so much, yet with some room for new discovery and new statement, even perhaps new achievement, not a thing in a nutshell cracked and its contents exhausted once for all by the first seer or sage, while the others must religiously crack the same nutshell all over again, each tremblingly fearful not to give the lie to the "past" seers and sages.

8-10-1935

KRISHNA AND PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATION

Sri Krishna never set out to arrive at any physical transformation, so anything of the kind could not be expected in his case.

Neither Buddha nor Shankara nor Ramakrishna had any idea of transforming the body. Their aim was spiritual *mukti* and nothing else. Krishna taught Arjuna to be liberated in works, but he never spoke of any physical transformation.

I do not know that we can take this [Yudhisthira entering the heavenly kingdom in the Himalayas with his mortal body] as a historical fact. *Svarga* is not somewhere in the Himalayas, it is another world in another plane of consciousness and substance. Whatever the story may mean, therefore, it has nothing to do with the question of physical transformation on earth.

1-6-1937

KRISHNA AND THE SUPERMIND

24th [November 1926] was the descent of Krishna into the physical.

Krishna is not the supramental Light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the Overmind Godhead preparing, though not itself actually, the descent of Supermind and Ananda. Krishna is the Anandamaya; he supports the evolution through the Overmind leading it towards the Ananda.

29-10-1935

SRI AUROBINDO AND KRISHNA

You can't expect me to argue about my own spiritual greatness in comparison with Krishna's. The question itself would be relevant only if there were two sectarian religions in opposition, Aurobindoism and Vaishnavism, each insisting on its own God's greatness. That is not the case. And then what Krishna must I challenge, — the Krishna of the Gita who is the transcendent Godhead, Paramatma, Parabrahma, Purushottama, the cosmic Deity, Master of the universe, Vasudeva who is all, the Immanent in the heart of all creatures, or the Godhead who was incarnate at Brindavan and Dwarka and Kurukshetra and who was the

guide of my Yoga and with whom I realised identity? All that is not to me something philosophical or mental but a matter of daily and hourly realisation and intimate to the stuff of my consciousness. Then from what position can I adjudicate this dispute? X thinks I am superior in greatness, you think there can be nothing greater than Krishna: each is entitled to have his own view or feeling, whether it is itself right or not. It can be left there; it can be no reason for your leaving the Ashram.

25-2-1945

I thought I had already told you that your turn towards Krishna was not an obstacle. In any case, I affirm that positively in answer to your question. If we consider the large and indeed predominant part he played in my own Sadhana, it would be strange if the part he has in your Sadhana could be considered objectionable. Sectarianism is a matter of dogma, ritual, etc., not of spiritual experience; the concentration on Krishna is a self-offering to the *iṣṭa-deva*. If you reach Krishna you reach the Divine; if you can give yourself to him, you give yourself to me. Your inability to identify may be because you are laying too much stress on the physical aspects, consciously or unconsciously.

18-6-1943

KRISHNA AND CHRIST

I feel it difficult to say anything about X's Christ and Krishna. The attraction which she says people feel for Christ has never touched me, partly because I got disgusted with the dryness and deadness of Christianity in England and partly because the Christ of the gospels (apart from a few pregnant episodes) is luminous no doubt, but somewhat shadowy and imperfectly constructed in his luminosity: there is more of the ethical put forward than of the spiritual or divine man. The Christ that has strongly lived in the Western saints and mystics is the Christ of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Teresa and others.

But apart from that, is it a fact that Christ has been strongly and vividly loved by Christians? Only by a very few, it seems to me. As for Krishna, to judge him and his revealing tradition by the Christ figure and Christ tradition is not possible. The two stand in two different worlds. There is nothing in Christ of the great and boundless and sovereign spiritual knowledge and power of realisation we find in the Gita, nothing of the emotional force, passion, beauty of the Gopi-symbol and all that lies behind it, nothing of the many-sided manifestation of the Krishna figure. Christ has other qualities: there is no gain in putting them side by side and trying to weigh them against each other. That is the besetting sin of the Christian mind, even in those who are most liberal like Dr. Stanley Jones: they cannot get altogether free from the sectarian narrowness and leave each manifestation to its own inner world for those to follow who have an inner drawing to the one or the other. I have always refrained from these comparisons in my published writings in order to avoid this error. What I feel personally is for myself — I cannot ask others to conform to my measure.

4-1-1936

INTEGRAL YOGA AND ITS ACCEPTANCE BY HUMANITY

Q: It seems to me that the number of people in the world accepting our Yoga of Transformation would not be as large as those who accepted Buddhism, Vedanta or Christianity.

A: Nothing depends on the numbers. The numbers of Buddhism or Christianity were so great because the majority professed it as a creed without its making the least difference to their external life. If the new consciousness were satisfied with that, it could also and much more easily command homage and acceptance by the whole earth. It is because it is a greater consciousness, the Truth-Consciousness, that it will insist on a real change.

29-4-1934

Q: The ordinary people would see some more immediate result in the traditional systems than in our Yoga, as many must have found some benefit by 'miracles' or otherwise in these systems. In our Yoga they would find the way closed for that. Naturally they would shrink from it.

A: It would on the contrary be impossible for them not to feel that a greater Light and Power had come on the earth.

29-4-1934

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Q: On the whole there is very little scope for very few people in our Yoga, and the world would hardly interest itself in it.

A: How do you know that it will have no effect on the ordinary people? It will inevitably increase their possibilities and even though all cannot rise to the highest, that will mean a great change for the earth.

29-4-1934

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Q: There appears to be so much self-concentration in the people of the world that hardly a few would think of doing this Yoga. Perhaps a larger number would go (and are going) for the old Hathayoga and Rajayoga which may bring some small immediately satisfying result. Even from those who are sincere truth-seekers, many would not be able to see the truth of our Yoga of Transformation. And the ordinary people, the scientists, the politicians and leading intellectuals — one cannot see the possibility of their ever accepting the spiritual life.

A: I suppose they are not intended to take it up — only an opening can be given for those who want to rise into a somewhat higher consciousness than they have now.

Q: You have said that the aim of our Yoga is to rise beyond Nirvana, but even in the Ashram there are extremely few who have reached or have tried to reach even up to the Nirvana level. Even to reach Nirvana one has to give up desire, duality and ego and establish a certain amount of equanimity and peace. Could it be said that a sufficient number of Sadhaks in the Ashram have succeeded in doing so? At least everybody must be making some effort to do this. Why then are they not successful? Is it that after some time they forget the aim and live here as in ordinary life?

A: I suppose if the Nirvana aim had been put before them, more would have been fit for it, for the Nirvana aim is easier than the one we have put before us — and they would not have found it so difficult to reach the standard. The Sadhaks here are of all kinds and in all stages. But the real difficulty even for those who have progressed is with the external man. Even among those who follow the old ideal, the external man of the Sadhak remains almost the same even after they have attained to something. The inner being gets free, the outer follows still its fixed nature. Our Yoga can succeed only if the external man too changes, but that is the most difficult of all things. It is only by a change of the physical nature that it can be done, by a descent of the highest light into this lowest part of Nature. It is here that the struggle is going on. The internal being of most of the Sadhaks here, however imperfect still, is still different from that of the ordinary man, but the external still clings to its old ways, manners, habits. Many do not seem even to have awakened to the necessity of a change. It is when this is realised and done, that the Yoga will produce its full results in the Ashram itself, and not before.

30-4-1934

Section Four

SADHANA FOR THE EARTH-CONSCIOUSNESS

SADHANA FOR THE EARTH-CONSCIOUSNESS

SRI AUROBINDO AND SUPERMAN

I don't know that I have called myself a Superman. But certainly I have risen above the ordinary human mind, otherwise I would not think of trying to bring down the Supermind into the physical.

15-9-1935

OBJECT OF SEEKING THE SUPERMIND

These egoistic terms are not those in which my vital moves. It is a higher Truth I seek, whether it makes men greater or not is not the question, but whether it will give them truth and peace and light to live in and make life something better than a struggle with ignorance and falsehood and pain and strife. Then, even if they are less great than the men of the past, my object will have been achieved. For me mental conceptions cannot be the end of all things. I know that the Supermind is a truth.

It is not for personal greatness that I am seeking to bring down the Supermind. I care nothing for greatness or littleness in the human sense. I am seeking to bring some principle of inner Truth, Light, Harmony, Peace into the earth-consciousness; I see it above and know what it is — I feel it ever gleaming down on my consciousness from above and I am seeking to make it possible for it to take up the whole being into its own native power, instead of the nature of man continuing to remain in half-light, half-darkness. I believe the descent of this Truth opening the way to a development of divine consciousness here to be the final sense of the earth evolution. If greater men than myself have not had this vision and this ideal before them, that is no reason why I should not follow my Truth-sense and Truth-vision. If human reason regards me as a fool for trying to do what Krishna did not try, I do not in the least care. There is no question of X or Y or anybody else in that. It is a question between

the Divine and myself — whether it is the Divine Will or not, whether I am sent to bring that down or open the way for its descent or at least make it more possible or not. Let all men jeer at me if they will or all Hell fall upon me if it will for my presumption, — I go on till I conquer or perish. This is the spirit in which I seek the Supermind, no hunting for greatness for myself or others.

10-2-1935

My point about my Sadhana was that my Sadhana was not done for myself but for the earth-consciousness as a showing of the way towards the Light, so that whatever I showed in it to be possible — inner growth, transformation, manifesting of new faculties, etc. — was not of no importance to anybody, but meant as an opening of lines and ways for what had to be done. The question of degree of greatness does not come in at all.

May, 1933

ANANDA ON EARTH

My own experience is *not* limited to a "radiant peace"; I know very well what ecstasy and Ananda are from the *brahmānanda* down to the *śarīrānanda*, and can experience them at any time. But of these things I prefer to speak only when my work is done — for it is in a transformed consciousness here and not only above where the Ananda always exists that I seek their base of permanence.

CONDITIONS FOR SUPRAMENTALISATION

I have no intention of achieving the Supermind for myself only — I am not doing anything for myself, as I have no personal need of anything, neither of salvation (Moksha) nor supramentalisation. If I am seeking after supramentalisation, it is because it is a thing that has to be done for the earth-consciousness and

if it is not done in myself, it cannot be done in others. My supramentalisation is only a key for opening the gates of the supramental to the earth-consciousness; done for its own sake, it would be perfectly futile. But it does not follow either that if or when I become supramental, everybody will become supramental. Others can so become who are ready for it, when they are ready for it — though, of course, the achievement in myself will be to them a great help towards it. It is therefore quite legitimate to have the aspiration for it — provided:

1. One does not make a too personal or egoistic affair of it turning it into a Nietzschean or other ambition to be a superman.

2. One is ready to undergo the conditions and stages needed for the achievement.

3. One is sincere and regards it as part of the seeking of the Divine and consequent culmination of the Divine Will in one and insists on no more than the fulfilment of that will whatever it may be, psychicisation, spiritualisation or supramentalisation. It should be regarded as the fulfilment of God's working in the world, not as a personal chance or achievement.

April, 1935

It is true that I want the supramental not for myself but for the earth and souls born on the earth, and certainly therefore I cannot object if anybody wants the supramental. But there are the conditions. He must want the Divine Will first and the soul's surrender and the spiritual realisation (through works, Bhakti, knowledge, self-perfection) on the way.

15-4-1935

EFFECT OF SUPRAMENTAL DESCENT ON EARTH-LIFE

Q: When I hear people talking about the supramental descent it makes me somewhat sceptic. They expect that when the descent happens everything will soon be spiritualised and even in the most outward political life

all that is now wrong will be immediately set right — and this expectation creates in them a great curiosity and flutter.

A: All that is absurd. The descent of the supramental means only that the Power will be there in the earth-consciousness as a living force just as the thinking mental and higher mental are already there. But an animal cannot take advantage of the presence of the thinking mental Power or an undeveloped man of the presence of the higher mental Power — so too anybody will not be able to take advantage of the presence of the supramental Power. I have also often enough said that it will be at first for the few, not for the whole earth, — only there will be a growing influence of it on the earth-life.

15-12-1934

Q: When the Supermind descends into the earth-consciousness will all the Sadhaks be aware of it — the descent into the earth, I mean, not in themselves?

A: It would not necessarily be known by everybody. Besides, even if the descent were here one would have to be ready before one could get the final change.

SRI AUROBINDO'S SADHANA, AVATARHOOD AND LAWS OF NATURE

My Sadhana is not a freak or a monstrosity or a miracle done outside the laws of Nature and the conditions of life and consciousness on earth. If I could do these things or if they could happen in my Yoga, it means that they can be done and that therefore these developments and transformations are possible in the terrestrial consciousness.

9-2-1935

No, the supramental has not descended into the body or into Matter — it is only at the point where such a descent has become not only possible but inevitable; I am speaking, of course, of my experience. But as my experience is the centre and condition of all the rest, that is sufficient for the promise.

My difficulty is that you all seem to expect a kind of miraculous fairy-tale change and do not realise that it is a rapid and concentrated evolution which is the aim of my Sadhana and that there must be a process for it, a working of the higher in the lower and a dealing with all the necessary intervals — not a sudden feat of creation by which everything is done on a given date. It is a supramental but not an irrational process. What is to be done will happen — perhaps with a rush even — but in a workmanlike way and not according to Faerie.

14-11-1933

The question was whether new faculties not at all manifested in the personality up to now in this life could appear, even suddenly appear, by force of Yoga. I say they can and I gave my own case as proof. I could have given others also. The question involved is also this — is a man bound to the characters and qualities he has come with into this life — can he not become a new man by Yoga? That also I have proved in my Sadhana, it can be done. When you say that I could do this only in my case because I am an Avatar (!) and it is improbable in any other case, you reduce my Sadhana to an absurdity — and Avatarhood also to an absurdity. For my Yoga is done not for myself who need nothing and do not need salvation or anything else, but precisely for the earth-consciousness, to open a way for the earth-consciousness to change. Has the Divine need to come down to prove that he can do this or that or has he any personal need of doing it? Your argument proves that I am not an Avatar but only a big human person. It may well be so as a matter of fact, but you start your argument from the other basis. Besides, even if I am only a big human person, what I achieve shows that that achievement is possible for humanity. Whether any street-beggar can do it or has done it, is a side issue; it is sufficient if others

who have not the economic misfortune of being street-beggars can do it.

10-2-1935

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I was pointing out that in the essentiality all things are possible — so you ought not to say the Divine cannot do this or that. But at the same time I was pointing out too that the Divine is not bound to show his omnipotence without rhyme or reason when he is working by his own will under conditions. For by arguing that the Divine cannot, that he is impotent, that he cannot do what has never yet been done etc., you deny the possibility of changing things and thus of evolution, of the realisation of the unrealised, of the action of the Divine Power, of Divine Grace, and reduce all to a matter of rigid and unalterable *status quo*, which is an insolent defiance to both fact and reason (!) and suprareason. See now?

About myself and the Mother, — there are people who say, "If the supramental is to come down, it can come down in everyone, why then in them first? Why should we not get it before they do? Why through them, not direct?" It sounds very rational, logical, very arguable. The difficulty is that this reasoning ignores the conditions, foolishly assumes that one can get the supramental down into oneself without having the least knowledge of what the supramental is and so supposes an upside-down miracle — everybody who tries it is bound to land himself in a most horrible cropper — as all have done hitherto who tried it. It is like thinking one need not follow the Guide, but can reach up to the top of the mountain from the narrow path one is following on the edge of a precipice by simply leaping into the air. The result is inevitable.

10-2-1935

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I had no urge towards spirituality in me, I developed spirituality. I was incapable of understanding metaphysics, I developed into a philosopher. I had no eye for painting — I developed it by Yoga. I transformed my nature from what it was to what it was

not. I did it by a special manner, not by a miracle and I did it to show what could be done and how it could be done. I did not do it out of any personal necessity of my own or by a miracle without any process. I say that if it is not so, then my Yoga is useless and my life was a mistake — a mere absurd freak of Nature without meaning or consequence. You all seem to think it a great compliment to me to say that what I have done has no meaning for anybody except myself — it is the most damaging criticism on my work that could be made. I also did not do it by myself, if you mean by myself the Aurobindo that was. He did it by the help of Krishna and the Divine Shakti. I had help from human sources also.

13-2-1935

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I don't know about Avatars. Practically what I know is that I had not all the powers necessary when I started, I had to develop them by Yoga, at least many of them which were not in existence in me when I began, and those which were I had to train to a higher degree. My own idea of the matter is that the Avatar's life and actions are not miracles. If they were, his existence would be perfectly useless, a mere superfluous freak of Nature. He accepts the terrestrial conditions, he uses means, he shows the way to humanity as well as helps it. Otherwise what is the use of him and why is he here?

I was not always in the Overmind, if you please. I had to climb there from the mental and vital level.

13-2-1935

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Let me remind you of what I wrote about the Avatar. There are two sides of the phenomenon of Avatarhood, the Divine Consciousness and the instrumental personality. The Divine Consciousness is omnipotent but it has put forth the instrumental personality in Nature under the conditions of Nature and it uses it according to the rules of the game — though also sometimes to change the rules of the game. If Avatarhood is only a flashing

miracle, then I have no use for it. If it is a coherent part of the arrangement of the omnipotent Divine in Nature, then I can understand and accept it.

13-2-1935

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I have never said anything about how I choose people. I was answering the argument that what has not been or is not in manifestation, cannot be. That was very clearly the point in the discussion, — that the Divine cannot manifest what is not yet there — even he is impotent to do that. He can only manifest what is either already manifest or else latent in the field (person) he is working in. I say no — he can bring in new things. He can bring it in from the universal or he can bring it down from the transcendent. For in the Divine cosmic and transcendent all things are. Whether he will do so or not in a particular case is quite another matter. My argument was directed towards dissipating this "can't, can't" with which people try to stop all possibility of progress.

15-2-1935

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Let me make it clear that in all I wrote I was not writing to prove that I am an Avatar! You are busy in your reasonings with the personal question, I am busy more with the general one. I am seeking to manifest something of the Divine that I am conscious of and feel — I care a damn whether that constitutes me an Avatar or something else. That is not a question which concerns me. By manifestation, of course, I mean the bringing out and spreading of that Consciousness so that others also may feel and enter into it and live in it.

8-3-1935

SRI AUROBINDO, THE DIVINE INCARNATION

Q: I have a strong faith that you are the Divine Incarnation. Am I right?

A: Follow your faith — it is not likely to mislead you.

12-8-1935

PLACE OF HUMANITY IN SRI AUROBINDO'S WORK

But you are surely mistaken in thinking that I said that we work spiritually for the relief of the poor. I have never done that. My work is not to intervene in social matters within the frame of the present humanity but to bring down a higher spiritual light and power of a higher character which will make a radical change in the earth-consciousness.

22-12-1936

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As to the extract about Vivekananda,[1] the point I make there does not seem to me humanitarian. You will see that I emphasise there the last sentences of the page quoted from Vivekananda, not the words about God the poor and sinner and criminal. The point is about the Divine in the world, the All, *sarva-bhūtāni* of the Gita. That is not merely humanity, still less, only the poor or the wicked; surely, even the rich or the good are the part of the All and those also who are neither good nor bad nor rich nor poor. Nor is there any question (I mean in my own remarks) of philanthropic service; so neither *daridrer sevā* is the point. I had formerly not the humanitarian but the humanity view — and something of it may have stuck to my expressions in the *Arya*. But I had already altered my viewpoint from the "Our Yoga for the sake of humanity" to "Our Yoga for the sake of the Divine". The Divine includes not only the supracosmic but the cosmic and the individual — not only Nirvana or the Beyond

[1] "I have lost all wish for my salvation, may I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum-total of all souls, — and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species is the special object of my worship. He who is the high and low, the saint and the sinner, the god and the worm, Him worship, the visible, the knowable, the real, the omnipresent; break all other idols. In whom there is neither past life nor future birth, nor death nor going nor coming, in whom we always have been and always will be one, Him worship; break all other idols." (From a letter of Swami Vivekananda; quoted by Sri Aurobindo in *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Centenary Edition, 1972), pp. 257-58.)

but Life and the All. It is that I stress everywhere.

29-12-1934

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I can say little about the method X speaks of for getting rid of dead concepts. Each mind has its own way of moving. My own has been a sort of readjustment or rectification of positions and I should rather call it discrimination accompanied by a rearrangement of intuitions. At one time I had given much too big a place to "humanity" in my scheme of things with a number of ideas attached to that exaggeration which needed to be put right. But the change did not come by doubt about what I had conceived before, but by a new light on things in which "humanity" automatically stepped down and got into its right place and all the rest rearranged itself in consequence. But all that is probably because I am constitutionally lazy (in spite of my present feats of correspondence) and prefer the easiest and most automatic method possible. I have a suspicion however that X's method is essentially the same as mine, only he does it in a more diligent and conscientious spirit. For his remark about the concepts as flags and not the means of advance seems to indicate that.

26-10-1934

THE BURDEN OF LOVE

It is only divine Love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of its darkness towards the Divine. The Gallio-like "Je m'en fiche"-ism (I do not care) — would not carry me one step; it would certainly not be divine. It is quite another thing that enables me to walk unweeping and unlamenting towards the goal.

April, 1934

I use the language of the mind because there is no other which human beings can understand, — even though most of them

understand it badly. If I were to use a supramental language like Joyce, you would not even have the illusion of understanding it; so, not being an Irishman, I don't make the attempt. But, of course, anyone who wants to change earth-nature must first accept it in order to change it. To quote from an unpublished poem[1] of my own:

He who would bring the heavens here,
Must descend himself into clay
And the burden of earthly nature bear
And tread the dolorous way.

25-8-1935

THE PLUNGE IN THE ABYSS

No, it is not with the Empyrean that I am busy: I wish it were. It is rather with the opposite end of things; it is in the Abyss that I have to plunge to build a bridge between the two. But that too is necessary for my work and one has to face it.

30-5-1936

LIFE OF STRUGGLE AND BATTLE

But what strange ideas again! — that I was born with a supramental temperament and that I know nothing of hard realities! Good God! My whole life has been a struggle with hard realities, from hardships, starvation in England and constant dangers and fierce difficulties to the far greater difficulties continually cropping up here in Pondicherry, external and internal. My life has been a battle from its early years and is still a battle: the fact that I wage it now from a room upstairs and by spiritual means as well as others that are external makes no difference to its character. But, of course, as we have not been shouting about these things, it is natural, I suppose, for others to think that I am

[1] "*A God's Labour*", subsequently published in *Poems Past and Present*. See *Collected Poems* (Centenary Edition, 1972), p. 99.

living in an august, glamorous, lotus-eating dreamland where no hard facts of life or Nature present themselves. But what an illusion all the same!

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You think then that in me (I don't bring in the Mother) there was never any doubt or despair, no attacks of that kind. I have borne every attack which human beings have borne, otherwise I would be unable to assure anybody "This too can be conquered". At least I would have no right to say so. Your psychology is terribly rigid. I repeat, the Divine when he takes on the burden of terrestrial nature, takes it fully, sincerely and without any conjuring tricks or pretence. If he has something behind him which emerges always out of the coverings, it is the same thing in essence even if greater in degree, that there is behind others — and it is to awaken that that he is there.

The psychic being does the same for all who are intended for the spiritual way — men need not be extraordinary beings to follow it. That is the mistake you are making — to harp on greatness as if only the great can be spiritual.

8-3-1935

THE HELP OF DIFFICULTIES

As for faith, you write as if I never had a doubt or any difficulty. I have had worse than any human mind can think of. It is not because I have ignored difficulties, but because I have seen them more clearly, experienced them on a larger scale than anyone living now or before me that, having faced and measured them, I am sure of the results of my work. But even if I still saw the chance that it might come to nothing (which is impossible), I would go on unperturbed, because I would still have done to the best of my power the work that I had to do, and what is so done always counts in the economy of the universe. But why should I feel that all this may come to nothing when I see each step and where it is leading and every week and day — once it was every

year and month and hereafter it will be every day and hour — brings me so much nearer to my goal? In the way that one treads with the greater Light above, even every difficulty gives its help and has its value and Night itself carries in it the burden of the Light that has to be.

December, 1936

LIVING DANGEROUSLY

There is a coward in every human being — precisely the part in him which insists on "safety" — for that is certainly not a brave attitude. I admit however that I would like safety myself if I could have it — perhaps that is why I have always managed instead to live dangerously and follow the dangerous paths dragging on many poor Xs in my train.

5-1-1935

STORMS AND THE SUNLIT WAY

I quite agree with you in not relishing the idea of another attack of this nature. I am myself, I suppose, more a hero by necessity than by choice — I do not love storms and battles, at least on the subtle plane. The sunlit way may be an illusion, — though I do not think it is, — for I have seen people treading it for years; but a way with only natural or even only moderate fits of rough weather, a way without typhoons surely is possible — there are so many examples; *durgam pathastat* may be generally true and certainly the path of Laya or Nirvana is difficult in the extreme to most (although in my case I walked into Nirvana without intending it or rather Nirvana walked casually into me not so far from the beginning of my Yogic career without asking my leave). But the path need not be cut by periodical violent storms, though that it is so for a great many is an obvious fact. But even for these if they stick to it, I find that after a certain point the storms diminish in force, frequency, duration. That is why I insisted so much on your sticking — for if you stick, the turning-point is bound to

come. I have seen some astonishing instances recently of this typhoonic periodicity beginning to fade out after years and years of violent recurrence.

11-2-1937

THE GOSPEL OF FAITH

Fits of depression and darkness and despair are a tradition in the path of Sadhana — in all Yogas, oriental or occidental, they seem to have been the rule. I know all about them myself — but my experience has led me to the perception that they are an unnecessary tradition and could be dispensed with if one chose. That is why whenever they come in you or others I try to lift up before them the gospel of faith. If still they come, one has to get through them as soon as possible and get back into the sun.

9-4-1930

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Q: No joy, no energy. Don't like to read or write — as if a dead man were walking about. Do you understand the position? Any personal experience?

A: I quite understand; often had it myself devastatingly. That's why I always advise people who have it to cheer up and buck up.

To cheer up, buck up and the rest if you can, saying, "Rome was not built in a day" — if you can't, gloom it through till the sun rises and the little birds chirp and all is well.

Looks however as if you were going through a training in *vairāgya*. Don't much care for *vairāgya* myself, always avoided the beastly thing, but had to go through it partly, till I hit on *samatā* as a better trick. But *samatā* is difficult, *vairāgya* is easy, only damnably gloomy and uncomfortable.

3-6-1936

THE ADVERSARY'S EXAGGERATION

There is no reason to think that the movement of strength and

purity was a make-believe. No, it was a real thing. But with these strong forward movements the vital enthusiasm often comes in with a triumphant "Now it is finished" which is not quite justified, for, "Now it will be soon finished" would be nearer to it. It is at these moments that the thrice-damned Censor comes in with a jog, raises up a still shaky bit of the nature and produces a result that is out of all proportion to the size of the little bit, just to show that it is not finished. I have had any number of times that experience myself. All this comes from the complexity and slowness of our evolutionary nature which Yoga quickens, but not as a whole at a stroke. But in fact, as I said, these crises are out of all proportion to their cause in the nature. One must therefore not be discouraged, but see the exaggeration in the adversary's successful negation as well as the exaggeration in our idea of a complete and definite victory already there.

24-6-1936

EXACERBATION OF VITAL MOVEMENTS

The exacerbation of certain vital movements is a perfectly well-known phenomenon in Yoga and does not mean that one has degenerated, but only that one has come to close grips instead of to a pleasant nodding acquaintance with the basic instincts of the earthly vital nature. I have had myself the experience of this rising to a height, during a certain stage of the spiritual development, of things that before hardly existed and seemed quite absent in the pure Yogic life. These things rise up like that because they are fighting for their existence — they are not really personal to you and the vehemence of their attack is not due to any "badness" in the personal nature. I dare say seven Sadhaks out of ten have a similar experience. Afterwards when they cannot effect their object, which is to drive the Sadhak out of his Sadhana, the whole thing sinks and there is no longer any vehement trouble.

24-6-1932

RISING OF ANGER

There is nothing peculiar about retrogression. I was also noted in my earlier time before Yoga for the rareness of anger. At a certain period of the Yoga it rose in me like a volcano and I had to take a long time eliminating it. I was speaking of a past phase. I don't know about the subconscient, must have come from universal nature.

5-8-1936

DROPS IN SADHANA

Q: Suddenly to drop without doing anything wrong — why such a setback?

A: Everybody drops. I have dropped myself thousands of times during the Sadhana. What rose-leaf-princess Sadhaks you all are!

2-4-1937

TEMPORARY STOPPING OF SADHANA

The worst thing for Sadhana is to get into a morbid condition, always thinking of lower forces, attacks, etc. If the Sadhana has stopped for a time, then let it stop, remain quiet, do ordinary things, rest when rest is needed — wait till the physical consciousness is ready. My own Sadhana when it was far more advanced than yours used to stop for half a year together. I did not make a fuss about it, but remained quiet till the empty or dull period was over.

8-3-1935

THE PLUNGE INTO THE PHYSICAL

Q: What did you imply when you wrote to me: "You

are in the physical consciousness"? Did you mean that I am living like an animal or vegetating like a plant and did you suggest that I should come out of the "physical consciousness" and live on the mental level?

A: I am myself living in the physical consciousness and have been for several years. At first it was a plunge into the physical — into all its obscurity and inertia, afterwards it was a station in the physical open to the higher and higher consciousness and slowly having fought out in it the struggle of transformation of the physical consciousness with a view to prepare it for the supramental change.

It is possible to go back to the mental level where one receives all the mental realisations readily enough if the mind is open and bright. But it is not the course that the Sadhana usually follows.

29-12-1934

THE WAY OUT OF THE PHYSICAL PASSIVITY

Q: Was there in me a continuous real Sadhana in 1933? Was it not rather only a mental experience without any real solidity in it? Otherwise why should such a fall have come during these two years?

A: There was certainly a real Sadhana then and a very persistent preparation on the mental and vital planes. If that had not been there the descent of peace would not have begun. The fall came because when you descended into the physical consciousness to complete the preparation there, you became too passive, not continuing your will of Tapasya, with the result that the sex-force took advantage of the inertia of the physical consciousness to assert itself fully. That kind of passivity to the forces comes upon many when there is the descent into the physical; one then feels different forces playing in the consciousness without having the same power of reaction as one had in the mind and the vital — sometimes peace etc. from above, sometimes disturbing forces.

I had to pass through the same stage myself and it took me two years at least to get out of it. To develop in the physical itself a constant will for the drawing down of the higher consciousness — especially the Peace and Force from above, is the best way out of it.

8-7-1935

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Q: Something prevents the ascension in spite of the fact that the lower nature can best be dealt with from above.

A: It happened in the same way with myself. I had to come down into the physical to deal with it instead of keeping the station always above. Of course if you can keep the station above so much the better, but as almost everybody is down in the physical, it is a little difficult perhaps.

5-9-1935

CHANGE OF METHOD FOR TRANSFORMING THE BODY-CONSCIOUSNESS

Q: If the progress of the transformation of the body is so slow that it cannot keep pace with that of the higher parts then it is clear that at all stages it would always be lagging behind the higher parts. For example, when the higher parts are overmentalised the body would be just beginning to be intuitivised. In the same way, when the higher parts are supramentalised, the physical consciousness would be just beginning to receive the overmental influence. Would not this disparity be unavoidable unless one leaves the body for dealing with it later or at each stage one stops till the body is completely transformed before proceeding farther?

A: That is hardly possible. The body-consciousness is there and cannot be ignored, so that one can neither transform the higher parts completely leaving the body for later dealing nor make

each stage complete in all its parts before going to the rest. I tried that method but it never worked. A predominant overmentalisation of mind and vital is the next step, for instance, when overmentalising, but the body-consciousness retains all the lower movements unovermentalised and until these can be pulled up to the overmental standard, there is no overmental perfection, always the body-consciousness brings in flaws and limitations. To perfect the Overmind one has to call in the supramental force and it is only when the Overmind has been partially supramentalised that the body begins to be more and more overmental. I do not see any way of avoiding this process, though it is what makes the thing so long.

18-11-1935

EFFORT AT SUPRAMENTAL INTERVENTION

I have never told you that the power that works here is absolute at present; I have, on the contrary, told you that I am trying to make it absolute and it is for that that I want the Supermind to intervene. But to say that because it is not absolute therefore it does not exist, seems to me a logical inconsequence.

28-8-1934

CROSSING OF A BORDER

The last Darshan [15th August 1936] was good on the whole. I am not now trying to bring anything sensational down on these days, but I am watching the progress in the action of the Force and Consciousness that are already there, the infiltration of a greater Light and Power from above, and there was a very satisfactory crossing of a difficult border which promises well for the near future. A thing has been done which had long failed to accomplish itself and which is of great importance. I don't explain now, because it forms part of an arranged whole which is explicable only when it is complete. But it gives a sort of strong practical assurance that the thing will be done.

26-8-1936

IMPOSSIBILITY OF FIXING PRECISE DATES

I am surprised at Tagore's remark[1] about the two years; he must have misunderstood or misheard me. I did tell him that I would expand only after making a perfect (inner) foundation here, but I gave no date. I did give that date of two years long before in my letter to X, but I had then a less ample view of the work to be done than I have now — and I am now more cautious about assigning dates than I was once. To fix a precise time is impossible except in the two regions of certitude — the pure material which is the field of mathematical certitudes and the supramental which is the field of divine certitudes. In the planes in between where life has its word to say and things have to evolve under shock and stress, Time and Energy are too much in a flux and apt to kick against the rigour of a prefixed date or programme.

16-8-1931

ACTION OF THE SUPRAMENTAL TRUTH-POWER

You have created your own bewildering problem by supplying your own data! There is nothing nebulous about the supramental; its action depends on the utmost precision possible. As for solidity, since I once have got many solid things from much lower forces, I do not see why the highest ones should only give us nebulosities. But that seems to be the human mind's position: that only what is earthy is solid, what is high must be misty and unreal — the worm is a reality, the eagle only a vapour!

However, I have not told X that I have been scaling and winging — on the contrary, I have been dealing with very hard practical facts. I only told him I had got the formula of solution for the difficulty that had been holding me up since last November and I am working it out.

To return to the supramental: the supramental is simply

[1] Tagore said to Y that Sri Aurobindo had told him in 1928 that he would "expand" after two years.

the direct self-existent Truth-Consciousness and the direct self-effective Truth-Power. There can therefore be no question of jugglery about it. What is not true is not supramental. As for calm and silence, there is no need of the supramental to get that. One can get it even on the level of Higher Mind which is the next above the human intelligence. I got these things in 1908, 27 years ago, and I can assure you they were solid enough and marvellous enough in all conscience without any need of supramentality to make it more so. Again, "a calm that looks like action and motion" is a phenomenon of which I know nothing. A calm or silence that is what I have had — the proof is that out of an absolute silence of the mind I edited the *Bande Mataram* for 4 months and wrote 6 volumes of the *Arya*, not to speak of all the letters and messages etc. I have written since. If you say that writing is not an action or motion but only something that seems like it, a jugglery of the consciousness, — well, still out of that calm and silence I conducted a pretty strenuous political activity and have also taken my share in keeping up an Ashram which has at least an appearance to the physical senses of being solid and material! If you deny that these things are material or solid (which, of course, metaphysically you can), then you land yourself plump into Shankara's Illusionism, and there I will leave you.

You will say, however, that this is not the supramental but at most the Overmind that helped me to these non-nebulous motions and action. But the Supermind is by definition a greater dynamic activity than mind or Overmind. I have said that what is not true is not supramental; I will add that what is ineffective is not supramental. And, finally, I conclude by saying that I have not told X that I have taken complete possession of the supramental — I only admit to be very near to it. But "very near" is — well, after all — a relative phrase like all human phrases.

I don't know how you are to answer Y. You might perhaps by my two formulas, but it is doubtful. Or perhaps you might tell him that the supramental was silence — only, it would be untrue! So I leave you in your fix — there is no other go. At least until I have firm physical hold of the supramental and can come and tell the mentals and humans, — no doubt in a langu-

age which will be intelligible to them, — I must be somewhat dumb, since they have wholly misunderstood even the little that has found voice through my writings up till now.

23-8-1935

THE PRESENT BUSINESS

Q: Why not write something about the Supermind which these people find it so difficult to understand?

A: What's the use? How much would anybody understand? Besides the present business is to bring down and establish the Supermind, not to explain it. If it establishes itself, it will explain itself — if it does not, there is no use in explaining it. I have said some things about it in past writings, but without success in enlightening anybody. So why repeat the endeavour?

8-10-1935

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Supramental nature can only be understood if one understands what Supermind is and that is not altogether possible for mind so long as it does not open to the higher planes. So far as a mental account can be given, I have done it in the *Arya.*

THE TRUE WAY TO UNDERSTAND SRI AUROBINDO'S ACTION

Q: Since it is the Divine which does everything, what is the difference between ordinary happenings and those in which you are consciously active?

Is there any essential difference between one happening which you simply foresee, and one happening which you consciously direct? Since all happenings take place in the Divine Consciousness, to foresee is for you simply to turn your attention towards them in such a way as to become conscious of them in the most external consciousness — and then what is the nature of your conscious *action on them?*

A: To answer your question I would have to speak in the terms of a consciousness to which the mind has no key and at the same time try to explain its relations to the lower consciousness in which things are now happening. What is the use of doing this? The mind will either understand nothing or misunderstand or think it has understood when really it has understood nothing.

Or I would have to make up a mental answer to the question which would not be the real thing, but just something to keep the questioning mind quiet.

The true way to enter into these things is to still the mind and open to the consciousness from which things are done. Then you would first have a direct experience of the way the divine consciousness acts on different planes and secondly a light of knowledge about the experience. This is the only true way — all the rest is only words and sterile mental logic.

1928

DISAPPOINTING WORLD-CONDITION AND NEW CREATION

Q: I am disconcerted at what is happening in the world. Everywhere misery is rampant, people are losing faith in everything and even the intellectuals like Tagore, Russell and Rolland are clamouring for an end of the age. How is it that things should be marching headlong into a quagmire such as this? I sometimes fear that eventually you and the Mother will retire into an extra-cosmic Samadhi leaving the wicked world to sink or swim as best it can. Perhaps that would be the wisest course — who knows?

A: I have no intention of doing so — even if all smashed, I would look beyond the smash to the new creation. As for what is happening in the world, it does not upset me because I knew all along that things would happen in that fashion, and as for the hopes of the intellectual idealists I have not shared them, so I am not disappointed.

10-8-1933

AMENDMENT TO BERGSON PLAN

Q: Bergson writes that the progress of Life is marked by tensions succeeded by flowerings. What do you think of that, since the great philosopher too agrees with our way of marching to Beatitude through struggles and sufferings?

A: Humph! Such a method is all very well, but one has so much of it in life and in this Ashram that I yearn for some other non-Bergsonian evolution. Even if Lord God and Bergson planned it together, I would move an amendment.

WORLD'S READINESS TO RECEIVE THE SUPRAMENTAL

Q: I am disgusted with the world and would have preferred to go away from it to some subtler existence had it not been for your programme of changing the world and bringing some better things into it. But does the world want to change and buy your wares at the heavy cost of giving up all it is and has and does?

A: It wants and it does not want something that it has not got. All that the supramental could give, the inner mind of the world would like to have, but its outer mind, its vital and physical do not like to pay the price. But, after all, I am not trying to change the world all at once but only to bring down centrally something into it it has not yet, a new consciousness and power.

31-7-1935

SOMETHING BETTER FOR THE WOE-BEGONE PLANET

Q: It seems that wherever one turns one sees the same humanity — with all its ignorance and incapacity.

A: Of course. That is what I have been telling all along. It is

not without reason that I am eager to see something better in this well-meaning but woe-begone planet.

3-8-1935

THE CERTITUDE OF SUPRAMENTAL ADVENT

I have already spoken about the bad conditions of the world; the usual idea of the occultists about it is that the worse they are, the more is probable the coming of an intervention or a new revelation from above. The ordinary mind cannot know — it has either to believe or disbelieve or wait and see.

As to whether the Divine seriously means something to happen, I believe it is intended. I know with absolute certitude that the supramental is a truth and that its advent is in the very nature of things inevitable. The question is as to the when and the how. That also is decided and predestined from somewhere above; but it is here being fought out amid a rather grim clash of conflicting forces. For in the terrestrial world the predetermined result is hidden and what we see is a whirl of possibilities and forces attempting to achieve something with the destiny of it all concealed from human eyes. This is, however, certain that a number of souls have been sent to see that it shall be now. That is the situation. My faith and will are for the now. I am speaking of course on the level of the human intelligence — mystically-rationally, as one might put it. To say more would be going beyond that line. You don't want me to start prophesying, I suppose? As a rationalist, you can't.

25-12-1934

THE ISSUE FOR THE PRESENT HUMAN CIVILISATION

About the present human civilisation. It is not this which has to be saved; it is the world that has to be saved and that will surely be done, though it may not be so easily or so soon as some wish or imagine, or in the way that they imagine. The present must surely change, but whether by a destruction or a new

construction on the basis of a greater Truth, is the issue. The Mother has left the question hanging and I can only do the same. After all, the wise man, unless he is a prophet or a Director of the Madras Astrological Bureau, must often be content to take the Asquithian position. Neither optimism nor pessimism is the truth: they are only modes of the mind or modes of the temperament.

Let us then, without either excessive optimism or excessive pessimism, "wait and see".

September, 1945

PREPARATION UNDER VEIL

I know that this is a time of trouble for you and everybody. It is so for the whole world. Confusion, trouble, disorder and upset everywhere is the general state of things. The better things that are to come are preparing or growing under a veil and the worse are prominent everywhere. The one thing is to hold on and hold out till the hour of light has come.

2-6-1946

THE LIGHT OF VICTORY

As regards Bengal, things are certainly very bad; the conditions of the Hindus there are terrible and they may even get worse in spite of the Interim *mariage de convenance* at Delhi. But we must not let our reaction to it become excessive or suggest despair. There must be at least 20 million Hindus in Bengal and they are not going to be exterminated, — even Hitler with his scientific methods of massacre could not exterminate the Jews who are still showing themselves very much alive and, as for Hindu culture, it is not such a weak and fluffy thing as to be easily stamped out; it has lasted through something like 5 millenniums at least and is going to carry on much longer and has accumulated quite enough power to survive. What is happening did not come to me as a surprise. I foresaw it when I was in Bengal and warned

people that it was probable and almost inevitable and that they should be prepared for it. At that time no one attached any value to what I said, although some afterwards remembered and admitted, when the trouble first began, that I have been right; only C.R.Das had grave apprehensions and he even told me when he came to Pondicherry that he would not like the British to go out until this dangerous problem had been settled. But I have not been discouraged by what is happening, because I know and have experienced hundreds of times that beyond the blackest darkness there lies for one who is a divine instrument the light of God's victory. I have never had a strong and persistent will for anything to happen in the world — I am not speaking of personal things — which did not eventually happen even after delay, defeat or even disaster. There was a time when Hitler was victorious everywhere and it seemed certain that a black yoke of the Asura would be imposed on the whole world; but where is Hitler now and where is his rule? Berlin and Nuremberg have marked the end of that dreadful chapter in human history. Other blacknesses threaten to overshadow or even engulf mankind, but they too will end as that nightmare has ended. I cannot write fully in this letter of all things which justify my confidence — some day perhaps I shall be able to do it.

19-10-1946

DARKNESS BEFORE DAWN

The extreme acuteness of your difficulties is due to the Yoga having come down against the bed-rock of Inconscience which is the fundamental basis of all resistance in the individual and in the world to the victory of the Spirit and the Divine Work that is leading toward that victory. The difficulties themselves are general in the Ashram as well as in the outside world. Doubt, discouragement, diminution or loss of faith, waning of the vital enthusiasm for the ideal, perplexity and a baffling of the hope for the future are the common features of the difficulty. In the world outside there are much worse symptoms such as the general increase of cynicism, a refusal to believe in anything at all, a

decrease of honesty, an immense corruption, a preoccupation with food, money, comfort, pleasure, to the exclusion of higher things, and a general expectation of worse and worse things awaiting the world. All that, however acute, is a temporary phenomenon for which those who know anything about the workings of the world-energy and the workings of the Spirit were prepared. I myself foresaw that this worst would come, the darkness of night before the dawn; therefore I am not discouraged. I know what is preparing behind the darkness and can see and feel the first signs of its coming. Those who seek for the Divine have to stand firm and persist in their seeking; after a time, the darkness will fade and begin to disappear and the Light will come.

9-4-1947

THE PRESENT EFFORT

If I had been standing on the Supermind level and acting on the world by the instrumentation of Supermind, that world would have changed or would be changing much more rapidly and in a different fashion from what is happening now. My present effort is not to stand up on a high and distant Supermind level and change the world from there, but to bring something of it down here and to stand on that and act by that; but at the present stage the progressive supramentalisation of the Overmind is the first immediate preoccupation and a second is the lightening of the heavy resistance of the Inconscient and the support it gives to human ignorance which is always the main obstacle in any attempt to change the world or even to change oneself. I have always said that the spiritual force I have been putting on human affairs such as the War is not the supramental but the Overmind force, and that when it acts in the material world is so inextricably mixed up in the tangle of the lower world forces that its results, however strong or however adequate to the immediate object, must necessarily be partial. That is why I am getting a birthday present of a free India on August 15, but complicated by its being presented in two packets as two free Indias: this is

a generosity I could have done without, one free India would have been enough for me if offered as an unbroken whole.

7-7-1947

CALL TO REMAIN FIRM

Remain firm through the darkness; the light is there and will conquer.

4-2-1948

PEACE BORN OF CERTITUDE

You must make grow in you the peace that is born of the certitude of victory.

THE PRESENT DARKNESS AND THE NEW WORLD

I am afraid I can hold out but cold comfort — for the present at least — to those of your correspondents who are lamenting the present state of things. Things are bad, are growing worse and may at any time grow worst or worse than worst if that is possible — and anything however paradoxical seems possible in the present perturbed world. The best thing for them is to realise that all this was necessary because certain possibilities had to emerge and be got rid of, if a new and better world was at all to come into being; it would not have done to postpone them for a later time. It is, as in Yoga, where things active or latent in the being have to be put into action in the light so that they may be grappled with and thrown out or to emerge from latency in the depths for the same purificatory purpose. Also they can remember the adage that night is darkest before dawn and that the coming of dawn is inevitable. But they must remember too that the new world whose coming we envisage is not to be made of the same texture as the old and different only in pattern, and that it must come by other means — from within and not from without; so the best

way is not to be too much preoccupied with the lamentable things that are happening outside, but themselves to grow within so that they may be ready for the new world, whatever form it may take.

18-7-1948

You have expressed in one of your letters your sense of the present darkness in the world round us and this must have been one of the things that contributed to your being so badly upset and unable immediately to repel the attack. For myself, the dark conditions do not discourage me or convince me of the vanity of my will to "help the world", for I knew they had to come; they were there in the world-nature and had to rise up so that they might be exhausted or expelled and a better world freed from them might be there. After all, something has been done in the outer field and that may help or prepare for getting something done in the inner field also. For instance, India is free and her freedom was necessary if the Divine Work was to be done. The difficulties that surround her now and may increase for a time, especially with regard to the Pakistan imbroglio, were also things that had to come and to be cleared out.... Here too there is sure to be a full clearance, though unfortunately, a considerable amount of human suffering in the process is inevitable. Afterwards the work for the Divine will become more possible and it may well be that the dream, if it is a dream, of leading the world towards the spiritual light, may even become a reality. So I am not disposed even now, in these dark conditions, to consider my will to help the world as condemned to failure.

4-4-1950

Section Five

THE MASTER AND THE GUIDE

THE MASTER AND THE GUIDE

CONDITIONS OF ACCEPTANCE AS DISCIPLES

I do not very readily accept disciples as this path of Yoga is a difficult one and it can be followed only if there is a special call.

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If he wishes to accept my Yoga the conditions are a steady resolve and aspiration towards the truth I am bringing down, a calm passivity and an opening upward towards the source from which the light is coming. The Shakti is already working in him and if he takes and keeps this attitude and has a complete confidence in me, there is no reason why he should not advance safely in the Sadhana.

9-12-1922

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As for the Zamindar he seems to expect some *dīkṣā* of the traditional kind from me, but this I cannot give. He will have to be told that I do not and that my method is different. It may be a little difficult to explain to him or for him to understand what it is. Perhaps he may be told that those who come to have the Yoga are not accepted at once and there is sometimes a long period of trial before they are. We can see how he takes it and decide afterwards if he persists in his desire to come here.

11-7-1949

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If he had a true Yogic capacity it would be different, but we see no trace of it. Tell him he needs another kind of guidance — he will not be able to stand this Yoga.

It is not possible for me to give him help and guidance — for that would mean an Influence put on him and in the present stage of his development he has not the necessary strength and balance to receive it and bear it.

I have said he cannot do this Yoga. He needs something else that he can assimilate.

4-7-1936

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I have read and considered your letter and have decided to give you the opportunity you ask for — you can reside in the Ashram for two or three months to begin with and find out whether this is really the place and the path you were seeking and we also can by a closer observation of your spiritual possibilities discern how best we can help you and whether this Yoga is the best for you.

This trial is necessary for many reasons, but especially because it is a difficult Yoga to follow and not many can really meet the demands it makes on the nature. You have written that you saw in me one who achieved through the perfection of the intellect, its spiritualisation and divinisation; but in fact I arrived through the complete silence of the mind and whatever spiritualisation and divinisation it attained was through the descent of a higher supra-intellectual knowledge into that silence. The book, *Essays on the Gita*, itself was written in that silence of the mind, without intellectual effort and by a free activity of this knowledge from above. This is important because the principle of this Yoga is not perfection of the human nature as it is but a psychic and spiritual transformation of all the parts of the being through the action of an inner consciousness and then of a higher consciousness which works on them, throws out their old movements or changes them into the image of its own and so transmutes lower into higher nature. It is not so much the perfection of the intellect as a transcendence of it, a transformation of the mind, the substitution of a larger greater principle of knowledge — and so with all the rest of the being.

This is a slow and difficult process; the road is long and it is hard to establish even the necessary basis. The old existing nature resists and obstructs and difficulties rise one after another and repeatedly till they are overcome. It is therefore necessary to be sure that this is the path to which one is called before one finally decides to tread it.

If you wish, we are ready to give you the trial you ask for. On receiving your answer the Mother will make the necessary arrangements for your residence in the Ashram.

26-3-1937

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Write to your friend that we do not ask for any financial help from your father and therefore you are not called upon to answer the questions in his letter. It is not everyone who has the *adhikāra* to help in the work of the Ashram.

Those only can do so who have faith in it, or sympathy or at least confidence in Sri Aurobindo....

Sri Aurobindo is not anxious to increase the number of his disciples and only those are accepted usually who have the call and capacity for Yoga and are ready to satisfy the conditions.

14-10-1928

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If I said only things that human nature finds easy and natural, that would certainly be very comfortable for the disciples, but there would be no room for spiritual aim or endeavour. Spiritual aims and methods are not easy or natural (e.g., as quarrelling, sex-indulgence, greed, indolence, acquiescence in all imperfections are easy and natural,) and if people become disciples, they are supposed to follow spiritual aims and endeavours, however hard and above ordinary nature and not the things that are easy and natural.

3-5-1937

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Q: Here is a man of fifty intending vānaprastha, who thinks our Ashram will just be the place for him. He says he has prepared himself for Ashram life; his only fault being taking a little opium for the sake of health. What should I write to him?

A: Declined with thanks. Opium not allowed here. Also this is not a *vānaprastha* Ashram.

17-7-1936

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Q: Here is a village girl, a young widow, who has heard your call in a dream and is eager to come here.

A: Too young — such dreams are not decisive and there is too much of the vital tone in her remarks; you need say nothing about that however.

14-10-1938

IMPERSONAL APPROACH AND PERSONAL TOUCH

Well, what I am considering is this, whether it would not be wiser, as far as concerns England or America, to start impersonally with the philosophical side and the side of the Yoga, and leave the person a little behind the scene, for the present, until people there are ready as individuals for the personal touch; that is the course we have been following up to now. In India it is different, for here there is another kind of general mentality and there is the tradition of the Guru and the Shishya.

May, 1943

THE DISCIPLES AND THE MASTER

Q: What disciples we are of what a Master! I wish you had chosen or called some better stuff — perhaps somebody like X.

A: As to the disciples, I agree! — Yes, but would the better stuff, supposing it to exist, be typical of humanity? To deal with a few exceptional types would hardly solve the problem. And would they consent to follow my path — that is another question? And if they were put to the test, would not the common

humanity suddenly reveal itself — that is still another question.

3-8-1935

HARM IN GOING OUT OF THE ASHRAM

Q: Does your allowing people to go out from here mean that now there is no harm in their doing so?

A: No, it does not; it simply means that we can't always be holding back people whose vital says "I want to go, I want to go" and they side with the vital. They are allowed to go and take their risk.

18-3-1937

INTEREST IN YOGA AND GIVING MONEY

Q: X wants to approach rich people for money, but does not know how to do it.... He says that if people are directly approached for money, there may not be any response. His plan is to somehow...make them take interest in our work so that they may themselves offer money without any asking.... He asked me to take your advice in this matter.

A: If it is done in that way, X will have to wait for a result for years together. Even if they are interested, even if they are practising Yoga, people don't think of giving money unless they are asked, except a few who have a generous vital nature. It is all right to interest people in the work and the Yoga — but of itself that will be rarely sufficient, they must know that money is needed and the idea of giving must be put into them.

13-3-1933

CORRESPONDENCE WITH SADHAKS

About the correspondence, I would be indeed a brainless fool if I made it the central aim of my life to con an absurd mountain of

letters and leave all higher aims aside! If I have given importance to the correspondence, it is because it was an effective instrument towards my central purpose — there are a large number of Sadhaks whom it has helped to awaken from lethargy and begin to tread the way of spiritual experience, others whom it has carried from a small round of experience to a flood of realisations, some who have been absolutely hopeless for years who have undergone a conversion and entered from darkness into an opening of light. Others no doubt have not profited or profited only a little. Also there were some who wrote at random and wasted our time. But I think we can say that for the majority of those who wrote there has been a real progress. No doubt also it was not the correspondence in itself but the Force that was increasing in its pressure on the physical nature which was able to do all this, but a canalisation was needed, and this served the purpose. There were many for whom it was not necessary, others for whom it was not suitable. If it had been a mere intellectual asking of questions it would have been useless, but the substantial part was about Sadhana and experience and it is that that proved to be of great use.

But as time went on the correspondence began to grow too much and reached impossible proportions, yet it was difficult to stop the flood or to make distinctions which would not have been understood; so we have to seek a way out and as yet have only found palliatives. The easy way would be if those who have opened would now rely on the inner communication with only a necessary word now and then — some have begun to do so. I suppose in the end we shall be able to reduce the thing to manageable proportions.

12-1-1934

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I do not understand your point about raising up a new race by my going on writing "trivial" letters ten hours a day. Of course not — nor by writing important letters either; even if I were to spend my time writing fine poems it would not build up a new race. Each activity is important in its own place — an electron or a molecule or a grain may be small things in themselves, but in

their place they are indispensable to the building up of a world; it cannot be made up only of mountains and sunsets and streamings of the *aurora borealis* — though these have their place there. All depends on the force behind these things and the purpose in their action — and that is known to the Cosmic Spirit which is at work; and it works, I may add, not by the mind or according to human standards but by a greater consciousness which, starting from an electron, can build up a world and, using a tangle of ganglia, can make them the base here for the works of the Mind and Spirit in Matter, produce a Ramakrishna, or a Napoleon, or a Shakespeare. Is the life of a great poet either made up only of magnificent and important things? How many trivial things had to be dealt with and done before there could be produced a *King Lear* or a *Hamlet*? Again, according to your own reasoning, would not people be justified in mocking at your pother — so they would call it, I do not — about metre and scansion and how many ways a syllable can be read? Why, they might say, is he wasting his time in trivial prosaic things like this when he might have been spending it in producing a beautiful lyric or fine music? But the worker knows and respects the material with which he must work and he knows why he is busy with "trifles" and small details and what is their place in the fullness of his labour.

December, 1933

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But I do not understand how all that can prevent me from answering mental questions. On my own showing, if it is necessary for the Divine purpose, it has to be done. Sri Ramakrishna himself answered thousands of questions, I believe. But the answers must be such as he gave and such as I try to give, answers from higher spiritual experience, from a deeper source of knowledge and not lucubrations of the logical intellect trying to co-ordinate its ignorance. Still less can there be a placing of the Divine Truth before the judgments of the intellect to be condemned or acquitted by that authority, for that authority has no sufficient jurisdiction or competence.

Q: Is it not true that the letters we receive from you are full of power?

A: Yes, power is put into them.

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Q: It seems as if those who are not writing to you daily are not worse off for it. What is that due to?

A: Either they have not that same push for the Sadhana or they feel less need to lay open their difficulties because they have some line of positive experience which they confidently follow.

24-9-1933

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Q: Even for those who do not write to you often and confidently follow a line of positive experience, is there not the danger of wrong suggestions and constructions coming to them and also of an absence of variety or integrality of experience?

A: Yes, there are both these dangers. Those even who are not visited by serious difficulties, are exposed to the latter danger of remaining always in the same plane of experience. But again many do not write because they are not yet prepared for the pressure on them to progress rapidly which that would mean.

25-9-1933

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Q: Is the asking of questions a help to Yoga?

A: Questions are meant for getting light on the things that are going on in one. It is the statement of what is going on that helps to surrender.

3-4-1934

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Q: Many times questions come to the mind like: "What is the Divine?" Is it not better to write them to you?

A: Provided you do not expect me to answer always. People write to me not for getting mental information or answering questions but to lay before me their experiences and difficulties and get my help. When it is necessary, I answer questions, but I cannot be doing it all the time.

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I cannot undertake to be telling you all the time all that is not perfectly Yogic in the details of your action from morning to night. These are things to see to yourself. It is the movements of your Sadhana that you place before me and it is this that I have to see whether they are the right things or not.

7-5-1936

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When what you write is correct, I say nothing — when it is your physical mind that brings in wrong ideas, I correct.

10-5-1936

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Q: Before reading Your answers to my letters I feel as if I would be unable to read or understand them. What is this activity in me?

A: A useless activity of the vital mind. You should keep it quiet and receive with a silent mind waiting for light. In the silent mind one can receive an answer even if I write nothing.

9-6-1933

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Q: When I wrote that while reading your answers I experienced something coming out of my heart, you replied, "It depends on the nature of the movement. Something from the psychic?" Well, it was something

from the psychic. But how did it get connected with the answers?

A: The psychic can be connected with anything that gives room for love or Bhakti.

It is the psychic contact with what is in or behind the answers — what comes out into them from myself.

26-6-1936

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Q: When you make a fresh opening in me, is it not possible to inform me one day in advance, so that I may keep myself ready?

A: No. Certainly not. Such a mental method would be of no use whatever. The experience must come of itself.

9-5-1936

THE OUTER GUIDANCE AND THE INNER HELP

The outer guidance is meant only as an aid to the inner working, especially for the correction of any erroneous movement and sometimes in order to point out the right road. It is not meant, except at a very early stage, to satisfy mental questionings or to stimulate a mental activity.

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What I write usually helps only the mind and that too very little, for people do not really understand what I write — they put their own constructions on it. The inner help is quite different and there can be no confusion with it, for it reaches the substance of the consciousness, not the mind only.

SRI AUROBINDO'S TOUCH

My touch is always there; but you must learn to feel it not only with the outward contact as a medium — a touch of the pen —

but in its direct action on the mind and heart and vital and body. There would then be very much less difficulty — or no difficulty at all.

27-3-1933

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The outward touch is helpful; but the inward is still more helpful when one is accustomed to receive it with a certain concreteness — and the outward touch is not always fully possible, while the inward can be there all the time.

SRI AUROBINDO'S COMPASSION

Q: Why is the flower symbolising your compassion so delicate and why does it wither away so soon?

A: No, the compassion does not wither with its symbol — flowers are the moment's representations of things that are in themselves eternal.

9-8-1936

SPIRITUAL CHANGE AND THE SCHOOL-MASTER METHOD

I never point out to anybody his defects unless he gives me the occasion. A Sadhak must become conscious and lay himself before the light, see and reject and change. It is not the right method for us to interfere and lecture and point out this and point out that. That is the school-master method — it does not work in the spiritual change.

10-5-1936

SHUTTING UP DOORS AGAINST HELP

I am not aware of refusing help; but to receive the help is also necessary. When you are in this condition you seem at once to

shut yourself up against those from whom you seek help by a spirit of bitterness and anger. That is not an attitude which makes it easy to receive or be conscious and it is not easy either for the help to be effective. All I can do is to send you the Force that if received would help you to change your condition; it is what I have always done. But it cannot act effectively — or at least not at once — if the doors are shut against it.

23-5-1936

THE WORST HOSTILE SUGGESTION

Q: The worst of the hostile suggestions is that you are partial in your dealings. When this is accepted a wall comes between you and the Sadhak and there is a revolt and then there may be an end of the Sadhana!

A: Yes, it is their aim — for it is their one short cut to success, to separate the Sadhak from his soul.

3-5-1935

WORK AND TIME

You do not realise that I have to spend 12 hours over the ordinary correspondence, numerous reports, etc. I work 3 hours in the afternoon and the whole night up to 6 in the morning over this. So if I get a long letter with many questions I may not be able to answer it all at once. To get into such a disturbance over it and want to throw off the Yoga is quite unreasonable.

17-6-1933

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As to the book, I am afraid I have no time for such things. The twenty-four hours are already too short for what I have to do.

3-9-1930

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Good Lord! What can one write in 1 or 1 $^1/_2$ hours? If I could only get that time for immortal productions every day! Why in another three years *Savitri* and *Ilion* and I don't know how much more would be all rewritten, finished, resplendently complete.

6-12-1935

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Q: What has happened to my typescript? Hibernating?

A: My dear sir, if you saw me nowadays with my nose to paper from afternoon to morning, deciphering, deciphering, writing, writing, writing, even the rocky heart of a disciple would be touched and you would not talk about typescripts and hibernation. I have given up (for the present at least) the attempt to minimise the cataract of correspondence; I accept my fate like X with the plague of Prasads and admirers, but at least don't add anguish to annihilation by talking about typescripts.

9-3-1936

SRI KRISHNA AND CORRESPONDENCE

Q: Sri Krishna must have had more leisure than you have. In those days the art of writing had not developed so much and so he had not to reply to questions, though sometimes he had sudden calls as when Durvasa came with a host of thousands of disciples asking for food when there was not a morsel. Perhaps Sri Krishna had to perform more miracles than you have to, though I should not forget that constant calls must be coming to you also for help in illnesses and many others in many ways. Moreover, Sri Krishna never actually became a Guru of several people.

A: Well, he may have been rather wise in that and fortunate in the infrequency of correspondence in those days — but that did not save him. There is a poignant chapter in the Mahabharata

describing his miseries and bothers with his people in Dwarka which is very illuminating — unfortunately I have forgotten where it is. The calls don't matter much, for putting the Force is a subjective thing which does not take time, except in cases when it is a daily or frequently recurring difficulty. As for Durvasa if he turned up, it would be met by an order to X "Go and manage" or else an intimation to Durvasa not to be unreasonable.

4-9-1936

REASONS FOR RETIREMENT

My retirement is nothing new, even the cessation of contact by correspondence is nothing new, — it has been there now for a long time. I had to establish the rule not out of personal preference or likes or dislikes, but because the correspondence occupied the greater part of my time and energies and there was a danger of my real work remaining neglected or undone if I did not change my course and devote myself to it, while the actual results of the outer activity were very small — it cannot be said that it resulted in the Ashram making a great spiritual progress. Now in these times of world-crisis when I have to be on guard and concentrated all the time to prevent irremediable catastrophes and have still to be so, and when, besides, the major movement of the inner spiritual work needs an equal concentration and persistence, it is not possible for me to abandon my rule. (Moreover, even for the individual Sadhak it is in *his* interest that this major spiritual work should be done, for its success would create conditions under which his difficulties could be much more easily overcome.) All the same I have broken my rule, and broken it for you alone: I do not see how that can be interpreted as a want of love and a hard granite indifference.

29-5-1942

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No, there is no obligation of gloom, harshness, austerity or lonely grandeur in this Yoga. If I am living in my room, it is not out of passion for solitude, and it would be ridiculous to put for-

ward this purely external circumstance as if it were the obligatory sign of a high advance in the Yoga or solitude the aim. So you need not be anxious; solitude is not demanded of you.

1932

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I have no intention, I can assure you, of cutting off connection in the future. What restrictions there have been, were due to unavoidable causes. My retirement itself was indispensable; otherwise I would not be now where I am, that is, personally, near the goal. When the goal is reached, it will be different. If you had an unprecedented peace for so long a time, it was due to my persistent inner pressure; I refuse to give up all the credit to my double, Krishna.

14-8-1945

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The psychic is not responsible for my aloofness or retirement — it is the mass of opposition that I have to face which is responsible for that. It is only when I have overcome by the aid of the psychic and (excuse me!) your other *bête noire*, the Supermind, that the retirement can cease.

*

Q: I pray for Sri Aurobindo's Darshan once more before I leave. I know that it is against the rule but I hope you won't mind relaxing it for the sake of a Bhakta.

A: I am afraid it is impossible. No separate personal Darshan can be given at this stage — it is not a rule, it is a necessity for the work that Sri Aurobindo is doing.

17-8-1934

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Q: When will you come out of your retirement?

A: That is a thing of which nothing can be said at present. My

retirement had a purpose and that purpose must first be fulfilled.

25-8-1933

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Q: It would be very good if you could come out to give Darshan once a month instead of only three times a year. Is it possible?

A: If I went out once a month, the effect of my going out would be diminished by one third.

2-3-1933

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Q: Will you come out of your retirement after the supramental descent?

A: That will be decided after the descent.

23-9-1935

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Q: Sardar V asked X when you would come out and guide people. X replied that that was not to be expected. But perhaps V had a meaning in his question which X did not understand.

A: Perhaps not. V is not likely to understand more than others that a spiritual life can be led by me without a view to a comeback hereafter for the greatest good of the greatest India (or world). Tagore expected the latter and is much disappointed that I have not done it.

7-3-1935

SRI AUROBINDO'S LIGHT

Sri Aurobindo's light is not a light of the illumined mind — it is the divine Illumination which may act on any plane.

7-9-1933

Q: Two days back in a dream I saw Sri Aurobindo coming towards me. His body and dress were of blue colour. Why did I see him in this colour and not any other?

A: It is the basic light Sri Aurobindo manifests.

23-6-1933

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If it is pale blue, it may be my colour. Pale lavender blue, pale but very brilliant in its own shade.

6-8-1932

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It [the significance] depends on the shade of the blue. Ordinary pale blue is usually the light of the Illumined Mind or something of the Intuition. Whitish blue is Sri Aurobindo's light or Krishna's light.

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There are many blues and it is difficult to say which these are. Usually the deeper blue is Higher Mind, a paler blue is Illumined Mind — whitish blue Sri Krishna's Light (also called Sri Aurobindo's Light).

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The different blues mean different forces (the real blue has nothing to do with poison). The whitish blue is specially called my light — but it does not mean that that alone can come from me.

22-11-1933

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Q: Nowadays I see Sri Aurobindo's light for most of the time but in different forms — sometimes like a big star, sometimes like a moon, sometimes like a flash of light. Why do I not see it in the same form?

A: It varies according to the circumstances. Why should it be always the same?

21-4-1933

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Q: How can I receive Sri Aurobindo's light in the mind?

A: It can always come if you aspire patiently. But the basic condition, if you want that light, is to get rid of all other mental influences.

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Q: What is the meaning of "to get rid of all other mental influences"? Is it this that I had better not read any other books except Sri Aurobindo's or not try to learn anything by hearing or admiring others?

A: It is not a question of books or learning facts. When a woman loves or admires, her mind is instinctively moulded by the one she loves or admires, and this influence remains after the feeling itself has gone or appears to be gone. This does not refer to X's influence merely. It is the general rule given to keep yourself free from any other admiration or influence.

30-5-1932

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Q: As one approaches your photograph in the Reception Room, there is a feeling that it is an emanation of yours. There seems to be a special light in it.

A: The Sadhaks may themselves bring this light by approaching me through the photo.

24-8-1934

SOME VISIONS OF SRI AUROBINDO

Q: I looked at your photograph in the Reception Room

after meditation and clearly saw the portrait move its shoulders and as if breathing.

A: There was a movement in the vital plane and you opened to an inner vision of it.

22-3-1933

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Q: As I was sitting in prayer, I saw Sri Aurobindo in a vision coming down the staircase till he came just near to the floor. What does this mean?

A: It indicates perhaps the bringing of the Divine Consciousness down from level to level till it is now near the material.

23-9-1933

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Q: Today while meditating I saw in a vision that in Sri Aurobindo's light Nataraja Shiva was manifesting with many hands. What does this signify?

A: It is the sign of the manifestation.

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Q: Then I saw that in the sky Sri Aurobindo's light and red light were manifesting in the form of a globe. Does this signify the manifestation of Sri Aurobindo's divine light on the physical plane?

A: Yes.

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Q: Then I saw that Sri Aurobindo's light was manifesting on a sea along with another light of pale blue colour. Does this mean that in the vastness of consciousness Sri

Aurobindo's divine light is manifesting through the Intuitive Mind consciousness?

A: Yes.

15-10-1933

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Q: I saw Sri Aurobindo last night in a vision seated on a chair and writing something. Behind his head there was a circular green light. What does this mean?

A: The green light is that of a dynamic vital energy (of work). As I was writing — at work — it is natural that that light should be behind my head.

5-11-1933

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Q: Last night I had a dream that you had come out of your seclusion for once; you were tall, quite young, but very dark. I began to wonder if this was Sri Aurobindo of former years!

A: No. It is not likely. It is probably some subtle physical form — that one corresponding to the Shiva element in me. I have seen myself like that sometimes and it was always the Shiva formation.

11-12-1934

RIGHT USE OF VISIONS AND VOICES

Q: The visions and voices can help us to see or hear our Guru, to receive constant directions from you or the Mother for our Sadhana. Well, why can't you open me to them? I shall then have to trouble you much less with my crowd of questions. With this faculty you will always appear before me and talk to me!

A: I shall have first to be sure that you will make the right use of

them. I prefer that you should get higher discrimination and knowledge first.

9-7-1936

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X discouraged his disciples because his aim was the realisation of the inner Self and intuition — in other words the fullness of the spiritual Mind — visions and voices belong to the inner occult sense, therefore he did not want them to lay stress on it. I also discourage some from having any dealing with visions and voices because I see that they are being misled or in danger of being misled by false visions and false voices. That does not mean that visions and voices have no value.

9-7-1936

THE 15TH AUGUST DARSHAN

Q: X told me that only ten days were left for the August 15th Darshan. I replied that every day should be considered as the 15th.

A: That is the right attitude. Every day should be regarded as a day when a descent may take place or a contact established with the higher consciousness. Then the 15th itself would be more successful.

4-8-1934

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Q: During this Darshan, instead of Ananda, Force or Light I felt a great dryness.

A: It depends upon your condition whether the Ananda or Force or Light descends or whether the resistance rises. It is the resistance of the ordinary physical consciousness ignorant and obscure that seems to have risen in you. The period of 15th is a period of great descents but also of great resistances. This 15th was not an exception.

EVAPORATION OF AN EXPERIENCE AFTER DARSHAN

Q: When I came for your Darshan, it seemed as if it was Shiva himself I was seeing. I felt Ananda too. The consciousness of these things remained for two or three days, and then as if evaporated.

A: There is no reason to be discouraged by what you call the evaporation of the consciousness that you got on the Darshan day. It has not evaporated but drawn back from the surface. That usually happens when there is not the higher consciousness or some experience. What you have to learn is not to allow depression, but remain quiet allowing time for the assimilation and ready for fresh experience or growth *whenever* it comes.

USE OF SRI AUROBINDO'S FORCE

Certainly, my force is not limited to the Ashram and its conditions. As you know it is being largely used for helping the right development of the war and of change in the human world. It is also used for individual purposes outside the scope of the Ashram and the practice of Yoga; but that, of course, is silently done and mainly by a spiritual action. The Ashram, however, remains at the centre of the work and without the practice of Yoga the work would not exist and could not have any meaning or fruition.

13-3-1944

USE OF RUDRA POWER

I have dropped using the Rudra power; its effects used to be catastrophic, and now from a long disuse the inclination to use it has become rusty. Not that I am a convert to Satyagraha or Ahimsa: but Himsa too has its inconvenience. So the fires sleep.

SPIRITUAL STRENGTH AND RAJASIC VEHEMENCE

Zeal and enthusiasm are all right and very necessary but the spiritual condition combines calm with intensity. Psychic fire is different — what you are speaking of here is the rajasic vital fire of self-exertion, aggressive self-defence, exerting lawful rights, etc.

I speak from my own experience. I have solid strength, but I have not much of the fire that blazes out against anybody who does not give me lawful rights. Yet I do not find myself weak or a dead man. I have always made it a rule not to be restless in any way, to throw away restlessness — yet I have been able to use my solid strength whenever necessary. You speak as if rajasic force and vehemence were the only strength and all else is deadness and weakness. It is not so — the calm spiritual strength is a hundred times stronger; it does not blaze up and sink again — but is steady and unshakable and perpetually dynamic.

21-10-1933

CONCRETENESS OF YOGIC FORCE

The invisible Force producing tangible results both inward and outward is the whole meaning of the Yogic consciousness. Your question about Yoga bringing merely a feeling of Power without any result was really very strange. Who would be satisfied with such a meaningless hallucination and call it Power? If we had not had thousands of experiences showing that the Power within could alter the mind, develop its powers, add new ones, bring in new ranges of knowledge, master the vital movements, change the character, influence men and things, control the conditions and functionings of the body, work as a concrete dynamic Force on other forces, modify events, etc., etc., we would not speak of it as we do. Moreover, it is not only in its results but in its movements that the Force is tangible and concrete. When I speak of feeling Force of Power, I do not mean simply having a vague sense of it, but feeling it concretely and consequently being

able to direct it, manipulate it, watch its movement, be conscious of its mass and intensity and in the same way of that of other, perhaps opposing forces; all these things are possible and usual by the development of Yoga.

It is not, unless it is supramental Force, a Power that acts without conditions and limits. The conditions and limits under which Yoga or Sadhana has to be worked out are not arbitrary or capricious; they arise from the nature of things. These including the will, receptivity, assent, self-opening and surrender of the Sadhak have to be respected by the Yoga-force, unless it receives a sanction from the Supreme to override everything and get something done, but that sanction is sparingly given. It is only if the supramental Power came fully down, not merely sent its influences through the Overmind, that things could be very radically directed towards that object — for then the sanction would not be rare. For the Law of the Truth would be at work, not constantly balanced by the law of the Ignorance.

Still the Yoga-force is always tangible and concrete in the way I have described and has tangible results. But it is invisible — not like a blow given or the rush of a motor car knocking somebody down which the physical senses can at once perceive. How is the mere physical mind to know that it is there and working? By its results? But how can it know that the results were that of the Yogic force and not of something else? One of two things it must be. Either it must allow the consciousness to go inside, to become aware of inner things, to believe in the experience of the invisible and the supraphysical, and then by experience, by the opening of new capacities, it becomes conscious of these forces and can see, follow and use their workings, just as the Scientist uses the unseen forces of Nature. Or one must have faith and watch and open oneself and then it will begin to see how things happen, it will notice that when the Force was called in, there began after a time to be a result, then repetitions, more repetitions, more clear and tangible results, increasing frequency, increasing consistency of results, a feeling and awareness of the Force at work — until the experience becomes daily, regular, normal, complete. These are the two main methods, one internal, working from in outward, the other

external, working from outside and calling the inner force out till it penetrates and is visible in the exterior consciousness. But neither can be done if one insists always on the extrovert attitude, the external concrete only and refuses to join to it the internal concrete — or if the physical mind at every step raises a dance of doubts which refuses to allow the nascent experience to develop. Even the Scientist carrying on a new experiment would never succeed if he allowed his mind to behave in that way.

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Well, I made the mistake of "thinking aloud with my pen" when I wrote that unfortunate sentence[1] about the force I had put for the success of the gramophone. As my whole action consists of the use of force, — except, of course, my writing answers to correspondence which is concrete, but even that I am made to do by and with a force, otherwise I can assure you I would not and could not do it, — I am sometimes imprudent enough to make this mistake. It is foolish to do so because a spiritual force or any other is obviously something invisible and its action is invisible, so how can anyone believe in it? Only the results are seen and how is one to know that the results are the result of the force? It is not concrete.

But I am myself rather puzzled by your instances of the concrete. How are the schemes of a schemer concrete? Something happens and you tell me it was the result of a schemer's scheme. But the schemer's scheme was a product of his consciousness and not at all concrete; it was in his mind and another fellow's mind is not concrete to me unless I am a Yogi or a thought-reader. I can only infer from some things he said or did that he had a scheme, things which I have not myself seen or heard and which are therefore not to me concrete So how can I accept or believe in the scheme of the schemer? And even if I saw or heard, I am not bound to believe that it was a scheme or that which happened was the result of a scheme. He may have

[1] X had written to Sri Aurobindo that his gramophone records were proving a great success and were fast selling out, to which Sri Aurobindo had replied: "I am glad of that as I put much force for that result." X wrote back questioning the possibility of the force producing such a result, to which this letter is a reply.

acted on a chain of impulses and what happened may have been the result of something quite different or itself purely accidental. Again, how did you control the music choir? By word and signs etc. which are of course concrete. But what made you use those words and signs and why did they produce a control? And why did the other fellows do what you told them? What made them do that? It was something in your and their consciousness, I suppose; but that is not concrete. Again, scientists talk about electricity which is, it seems, an energy, a force in action and it seems that everything has been done by this energy, my own physical being is constituted by it and it is at the base of all my mental and life energies. But that is not concrete to me. I never felt my being constituted by electricity, I cannot feel it working out my thoughts and life processes — so how can I believe in it or accept it? The force I use is not a sweet blessing — a blessing (silent) certainly is not concrete, like a stone or a kick or other things seizable by the senses; it is not even a mere will saying within me "let it be so" — that also is not concrete. It is a force of consciousness directed towards or on persons and things and happenings — but obviously a force of consciousness is not seizable by the physical senses, so not concrete. I may feel it and the person acted on may feel it or may not feel it, but as the feeling is internal and not external and perceivable by others, it cannot be called concrete and nobody is bound to accept or believe in it. For instance, if I cure someone (without medicines) of a fever and send him fresh and full of strength to his work, all in the course of a single night, still why should any third person believe or accept that it was my force that did it? It may have been Nature or his imagination that made him cure (three cheers for those concrete things, imagination and Nature!) — or the whole thing happened of itself. So, you see the case is hopeless, it can't be proved at all — at all.

6-12-1935

SRI AUROBINDO'S FORCE, DIVINE FORCE AND YOGIC FORCE

The mistake is to think that it [Sri Aurobindo's Force] must be

either a miraculous force or else none. There is no miraculous force and I do not deal in miracles. The word Divine here is out of place if it is taken as an always omnipotently acting Power. Yogic Force is then better; it simply means a higher consciousness using its power, a spiritual and supraphysical force acting on the physical world directly. One has to train the instrument to be a channel of this force; it works also according to a certain law and under certain conditions. The Divine does not work arbitrarily or as a thaumaturge; He acts upon the world along the lines that have been fixed by the nature and purpose of the world we live in — by an increasing action of the thing that has to manifest, not by a sudden chance or disregard of all the conditions of the work to be done. If it were not so, there would be no need of Yoga or time or human action or instruments or of a Master and disciples or of a Descent or anything else. It could simply be a matter for the *tathāstu* and nothing more. But that would be irrational if you like and worse than irrational — "childish". This does not mean that interventions, things apparently miraculous, do not happen — they do. But all cannot be like that.

6-2-1935

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What is Sri Aurobindo's force? It is not a personal property of this body or mind. It is a higher Force used by me or acting through me. Of course it is a Divine Force, for there is only one force acting in the world, but it acts according to the nature of the instrument. Yogic Force is different from others because it is a special power of the spiritual consciousness.

There was an obvious intervention in the case he speaks of — but the agent or process could only be determined if one knew all the circumstances. Such interventions are frequent; e.g. my uncle's daughter was at her last gasp, the doctors had gone away telling him that there was no more to be done. He simply sat down to pray — as soon as he had finished, the death symptoms were suspended and the girl recovered without further treatment (it was a case of typhoid fever). Several cases of that kind have come within my personal observation.

I have marginalised on the Force — to write more completely would need more time than I have tonight. Of course, if it depended on a few cases of illness, it would be a thing of no certitude or importance. If the 'Force' were a mere freak or miracle, it would be equally trivial and unimportant, even if well-attested. It is only of importance if it is part of the consciousness and the life used at all times, not only for illness but for whatever one has to do. It manifests in various ways — as a strength of the consciousness evenly supporting the life and action, as a power put forth for this or that object of the outward life, as a special Force from above drawn down to raise and increase the scope of the consciousness and its height and transform not only by a miraculous but by a serious, steady organised action following certain definite lines. Its effectiveness as well as its action is determined first by its own height and intensity or that of the plane from which it comes (it may be from any plane ranging from the Higher Mind upward to the Overmind), partly by the condition of the objects or the field in which it acts, partly by the movement which it has to effect, general or particular. It is neither a magician's wand nor a child's bauble, but something one has to observe, understand, develop, master before one can use it aright or else — for few can use it except in a limited manner — be its instrument. This is only a preface.

6-2-1935

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I used the word preface to characterise the nature of what I had written, not in a prophetic sense.

There are two things — Yoga Force in its original totality which is that of the Divine spiritual Force, always potentially all-powerful, and Yoga Force doing its work under the conditions of the evolutionary world here.

It is not a question of 'can' or 'cannot' at all. All is possible, but all is not licit — except by a recognisable process; the Divine Power itself imposes on its action limits, processes, obstacles, vicissitudes. It is possible that an ass may be changed into an elephant, but it is not done, at least physically, because of the lack of a process. Psychologically such changes do take place.

I have myself in my time changed cowards into heroes and that can be done even without Yoga-Shakti, merely by an inner force. How can you say what is latent in man or what is incurably absent? I have developed many things by Yoga, often even without any will or effort to do so, which were not in my original nature. I may even say that I have transformed my whole nature and it is in many respects the opposite of what I began with. There can be no question about the power to change, to develop, to awaken faculties that were not there before; this power exists already, but it can be raised to an acme by being lifted to the spiritual plane....

The rest is for the indefinable future. One day I shall certainly try to explain methodically and by examples what the spiritual force is; how it has worked on the earth-plane, how it acts and under what conditions — conditions not rigidly fixed, but plastic and mutable.

6-2-1935

ELEMENTARY NOTIONS ABOUT THE ACTION OF SRI AUROBINDO'S FORCE

As to Force let me point out a few elementary notions which you ignore.

1. The Force is a divine Force, so obviously it can apply itself in any direction; it can inspire a poet, set in motion the soldier, doctor, scientist, everybody.

2. The Force is not a mental Force — it is not bound to go out from the Communicator with every detail mentally arranged, precise in its place, and communicate it mentally to the Recipient. It can go out as a global Force containing in itself the thing to be done, but working out the details in the Recipient and the action as the action progresses. It is not necessary for the Communicant to accompany mentally the Force, plant himself mentally in the mind of the Recipient and work out mentally there the details. He can send the Force or put on the Force, leave it to do its work and attend himself to other matters. In the world most things are worked out by such a global Force

containing the results in itself, but involved, concealed, and working them out in a subsequent operation. The seed contains the whole potentiality of the tree, the gene contains the potentiality of the living form that it initiates, etc., etc., but if you examine the seed and gene *ad infinitum*, still you will not find there either the tree or the living being. All the same the Force has put all these potentialities there in a certain evolution which works itself out automatically.

3. In the case of a man acting as an instrument of the Force the action is more complicated, because consciously or unconsciously the man must receive, also he must be able to work out what the Force puts through him. He is a living complex instrument, not a simple machine. So if he has responsiveness, capacity etc. he can work out the Force perfectly, if not he does it imperfectly or frustrates it. That is why we speak of and insist on the perfectioning of the instrument. Otherwise there would be no need of Sadhana or anything else — any fellow would do for any blessed work and one would simply have to ram things into him and see them coming out into action.

4. The Communicant need not be an all-round many-sided Encyclopaedia in order to communicate the Force for various purposes. If we want to help a lawyer to succeed in a case, we need not be perfect lawyers ourselves knowing all the law, Roman, English or Indian and supply him with all his arguments, questions etc., doing consciously and mentally through him his whole examinations, cross-examinations and pleading. Such a process would be absurdly cumbrous, incompetent and wasteful. The prearrangement of the eventual result and the capacity for making him work his instruments in the right way and for arranging events also so as to aid towards the result are put into the Force when it goes to him, they are therefore inherent in its action and the rest is a question of his own receptivity, experience etc. Naturally the best instrument even is imperfect (unless he is a perfected Adhar) and mistakes may be committed, other suggestions accepted etc., etc., but if the instrument is sufficiently open, the Force can set the thing to rights and the result still comes. In some or many cases the Force has to be renewed from time to time or supported by fresh Force. In some directions parti-

cular details have to be consciously attended to by the Communicant. All that depends on circumstances too multitudinous and variable to be reduced to rule. There are general lines, in these matters, but no rules; the working of non-mental Force has necessarily to be plastic, not rigid and tied to formulas. If you want to reduce things to patterns and formulas, you will necessarily fail to understand the workings of a spiritual (non-mental) Force.

5. All that I say here refers to spiritual Force. I am not speaking of the supramental.

6. Also please note that this is all about the working of Force on or through people: it has nothing to do with intuition which is quite another matter. Also it does not preclude always and altogether a plenary and detailed inspiration from a Communicant to a Recipient — such things happen, but it is not necessary to proceed in that way, nor below the Supermind or supramentalised Overmind can it be the ordinary process.

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If it [the latent medico] were there, I would develop that and run the Dispensary myself. What would be the need of a A or B or C?... What logic? Because Mother and myself are not engineers, therefore D can't develop the right intuition in engineering? or because neither I nor Mother are experts in Gujerati prosody, therefore E can't develop the inspiration for his poems?

Oh Lord! what a question! To guide internally is a million times easier than to guide externally. Let us suppose I want General X to beat Y's fellows back at Guadalagasu (please pronounce properly). I put the right force on him and he wakes up and, with his military knowledge and capacity, does the right thing and it is done. But if I, having no latent or patent military genius or knowledge in me, write to him saying "do this, do that", he won't do it and I would not be able to do it either. It is operations of two quite different spheres of consciousness. You absolutely refuse to make the necessary distinction between the two fields and their processes and then you jumble the two together and call it logic.

Intuition and revelation are inner things — they don't belong to the outer mind.... Do you imagine that I tell you inwardly or outwardly what expressions to use in your Bengali poems when you are writing? Still you write from an inspiration which I have set going.

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Q: When we were discussing a Spanish General you used the words: "the right Force". Why did you say "right"? Is there also a wrong Force?

A: Don't remember exactly what I wrote — can't say very well. But of course there can be a wrong Force. There are Asuric Forces, rajasic Forces, all sorts of Forces. Apart from that one can use a mental or vital Force which may not be the right thing. Or one may use the Force in such a way that it does not succeed or does not hit the General on the head or is not commensurate with the opposing Forces. (Opposing Forces need not be Asuric, they may be quite gentlemanly Forces thinking they are in the right. Or two Divine Forces might knock at each other for the fun of the thing. Infinite possibilities, sir, in the play of the Forces.)

What is a mistake? Evidently the Force used is always the Force that was destined to be used. If it succeeds, it does its work in the whole and if it fails it has also done its work in the whole. *Na tatra śocate budhaḥ.*[1]

In what way? A Force may be applied without any intuition — an intuition can come without any close connection with a Force, except the Force of intuition itself which is another matter. Moreover a Force may be applied from a higher plane than that of any Intuition.

17-4-1937

THE DIVINE'S USE OF DOCTORS

Q: I still can't understand why you should bother to

[1] The wise man grieves not over that.

follow us doctors. The Divine can very easily act from the supramental consciousness directly; you don't really need a diagnosis given by ordinary men!

A: If things were like that, why the devil should we have doctors or a dispensary at all? And what would have been the use of your 20,000? We don't propose to do the whole business of the inside and outside off our own bat. You are as necessary for this as X for the building or others for their work.

Who told you we are acting from supramental consciousness? We are not and cannot until the confounded quarrel with Matter is settled.

1-2-1935

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Q: What is this "confounded quarrel with Matter" you mention? Does this refer to the lower vital and physical movements of the Sadhaks?

A: I am not speaking of the Sadhaks, but the resistance of the Earth nature itself in its material parts. But these are things you people cannot understand unless you have less childlike notions about things.

2-2-1935

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Q: I am still wondering why there should be doctors and a dispensary at all! Isn't it a paradox — the Divine sending his disciples to the human physician?

A: Rubbish! This is a world of the play of the forces, sir, and the Doctor is a force. So why should not the Divine use him? Have you realised that if the Divine did everything, there would be no world, only a show of marionettes?

2-2-1935

USE OF SPIRITUAL FORCE FOR CURING ILLNESSES

I might say a word about Ramakrishna's attitude with regard

to the body. He seems always to have regarded it as a misuse of spiritual force to utilise it for preserving the body or curing its ailments or taking care for it. Other Yogis — I do not speak of those who think it justifiable to develop Yogic *siddhis* — have not had this complete disregard of the body: they have taken care to maintain it in good health and condition as an instrument or a physical basis for their development in Yoga. I have always been in agreement with this view: moreover, I have never had any hesitation in the use of a spiritual force for all legitimate purposes including the maintenance of health and physical life in myself and in others — that is indeed why the Mother gives flowers not only as a blessing but as a help in illness. I put a value on the body first as an instrument, *dharmasādhana*, or, more fully, as a centre of manifested personality in action, a basis of spiritual life and activity as of all life and activity upon the earth, but also because for me the body as well as the mind and life is a part of the Divine Whole, a form of the Spirit and therefore not to be disregarded or despised as something incurably gross and incapable of spiritual realisation or of spiritual use. Matter itself is secretly a form of the Spirit and has to reveal itself as that, can be made to wake to consciousness and evolve and realise the Spirit, the Divine within it. In my view the body as well as the mind and life has to be spiritualised or, one may say, divinised so as to be a fit instrument and receptacle for the realisation of the Divine. It has its part in the Divine Lila, even, according to the Vaishnava Sadhana, in the joy and beauty of Divine Love. That does not mean that the body has to be valued for its own separate sake or that the creation of a divine body in a future evolution of the whole being has to be contemplated as an end and not a means — that would be a serious error which would not be admissible. In any case, my speculations about an extreme form of divinisation are something in a far distance and are no part of the preoccupations of the spiritual life in the near future.

7-12-1949

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It is no doubt possible to draw the illnesses of others upon oneself

and even to do it deliberately, the instance of the Greek king Antigonus and his son Dimitrius is a famous historical case in point; Yogis also do this sometimes; or else adverse forces may throw illnesses upon the Yogi, using those round him as a door or a passage or the ill wishes of people as an instrumental force. But all these are special circumstances connected, no doubt, with his practice of Yoga; but they do not establish the general proposition as an absolute rule.... On the other side, there can be an opposite use and result of the Yogic consciousness: illness can be repelled from one's own body or cured, even chronic or deep-seated illnesses and long-established constitutional defects remedied or expelled and even a predestined death delayed for a long period. Narayan Jyotishi, a Calcutta astrologer, who predicted, not knowing then who I was, in the days before my name was politically known, my struggle with Mlechchha enemies and afterwards the three cases against me and my three acquittals, predicted also that though death was prefixed for me in my horoscope at the age of 63, I would prolong my life by Yogic power for a very long period and arrive at a full old age. In fact, I have got rid by Yogic pressure of a number of chronic maladies that had got settled in my body. But none of these instances either on the favourable or unfavourable side can be made into a rule; there is no validity in the tendency of human reason to transform the relativity of these things into an absolute.

8-12-1949

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As for the Force I use to cure people I shall see also whether I can explain what I mean by Force (the one I refer to is neither supramental nor omnipotent nor guaranteed to work like Beecham's pills in every case) and how it acts and in what conditions. I have tried it in hundreds of cases besides X's (on my own body first and always) and I have no doubt of its efficacy or reality under these conditions.

May, 1933

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I have not yet written about the Force because it is too complex

to be adequately stated in a short space and I had no time these days for anything long. Anyhow, the clue is that the Force does not act in a void and in an absolute way, like writing on a blank paper or on the air the : "Let there be Light and there was Light" formula. It comes as a Force intervening and acting on a very complex nexus of Forces that were in action and displacing their disposition and interrelated movement and natural result by a new disposition, movement and result.

It meets in so doing a certain opposition, very often a strong opposition from many of the forces already in possession and operation. To overcome it three factors are needed: (1) the power of the Force itself, i.e., its own sheer pressure and direct action on the field of action (here the man, his condition, his body); (2) the instrument (yourself); and (3) the instrumentation (treatment, medicine).

I have often used the Force alone, without any human instrument or outer means, but here all depends upon the recipient and his receptivity — unless, as in the case of healers, there are unseen beings or powers that assist.

If there is an instrument in direct touch with the patient, whether the doctors or one who can canalise the Force, then the action is immensely assisted, — how much depends on the instrument, his faith, his energy, his conveying power. Where there is a violent opposition, this is frequently not enough, or at least not enough for a rapid or total effect, the instrumentation (treatment or medicine) is needed. It is especially where the resistance of the body or the forces acting on the body-consciousness is strong that the medicine comes in as an aid.

But if the doctor is non-psychic or the medicine the wrong one or the treatment unplastic, then they become added resistance which the Force has to overcome.

This is a summary and a very inadequate statement, but it gives the main points, I believe.

24-1-1936

P.S. I forgot to say that the surroundings, especially the people around the patient, the atmosphere, the suggestions it

carries or they give to him, are often of a considerable importance.

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Speaking semi-seriously, I am not here to do miracles to order, but to try to get in a new consciousness somewhere in the world — which is itself however to attempt a miracle. If physical miracles happen to tumble in in the process, well and good, but you can't present your medical pistol in my face and call on me to stand and deliver. As for the Force, application of my force, short of the supramental, means always a struggle of forces and the success depends (1) on the strength and persistency of the force put out, (2) the receptivity of the subject, (3) the sanction of the Unmentionable — I beg your pardon, I meant the Unnameable, Ineffable, Unknowable. X's physical consciousness is rather obstinate, as you have noticed, and therefore not too receptive. It may feel the Mother inside it, but to obey her will or force is less habitual for it.

January, 1935

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As for me, I have no medico in me, not even a latent medico. If I had, I would not need the external one but diagnose, prescribe and cure all by my solitary self. My role in a medical case is to use the force either with or without medicines. There are three ways of doing that — one by putting the Force without knowing or caring what the illness is or following the symptoms — that however needs either the mental collaboration or acquiescence of the victim. The second is symptomatic, to follow the symptoms and act on them even if one is not sure of the disease. There an accurate report is very useful. The third needs a diagnosis — that is usually where the anti-forces are very strong and conscious or where the patient himself answers strongly to the suggestions of the illness and unwittingly resents the action of the Force. This last is usually indicated by the fact that the thing gets cured and comes back again or improves and swings back again to worse. It is especially the great difficulty in cases of

insanity and the like. Also in things where the nerves have a say — but in ordinary illnesses too.

2-2-1935

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Q: In the case of an illness, how do you...decide whether it is the recrudescence of an old illness or the action of a dark force or even some experience? From the description supplied to you?

A: Yes, certainly — just as you go by the symptoms of a case as seen by you and as related by the patient.

18-10-1936

HOMEOPATHY, ALLOPATHY AND OTHER MEDICAL SYSTEMS

Q: How can homeopathy cure diseases through merely the symptoms and without diagnosis?

A: Is it not the very principle of homeopathy that it cures the disease by curing the symptoms? I have always heard so. Do you deny that homeopaths acting on their own system, not on yours, have cured illnesses? If they have, is it not more logical to suppose that there is something in their system than to proclaim the sacrosanct infallibility of the sole all-allopathic system and its principle? For that matter I myself cure more often by attacking the symptoms than by any other way, because medical diagnosis is uncertain and fallible while the symptoms are there for everybody to see. Of course if a correct indisputable diagnosis is there, so much the better — the view can be more complete, the action easier, the result more sure. But even without infallible diagnosis one can act and get a cure.

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Q: A symptomatic treatment can't be applied in cases

where the same symptom is produced by two or three different diseases.

A: Why can't it? There is a possibility that you can strike at the cure, whatever it be, through the symptoms and you can kill the root through the stalk and leaves and not start by searching for the roots and digging them out. That at any rate is what I do.

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The universe is not shut up in the four walls of allopathic medicine. There are plenty of cases of illnesses being cured by other systems (not homeopathy alone) when they had defied the allopaths. My experience is not wide but I have come across a great number of such cases.

23-12-1935 — 26-12-1935

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Q: X [a homeopath] gives a high-blood-pressure patient on the verge of heart-failure "moderate" licence in eating, drinking etc. He calls it "leaving to Nature!"

A: Well, I have followed that system with myself and others and gone on the basis that Nature is very largely what you make of her or can make of her.

28-12-1935

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The Force needs an instrument and an instrumentation also sometimes. The instrument was X, the instrumentation partly at least his drugs. I don't believe in the story of the inefficiency of homeopathic drugs only because they are homeopathic. Also, I don't believe that X knows nothing about them and can't properly apply them. I have noted almost constantly that they have a surprising effect, sometimes instantaneous, sometimes rapid and this not in X's evidence alone, but in the statement of his

patients and the visible results. Not being an allopathic doctor, I can't ignore a fact like that.

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Tumour, syphilis etc. are specialities, but what I have found in my psycho-physical experience is that most disorders of the body are connected, though they go by families, but there is also connection between the families. If one can strike at their psycho-physical root, one can cure even without knowing the pathological whole of the matter and working through the symptoms as a possibility. Some medicines invented by demi-mystics have this power. What I am now considering is whether homeopathy has any psycho-physical basis. Was the founder a demi-mystic? I don't understand otherwise certain peculiarities of the way in which X's medicines act.

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> *Q: Why ignore wonderful things due to thousands of right diagnoses and let sporadic cases of error loom large in your eyes?*

A: Sporadic cases! I have heard of any number of them, they are as plentiful as blackberries in Europe. And as for the difference of diagnosis it is almost the rule except when doctors consult together and give concessions to each other. Don't try to throw allopathic dust in my eyes, sir! I have lived a fairly long time and seen something of the world before my retirement and much more after it.

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I have put down a few comments to throw cold water on all this blazing hot allopathism. But all these furious disputes seem to me now of little use. I have seen the working of both the systems and of others and I can't believe in the sole truth of any. The ones damnable in the orthodox view, entirely contradicting it,

have their own truth and succeed — also both the orthodox and heterodox fail. A theory is only a constructed idea-script which represents an imperfect human observation of a line of processes that Nature follows or can follow; another theory is a different idea-script of other processes that also she follows or can follow. Allopathy, homeopathy, naturopathy, osteopathy, Kaviraji, Hakimi have all caught hold of Nature and subjected her to certain processes; each has its successes and failures. Let each do its work in its own way. I do not see any need for fights and recriminations. For me all are only outward means and what really works are unseen forces from behind; as they act, the outer means succeed or fail — if one can make the process a right channel for the right force, then the process gets its full vitality — that's all.

BIRTHDAY-MESSAGES TO A SADHAK

A veil behind the heart, a lid over the mind divide us from the Divine. Love and devotion rend the veil, in the quietude of the mind the lid thins and vanishes.

9-9-1936

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May the inner Sun tranquillise and illumine the mind and awaken fully the heart and guide it.

9-9-1937

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In a quietude of the mind open to the presence of the Divine in your heart and everywhere; in a still mind and heart the Divine is seen like the sun in still water.

9-9-1938

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Rise into the higher consciousness, let its light control and transform the nature.

9-9-1939

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By the heart's self-giving the Presence and the Influence will be there even in the inconscience and prepare the nature for the true light and consciousness through the whole range of the being.

9-9-1940

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Put stress always on the aspiration within; let that get depth and steadiness in the heart; the outer obstacles of mind and the vital will recede of themselves with the growth of the heart's love and aspiration.

9-9-1941

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Keep the mind and heart open and turned inward and upward so that when the touch comes from within or the flow from above, you may be ready to receive it.

9-9-1942

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To persevere in turning towards the Light is what is most demanded. The Light is nearer to us than we think and at any time its hour may come.

9-9-1943

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To keep the soul ready for the Divine Grace so that it may be ready to receive it when it comes.

9-9-1944

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A persistent will for the work to be done in us and in the world is what is most needed; there is a sure spiritual result, the growth of the consciousness and the soul's readiness for the touch of the Divine's Light and Power.

9-9-1945

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When the Light enters into the Inconscience which hedges in all

our being and prevents or limits the manifestation of the true consciousness in us, when it inhibits the habits and recurrences and constant repetition of the same stimuli which besiege us and rise from the subconscient, then only can the nature be wholly free and respond only to the Truth from above.

9-9-1946

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Clarity of knowledge and inner self-vision, subjugation of the ego, love, scrupulousness in selfless and dedicated works, are the four wheels of the chariot of Yoga. One who has them will progress safely on the path.

9-9-1947

Section Six

THE POET AND THE CRITIC

THE POET AND THE CRITIC

READING AND POETIC CREATION AND YOGA

A literary man is one who loves literature and literary activities for their own separate sake. A Yogi who writes is not a literary man for he writes only what the inner Will and Word wants him to express. He is a channel and instrument of something greater than his own literary personality. Of course, the literary man and the intellectual love reading — books are their mind's food. But writing is another matter. There are plenty of people who never write a word in the literary way but are enormous readers. One reads for ideas, for knowledge, for the stimulation of the mind by all that the world has thought or is thinking. I never read in order to create. As the Yoga increased, I read very little — for when all the ideas in the world come crowding in from within or from above, there is not much need for gathering mental food from outside sources; at most a utility for keeping oneself informed of what is happening in the world, — but not as material for building up one's vision of the world and Truth and things. One becomes an independent mind in communion with the cosmic Thinker.

Poetry, even perhaps all perfect expression of whatever kind, comes by inspiration, not by reading. Reading helps only to acquire for the instrument the full possession of a language or to get the technique of literary expression. Afterwards one develops one's own use of the language, one's own style, one's own technique. It is a decade or two that I have stopped all but the most casual reading, but my power of poetic and perfect expression has increased tenfold. What I wrote with some difficulty, often with great difficulty, I now write with ease. I am supposed to be a philosopher, but I never studied philosophy — everything I wrote came from Yogic experience, knowledge and inspiration. So too my greater power over poetry and perfect expression was acquired in these last days not by reading and seeing how other people wrote, but from the heightening of my consciousness and the greater inspiration that came from the heightening.

Reading and painstaking labour are good for the literary man but even for him they are not the cause of his good writing, only an aid to it. The cause is within himself. As to "natural", I don't know. Sometimes when the talent is inborn and ready for expression, they can call it natural. Sometimes it awakes from within afterwards from a till then hidden nature.

11-9-1934

NATURAL GROWTH OF INBORN INTELLIGENCE

Q: How did your intellect become so powerful even before you started Yoga?

A: It was not any such thing before I started the Yoga. I started the Yoga in 1904 and all my work except some poetry was done afterwards. Moreover, my intelligence was inborn and so far as it grew before the Yoga, it was not by training but by a wide haphazard activity developing ideas from all things read, seen or experienced. That is not training, it is natural growth.

13-11-1936

Q: Can it be that in course of the Sadhana, one may have certain intellectual or other training by the direct power of Yoga? How did your own wide development come?

A: It came not by "training", but by the spontaneous opening and widening and perfecting of the consciousness in the Sadhana.

4-11-1936

DEVELOPMENT OF STYLE BY YOGIC FORCE

Q: For an effective style, reading is very necessary. In order to manufacture your style, which is incom-

parable, your enormous reading must have helped a lot, I am sure.

A: Excuse me! I never manufactured my style; style with any life in it cannot be manufactured. It is born and grows like any other living thing. Of course, it was fed on my reading which was not enormous — I have read comparatively little — (there are people in India who have read fifty times or a hundred times as much as I have), only I have made much out of that little. For the rest it is Yoga that has developed my style by the development of consciousness, fineness and accuracy of thought and vision, increasing inspiration and an increasing intuitive discrimination (self-critical) of right thought, word-form, just image and figure.

29-10-1935

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Q: Methinks you are making just a little too much of Yogic Force. Its potency as regards matters spiritual is undeniable, but for artistic or intellectual things one can't be so sure about its effectiveness. Take X's case; one could very well say: "Why give credit to the Force? Had he been as assiduous, sincere etc. elsewhere, he would have done just the same."

A: Will you explain to me how X who could not write a single good poem and had no power over rhythm and metre before he came here, suddenly, not after long "assiduous efforts" blossomed into a poet, rhythmist and metrist after he came here? Why was Tagore dumbfounded by a "lame man throwing away his crutches" and running freely and surely on the paths of rhythm? Why was it that I who never understood or cared for painting, suddenly in a single hour by an opening of vision got the eye to see and the mind of understanding about colour, line and design? How was it that I who was unable to understand and follow a metaphysical argument and whom a page of Kant or Hegel or Hume or even Berkeley left either dazed and uncomprehending and fatigued or totally uninterested because I could not fathom or

follow, suddenly began writing pages of the stuff as soon as I started the *Arya* and am now reputed to be a great philosopher? How is it that at a time when I felt it difficult to produce more than a paragraph of prose from time to time and more than a mere poem, short and laboured, perhaps one in two months, suddenly after concentrating and practising *prāṇāyāma* daily began to write pages and pages in a single day and kept sufficient faculty to edit a big daily paper and afterwards to write 60 pages of philosophy every month? Kindly reflect a little and don't talk facile nonsense. Even if a thing can be done in a moment or a few days by Yoga which would ordinarily take a long, "assiduous, sincere and earnest" cultivation, that would of itself show the power of the Yoga-force. But a faculty that did not exist appears quickly and spontaneously or impotence changes into highest potency or an obstructed talent changes with equal rapidity into fluent and facile sovereignty. If you deny that evidence, no evidence will convince you because you are determined to think otherwise.

1-11-1935

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Q: So about your style too, it is difficult to understand how much the Force has contributed towards its perfection.

A: It may be difficult for you to understand, but it is not difficult for me, since I have followed my own evolution from stage to stage with a perfect vigilance and following up of the process. I have made no endeavour in writing. I have simply left the higher Power to work and when it did not work, I made no efforts at all. It was in the old intellectual days that I sometimes tried to force things and not after I started the development of poetry and prose by Yoga. Let me remind you also that when I was writing the *Arya* and also since whenever I write these letters or replies, I never think or seek for expressions or try to write in good style; it is out of a silent mind that I write whatever comes ready-shaped from above. Even when I correct, it is because the correction comes in the same way. Where then is the place for

even a slight endeavour or any room at all for "my great endeavours"? Well?

By the way, please try to understand that the supra-intellectual (not the supramental only) is the field of a spontaneous automatic action. To get it or to get yourself open to it needs effort, but once it acts there is no effort. Your grey matter does not easily open; it closes up also too easily, so each time an effort has to be made, perhaps too much effort — if your grey matter would sensibly accommodate itself to the automatic flow there would not be the difficulty and the need of "assiduous, sincere and earnest endeavour" each time, methinks. Well?

I challenge your assertion that the Force is more easily potent to produce spiritual results than mental (literary) results. It seems to me the other way round. In my own case the first time I started Yoga, *prāṇāyāma*, etc., I laboured five hours a day for a long time and concentrated and struggled for five years without any least spiritual result, (when the spiritual experiences did come, they were as unaccountable and automatic as — as blazes), but poetry came like a river and prose like a flood and other things too that were mental, vital or physical, not spiritual richnesses or openings. I have seen in many cases an activity of the mind in various directions as the first or at least early result. Why? Because there is less resistance, more co-operation from the confounded lower members for these things than for a psychic or a spiritual change. That is easy to understand at least. Well?

1-11-1935

Q: I can quite understand that the inner knowledge comes with the growth and heightening of consciousness. But what about the outer knowledge — what we ordinarily call knowledge?

A: The capacity for it can come with the inner knowledge. E.g. I understood nothing about painting before I did Yoga. A moment's illumination in Alipore jail opened my vision and since then I have understood with the intuitive perception and vision. I do not know the technique, of course, but I can catch

it at once if anybody with knowledge speaks of it. That would have been impossible to me before.

29-12-1934

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Q: Suppose you had not studied English literature; would it be still possible for you to say something about it by Yogic experience?

A: Only by cultivating a special Siddhi, which would be much too bothersome to go after. But I suppose if I had got the Yogic knowledge (in your hypothetical case) it would be quite easy to add the outer one.

29-12-1934

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Q: When one hears that you had to plod through a lot, one wonders whether the story of Valmiki's sudden opening of poetic faculties is true — whether such a miracle is really possible.

A: Plod about what? For some things I had to plod — other things came in a moment or in two or three days like Nirvana or the power to appreciate painting. The "latent" philosopher failed to come out at the first shot (when I was in Calcutta) — after some years of incubation (?) it burst out like a volcano as soon as I started writing the *Arya*. There is no damned single rule for these things. Valmiki's poetic faculty might open suddenly like a champagne bottle, but it does not follow that everybody's will do like that.

1-4-1935

OPENING OF THE ARTISTIC EYE

Don't be desperate about your incapacity as a connoisseur of painting. I was far worse in this respect: knew something about sculpture, but blind to painting. Suddenly one day in the

Alipore jail while meditating I saw some pictures on the walls of the cell and lo and behold! the artistic eye in me opened and I knew all about painting except of course the more material side of the technique. I don't always know how to express though, because I lack the knowledge of the proper expressions, but that does not stand in the way of a keen and understanding appreciation. So, there you are: all things are possible in Yoga.

DIFFICULTY OF COMMANDING INSPIRATION

Inspiration is always a very uncertain thing; it comes when it chooses, stops suddenly before it has finished its work, refuses to descend when it is called. This is a well-known affliction, perhaps of all artists, but certainly of poets. There are some who can command it at will; those who, I think, are more full of an abundant poetic energy than careful for perfection; others who oblige it to come whenever they put pen to paper but with these the inspiration is either not of a high order or quite unequal in its levels. Again there are some who try to give it a habit of coming by always writing at the same time; Virgil with his nine lines first written, then perfected every morning, Milton with his fifty epic lines a day, are said to have succeeded in regularising their inspiration. It is, I suppose, the same principle which makes Gurus in India prescribe for their disciples a meditation at the same fixed hour every day. It succeeds partially of course, for some entirely, but not for everybody. For myself, when the inspiration did not come with a rush or in a stream, — for then there is no difficulty, — I had only one way, to allow a certain kind of incubation in which a large form of the thing to be done threw itself on the mind and then wait for the white heat in which the entire transcription could rapidly take place. But I think each poet has his own way of working and finds his own issue out of inspiration's incertitudes.

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X used to write ten or twelve poems in a day or any number more.

It takes me usually a day or two days to write and perfect one or three days even, or if very inspired I get two short ones out, and have thereafter to revise the next day. Another poet will be like Virgil writing nine lines a day and spending all the rest of his time polishing and polishing. A fourth will be like Y, as I knew him, setting down half lines and fragments and taking 2 weeks or 2 months to put them into shape. The time does not matter, getting it done and the quality alone matter. So forge ahead and don't be discouraged by the prodigious rapidity of X.

8-12-1935

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Considering that the Supramental Avatar himself is quite incapable of doing what X or Y do, i.e. producing a poem or several poems a day, why do you bring him in? In England indeed I could write a lot every day but most of that has gone to the Waste Paper Basket.

5-8-1936

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Poetry seems to have intervals in its visits to you very often. I rather think the malady is fairly common. X and Y who can write whenever they feel inclined are rare birds. I don't know about "the direction of consciousness". My own method is not to quiet the mind, for it is eternally quiet, but to turn upward and inward. You, I suppose, would have to quiet it first, which is not always easy. Have you tried it?

1935

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I myself have more than once abstained for some time from writing because I did not wish to produce anything except as an expression from a higher plane of consciousness but to do that you must be sure of your poetic gift, that it will not rust by too long a disuse.

4-9-1931

REWRITING POETRY

Q: We have been wondering why you should have to write and rewrite your poetry — for instance, "Savitri" ten or twelve times — when you have all the inspiration at your command and do not have to receive it with the difficulty that faces budding Yogis like us.

A: That is very simple. I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I rewrote from that level. Moreover I was particular — if part seemed to me to come from any lower levels I was not satisfied to leave it because it was good poetry. All had to be as far as possible of the same mint. In fact *Savitri* has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one's own Yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative. I did not rewrite *Rose of God* or the sonnets except for two or three verbal alterations made at the moment.

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Q: If X could receive his inspiration without any necessity for rewriting, why not you?

A: So could I if I wrote every day and had nothing else to do and did not care what the level of inspiration was so long as I produced something exciting.

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Q: Do you have to rewrite because of some obstruction in the way of the inspiration?

A: The only obstruction is that I have no time to put myself constantly into the poetic creative posture and if I write at all have to get out something in the intervals of quite another concentration.

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Q: With your silent consciousness it should be possible to draw from the highest planes with the least concentration.

A: The highest planes are not so accommodating as all that. If they were so, why should it be so difficult to bring down and organise the Supermind in the physical consciousness? What happy-go-lucky fancy-web-spinning ignoramuses you all are! You speak of silence, consciousness, overmental, supramental, etc., as if they were so many electric buttons you have only to press and there you are. It may be one day but meanwhile I have to discover everything about the working of all possible modes of electricity, all the laws, possibilities, perils etc., construct modes of connection and communication, make the whole far-wiring system, try to find out how it can be made foolproof and all that in the course of a single lifetime. And I have to do it while my blessed disciples are firing off their gay or gloomy *a priori* reasonings at me from a position of entire irresponsibility and expecting me to divulge everything to them not in hints but at length. Lord God *in omnibus*!

29-3-1936

Q: A great bother and an uninteresting business, this chiselling, I find. But perhaps it is very pleasant to you, as you cast and recast ad infinitum, *we hear, poetry or prose.*

A: Poetry only, not prose. And in poetry only one poem *Savitri*. My own other poems are written off at once and if any changes are to be made it is done the same day or the next day and very rapidly done.

9-5-1937

EFFORT AND INSPIRATION

Q: As regards poetry, inspiration exists, so also effort.

The first leaves one sometimes and one goes on beating and beating, hammering and hammering, but it comes not!

A: Exactly. When any real effect is produced, it is not because of the beating and the hammering, but because an inspiration slips down between the raising of the hammer and the falling and gets in under cover of the beastly noise. It is when there is no need of effort that the best comes. Effort is all right, but only as an excuse for inducing the Inspiration to come. If it wants to come, it comes, if it doesn't, it doesn't and one is obliged to give up after producing nothing or an inferior mind-made something. I have had that experience often enough myself. I have seen X also often producing something good but not perfect, beating the air and hammering it with proposed versions each as bad as the other; for it is only a new inspiration that can really improve a defect in the transcription of the first one. Still one makes efforts, but it is not the effort that produces the result but the inspiration that comes in answer to it. You knock at the door to make the fellow inside answer. He may or he may not; if he lies mum, you have only to walk off, swearing. That's effort and inspiration.

6-3-1936

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Q: Do you mean that this method [to "sit in vacant meditation and see what comes from the intuitive Gods"] can really do something? I understand that you wrote many things in that way, but people also say that Gods — no, Goddesses used to come and tell you the meaning of Vedas.

A: It was a joke. But all the same that is the way things are supposed to come. When the mind becomes decently quiet, an intuition perfect or imperfect is supposed to come hopping along and jump in and look round the place. Of course, it is not the only way. People tell a stupendous amount of rubbish. I wrote everything I have written since 1909 in that way, i.e. out of or

rather through a silent mind, and not only a silent mind but a silent consciousness. But Gods and Goddesses had nothing to do with the matter.

22-10-1935

PRESSURE OF CREATIVE FORMATION

I know very well this pressure of a creative formation to express itself and be fulfilled. When it presses like that there is nothing to do but to let it have its way, so as to leave the mind unoccupied and clear; otherwise it will be pushed two ways and would not be in the condition of ease necessary for concentration.

POETIC INSPIRATION AND PROSE-WORK

Q: I am at present too much caught in the prose-work. No wonder poetry is impossible. I suppose the prose has to run its course before the poetic inspiration gets a chance to return?

A: Why the deuce should your poetic inspiration wait for the results of the prose canter? The ground being still cumbered ought to be no obstacle to an aerial flight.

16-3-1935

MANIA OF SELF-DEPRECIATORY CRITICISM

You seem to suffer from a mania of self-depreciatory criticism. Many artists and poets have that; as soon as they look at their work they find it awfully poor and bad. (I had that myself often varied with the opposite feeling. X also has it); but to have it while writing is its most excruciating degree of intensity. Better get rid of it if you want to write freely.

14-12-1936

NEED TO LIMIT FIELDS FOR SUCCESS IN WRITING

Q: I have such a push to write poetry, stories, all kinds of things, in Bengali!

A: Ambitions of that kind are too vague to succeed. You have to limit your fields and concentrate in order to succeed in them. I don't make any attempt to be a scientist or painter or general. I have certain things to do and have done them, so long as the Divine wanted; others have opened in me from above or within by Yoga. I have done as much of them as the Divine wanted.

Q: To try to be a literary man and yet not to know what big literary people have contributed would be inexcusable.

A: Why is it inexcusable? I don't know what the Japanese or the Soviet Russian writers have contributed, but I feel quite happy and moral in my ignorance. As for reading Dickens in order to be a literary man that's a strange idea. He was the most unliterary bloke that ever succeeded in literature and his style is a howling desert.

19-9-1936

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Q: What about planning to read Meredith, Hardy, Shelley, Keats and the Continental and Russian writers?

A: Lord, sir, I wish I had time to follow out a programme as massive as yours. I have none even to dilate upon yours.

GAPS IN CULTURE

Q: You have nowhere said anything about Firdausi, the epic poet of Persia, author of Shahnameh? Would

you rank him with the other epic poets whom you consider absolutely first-rate — Homer, Valmiki, Vyasa? How is it that you who have made your own culture so wide by means of learning so many languages have allowed a serious gap in it by not knowing Persian?

A: I read Firdausi in a translation long ago but it gave me no idea at all of the poetic qualities of the original. As for gaps in the culture — well, I don't know Russian or Finnish (missing the *Kalevala*) and haven't read the *Nibelungenlied* in the original, nor for that matter Pentaur's poem on the conquests of Rameses in ancient Egyptian or at least the fragment that survives. I don't know Arabic either, but I don't mind that, having read Burton's translation of the Arabian Nights which is as much a classic as the original. Anyhow, the gaps are vast and many.

13-7-1937

INSPIRATION AND TECHNIQUE

You do not need at all to afflict your inspiration by studying metrical technique — you have all the technique you need, within you. I have *never* studied prosody myself — in English, at least; what I know I know by reading and writing and following my ear and using my intelligence. If one is interested in the technical study of prosody for its own sake, that is another matter — but it is not at all indispensable.

28-4-1934

LITERALNESS IN TRANSLATION

The proper rule about literalness in translation, I suppose, is that one should keep as close as possible to the original provided the result does not read like a translation but like an original poem in Bengali, and, as far as possible, as if it were the original poem originally written in Bengali.

I admit that I have not practised what I preached, — when-

ever I translated I was careless of the hurt feelings of the original text and transmogrified it without mercy into whatever my fancy chose. But that is a high and mighty criminality which one ought not to imitate. Latterly I have tried to be more moral in my ways, I don't know with what success. But anyhow it is a case of "Do what I preach and avoid what I practise."

10-10-1934

TRANSLATION OF PROSE INTO POETRY

I think it is quite legitimate to translate poetic prose into poetry; I have done it myself when I translated *The Hero and the Nymph* on the ground that the beauty of Kalidasa's prose is best rendered by poetry in English, or, at least, that I found myself best able to render it in that way. Your critic's rule seems to me rather too positive; like all rules it may stand in principle in a majority of cases, but in the minority (which is the best part, for the less is often greater than the more) it need not stand at all. Pushed too far, it would mean that Homer and Virgil can be translated only in hexameters. Again, what of the reverse cases — the many fine prose translations of poets so much better and more akin to the spirit of the original than any poetic version of them yet made? One need not go farther than Tagore's English version of his Gitanjali. If poetry can be translated so admirably (and therefore legitimately) into prose, why should not prose be translated legitimately (and admirably) into poetry? After all, rules are made more for the convenience of critics than as a binding law for creators.

TRANSLATIONS OF "VIKRAMORVASIE" AND "MEGHADUT"

Q: It is curious how you repeatedly forget that you have so wonderfully Englished Kalidasa's "Vikramorvasie" or "The Hero and the Nymph". Once before also I had to remind you of it. Surely it cannot be that you want

it to be rejected? By the way, you are supposed also to have translated Kalidasa's "Meghadut" or "The Cloud-Messenger" — in terza rima.

A: No, I do not reject *The Hero and the Nymph.* I had merely forgotten all about it.... I did translate the *Meghadut,* but it was lost by the man with whom I kept it.

5-7-1933

REWRITING SHELLEY

Q: In Shelley's "Skylark" my heart does not easily melt towards one simile —

Like a high-born maiden
In a palace-tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower.

Sometimes I am inclined even to feel this is an atrocity. Then I wonder whether the sentimental stuff shouldn't be cut out and replaced by something deeper although in Shelley's style as much as possible — something like:

Like a child who wanders
In an ancient wood
Where the strange glow squanders
All its secret mood
Upon her lilting soul lost in that solitude.

A: The attempt to rewrite Shelley better than Shelley himself is a rash and hopeless endeavour. Your proposed stanza is twentieth century mysticism quite out of place in the *Skylark* and has not the simple felicity and magic and music of Shelley's verse. I fail to see why the high-born maiden is an atrocity —

it expresses the romantic attitude towards love which was sentimental and emotional, attempting to lift it out of the coarseness of life into a mental-vital idealism which was an attempt to resuscitate the attitude of chivalry and the troubadours. Romantic and unreal, if you like, but not atrocious.

8-11-1934

COMMENTS ON CRITICISMS[1]

The...letter was to be, as I suggested, "between ourselves"; there is too much that is private and personal in it for publicity. It is something that can be shown to those who can appreciate and understand, but to an ordinary reader I might seem to be standing on my defence rather than attacking and demolishing a criticism which might damage the appreciation of it in readers who are not sure of their own critical standard and reliability of their taste and so might be shaken by well-phrased judgments and plausible reasonings such as X's: they might make the same confusion as X himself between an apology and an apologia. An idea might rise that I am not sure of the value of my own poetry especially the earlier poetry and accept his valuation of it. The humility you speak of is very largely a Socratic humility, the element of irony in it is considerable; but readers not accustomed to fineness of shades might take it literally and conclude wrongly that I accepted the strictures passed by an unfavourable criticism. A poet who puts no value or a very low value on his own writing has no business to write poetry or to publish it or keep it in publication; if I allowed the publication of the *Collected Poems* it is because I judged them worth publishing. Y's objection has therefore some value. On the other hand in

[1] In a long letter dated 4-5-1947 Sri Aurobindo gave his comments on certain criticisms made against his poetry by a friend of a Sadhak-poet apropos of a book by him on Sri Aurobindo's poetry. The Sadhak-poet had asked Sri Aurobindo's permission to show this letter to his friend, but in a second letter dated 7-7-1947 Sri Aurobindo had explained the reasons why he did not favour the idea of making it public. Since, however, any possibility of the first long letter being misconstrued is removed if it is read along with the second explanatory letter, it has been thought fit to publish it, especially as it contains extremely valuable data relating to Sri Aurobindo's own literary development. The letter dated 7-7-1947 is placed here first followed by the long letter dated 4-5-1947.

defending I may seem to be eulogising my own work, which is not a thing that can be done in public even if a poet's estimate of his achievement is as self-assured as that of Horace, *Exegi monumentum aere perennius*, or as magnificent as Victor Hugo's. Similarly, the reply was not meant for X himself and I do not think the whole can be shown to him without omissions or some editing, but if you wish and if you think that he will not resent any strictures I have made you can show to him the passages relevant to his criticisms.

7-7-1947

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You have asked me to comment on your friend X's comments on my poetry and especially on *Savitri*. But, first of all, it is not usual for a poet to criticise the criticisms of his critics though a few perhaps have done so; the poet writes for his own satisfaction, his own delight in poetical creation or to express himself and he leaves his work for the world, and rather for posterity than for the contemporary world, to recognise or to ignore, to judge and value according to its perception or its pleasure. As for the contemporary world he might be said rather to throw his poem in its face and leave it to resent this treatment as an unpleasant slap, as a contemporary world treated the early poems of Wordsworth and Keats, or to accept it as an abrupt but gratifying attention, which was ordinarily the good fortune of the great poets in ancient Athens and Rome and of poets like Shakespeare and Tennyson in modern times. Posterity does not always confirm the contemporary verdict, very often it reverses it, forgets or depreciates the writer enthroned by contemporary fame, or raises up to a great height work little appreciated or quite ignored in its own time. The only safety for the poet is to go his own way careless of the blows and caresses of the critics; it is not his business to answer them. Then you ask me to right the wrong turn your friend's critical mind has taken; but how is it to be determined what is the right and what is the wrong turn, since a critical judgment depends usually on a personal reaction determined by the critic's temperament or the aesthetic trend in him or by values, rules or canons which are settled for his intellect and

agree with the viewpoint from which his mind receives whatever comes to him for judgment; it is that which is right for him though it may seem wrong to a different temperament, aesthetic intellectuality or mental viewpoint. Your friend's judgments, according to his own account of them, seem to be determined by a sensitive temperament finely balanced in its own poise but limited in its appreciations, clear and open to some kinds of poetic creation, reserved towards others, against yet others closed and cold or excessively depreciative. This sufficiently explains his very different reactions to the two poems, *Descent* and *Flame-Wind*,[1] which he unreservedly admires and to *Savitri*. However, since you have asked me, I will answer, as between ourselves, in some detail and put forward my own comments on his comments and my own judgments on his judgments. It may be rather long; for if such things are done, they may as well be clearly and thoroughly done. I may also have something to say about the nature and intention of my poem and the technique necessitated by the novelty of the intention and nature.

Let me deal first with some of the details he stresses so as to get them out of the way. His detailed intellectual reasons for his judgments seem to me to be often arbitrary and fastidious, sometimes based on a misunderstanding and therefore invalid or else valid perhaps in other fields but here inapplicable. Take, for instance, his attack upon my use of the prepositional phrase. Here, it seems to me, he has fallen victim to a grammatical obsession and lumped together under the head of the prepositional twist a number of different turns some of which do not belong to that category at all. In the line,

> Lone on my summits of calm I have brooded
> with voices around me,[2]

there is no such twist; for I did not mean at all "on my calm summits", but intended straightforwardly to convey the natural, simple meaning of the word. If I write "the fields of beauty" or "walking on the paths of truth" I do not expect to be supposed to mean "in beautiful fields" or "in truthful paths"; it is the

[1] *Collected Poems* (Centenary Edition, 1972), pp. 563 and 559.

[2] Not in *Savitri* but in *Trance of Waiting*. See *ibid.*, p. 558.

same with "summits of calm", I mean "summits of calm" and nothing else; it is a phrase like "He rose to high peaks of vision" or "He took his station on the highest summits of knowledge". The calm is the calm of the highest spiritual consciousness to which the soul has ascended, making those summits its own and looking down from their highest heights on all below: in spiritual experience, in the occult vision or feeling that accompanies it, this calm is not felt as an abstract quality or a mental condition but as something concrete and massive, a self-existent reality to which one reaches, so that the soul standing on its peak is rather a tangible fact of experience than a poetical image. Then there is the phrase "A face of rapturous calm"[1]: he seems to think it is a mere trick of language, a substitution of a prepositional phrase for an epithet, as if I had intended to say "a rapturously calm face" and I said instead "a face of rapturous calm" in order to get an illegitimate and meaningless rhetorical effect. I meant nothing of the kind, nothing so tame and poor and scanty in sense: I meant a face which was an expression or rather a living image of the rapturous calm of the supreme and infinite consciousness, — it is indeed so that it can well be "Infinity's centre". The face of the liberated Buddha as presented to us by Indian art is such an expression or image of the calm of Nirvana and could, I think, be quite legitimately described as a face of Nirvanic calm, and that would be an apt and live phrase and not an ugly artifice or twist of rhetoric. It should be remembered that the calm of Nirvana or the calm of the supreme Consciousness is to spiritual experience something self-existent, impersonal and eternal and not dependent on the person — or the face — which manifests it. In these two passages I take then the liberty to regard X's criticism as erroneous at its base and therefore invalid and inadmissible.

Then there are the lines from the *Songs of the Sea*:

> The rains of deluge flee, a storm-tossed shade,
> Over thy breast of gloom...[2]

[1] *Savitri* (Centenary Edition, 1972), p. 4.
Infinity's centre, a Face of rapturous calm
Parted the eternal lids that open heaven.

[2] *Translations* (Centenary Edition, 1972), p. 366.

"Thy breast of gloom" is not used here as a mere rhetorical and meaningless variation of "thy gloomy breast"; it might have been more easily taken as that if it had been a human breast, though even then, it could have been entirely defensible in a fitting context; but it is the breast of the sea, an image for a vast expanse supporting and reflecting or subject to the moods or movements of the air and the sky. It is intended, in describing the passage of the rains of deluge over the breast of the sea, to present a picture of a storm-tossed shade crossing a vast gloom: it is the gloom that has to be stressed and made the predominant idea and the breast or expanse is only its support and not the main thing: this could not have been suggested by merely writing "thy gloomy breast". A prepositional phrase need not be merely an artificial twist replacing an adjective; for instance, "a world of gloom and terror" means something more than "a gloomy and terrible world", it brings forward the gloom and terror as the very nature and constitution, the whole content of the world and not merely an attribute. So also if one wrote "Him too wilt thou throw to thy sword of sharpness" or "cast into thy pits of horror", would it merely mean "thy sharp sword" and "thy horrible pits"? and would not the sharpness and the horror rather indicate or represent formidable powers of which the sword is the instrument and the pits the habitation or lair? That would be rhetoric but it would be a rhetoric not meaningless but having in it meaning and power. Rhetoric is a word with which we can batter something we do not like; but rhetoric of one kind or another has been always a great part of the world's best literature; Demosthenes, Cicero, Bossuet and Burke are rhetoricians, but their work ranks with the greatest prose styles that have been left to us. In poetry the accusation of rhetoric might be brought against such lines as Keats'

> Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
> No hungry generations tread thee down....

To conclude, there is "the swords of sheen" in the translation of *Bandè Mataram*.[1] That might be more open to the critic's stric-

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 309.

ture, for the expression can be used and perhaps has been used in verse as merely equivalent to "shining swords"; but for anyone with an alert imagination it can mean in certain contexts something more than that, swords that emit brilliance and seem to be made of light. X says that to use this turn in any other than an adjectival sense is unidiomatic, but he admits that there need be no objection provided that it creates a sense of beauty, but he finds no beauty in any of these passages. But the beauty can be perceived only if the other sense is seen, and even then we come back to the question of personal reaction; you and other readers may feel beauty where he finds none. I do not myself share his sensitive abhorrence of this prepositional phrase; it may be of course because there are coarser rhetorical threads in my literary taste. I would not, for instance, shrink from a sentence like this in a sort of free verse, "Where is thy wall of safety? Where is thy arm of strength? Whither has fled thy vanished face of glory?" Rhetoric of course, but it has in it an element which can be attractive, and it seems to me to bring in a more vivid note and mean more than "thy strong arm" or "thy glorious face" or than "the strength of thy arm" and "the glory of thy face".

I come next to the critic's trenchant attack on that passage in my symbolic vision of Night and Dawn in which there is recorded the conscious adoration of Nature when it feels the passage of the omniscient Goddess of eternal Light. Trenchant, but with what seems to me a false edge; or else if it is a sword of Damascus that would cleave the strongest material mass of iron he is using it to cut through subtle air, the air closes behind his passage and remains unsevered. He finds here only poor and false poetry, unoriginal in imagery and void of true wording and true vision, but that is again a matter of personal reaction and everyone has a right to his own, you to yours as he to his. I was not seeking for originality but for truth and the effective poetical expression of my vision. He finds no vision there, and that may be because I could not express myself with any power; but it may also be because of his temperamental failure to feel and see what I felt and saw. I can only answer to the intellectual reasonings and judgments which turned up in him when he tried to find the causes of his reaction. These seem to me to be either fasti-

dious and unsound or founded on a mistake of comprehension and therefore invalid or else inapplicable to this kind of poetry. His main charge is that there is a violent and altogether illegitimate transference of epithet in the expression "the wide-winged hymn of a great priestly wind"[1]. A transference of epithet is not necessarily illegitimate, especially if it expresses something that is true or necessary to convey a sound feeling and vision of things: for instance, if one writes in an Ovidian account of the *dénouement* of a lovers' quarrel

> In spite of a reluctant sullen heart
> My willing feet were driven to thy door,

it might be said that it was something in the mind that was willing and the ascription of an emotion or state of mind to the feet is an illegitimate transfer of epithet; but the lines express a conflict of the members, the mind reluctant, the body obeying the force of the desire that moves it and the use of the epithet is therefore perfectly true and legitimate. But here no such defence is necessary because there is no transfer of epithets. The critic thinks that I imagined the wind as having a winged body and then took away the wings from its shoulders and clapped them on to its voice or hymn which could have no body. But I did nothing of the kind; I am not bound to give wings to the wind. In an occult vision the breath, sound, movement by which we physically know of a wind is not its real being but only the physical manifestation of the wind-god or the spirit of the air, as in the Veda the sacrificial fire is only a physical birth, temporary body or manifestation of the god of Fire, Agni. The gods of the Air and other godheads in the Indian tradition have no wings, the Maruts or storm-gods ride through the skies in their galloping chariots with their flashing golden lances, the beings of the middle world in the Ajanta frescoes are seen moving through the air not with wings but with a gliding natural motion proper to ethereal bodies. The epithet "wide-winged" then does not belong to the wind and is not transferred from it, but is proper to the voice of the wind which takes the form of a conscious hymn of

[1] *Savitri*, p. 4.

aspiration and rises ascending from the bosom of the great priest, as might a great-winged bird released into the sky and sinks and rises again, aspires and fails and aspires again on the "altar hills". One can surely speak of a voice or a chant of aspiration rising on wide wings and I do not see how this can be taxed as a false or unpoetic image. Then the critic objects to the expression "altar hills" on the ground that this is superfluous as the imagination of the reader can very well supply this detail for itself from what has already been said: I do not think this is correct, a very alert reader might do so but most would not even think of it, and yet the detail is an essential and central feature of the thing seen and to omit it would be to leave a gap in the middle of the picture by dropping out something which is indispensable to its totality. Finally he finds that the line about the high boughs praying in the revealing sky does not help but attenuates, instead of more strongly etching the picture. I do not know why, unless he has failed to feel and to see. The picture is that of a conscious adoration offered by Nature and in that each element is conscious in its own way, the wind and its hymn, the hills, the trees. The wind is the great priest of this sacrifice of worship, his voice rises in a conscious hymn of aspiration, the hills offer themselves with the feeling of being an altar of the worship, the trees lift their high boughs towards heaven as the worshippers, silent figures of prayer, and the light of the sky into which their boughs rise reveals the Beyond towards which all aspires. At any rate this "picture" or rather this part of the vision is a complete rendering of what I saw in the light of the inspiration and the experience that came to me. I might indeed have elaborated more details, etched out at more length but that would have been superfluous and unnecessary; or I might have indulged in an ampler description but this would have been appropriate only if this part of the vision had been the whole. This last line[1] is an expression of an experience which I often had whether in the mountains or on the plains of Gujarat or looking from my window in Pondicherry not only in the dawn but at other times and I am unable to find any feebleness either in the experience or in the words that express it. If the critic or any reader does not feel or see what I so often

[1] The high boughs prayed in a revealing sky. — *Ibid.*

felt and saw, that may be my fault, but that is not sure, for you and others have felt very differently about it; it may be a mental or a temperamental failure on their part and it will be then my or perhaps even the critic's or reader's misfortune.

I may refer here to X's disparaging characterisation of my epithets. He finds that their only merit is that they are good prose epithets, not otiose but right words in their right place and exactly descriptive but only descriptive without any suggestion of any poetic beauty or any kind of magic. Are there then prose epithets and poetic epithets and is the poet debarred from exact description using always the right word in the right place, the *mot juste*? I am under the impression that all poets, even the greatest, use as the bulk of their adjectives words that have that merit, and the difference from prose is that a certain turn in the use of them accompanied by the power of the rhythm in which they are carried lifts all to the poetic level. Take one of the passages I have quoted from Milton,

> On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues...
>
> Blind Thamyris and blind Maeonides
> And Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old,

here the epithets are the same that would be used in prose, the right word in the right place, exact in statement, but all lies in the turn which makes them convey a powerful and moving emotion and the rhythm which gives them an uplifting passion and penetrating insistence. In more ordinary passages such as the beginning of *Paradise Lost* the epithets "forbidden tree" and "mortal taste" are of the same kind, but can we say that they are merely prose epithets, good descriptive adjectives and have no other merit? If you take the lines about Nature's worship in *Savitri*, I do not see how they can be described as prose epithets; at any rate I would never have dreamt of using in prose unless I wanted to write poetic prose such expressions as "wide-winged hymn" or "a great priestly wind" or "altar hills" or "revealing sky"; these epithets belong in their very nature to poetry alone whatever may be their other value or want of value. He says they

are obvious and could have been supplied by any imaginative reader; well, so are Milton's in the passages quoted and perhaps there too the very remarkable imaginative reader whom X repeatedly brings in might have supplied them by his own unfailing poetic verve. Whether they or any of them prick a hidden beauty out of the picture is for each reader to feel or judge for himself; but perhaps he is thinking of such things as Keats' "magic casements" and "foam of perilous seas" and "fairy lands forlorn", but I do not think even in Keats the bulk of the epithets are of that unusual character.

I have said that his objections are sometimes inapplicable. I mean by this that they might have some force with regard to another kind of poetry but not to a poem like *Savitri.* He says, to start with, that if I had had a stronger imagination, I would have written a very different poem and a much shorter one. Obviously, and to say it is a truism; if I had had a different kind of imagination, whether stronger or weaker, I would have written a different poem and perhaps one more to his taste; but it would not have been *Savitri.* It would not have fulfilled the intention or had anything of the character, meaning, world-vision, description and expression of spiritual experience which was my object in writing this poem. Its length is an indispensable condition for carrying out its purpose and everywhere there is this length, critics may say an "unconscionable length" — I am quoting the *Times*' reviewer's description[1] in his otherwise eulogistic criticism of *The Life Divine* — in every part, in every passage, in almost every canto or section of a canto. It has been planned not on the scale of *Lycidas* or *Comus* or some brief narrative poem, but of the longer epical narrative, almost a minor, though a very minor *Ramayana*; it aims not at a minimum but at an exhaustive exposition of its world-vision or world-interpretation. One artistic method is to select a limited subject and even on that to say only what is indispensable, what is centrally suggestive and leave the rest to the imagination or understanding of the reader. Another method which I hold to be equally artistic or, if you like, architectural is to give a large and even a vast, a complete interpretation, omitting nothing that is necessary, fundamental to the com-

[1] *The Times Literary Supplement*, January 17, 1942.

pleteness: that is the method I have chosen in *Savitri.* But X has understood nothing of the significance or intention of the passages he is criticising, least of all, their inner sense — that is not his fault, but is partly due to the lack of the context and partly to his lack of equipment and you have there an unfair advantage over him which enables you to understand and see the poetic intention. He sees only an outward form of words and some kind of surface sense which is to him vacant and merely ornamental or rhetorical or something pretentious without any true meaning or true vision in it: inevitably he finds the whole thing false and empty, unjustifiably ambitious and pompous without deep meaning or, as he expresses it, pseudo and phoney. His objection of *longueur* would be perfectly just if the description of the night and the dawn had been simply of physical night and physical dawn; but here the physical night and physical dawn are, as the title of the canto clearly suggests, a symbol, although what may be called a real symbol of an inner reality and the main purpose is to describe by suggestion the thing symbolised; here it is a relapse into Inconscience broken by a slow and difficult return of consciousness followed by a brief but splendid and prophetic outbreak of spiritual light leaving behind it the "day" of ordinary human consciousness in which the prophecy has to be worked out. The whole of *Savitri* is, according to the title of the poem, a legend that is a symbol and this opening canto is, it may be said, a key beginning and announcement. So understood there is nothing here otiose or unnecessary; all is needed to bring out by suggestion some aspect of the thing symbolised and so start adequately the working out of the significance of the whole poem. It will of course seem much too long to a reader who does not understand what is written or, understanding, takes no interest in the subject; but that is unavoidable.

To illustrate the inapplicability of some of his judgments one might take his objection to repetition of the cognates "sombre Vast", "unsounded Void", "opaque Inane", "vacant Vasts" and his clinching condemnation of the inartistic inelegance of their occurrence in the same place at the end of the line. I take leave to doubt his statement that in each place his alert imaginative reader, still less any reader without that

equipment, could have supplied these descriptions and epithets from the context, but let that pass. What was important for me was to keep constantly before the view of the reader, not imaginative but attentive to seize the whole truth of the vision in its totality, the ever-present sense of the Inconscience in which everything is occurring. It is the frame as well as the background without which all the details would either fall apart or stand out only as separate incidents. That necessity lasts until there is the full outburst of the dawn and then it disappears; each phrase gives a feature of this Inconscience proper to its place and context. It is the entrance of the "lonely splendour" into an otherwise inconscient obstructing and unreceptive world that has to be brought out and that cannot be done without the image of the "opaque Inane" of the Inconscience which is the scene and cause of the resistance. There is the same necessity for reminding the reader that the "tread" of the Divine Mother was an intrusion on the vacancy of the Inconscience and the herald of deliverance from it. The same reasoning applies to the other passages. As for the occurrence of the phrases in the same place each in its line, that is a rhythmic turn helpful, one might say necessary to bring out the intended effect, to emphasise this reiteration and make it not only understood but felt. It is not the result of negligence or an awkward and inartistic clumsiness, it is intentional and part of the technique. The structure of the pentameter blank verse in *Savitri* is of its own kind and different in plan from the blank verse that has come to be ordinarily used in English poetry. It dispenses with enjambment or uses it very sparingly and only when a special effect is intended; each line must be strong enough to stand by itself, while at the same time it fits harmoniously into the sentence or paragraph like stone added to stone; the sentence consists usually of one, two, three or four lines, more rarely five or six or seven: a strong close for the line and a strong close for the sentence are almost indispensable except when some kind of inconclusive cadence is desirable; there must be no laxity or diffusiveness in the rhythm or in the metrical flow anywhere, — there must be a flow but not a loose flux. This gives an added importance to what comes at the close of the line and this placing is used very often to give emphasis and

prominence to a key phrase or a key idea, especially those which have to be often reiterated in the thought and vision of the poem so as to recall attention to things that are universal or fundamental or otherwise of the first consequence — whether for the immediate subject or in the total plan. It is this use that is served here by the reiteration at the end of the line.

I have not anywhere in *Savitri* written anything for the sake of mere picturesqueness or merely to produce a rhetorical effect; what I am trying to do everywhere in the poem is to express exactly something seen, something felt or experienced; if, for instance, I indulge in the wealth-burdened line or passage, it is not merely for the pleasure of the indulgence, but because there is that burden, or at least what I conceive to be that, in the vision or the experience. When the expression has been found, I have to judge, not by the intellect or by any set poetical rule, but by an intuitive feeling, whether it is entirely the right expression and, if it is not, I have to change and go on changing until I have received the absolutely right inspiration and the right transcription of it and must never be satisfied with any *à peu près* or imperfect transcription even if that makes good poetry of one kind or another. This is what I have tried to do. The critic or reader will judge for himself whether I have succeeded or failed; but if he has seen nothing and understood nothing, it does not follow that his adverse judgment is sure to be the right and true one, there is at least a chance that he may so conclude, not because there is nothing to see and nothing to understand, only poor pseudo-stuff or a rhetorical emptiness but because he was not equipped for the vision or the understanding. *Savitri* is the record of a seeing, of an experience which is not of the common kind and is often very far from what the general human mind sees and experiences. You must not expect appreciation or understanding from the general public or even from many at the first touch; as I have pointed out, there must be a new extension of consciousness and aesthesis to appreciate a new kind of mystic poetry. Moreover if it is really new in kind, it may employ a new technique, not perhaps absolutely new, but new in some or many of its elements: in that case old rules and canons and standards may be quite inapplicable; evidently, you cannot justly

apply to the poetry of Whitman the principles of technique which are proper to the old metrical verse or the established laws of the old traditional poetry; so too when we deal with a modernist poet. We have to see whether what is essential to poetry is there and how far the new technique justifies itself by new beauty and perfection, and a certain freedom of mind from old conventions is necessary if our judgment is to be valid or rightly objective.

Your friend may say as he has said in another connection that all this is only special pleading or an apology rather than an apologia. But in that other connection he was mistaken and would be so here too, for in neither case have I the feeling that I had been guilty of some offence or some shortcoming and therefore there could be no place for an apology or special pleading such as is used to defend or cover up what one knows to be a false case. I have enough respect for truth not to try to cover up an imperfection; my endeavour would be rather to cure the recognised imperfection; if I have not poetical genius, at least I can claim a sufficient, if not an infinite capacity for painstaking: that I have sufficiently shown by my long labour on *Savitri*. Or rather, since it was not labour in the ordinary sense, not a labour of painstaking construction, I may describe it as an infinite capacity for waiting and listening for the true inspiration and rejecting all that fell short of it, however good it might seem from a lower standard until I got that which I felt to be absolutely right. X was evidently under a misconception with regard to my defence of the wealth-burdened line; he says that the principle enounced by me was sound but what mattered was my application of the principle, and he seems to think that I was trying to justify my application although I knew it to be bad and false by citing passages from Milton and Shakespeare as if my use of the wealth-burdened style were as good as theirs. But I was not defending the excellence of my practice, for the poetical value of my lines was not then in question; the question was whether it did not violate a valid law of a certain chaste economy by the use of too many epithets massed together: against this I was asserting the legitimacy of a massed richness, I was defending only its principle, not my use of the principle. Even a very

small poet can cite in aid of his practice examples from greater poets without implying that his poetry is on a par with theirs. But he further asserts that I showed small judgment in choosing my citations, because Milton's passage[1] is not at all an illustration of the principle and Shakespeare's[2] is inferior in poetic value, lax and rhetorical in its richness and belongs to an early and inferior Shakespearean style. He says that Milton's astounding effect is due only to the sound and not to the words. That does not seem to me quite true: the sound, the rhythmic resonance, the rhythmic significance is undoubtedly the predominant factor; it makes us hear and feel the crash and clamour and clangour of the downfall of the rebel angels: but that is not all, we do not merely hear as if one were listening to the roar of ruin of a collapsing bomb-shattered house, but saw nothing, we have the vision and the full psychological commotion of the "hideous" and flaming ruin of the downfall, and it is the tremendous force of the words that makes us see as well as hear. X's disparagement of the Shakespearean passage on "sleep" and the line on the sea considered by the greatest critics and not by myself only as ranking amongst the most admired and admirable things in Shakespeare is surprising and it seems to me to illustrate a serious limitation in his poetic perception and temperamental sympathies. Shakespeare's later terse and packed style with its more powerful dramatic effects can surely be admired without disparaging the beauty and opulence of his earlier style; if he had never written in that style, it would have been an unspeakable loss to the sum of the world's aesthetic possessions. The lines I have quoted are neither lax nor merely rhetorical, they have a terseness or at least a compactness of their own, different in character from the lines, let us say, in the scene of Antony's death or other memorable passages written in his great tragic style but none the less at every step packed with pregnant meanings and powerful significances which would not be possible if

[1] With hideous ruin and combustion, down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In adamantine chains and penal fire.

[2] Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the shipboy's eyes and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge?

it were merely a loose rhetoric. Anyone writing such lines would deserve to rank by them alone among the great and even the greatest poets.

That is enough for the detail of the criticism and we can come to the general effect and his pronounced opinion upon my poetry. Apart from his high appreciation of *Flame-Wind* and *Descent*, *Jivanmukta* and *Thought the Paraclete* and his general approval of the mystic poems published along with my essay on quantitative metre in English, it is sufficiently damning and discouraging and if I were to accept his verdict on my earlier and latest poetry, the first comparatively valueless and the last for the most part pseudo and phoney and for the rest offering only a few pleasant or pretty lines but not charged with the power and appeal of true or great poetry, I would have to withdraw the *Collected Poems* from circulation, throw *Savitri* into the wastepaper-basket and keep only the mystical poems, — but these also have been banned by some critics, so I have no refuge left to me. As X is not a negligible critic and his verdict agrees with that of the eulogist of my philosophy in *The Times Literary Supplement*, not to speak of others less authoritative like the communist reviewer of Iyengar's book who declared that it was not at all certain that I would live as a poet, it is perhaps incumbent on me to consider in all humility my dismal position and weigh whether it is really as bad as all that. There are some especial judgments in your friend's comments on the *Collected Poems* but these seem to concern only the translations. It is curious that he should complain of the lack of the impulse of self-expression in the *Songs of the Sea* as in this poem I was not busy with anything of the kind but was only rendering into English the self-expression of my friend and fellow-poet C. R. Das in his fine Bengali poem *Sagar Sangit*. I was not even self-moved to translate this work, however beautiful I found it; I might even be accused of having written the translation as a pot-boiler, for Das knowing my impecunious and precarious condition at Pondicherry offered me Rs. 1,000 for the work. Nevertheless I tried my best to give his beautiful Bengali lines as excellent a shape of English poetry as I could manage. The poet and *littérateur* Chapman condemned my work because I had made it too

English, written too much in a manner imitative of traditional English poetry and had failed to make it Bengali in its character so as to keep its native spirit and essential substance. He may have been right; Das himself was not satisfied as he appended a more literal translation in free verse but this latter version does not seem to have caught on while some at least still read and admire the English disguise. If X is right in finding an overflow of sentiment in the *Songs*, that must be my own importation of an early romantic sentimentalism, a contribution of my own "self-expression" replacing Das's. The sea to the Indian imagination is a symbol of life, — one speaks of the ocean of the *saṁsāra* and Indian Yoga sees in its occult visions life in the image of a sea or different planes of being as so many oceans. Das's poem expresses his communing with this ocean of universal life and psychic intimacies with the Cosmic Spirit behind it and these have a character of grave emotion and intense feeling, not of mere sentimentalism, but they come from a very Indian and even a very Bengali mentality and may seem in translation to a different mind a profuse display of fancy and sentiment. The *Songs* are now far away from me in a dim backward of memory and I will have to read them again to be sure, but for that I have no time.

Again, I am charged with modern nineteenth-century romanticism and a false imitation of the Elizabethan drama in my rendering of Kalidasa's *Vikramorvasie*; but Kalidasa's play *is* romantic in its whole tone and he might almost be described as an Elizabethan predating by a thousand years at least the Elizabethans; indeed most of the ancient Sanskrit dramas are of this kind, though the tragic note is missing, and the general spirit resembles that of Elizabethan romantic comedy. So I do not think I committed any fault in making the translation romantic and in trying to make it Elizabethan, even if I only achieved a "sapless pseudo-Elizabethan" style. One who knew the Sanskrit original and who, although an Indian, was recognised as a good critic in England as well as a poet, one too whose attitude towards myself and my work had been consistently adverse, yet enthusiastically praised my version and said if Kalidasa could be translated at all, it was only so that he could be translated.

This imprimatur of an expert may perhaps be weighed against the discouraging criticism of X. The comment on my translation of Bhartrihari is more to the point; but the fault is not Bhartrihari's whose epigrams are as concise and lapidary as the Greek, but in translating I indulged my tendency at the time which was predominantly romantic: the version presents faithfully enough the ideas of the Sanskrit poet but not the spirit and manner of his style. It is comforting, however, to find that it makes "attractive reading", — I must be content with small mercies in an adversely critical world. After all, these poems are translations and not original work and not many can hope to come within a hundred miles of the more famous achievements of this kind such as Fitzgerald's splendid misrepresentation of Omar Khayyam, or Chapman's and Pope's mistranslations of Homer which may be described as first-class original poems with a borrowed substance from a great voice of the past. X does not refer specifically to *Love and Death*, to which your enthusiasm first went out, to *Poems*, to *Urvasie* and to *Perseus the Deliverer* though this last he would class, I suppose, as sapless pseudo-Elizabethan drama; but that omission may be there because he only skimmed through them and afterwards could not get the first volume. But perhaps they may come under his general remark that this part of my work lacks the glow and concentration of true inspired poetry and his further judgment classing it with the works of Watson and Stephen Phillips and other writers belonging to the decline of romantic poetry. I know nothing about Watson's work except for one or two short pieces met by chance; if I were to judge from them, I would have to regard him as a genuine poet with a considerable elevation of language and metrical rhythm but somewhat thin in thought and substance; my poems may conceivably have some higher quality than his in this last respect since the reviewer in *The Times Literary Supplement* grants deep thought and technical excellence as the only merits of my uninspired poetry. It is otherwise with Stephen Phillips: I read *Marpessa* and *Christ in Hades*, the latter in typescript, shortly before I left England and they aroused my admiration and made a considerable impression on me. I read recently a reference to Phillips as a forgotten poet, but if that includes these

two poems I must consider the oblivion as a considerable loss to the generation which has forgotten them. His later poetry disappointed me, there was still some brilliance but nothing of that higher promise. The only other poet of that time who had some influence on me was Meredith, especially his *Modern Love* which may have helped in forming the turn of my earlier poetic expression. I have not read the other later poets of the decline. Of subsequent writers or others not belonging to this decline I know only A.E. and Yeats, something of Francis Thompson, especially the *Hound of Heaven* and the *Kingdom of God*, and a poem or two of Gerald Hopkins; but the last two I came across very late, Hopkins only quite recently, and none of them had any influence on me, although one English reviewer in India spoke of me in eulogistic terms as a sort of combination of Swinburne and Hopkins and some have supposed that I got my turn for compound epithets from the latter! The only romantic poets of the Victorian Age who could have had any influence on me, apart from Arnold whose effect on me was considerable, were Tennyson perhaps, subconsciously, and Swinburne of the earlier poems, for his later work I did not at all admire. Still it is possible that the general atmosphere of the later Victorian decline, if decline it was, may have helped to mould my work and undoubtedly it dates and carries the stamp of the time in which it was written. It is a misfortune of my poetry from the point of view of recognition that the earlier work forming the bulk of the *Collected Poems* belongs to the past and has little chance of recognition now that the aesthetic atmosphere has so violently changed, while the later mystical work and *Savitri* belong to the future and will possibly have to wait for recognition of any merit they have for another strong change. As for the mystical poems which your friend praises in such high terms, they are as much challenged by others as the rest of my work. Some reviewers have described them as lacking altogether in spiritual feeling and void of spiritual experience; they are, it seems, mere mental work, full of intellectually constructed images and therefore without the genuine value of spiritual or mystic poetry.

Well, then, what is the upshot? What have I to decide as a result of my aesthetic examination of conscience? It is true that

there are voices on the other side, not only from my disciples but from others who have no such connection with me. I have heard of individuals nameless or fameless in England who chanced to come across *Love and Death* and had the same spontaneous enthusiasm for it as yourself; others have even admired and discovered in my earlier work the beauty and the inspiration which X and the *Times* reviewer find to be badly lacking in it. It is true that they have differed in the poems they have chosen; Andrews cited particularly the *Rishi* and the epigram on Goethe as proof of his description of me as a great poet; an English critic, Richardson, singled out *Urvasie* and *Love and Death* and the more romantic poems, but thought that some of my later work was less inspired, too intellectual and philosophical, too much turned towards thought, while some work done in the middle he denounced altogether, complaining that after feeding my readers on nectar for so long I came later on to give them mere water. This critic made a distinction between great poets and good poets and said that I belonged to the second and not to the first category, but as he classed Shelley and others of the same calibre as examples of the good poets, his praise was sufficiently "nectarous" for anybody to swallow with pleasure! Krishnaprem (Ronald Nixon), Moore and others have also had a contrary opinion to the adverse critics and these, both English and Indian, were men whose capacity for forming a true literary judgment is perhaps as good as any on the other side. Krishnaprem I mention, because his judgement forms a curious and violent contrast to X's: the latter finds no overtones in my poetry while Krishnaprem who similarly discourages Harin's poetry on the ground of a lack of overtones finds them abundant in mine. One begins to wonder what overtones really are, or are we to conclude that they have no objective existence but are only a term for some subjective personal reaction in the reader? I meet the same absolute contradiction everywhere; one critic says about *Perseus* that there is some good poetry in it but it is not in the least dramatic except for one scene and that the story of the play is entirely lacking in interest, while another finds in it most of all a drama of action and the story thrilling and holding a breathless interest from beginning to end. Highest eulogy, ex-

treme disparagement, faint praise, mixed laudation and censure — it is a see-saw on which the unfortunate poet who is incautious enough to attach any value to contemporary criticism is balanced without any possibility of escape. Or I may flatter myself with the idea that this lively variation of reaction from extreme eulogy to extreme damnation indicates that my work must have after all something in it that is real and alive. Or I might perhaps take refuge in the supposition that the lack of recognition is the consequence of an untimely and too belated publication, due to the egoistic habit of writing for my own self-satisfaction rather than any strong thirst for poetical glory and immortality and leaving most of my poetry in the drawer for much longer than, even for twice or thrice, the time recommended by Horace who advised the poet to put by his work and read it again after ten years and then only, if he still found it of some value, to publish it. *Urvasie*, the second of the only two poems published early, was sent at first to Lionel Johnson, a poet and *littérateur* of some reputation who was the Reader of a big firm. He acknowledged some poetic merit, but said that it was a repetition of Matthew Arnold and so had no sufficient reason for existence. But Lionel Johnson, I was told, like the Vedantic sage who sees Brahman in all things, saw Arnold everywhere, and perhaps if I had persisted in sending it to other firms, some other Reader, not similarly obsessed, might have found the merit and, as romanticism was still the fashion, some of the critics and the public too might have shared your and Richardson's opinion of this and other work and, who knows, I might have ranked in however low a place among the poets of the romantic decline. Perhaps then I need not decide too hastily against any republication of the *Collected Poems* or could even cherish the hope that, when the fashion of anti-romanticism has passed, it may find its proper place, whatever that may be, and survive.

As regards your friend's appraisal of the mystical poems,[1] I need say little. I accept his reservation that there is much inequality as between the different poems: they were produced very rapidly — in the course of a week, I think — and they were not given the long reconsideration that I have usually given

[1] See *Collected Poems* (Centenary Edition, 1972), pp. 557-569.

to my poetic work before publication; he has chosen the best, though there are others also that are good, though not so good; in others, the metre attempted and the idea and language have not been lifted to their highest possible value. I would like to say a word about his hesitation over some lines in *Thought the Paraclete*[1] which describe the spiritual planes. I can understand this hesitation; for these lines have not the vivid and forceful precision of the opening and the close and are less pressed home, they are general in description and therefore to one who has not the mystic experience may seem too large and vague. But they are not padding; a precise and exact description of these planes of experience would have made the poem too long, so only some large lines are given, but the description is true, the epithets hit the reality and even the colours mentioned in the poem, "gold-red feet" and "crimson-white mooned oceans", are faithful to experience. Significant colour, supposed by intellectual criticism to be symbolic but there is more than that, is a frequent element in mystic vision; I may mention the powerful and vivid vision in which Ramakrishna went up into the higher planes and saw the mystic truth behind the birth of Vivekananda. At least, the fact that these poems have appealed so strongly to your friend's mind may perhaps be taken by me as a sufficient proof that in this field my effort at interpretation of spiritual things has not been altogether a failure.

But how then are we to account for the same critic's condemnation or small appreciation of *Savitri* which is also a mystic and symbolic poem although cast into a different form and raised to a different pitch, and what value am I to attach to his criticism? Partly, perhaps, it is this very difference of form and pitch which accounts for his attitude and, having regard to his aesthetic temperament and its limitations, it was inevitable. He himself seems to suggest this reason when he compares this difference to the difference of his approach as between *Lycidas* and *Paradise Lost*. His temperamental turn is shown by his special appreciation of Francis Thompson and Coventry Patmore and his response to *Descent* and *Flame-Wind* and the fineness of his judgment when speaking of the *Hound of Heaven* and the

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 582.

Kingdom of God, its limitation by his approach towards *Paradise Lost*. I think he would be naturally inclined to regard any very high-pitched poetry as rhetorical and unsound and declamatory, wherever he did not see in it something finely and subtly true coexisting with the high-pitched expression, — the combination we find in Thompson's later poem and it is this he seems to have missed in *Savitri*. For *Savitri* does contain or at least I intended it to contain what you and others have felt in it but he has not been able to feel because it is something which is outside his own experience and to which he has no access. One who has had the kind of experience which *Savitri* sets out to express or who, not having it, is prepared by his temperament, his mental turn, his previous intellectual knowledge or psychic training, to have some kind of access to it, the feeling of it if not the full understanding, can enter into the spirit and sense of the poem and respond to its poetic appeal; but without that it is difficult for an unprepared reader to respond, — all the more if this is, as you contend, a new poetry with a new law of expression and technique.

Lycidas is one of the finest poems in any literature, one of the most consistently perfect among works of an equal length and one can apply to it the epithet "exquisite" and it is to the exquisite that your friend's aesthetic temperament seems specially to respond. It would be possible to a reader with a depreciatory turn to find flaws in it, such as the pseudo-pastoral setting, the too powerful intrusion of St. Peter and puritan theological controversy into that incongruous setting and the image of the hungry sheep which someone not in sympathy with Christian feeling and traditional imagery might find even ludicrous or at least odd in its identification of pseudo-pastoral sheep and theological human sheep: but these would be hypercritical objections and are flooded out by the magnificence of the poetry. I am prepared to admit the very patent defects of *Paradise Lost*: Milton's heaven is indeed unconvincing and can be described as grotesque and so too is his gunpowder battle up there, and his God and angels are weak and unconvincing figures, even Adam and Eve, our first parents, do not effectively fill their part except in his outward description of them; and the later narrative falls far below the grandeur of the first four books but those four books stand

for ever among the greatest things in the world's poetic literature. If *Lycidas* with its beauty and perfection had been the supreme thing done by Milton even with all the lyrical poetry and the sonnets added to it, Milton would still have been a great poet but he would not have ranked among the dozen greatest; it is *Paradise Lost* that gives him that place. There are deficiencies if not failures in almost all the great epics, the *Odyssey* and perhaps the *Divina Commedia* being the only exceptions, but still they are throughout in spite of them great epics. So too is *Paradise Lost*. The grandeur of his verse and language is constant and unsinking to the end and makes the presentation always sublime. We have to accept for the moment Milton's dry Puritan theology and his all too human picture of the celestial world and its denizens and then we can feel the full greatness of the epic. But the point is that this greatness in itself seems to have less appeal to X's aesthetic temperament; it is as if he felt less at home in its atmosphere, in an atmosphere of grandeur and sublimity than in the air of a less sublime but a fine and always perfect beauty. It is the difference between a magic hill-side woodland of wonder and a great soaring mountain climbing into a vast purple sky: to accept fully the greatness he needs to find in it a finer and subtler strain as in Thompson's *Kingdom of God*. On a lower scale this, his sentence about it seems to suggest, is the one fundamental reason for his complete pleasure in the mystical poems and his very different approach to *Savitri*. The pitch aimed at by *Savitri*, the greatness you attribute to it, would of itself have discouraged in him any abandonment to admiration and compelled from the beginning a cautious and dubious approach; that soon turned to lack of appreciation or a lowered appreciation even of the best that may be there and to depreciation and censure of the rest.

But there is the other reason which is more effective. He sees and feels nothing of the spiritual meaning and the spiritual appeal which you find in *Savitri*; it is for him empty of anything but an outward significance and that seems to him poor, as is natural since the outward meaning is only a part and a surface and the rest is to his eyes invisible. If there had been what he hoped or might have hoped to find in my poetry, a spiritual vision such as

that of the Vedantin, arriving beyond the world towards the Ineffable, then he might have felt at home as he does with Thompson's poetry or might at least have found it sufficiently accessible. But this is not what *Savitri* has to say or rather it is only a small part of it and, even so, bound up with a cosmic vision and an acceptance of the world which in its kind is unfamiliar to his mind and psychic sense and foreign to his experience. The two passages with which he deals do not and cannot give any full presentation of this way of seeing things since one is an unfamiliar symbol and the other an incidental and, taken by itself apart from its context, an isolated circumstance. But even if he had had other more explicit and clearly revealing passages at his disposal, I do not think he would have been satisfied or much illuminated; his eyes would still have been fixed on the surface and caught only some intellectual meaning or outer sense. That at least is what we may suppose to have been the cause of his failure, if we maintain that there is anything at all in the poem; or else we must fall back on the explanation of a fundamental personal incompatibility and the rule *de gustibus non est disputandum*, or to put it in the Sanskrit form *nānārucirhi lokaḥ*. If you are right in maintaining that *Savitri* stands as a new mystical poetry with a new vision and expression of things, we should expect, at least at first, a widespread, perhaps, a general failure, even in lovers of poetry to understand it or appreciate; even those who have some mystical turn or spiritual experience are likely to pass it by if it is a different turn from theirs or outside their range of experience. It took the world something like a hundred years to discover Blake; it would not be improbable that there might be a greater time-lag here, though naturally we hope for better things. For in India at least some understanding or feeling and an audience few and fit may be possible. Perhaps by some miracle there may be before long a larger appreciative audience.

At any rate this is the only thing one can do, especially when one is attempting a new creation, to go on with the work with such light and power as is given to one and leave the value of the work to be determined by the future. Contemporary judgments we know to be unreliable; there are only two judges whose joint verdict cannot easily be disputed, the World and Time. The

Roman proverb says, *securus judicat orbis terrarum*; but the world's verdict is secure only when it is confirmed by Time. For it is not the opinion of the general mass of men that finally decides, the decision is really imposed by the judgment of a minority and *élite* which is finally accepted and settles down as the verdict of posterity; in Tagore's phrase it is the universal man, *viśva mānava*, or rather something universal using the general mind of man, we might say the Cosmic Self in the race that fixes the value of its own works. In regard to the great names in literature this final verdict seems to have in it something of the absolute, — so far as anything can be that in a temporal world of relativities in which the Absolute reserves itself hidden behind the veil of human ignorance. It is no use for some to contend that Virgil is a tame and elegant writer of a wearisome work in verse on agriculture and a tedious pseudo-epic written to imperial order and Lucretius the only really great poet in Latin literature or to depreciate Milton for his Latin English and inflated style and the largely uninteresting character of his two epics; the world either refuses to listen or there is a temporary effect, a brief fashion in literary criticism, but finally the world returns to its established verdict. Lesser reputations may fluctuate, but finally whatever has real value in its own kind settles itself and finds its just place in the durable judgment of the world. Work which was neglected and left aside like Blake's or at first admired with reservation and eclipsed like Donne's is singled out by a sudden glance of Time and its greatness recognised; or what seemed buried slowly emerges or re-emerges; all finally settles into its place. What was held as sovereign in its own time is rudely dethroned but afterwards recovers not its sovereign throne but its due position in the world's esteem; Pope is an example and Byron who at once burst into a supreme glory and was the one English poet, after Shakespeare, admired all over Europe but is now depreciated, may also recover his proper place. Encouraged by such examples, let us hope that these violently adverse judgments may not be final and absolute and decide that the wastepaper-basket is not the proper place for *Savitri*. There may still be a place for a poetry which seeks to enlarge the field of poetic creation and find for the inner spiritual life of man and his now occult or mystical knowledge and

experience of the whole hidden range of his and the world's being, not a corner and a limited expression such as it had in the past, but a wide space and as manifold and integral an expression of the boundless and innumerable riches that lie hidden and unexplored as if kept apart under the direct gaze of the Infinite as has been found in the past for man's surface and finite view and experience of himself and the material world in which he has lived striving to know himself and it as best he can with a limited mind and senses. The door that has been shut to all but a few may open; the kingdom of the Spirit may be established not only in man's inner being but in his life and his works. Poetry also may have its share in that revolution and become part of the spiritual empire.

I had intended as the main subject of this letter to say something about technique and the inner working of the intuitive method by which *Savitri* was and is being created and of the intention and plan of the poem. X's idea of its way of creation, an intellectual construction by a deliberate choice of words and imagery, badly chosen at that, is the very opposite of the real way in which it was done. That was to be the body of the letter and the rest only a preface. But the preface has become so long that it has crowded out the body. I shall have to postpone it to a later occasion when I have more time.

4-5-1947

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Q: In that long letter on your own poetry, apropos of my friend's criticisms, you have written of certain influences of the later Victorian period on you. Meredith's from "Modern Love" I have been unable to trace concretely — unless I consider some of the more pointed and bitter-sweetly reflective turns in "Songs to Myrtilla" to be Meredithian. That of Tennyson is noticeable in only a delicate picturesqueness here and there or else in the use of some words. Perhaps more than in your early blank verse the Tennysonian influence of this kind in general is there in "Songs to Myrtilla". Arnold has influenced

your blank verse in respect of particular constructions like two or three "buts" as in

No despicable wayfarer, but Ruru,
But son of a great Rishi,

or

But tranquil, but august, but making easy...

Arnold is also observable in the way you build up and elaborate your similes both in "Urvasie" and in "Love and Death". Less openly, a general tone of poetic mind from him can also be felt: it persists subtly in even the poems collected in "Ahana", not to mention "Baji Prabhou". I don't know whether Swinburne is anywhere patent in your narratives: he probably does have something to do with "Songs to Myrtilla". Stephen Phillips is the most direct influence in "Urvasie" and "Love and Death". But as I have said in my essay on your blank verse he is assimilated into a stronger and more versatile genius, together with influences from the Elizabethans, Milton and perhaps less consciously Keats. In any case, whatever the influences, your early narratives are intensely original in essential spirit and movement and expressive body. It is only unreceptiveness or inattention that can fail to see this and to savour the excellence of your work.

A: The influences I spoke of were of course only such influences as every poet undergoes before he has entirely found himself. What you say about Arnold's influence is quite correct; it acted mainly, however, as a power making for restraint and refinement, subduing any uncontrolled romanticism and insisting on clear lucidity and right form and building. Meredith had no influence on *Songs to Myrtilla*; even afterwards I did not make myself acquainted with all his poetry, it was only *Modern Love* and poems like the sonnet on *Lucifer* and the *Ascent to Earth of the Daughter of Hades* that I strongly admired and it had its effect on the formation of my poetic style and its after-effects in

that respect are not absent from *Savitri*. It is only Swinburne's early lyrical poems that exercised any power on me, *Dolores*, *Hertha*, *The Garden of Proserpine* and others that rank among his best work, — also *Atalanta in Calydon*, his later lyrical poetry I found too empty and his dramatic and narrative verse did not satisfy me. One critic characterised *Love and Death* as an extraordinarily brilliant and exact reproduction of Keats: what do you say to that? I think Stephen Phillips had more to do with it.

7-7-1947

SYMBOLISM OF THE TALE OF SATYAVAN AND SAVITRI

The tale of Satyavan and Savitri is recited in the *Mahabharata* as a story of conjugal love conquering death. But this legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance; Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down and is born to save; Aswapati, the Lord of the Horse, her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes; Dyumatsena, Lord of the Shining Hosts, father of Satyavan, is the Divine Mind here fallen blind, losing its celestial kingdom of vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory. Still this is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help men and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.

CREATION OF "LOVE AND DEATH"[1]

Q: As "Love and Death" I have long since adopted as my poetic Bible owing to the consummate beauty of its

[1] See *Collected Poems* (Centenary Edition, 1972), pp. 231-257.

inspiration and art, and as now I am just awaking to a capacity in myself for blank verse, I shall be really happy if you will tell me the way in which you created this poem — the first falling of the seed of the idea, the growth and maturing of it, the influences assimilated from other poets, the mood and atmosphere you used to find most congenial and productive, the experience and the frequency of the afflatus, the pace at which you composed, the evolution of that multifarious, many-echoed yet perfectly original style and of a blank verse whose art is the most unfailing and, except for one too close repetition of the mannerism of the double "but", the most unobtrusively conscious that I have seen. In my essay, in "Sri Aurobindo — the Poet", I tried to show the white harmony, so to speak, of "Love and Death" in a kind of spectrum analysis, how colours from Latin, Italian, Sanskrit and English verse had fused here together with an absolutely original ultra-violet and infra-red not to be traced anywhere. Among English influences the most outstanding are, to my mind, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats and Stephen Phillips. In my essay I dwelt at length on the first two and on the magic way in which the passage about Ruru's sail along the Ganges and subsequent sea-plunge into Patala combines at the same time the early and later Milton and, with that, something of Shelley and Coleridge. Keats and Stephen Phillips I did not specially deal with. Keats seems to have added to the element of supple strength in your poem, while Phillips has tinged it with a certain poignant vividness and colourful delicacy. More fundamental, however, than the effect of his manner was, I think, the spell cast by certain moods, as it were, of his "Marpessa".... But all this is guess-work — correct maybe in some respects, but I should like very much to have your own illuminating account of the matter, as well as your answer to the other points in my question at the beginning of this letter.

A: I cannot tell you much about it from that point of view;

I did not draw consciously from any of the poets you mention except from Phillips. I read *Marpessa* and *Christ in Hades* before they were published and as I was just in the stage of formation then — at the age of 17 — they made a powerful impression which lasted until it was worked out in *Love and Death.* I dare say some influence of most of the great English poets and of others also, not English, can be traced in my poetry — I can myself see that of Milton, sometimes of Wordsworth and Arnold; but it was of the automatic kind — they came in unnoticed. I am not aware of much influence of Shelley and Coleridge, but since I read Shelley a great deal and took an intense pleasure in some of Coleridge's poetry, they may have been there without my knowledge. The one work of Keats that influenced me was *Hyperion* — I dare say my blank verse got something of his stamp through that. The poem itself was written in a white heat of inspiration during 14 days of continuous writing — in the mornings, of course, for I had to attend office the rest of the day and saw friends in the evening. I never wrote anything with such ease and rapidity before or after. Your other questions I can't very well answer — I have lived ten lives since then and don't remember. I don't think there was any falling of the seed of the idea or growth and maturing of it; it just came, — from my reading about the story of Ruru in the *Mahabharata*; I thought, "Well, here's a subject", and the rest burst out of itself. Mood and atmosphere? I never depended on these things that I know of — something wrote in me or didn't write, more often didn't, and that is all I know about it. Evolution of style and verse? Well, it evolved, I suppose — I assure you I didn't build it. I was not much of a critic in those days — the critic grew in me by Yoga like the philosopher, and as for self-criticism the only standard I had was whether I felt satisfied with what I wrote or not, and generally I felt it was very fine when I wrote it and found it was very bad after it had been written, but I could not at that time have given you a reason either for the self-eulogy or the self-condemnation. Nowadays it is different, of course; for I am conscious of what I do and how things are done. I am afraid this will not enlighten you much but it is all I can tell you.

3-7-1933

There was no trial or experiment — as I wrote, I did not proceed like that, — I put down what came, changing afterwards; but there too only as it came. At that time I had no theories, no methods or process. But *Love and Death* was not my first blank verse poem — I had written one before in the first years of my stay in Baroda which was privately published, but afterwards I got disgusted with it and rejected it.[1] I made also some translations from the Sanskrit (in blank verse and heroic verse); but I don't remember to what you are referring as the translation of Kalidasa. Most of all that has disappeared into the unknown in the whirlpools and turmoil of my political career.

4-7-1933

MADAN'S SPEECH IN "LOVE AND DEATH"

Q: The other day X told me that he considered the long speech of the Love-God Kama or Madan about himself in "Love and Death" one of the peaks in that poem — he as good as compared it to the descent into Hell about which I have raved ever since I read the poem some years back. He added that the Mother too had been very much moved by it. Somehow I couldn't at the time wax extremely enthusiastic about it. I found it moving and excellent of its own kind, very powerful and displaying great psychological acumen; but, except for the opening eight or ten lines and some three or four in the middle, I couldn't regard it as astonishing poetry — at least not one of the peaks. What is your own private opinion? I need not of course, quote it to anyone. Here is the passage, to refresh your memory:

[1] The poem in question is *Urvasie*, a long narrative which some critics are inclined to consider the best of Sri Aurobindo's early blank verses. The reaction in himself against it which Sri Aurobindo speaks of in this letter persisted for many years during which he had no opportunity to see the poem again. On 5-2-1931 he wrote to a Sadhak-poet: "I don't think I have the *Urvasie*, neither am I very anxious to have the poem saved from oblivion." Later when he saw it he found it not at all a thing to be thrown away and allowed its inclusion in *Collected Poems and Plays* (First Edition, 1942). Subsequently it has been included in *Collected Poems* (Centenary Edition, 1972), pp. 189-228.

But with the thrilled eternal smile that makes
The spring, the lover of Rathi golden-limbed
Replied to Ruru, "Mortal, I he;
I am that Madan who inform the stars
With lustre and on life's wide canvas fill
Pictures of light and shade, of joy and tears,
Make ordinary moments wonderful
And common speech a charm: knit life to life
With interfusions of opposing souls
And sudden meetings and slow sorceries:
Wing the boy bridegroom to that panting breast,
Smite Gods with mortal faces, dreadfully
Among great beautiful kings and watched by eyes
That burn, force on the virgin's fainting limbs
And drive her to the one face never seen,
The one breast meant eternally for her.
By me come wedded sweets, by me the wife's
Busy delight and passionate obedience,
And loving eager service never sated,
And happy lips, and worshipping soft eyes:
And mine the husband's hungry arms and use
Unwearying of old tender words and ways,
Joy of her hair and silent pleasure felt
Of nearness to one dear familiar shape.
Nor only these, but many affections bright
And soft glad things cluster around my name.
I plant fraternal tender yearnings, make
The sister's sweet attractiveness and leap
Of heart towards imperious kindred blood,
And the young mother's passionate deep look,
Earth's high similitude of One not earth,
Teach filial heart-beats strong. These are my gifts
For which men praise me, these my glories calm:
But fiercer shafts I can, wild storms blown down
Shaking fixed minds and melting marble natures,
Tears and dumb bitterness and pain unpitied,
Racked thirsting jealousy and kind hearts made stone:
And in undisciplined huge souls I sow

Dire vengeance and impossible cruelties,
Cold lusts that linger and fierce fickleness,
The loves close kin to hate, brute violence
And mad insatiable longings pale,
And passion blind as death and deaf as swords.
O mortal, all deep-souled desires and all
Yearnings immense are mine, so much I can."

A: My own private opinion agrees with X's estimate rather than with yours. These lines may not be astonishing in the sense of an unusual effort of constructive imagination and vision like the descent into Hell; but I do not think I have, elsewhere, surpassed this speech in power of language, passion and truth of feeling and nobility and felicity of rhythm all fused together into a perfect whole. And I think I have succeeded in expressing the truth of the godhead of Kama, the godhead of vital love (I am not using "vital" in the strict Yogic sense; I mean the love that draws lives passionately together or throws them into or upon each other) with a certain completeness of poetic sight and perfection of poetic power, which puts it on one of the peaks — even if not the highest possible peak — of achievement. That is my private opinion — but, of course, all do not need to see alike in these matters.

10-2-1932

APPRECIATION OF "LOVE AND DEATH"

Q: A.E. has made a few interesting remarks on some of my poems — remarks curious in some places while fairly perceptive in others. He warns against frequent use of words like "infinite", "eternal", "limitless". The difficulty about such words has struck me before — frequent use of them gives a not altogether agreeable Hugoesque flavour to mystic Indian poetry; but I wonder whether I have cheapened or misused them. At least you have never taken me to task on that score.

As regards those two poems of mine which you have

liked immensely, he notes with pleasure only one phrase in "Ne Plus Ultra" — "the song-impetuous mind" — and has nothing to say about "This Errant Life". Isn't that strange?

By the way, the copy of your "Love and Death" is ready to go to England. I wonder how the critics will receive the poem. They should be enthusiastic. It is full of superb passages. Do you remember Ruru's going down to Patala, the underworld? I have commented on its inspiration in my essay "Sri Aurobindo — the Poet". I can never stop thrilling to it. Here are the lines:

In a thin soft eve
Ganges spread far her multitudinous waves,
A glimmering restlessness with voices large,
And from the forests of that half-seen bank
A boat came heaving over it, white-winged,
With a sole silent helmsman marble-pale.
Then Ruru by his side stepped in; they went
Down the mysterious river and beheld
The great banks widen out of sight. The world
Was water and the skies to water plunged.
All night with a dim motion gliding down
He felt the dark against his eyelids; felt,
As in a dream more real than daylight,
The helmsman with his dumb and marble face
Near him and moving wideness all around,
And that continual gliding dimly on,
As one who on a shoreless water sails
For ever to a port he shall not win.
But when the darkness paled, he heard a moan
Of mightier waves and had the wide great sense
Of Ocean and the depths below our feet.
But the boat stopped; the pilot lifted on him
His marble gaze coeval with the stars.
Then in the white-winged boat the boy arose
And saw around him the vast sea all grey
And heaving in the pallid dawning light.

Loud Ruru cried across the murmur: "Hear me,
O inarticulate grey Ocean, hear.
If any cadence in thy infinite
Rumour was caught from lover's moan, O Sea,
Open thy abysses to my mortal tread.
For I would travel to the despairing shades,
The spheres of suffering where entangled dwell
Souls unreleased and the untimely dead
Who weep remembering. Thither, O guide me,
No despicable wayfarer, but Ruru,
But son of a great Rishi, from all men
On earth selected for peculiar pangs,
Special disaster. Lo, this petalled fire,
How freshly it blooms and lasts with my great pain!"
He held the flower out subtly glimmering.
And like a living thing the huge sea trembled,
Then rose, calling, and filled the sight with waves,
Converging all its giant crests: towards him
Innumerable waters loomed and heaven
Threatened. Horizon on horizon moved
Dreadfully swift; then with a prone wide sound
All Ocean hollowing drew him swiftly in,
Curving with monstrous menace over him.
He down the gulf where the loud waves collapsed
Descending, saw with floating hair arise
The daughters of the sea in pale green light,
A million mystic breasts suddenly bare,
And came beneath the flood and stunned beheld
A mute stupendous march of waters race
To reach some viewless pit beneath the world.

A: I did not object to your frequent use of "infinite", "eternal", "limitless", because these are adjectives that I myself freely pepper over my poetry. When one writes about the Infinite, the Eternal and the Limitless or when one feels them constantly, what is one to do? A. E. who has not this consciousness but only that of the temporal and finite (natural or occult) can avoid these words, but I can't. Besides, all poets have their favourite words

and epithets which they constantly repeat. A. E. himself has been charged with a similar crime.

If you send your poems to five different poets, you are likely to get five absolutely disparate and discordant estimates of them. A poet likes only the poetry that appeals to his own temperament or taste, the rest he condemns or ignores. Contemporary poetry, besides, seldom gets its right judgment from contemporary critics, even. You expect for instance *Love and Death* to make a sensation in England — I don't expect it in the least: I shall be agreeably surprised if it gets more than some qualified praise, and if it does not get even that, I shall be neither astonished nor discomfited. I know the limitations of the poem and its qualities and I know that the part about the descent into Hell can stand comparison with some of the best English poetry; but I don't expect any contemporaries to see it. If they do, it will be good luck or divine grace, that is all. Nothing can be more futile than for a poet to write in expectation of contemporary fame or praise, however agreeable that may be, if it comes: but it is not of much value; for very few poets have enjoyed a great contemporary fame and very great poets have been neglected in their time. A poet has to go on his way, trying to gather hints from what people say for or against, when their criticisms are things he can profit by, but not otherwise moved (if he can manage it) — seeking mainly to sharpen his own sense of self-criticism by the help of others. Differences of estimate need not surprise him at all.

2-2-1932

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I am afraid you are under an illusion as to the success of *Love and Death* in England. *Love and Death* dates, — it belongs to the time when Meredith and Phillips were still writing and Yeats and A. E. were only in bud if not *in ovo*. Since then the wind has changed and even Yeats and A.E. are already a little high and dry on the sands of the past, while the form or other characteristics of *Love and Death* are just the things that are anathema to the post-war writers and literary critics. I fear it would be, if not altogether ignored which is most likely, regarded as a feeble and belated imitation of the literary model exploded and buried

long ago. I don't regard it in that light myself, but it is not my opinion that counts for success but that of the modern highbrows. If it had been published when it was written it might have been a success, but now! Of course, I know there are many people still in England, if it got into their hands, who would read it with enthusiasm, but I don't think it would get into their hands at all.

As for the other poems they could not go with *Love and Death*. When the time comes for publication, the sonnets will have to be published in a separate book of sonnets and the others in a separate book of (mainly) lyrical poems — so it cannot be now. That at least is my present idea. It is not that I am against publication for all time, but my idea was to wait for the proper time rather than do anything premature.

One thing, however, could be done. X could send his friend *Love and Death* and perhaps the *Six Poems* and sound the publishers as to whether the publication, in their eye, would be worthwhile from their point of view. That could at least give a clue.

24-10-1934

AN INTERPRETATION OF "THOUGHT THE PARACLETE"[1]

Q: Dr. X has given an interpretation of your poem "Thought the Paraclete", which some other critic has fallen foul of. What is your own analysis of the thought-structure in this poem.

A: There is no thought-structure in the poem; there is only a succession of vision and experience, it is a mystic poem, its unity is spiritual and concrete, not a mental and logical building. When you see a flower, do you ask the gardener to reduce the flower to its chemical components? There would then be no flower left and no beauty. The poem is not built upon intellectual definitions or philosophical theorisings; it is something seen. When you ascend a mountain, you see the scenery and feel the delight

[1] *Collected Poems* (Centenary Editon, 1972), p. 582.

of the ascent; you don't sit down to make a map with names for every rock and peak or spend time studying its geological structure — that is work for the geologist, not for the traveller. X's geological account (to make one is part of his *métier* as a critic and a student and writer on literature) is probably as good as any other is likely to be; but each is free to make his own according to his own idea. Reasoning and argumentation are not likely to make one account truer and invalidate the rest. A mystic poem may explain itself or a general idea may emerge from it, but it is the vision that is important or what one can get from it by intuitive feeling, not the explanation or idea; *Thought the Paraclete* is a vision or revelation of an ascent through spiritual planes, but gives no names and no photographic descriptions of the planes crossed. I leave it there.

BHAVA BEHIND "THE BIRD OF FIRE"[1]

Q: Your "The Bird of Fire" is full of colour and images, but if one can follow the bhāva behind or through them, I believe the appreciation becomes complete.

A: What do you mean by following the *bhāva* behind? Putting a label on the bird and keeping it *dried* up in your intellectual museum, for Professors to describe — to their pupils — "this is the species and that's how it is constituted, these are the bones, feathers etc., etc., and now you know all about the bird. Or would you like me to dissect it farther?"

TAGORE'S OBJECTIONS TO "THE LIFE HEAVENS"[2]

In regard to Tagore, I understand from X that his objections to *The Life Heavens* were personal rather than in principle — that is, *he himself* had no such experience and could not take them as true (for himself), so they excited in him no emotion, while my poem *Shiva*[3] was just the contrary. I don't say anything to that,

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 571. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 574. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 140.

as I could not say anything if somebody condemned a poem of mine root-and-branch because he did not like it or on good grounds such as Cousins' objection to the inferiority of the greater part of my poem *In the Moonlight*[1] to the opening stanzas. I learnt a great deal from that objection: it pointed me the way I had to go towards "The Future Poetry". Not that I did not know before, but that it gave precision and point to my previous perception. But still I don't quite understand Tagore's objection. I myself do not take many things as true in poetry (e.g. Dante's Hell etc.) of which I yet feel the emotion. It is surely part of the power of poetry to open new worlds to us as well as to give a supreme voice to our own ideas, experiences and feelings. *The Life Heavens* may not do that for its readers, but, if so, it is a fault of execution, not of principle.

COUSIN'S CRITICISM OF "THE RISHI"[2]

Q: I hear that James Cousins said about your poem "The Rishi" that it was only spiritual philosophy, not poetry.

A: I never heard that. If I had I would have noted that Cousins had no capacity for appreciating intellectual poetry. But that I knew already, just as he had no liking for epic poetry either, only for poetic "jewellery". His criticism was of *In the Moonlight* which he condemned as brain-stuff only except the early stanzas for which he had high praise. That criticism was of great use to me, though I did not agree with it. But the positive part of it helped me to develop towards a supra-intellectual style. As *Love and Death* was poetry of the vital, so *Ahana*[3] is mostly work of the poetic intelligence. Cousins' criticism helped me to go a stage farther.

11-11-1936

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Q: X says Cousins ignored your poem "The Rishi" while

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 55. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 297.

[3] The reference is to the early version, not the one revised and considerably re-written later.

speaking of the others. Isn't that far worse?

A: Neither worse nor better. What does Cousins' bad opinion about *The Rishi* matter to me? I know the limitations of my poetry and also its qualities. I know also the qualities of Cousins as a critic and also his limitations. If Milton had written during the life of Cousins instead of having an established reputation for centuries, Cousins would have said of *Paradise Lost* and still more of *Paradise Regained*, "This is not poetry, this is theology". Note that I don't mean to say that *The Rishi* is anywhere near *Paradise Lost*, but it is poetry as well as spiritual philosophy.

13-11-1936

SPIRITUAL VALUE OF POETRY

It won't do to put excessive and sweeping constructions on what I write, otherwise it is easy to misunderstand its real significance. I said there was no reason why poetry of a spiritual character (not any poetry like Verlaine's or Swinburne's or Baudelaire's) should bring no realisation at all. This did not mean that poetry is a major means of realisation of the Divine. I did not say that it would lead us to the Divine or that anyone had achieved the Divine through poetry or that poetry by itself can lead us straight into the sanctuary. Obviously, if such exaggerations are put into my words, they become absurd and untenable.

My statement is perfectly clear and there is nothing in it against reason or common sense. The Word has power — even the ordinary written word has a power. If it is an inspired word it has still more power. What kind of power or power for what depends on the nature of the inspiration and the theme and the part of the being it touches. If it is the Word itself, — as in certain utterances of the great Scriptures, Veda, Upanishads, Gita, it may well have a power to awaken a spiritual and uplifting impulse, even certain kinds of realisation. To say that it cannot contradicts spiritual experience.

The Vedic poets regarded their poetry as Mantras, they were the vehicles of their own realisations and could become

vehicles of realisation for others. Naturally, these mostly would be illuminations, not the settled and permanent realisation that is the goal of Yoga — but they could be steps on the way or at least lights on the way. I have had in former times many illuminations, even initial realisations while meditating on verses of the Upanishads or the Gita. Anything that carries the Word, the Light in it, spoken or written, can light this fire within, open a sky, as it were, bring the effective vision of which the Word is the body. You yourself know that some of your poems deeply moved people who had the tendency towards spiritual things. Many have got openings into realisation while reading passages of the *Arya* — which are not poetry, have not the power of spiritual poetry — but it shows all the more that the word is not without power even for the things of the spirit. In all ages spiritual seekers have expressed their aspirations or their experiences in poetry or inspired language and it has helped them and others. Therefore there is nothing absurd in my assigning to such poetry a spiritual or psychic value and effectiveness of a psychic or spiritual character.

It is obvious that poetry cannot be a substitute for Sadhana; it can be an accompaniment only. If there is a feeling (of devotion, surrender etc.), it can express and confirm it; if there is an experience, it can express and strengthen the force of experience. As reading of books like the Upanishads or Gita or singing of devotional songs can help, especially at one stage or another, so this can help also. Also it opens a passage between the external consciousness and the inner mind or vital. But if one stops at that, then nothing much is gained. Sadhana must be the main thing and Sadhana means the purification of the nature, the consecration of the being, the opening of the psychic and the inner mind and vital, the contact and presence of the Divine, the realisation of the Divine in all things, surrender, devotion, the widening of the consciousness into the cosmic Consciousness, the Self one in all, the psychic and the spiritual transformation of the nature. If these things are neglected and only poetry and mental

development and social contact occupy all the time, then that is not Sadhana. Also the poetry must be written in the true spirit, not for fame or self-satisfaction, but as a means of contact with the Divine through inspiration or of the expression of one's own inner being as it was written formerly by those who left behind them so much devotional and spiritual poetry in India; it does not help if it is written only in the spirit of the western artist or *littérateur*. Even works or meditation cannot succeed unless they are done in the right spirit of consecration and spiritual aspiration gathering up the whole being and dominating all else. It is lack of this gathering up of the whole life and nature and turning it towards the one aim, which is the defect in so many here that lowers the atmosphere and stands in the way of what is being done by myself and the Mother.

19-5-1938

POETRY AND YOGA

Literature and art are or can be a first introduction to the inner being — the inner mind, vital; for it is from there that they come. And if one writes poems of Bhakti, poems of divine seeking, etc., or creates music of that kind, it means that there is a Bhakta or seeker inside who is supporting himself by that self-expression. There is also the point of view behind Lele's answer to me when I told him that I wanted to do Yoga but for work, for action, not for Sannyasa and Nirvana, — but after years of spiritual effort I had failed to find the way and it was for that I had asked to meet him. His first answer was, "It would be easy for you as you are a poet." But it was not from any point of view like that that X put his question and it was not from that point of view that I gave my answer. It was about some especial character-making virtue that he seemed to attribute to literature.

18-11-1936

I have not seen what X says, but if it is that you have narrowed or deteriorated because you no longer sing erotic songs. I do not

see how that can be. One is not narrowed if one loses taste for Jazz and can hear with rich pleasure only the great masters or music like theirs; it is not deterioration when one rises from a lower to a higher plane of thinking, feeling or artistic self-expression. I used to write poems on vital love, I could not do it now (for if I wrote of love, it would be the psychic and spiritual feeling) not because I have narrowed or deteriorated but I have centred myself in a higher consciousness and anything merely vital would not express me. It must be the same with anyone who changes his level of consciousness. Can one say of the man who has grown out of childishness and no longer plays with nursery toys that he has narrowed and deteriorated by the change?

27-8-1933

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What you write is perfectly true, that all human greatness and fame and achievement are nothing before the greatness of the Infinite and the Eternal. There are two possible deductions from that: first that all human action has to be renounced and one should go into a cave; the other is that one should grow out of ego so that the activities of the nature may become one day consciously an action of the Infinite and Eternal. I myself never gave up poetry or other creative human activities out of *tapasyā*; they fell into a subordinate position because the inner life became stronger and stronger slowly: nor did I really drop them, only I had so heavy a work laid upon me that I could not find time to go on. But it took me years and years to get the ego out of them or the vital absorption, but I never heard anybody say nor did it ever occur to me that that was a proof that I was not born for Yoga.

The difficulty you feel or any Sadhak feels about Sadhana is not really a question of meditation *versus* Bhakti *versus* works, it is a difficulty of the attitude to be taken, the approach or whatever you call it. Yours seems to be characterised on one side by a tremendous effort in the mind, on the other a gloomy certitude in the vital which seems to watch and mutter under its breath if

not aloud, "Yes, yes, go ahead, my fine fellow, but"...and at the end of the meditation "What did I tell you?"... A vital so ready to despair that even after a "glorious" flood of poetry, it uses the occasion to preach the gospel of despair! I have passed through most of the difficulties of the Sadhak, but I cannot recollect to have looked on delight of poetical creation or concentration in it as something undivine and a cause for despair. This seems to me excessive.

23-12-1934

HELP TO NEW POETS

Yes, of course, I have been helping X. When somebody wants, really, to develop the literary power, I put some force to help him or her. If there is faculty and application, however latent the faculty, it always grows under the pressure and can even be turned in this or that direction. Naturally, some are more favourable Adharas than others and grow more decisively and quickly. Others drop off not having the necessary power of application. But, on the whole, it is easy enough to make this faculty grow for there is co-operation on the part of the recipient and only the Tamas of the *apravṛtti* and *aprakāśa* in the human mind are to be overcome which are not as serious obstacles in the things of the human mind as a vital resistance or non-co-operation of the will or idea which confronts one when there is a pressure for change or progress in other directions.

11-6-1935

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Q: We feel that your Force gives us the necessary inspiration for poetry, but I often wonder if you send it in a continuous current.

If it were so, we would not write 15 to 20 lines at a stretch and then go on for days together producing only 3 or 4 lines.

A: Of course not. Why should I? It is not necessary. I put my

Force from time to time and let it work out what has to be worked out. It is true that with some I have to put it often to prevent too long stretches of unproductivity, but even there I don't put a continuous current. I have not time for such things.

That depends on the mental instrument. Some people write freely — others do so only when in a special condition.

12-6-1935

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Q: I tried to write a poem, but failed in spite of prayer and call. Then I wrote to you to send me some Force. Before the letter had reached you, lo, the miracle was done! Can you explain the process? Simply the writing has helped to establish the contact with the Force?

A: The call for the Force is very often sufficient, not absolutely necessary that it should reach my physical mind first. Many get as soon as they write — or (if they are outside), when the letter reaches the atmosphere.

Yes, it is the success in establishing the contact that is important. It is a sort of hitching on or getting hold of the invisible button or whatever you like to call it.

21-6-1936

Q: When you send the Force, is there a time limit for its functioning or does it work itself out in the long run or get washed off after a while, finding the Adhar unreceptive?

A: There is no time limit. I have known cases in which I have put a Force for getting a thing done and it seemed to fail damnably at the moment; but after two years everything carried itself out in exact detail and order just as I had arranged it, although I was thinking no more at all of the matter. You ought to know but I suppose you don't that "Psychic" Research in Europe has proved that all so-called "psychic" communications can sink into the consciousness without being noticed and turn up long afterwards.

It is like that with the communication of Force also.

21-6-1936

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Q: If a man has outer knowledge and capacity, will he not receive your right Force?

A: It does not follow. Another man may have the knowledge and receive nothing. If he receives, his knowledge and capacity help the Force to work out the details.

10-4-1937

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Your idea is that either I must inspire him specifically in every detail, making a mere automaton of him, or if I don't do that I can do nothing with him? What is this stupid mechanical notion of things?

28-4-1937

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Q: Don't you develop our intuition by outer guidance in the form of corrections and changes in our English poems?

A: I do so in your English poetry because I am an expert in English poetry. In Bengali poetry I don't do it. I only select among alternatives offered by yourself. Mark that for X I nowa-days avoid correcting or changing as far as possible — that is in order to encourage the inspiration to act in himself. Sometimes I see what he should have written but do not tell it to him, leaving him to get it or not from my silence.

10-4-1937

X's poems are only attempts — good attempts for his age — so I encourage him by telling him that they are good attempts. It is his English poems I correct, as he has talent, but his mastery of the language is still naturally very imperfect. The other three

are masters of language and Y is a poet of a very high order. I give my general opinion only when they want it. I never make suggestions. It is in English poetry that I give my opinions or correct or make suggestions.

22-11-1933

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I do not know that I can suggest any detailed criticisms of Bengali poetry, as I have to rely more on what I feel than on any expert knowledge of language and metre.

I don't want to say anything [about X's book], because when I cannot positively encourage a young and new writer, I prefer to remain mum.... Each writer must be left to develop in his own way.

31-5-1943

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As to X, you can, if you like, send the complimentary portion of my remarks with perhaps a hint that I found his writing rather unequal, so that it may not be all sugar. But the phrases about album-verse and chaotic technique are too vivid — being meant only for private consumption — to be transmitted to the writer of the poem criticised; I would for that have expressed the same view in less drastic language. As I have already said once, I do not want to write anything disparaging or discouraging for those whom I cannot help to do better. I received much poetry from Indian writers for review in the *Arya*, but I always refrained because I would have had to be very severe. I wrote only about Y because there I could seriously, and I think justly, write unqualified praise.

25-5-1931

JUDGMENT OF POETRY

You seem to demand a very rigid and academic fixity of meaning

from my hastily penned comments on the poetry sent to me. I have no unvarying aesthetic standard or fixed qualitative criterion, — not only so, but I hold any such thing to be impossible with regard to so subtle and unintellectual an essence as poetry. It is only physical things that can be subjected to fixed measures and unvarying criteria. Appreciation of poetry is a question of feeling, of intuitive perception, of a certain aesthetic sense, it is not the result of an intellectual judgment.

My judgment does differ with different writers and also with different kinds of writings. If I put "very good" on a poem of S's, it does *not* mean that it is on a par with H's or A's or yours. It means that it is very good S, but not that it is very good H or very good A. "If very good were *won* by them all," you write! But, good heavens, you write that as if I were a master giving marks in a class. I may write "good" or "very good" on the work of a novice if I see that it has succeeded in being poetry and not mere verse however correct or well rhymed — but if H or A or you were to produce work like that, I would not say "very good" at all. There are poems of yours which I have slashed and pronounced unsatisfactory, but if certain others were to send me that, I would say, "Well, you have been remarkably successful this time." I am not giving comparative marks according to a fixed rule. I am using words flexibly according to the occasion and the individual. It would be the same with different kinds of writings. If I write "very good" or "excellent" on some verses of D about his chair, I am not giving it a certificate of equality with some poems of yours similarly appreciated — I am only saying that as humorous easy verse in the lightest vein it is very successful, an outstanding piece of work. Applied to your poem it would mean something different altogether.

Coming from your huge P.S. to the tiny body of your letter, what do you mean by "a perfect success"? I meant that pitched in a certain key and style your poem had worked itself out very well in that key and style in a very satisfying way from the point of view of thought, expression and rhythm. From that standpoint it is a perfect success. If you ask whether it is at your highest possible pitch of inspiration, I would say no, but it is nowhere weak or inadequate and it says something poetically well

worth saying and says it well. One cannot always be writing at the highest pitch of one's possibility, but that is no reason why work of very good quality in itself should be rejected.

14-11-1934

You all attach too much importance to the exact letter of my remarks of the kind as if it were a giving of marks. I have been obliged to renounce the use of the word "good" or even "very good" because it depressed N — though I would be very much satisfied myself if I could always write poetry certified to be very good. I write "very fine" against work which is not improvable, so why ask me for suggestions for improving the unimprovable? As for rising superior to yourself that is another matter — one always hopes to do better than one has yet done, but that means not an avoidance of defects — I always point out ruthlessly anything defective in your work — but to rise higher, wider, deeper etc. etc. in the consciousness. Incidentally, even if my remarks are taken to be of mark-giving value, what shall I do in future if I have exhausted all adverbs? How shall I mark your self-exceeding if I have already certified your work as exceeding? I shall have to fall back on roars "Oh, damned fine, damned damned damned damned fine!"

15-5-1937

DIFFICULTY OF APPRECIATION OF IMAGED SPIRITUAL POETRY

Q: How is it that people find my poetry difficult? I almost suspect that only N and A get the whole hang of it properly. Of course many appreciate when I have explained it to them — but otherwise they admire the beauty of individual phrases without grasping the many-sided whole the phrases form. This morning P, V and N read my "Agni". None of them caught the precise

relevances, the significant connections of the words and phrases of the opening lines:

> *Not from the day but from the night he's born,*
> *Night with her pang of dream — star on pale star*
> *Winging strange rumour through a secret dawn.*
> *For all the black uncanopied spaces mirror*
> *The brooding distance of our plumbless mind.*

In the rest of the poem too they failed to get, now and again, the true point of felicity which constitutes poetic expression. My work is not surrealist: I put meaning into everything, not intellectualism but a coherent vision worked out suggestively in various detail. Why then the difficulty? Everybody feels at home in H's poetry, though I dare say that if I catechised them I might find the deepest felicities missed. All the same, there was something in his work which made his sense more accessible. Even D says that my work passes a little over his head — A's, of course, he finds still more difficult. Perhaps I tend to pack too much stuff into my words and to render my links a little less explicit than H did — or D himself does in Bengali. But would people have the same trouble with vernacular poetry, however like my own it might be?

A: It is precisely because what you put in is not intellectualism or a product of mental imagination that your poetry is difficult to those who are accustomed to a predominantly mental strain in poetry. One can grasp fully if one has some clue to what you put in, either the clue of personal experience or the clue of a sympathetic insight. One who has had the concrete experience of the consciousness as a night with the stars coming out and the sense of the secret dawn can at once feel the force of those two lines, as one who has had experience of the mind as a wide space or infinity or a thing of distances and expanses can fathom those that follow. Or even if he has had not these experiences but others of the same order, he can feel what you mean and enter into it by a kind of identification. Failing this experience, a sym-

pathetic insight can bring the significance home; certainly, N and A who write poems of the inner vision and feeling must have that, moreover their minds are sufficiently subtle and plastic to enter into all kinds of poetic vision and expression. P and V have no such training; it is natural that they should find it difficult. N ought to understand, but he would have to ponder and take some trouble before he got it; night with her labour of dream, the stars, the bird-winging, the bird-voices, the secret dawn are indeed familiar symbols in the poetry he is himself writing or with which he is familiar; but his mind seeks usually at first for precise allegories to fit the symbols and is less quick to see and feel by identification what is behind them — it is still intellectual and not concrete in its approach to these things, although his imagination has learned to make itself their transcribing medium. That is the difficulty, the crux of imaged spiritual poetry; it needs not only the fit writer but the fit audience — and that has yet to be made.

D wrote to me in recent times expressing great admiration for A's poems and wanting to get something of the same quality into his own poetic style. But in any case D has not the mystic mind and vision — H also. In quite different ways they receive and express their vision or experience through the poetic mind and imagination — even so, because it expressed something unusual, D's poetry has had a difficulty in getting recognised except by people who were able to give the right response. H's poetry deals very skilfully with spiritual ideas or feelings through the language of the emotion and the poetic imagination and intelligence — no difficulty there. As regards your poetry, it is indeed more compressed and carefully packed with substance and that creates a difficulty except for those who are alive to the language or have become alive to subtle shades, implications, depths in the words. Even those who understand a foreign language well in the ordinary way find it sometimes difficult to catch these in its poetry. Indications and suggestions easy to catch in one's own tongue are often missed there. So probably your last remark is founded.

14-5-1937

Q: I hope people won't misunderstand what you have remarked about the mystic mind. One's not having the mystic mind and vision does not reflect upon one's poetic excellence, even as a singer of the Spirit. As regards H, you had said long ago that he wrote from several planes. And surely his "Dark Well" poems come from a source beyond the poetic intelligence?

A: I used the word "mystic" in the sense of a certain kind of inner seeing and feeling of things, a way which to the intellect would seem occult and visionary — for this is something different from imagination and its work with which the intellect is familiar. It was in this sense that I said D had not the mystic mind and vision. One can go far in the spiritual way, have plenty of spiritual visions and dreams even without having this mystic mind and way of seeing things. So too one may write poetry from different planes or sources of inspiration and expressing spiritual feelings, knowledge, experience and yet use the poetic intelligence as the thought medium which gives them shape in speech; such poems are not of the mystic type. One may be mystic in this sense without being spiritual — one may also be spiritual without being mystic; or one may be both spiritual and mystic in one. Poems ditto.

I had not in view the *Dark Well* poems when I wrote about H. I was thinking of his ordinary way of writing. If I remember right, the *Dark Well* poems came from the inner mind centre, some from the Higher Mind — other planes may have sent their message to his mind to put in poetic speech, but the main worker was the poetic intelligence which took what was given and turned it into something very vivid, coloured and beautiful, — but surely not mystic in the sense given above.

15-5-1937

YEATS' ADVICE TO INDIAN POETS

Q: What do you think of Yeats' letter to Purohit Swami, in which he advises Indian poets to write in their

mother tongues — Marathi, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Tamil — and not try English?

A: All very well for those who can write in some language of India and don't know English intimately. But what of those who think and write naturally in English? Why didn't Yeats write in Gaelic?

17-9-1936

OVERHEAD INSPIRATION — A FEW EXAMPLES

Q: To help me distinguish the planes of inspiration, would you just indicate where the following lines from various poems of mine have their sources?

1. *What visionary urge*
Has stolen from horizons watched alone
Into thy being with ethereal guile?

2. *A huge sky-passion sprouting from the earth*
In branchèd vastnesses of leafy rapture.

3. *The mute unshadowed spaces of her mind.*

4. *A sea unheard where spume nor spray is blown.*

5. *Irradiant wing-waft through eternal space,*
Pride of lone rapture and invincible sun-gaze.

6. *Born nomad of the infinite heart!*
Time-tamer! star-struck debauchee of light!
Warrior who hurls his spirit like a dart
Across the terrible night
Of death to conquer immortality!

7. *...And to the earth-self suddenly*
Came, through remote entrancèd marvelling

Of adoration ever-widening,
A spacious sense of immortality.

8. *Here life's lost heart of splendour beats immense.*

9. *The haunting rapture of the vast dream-wind*
That blows, star-fragrant, from eternity.

10. *An ocean-hearted ecstasy am I*
Where time flows inward to eternal shores.

A: 1. Second line Intuitive with Overmind touch. Third line imaginative Poetic Intelligence.

2. Imaginative Poetic Intelligence with something of the Higher Mind.

3. Intuitive with Overmind touch.

4. Intuitive.

5. Higher Mind with mental Overmind touch.

6. Illumined Mind with mental Overmind touch.

7. Mixture of Higher and Illumined Mind — in the last line the mental Overmind touch.

8. Illumined Mind with mental Overmind touch.

9. Ditto.

10. Intuitive, Illumined, Overmind touch all mixed together.

I have analysed but very imperfectly — because these influences are so mixed together that the descriptions are not exhaustive.

Also remember that I speak of a *touch*, of the *mental* Overmind touch and that when there is the touch it is not always complete — it may be more apparent from something either in the language or substance or rhythm than in all three together.

Even so, perhaps some of my descriptions are overhasty and denote the impression of the moment. Also the poetical value of the poetry exists independent of its source.

13-2-1934

Q: I should like to know whether you intend any important distinction when you speak of "Overmind touch" and "mental Overmind touch."

A: Yes — the Overmind proper has some gnostic light in it which is absent in the mental Overmind.

2-3-1934

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Q: Once the consciousness is aware of a certain vibration and poetic quality, it is possible to reach out towards its source of inspiration. As poetry for us here must be a way of Yoga, I suppose this reaching out is a helpful attempt; but it would become easier if there were some constant vibration present in the consciousness which we know to have descended from the higher ranges. Very often the creative spark comes to me from the poems I read. I shall be obliged if you will indicate the origin of the few examples below — only the first of which is from my own work.

1. *Plumbless inaudible waves of shining sleep.*

2. *The diamond dimness of the domèd air.*

3. *Withdrawn in a lost attitude of prayer.*

4. *This patter of Time's marring steps across the solitude*
   Of Truth's abidingness, Self-blissful and alone.

5. *Million d'oiseaux d'or, ô fûture vigueur!*

6. *Rapt above earth by power of one fair face.*

7. *I saw them walking in an air of glory.*

8. *Solitary thinkings such as dodge*

Conception to the very bourne of heaven,
Then leave the naked brain.

9. *But felt through all this fleshly dress*
Bright shoots off everlastingness.

10. *I saw Eternity the other night,*
Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright.

A: 1. Illumined Mind.

2. Illumined Mind.

3. Intuition.

4. Illumined Mind with an intuitive element and a strong Overmind touch.

5. Illumined Mind.

6. Difficult to say. More of Higher Mind perhaps than anything else — but something of illumination and intuition also.

7. It is a mixture. Something of the Illumined Mind, something of the Poetic Intelligence diluting the full sovereignty of the higher expression.

8. Higher Mind combined with Illumined.

9. Illumined Mind with something from Intuition.

10. Illumined Mind with something from Overmind.

7-3-1934

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Q: A long time ago, you wrote to me that the Overmind has two levels — the intuitive and the gnostic. There are surely several passages in your own poetry as well as in the Upanishads and the Gita that sustain an inspiration from the former; but has no poetry ever come from the Overmind proper which is turned towards the full supramental Gnosis? Do you remember anything either in Sanskrit or in your own work which derives from there? If not, is it possible to give some idea as to what quality of rhythm, language and substance would constitute the difference between the expression of the Overmind

Intuition and the Overmind Gnosis? Those four lines I quoted to you from yourself the other day — where do they hail from? —

Arms taking to a voiceless supreme delight,
Life that meets the Eternal with close breast,
An unwalled mind dissolved in the Infinite,
Force one with unimaginable rest.[1]

A: It is really very difficult for me to say anything in this respect about my own poetry; there is too complex a working of the Consciousness for it to be possible for me to classify and define. As for the Overmind Gnosis, I cannot yet say anything — I am familiar with its workings, but they are not easily definable or describable and, as for poetry I have not yet observed sufficiently to say whether it enters in anywhere or not. I should expect its intervention to be extremely rare even as a touch; but I refer at present all higher Overmind intervention to the Overmind Intuition in order to avoid any risk of overstatement. In the process of overmental transformation what I have observed is that the Overmind first takes up the illumined and higher mind and intellect (thinking, perceiving and reasoning intelligence) into itself and modifies itself to suit the operation — the result is what may be called a mental Overmind — then it lifts these lower movements and the intuitive mind together into a higher reach of itself, forming there the Overmind Intuition, and then all that into the Overmind Gnosis awaiting the supramental transformation. The Overmind "touch" on the Higher Mind and Illumined Mind can thus raise towards the O.I. or to the O.G. or leave in the M.O.; but estimating at a glance as I have to do, it is not easy to be quite precise. I may have to revise my estimates later on a little, though not perhaps very appreciably, when I am able to look at things in a more leisurely way and fix the misty lines which often tend to fade away, being an indefinable border.

3-5-1937

[1] "The Life Heavens", *Collected Poems* (Centenary Edition, 1972), p. 575.

Q: I said to X and Y that it has been a habit with me to reread and repeat and hum lines which I have felt or known to have come from very high sources. I mentioned your recent poems as my aid to drawing inspiration from the Overhead planes. I quoted also the famous lines from other poets which have derived from the highest levels. Y begged me to type for her all the lines of this character from your poems. I have chosen the following:

1. *O marvel bird with the burning wings of light and the*
   unbarred lids that look beyond all space...

2. *Lost the titan winging of the thought.*

3. *Arms taking to a voiceless supreme delight,*
   Life that meets the Eternal with close breast,
   An unwalled mind dissolved in the Infinite,
   Force one with unimaginable rest.

4. *My consciousness climbed like a topless hill...*

5. *He who from Time's dull motion escapes and thrills*
   Rapt thoughtless, wordless into the Eternal's breast,
   Unrolls the form and sign of being,
   Seated above in the omniscient Silence.

6. *Calm faces of the gods on backgrounds vast*
   Bringing the marvel of the infinitudes...

7. *A silent unnamed emptiness content*
   Either to fade in the Unknowable
   Or thrill with the luminous seas of the Infinite.

8. *Crossing power-swept silences rapture-stunned,*
   Climbing high far ethers eternal-sunned...

9. *I have drunk the Infinite like a giant's wine.*

10. My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight...

11. Rose of God like a blush of rapture on Eternity's face,
Rose of Love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace!
Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature's abyss:
Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life beatitude's kiss.

I shan't ask you to tell me in detail the sources of all these lines — but what do you think in general of my choice? Only for one quotation I must crave the favour of your closer attention. Please do try to tell me something about it, for I like it so much that I cannot remain without knowing all that can be known: it is, of course, Number 3 here. I consider these lines the most satisfying I have ever read: poetically as well as spiritually, you have written others as great — but what I mean to say is that the whole essence of the truth of life is given by them and every cry in the being seems answered. So be kind enough to take a little trouble and give me an intimate knowledge of them. I'll be very happy to know their sources and the sort of enthousiasmos *you had when writing them. How exactly did they come into being?*

A: The choice is excellent. I am afraid I couldn't tell you in detail the sources, though I suppose they all belong to the Overhead inspiration. In all I simply remained silent and allowed the lines to come down shaped or shaping themselves on the way — I don't know that I know anything else about it. All depends on the stress of the *enthousiasmos*, the force of the creative thrill and largeness of the wave of its Ananda, but how is that describable or definable? What is prominent in No. 3 is a certain calm, deep and intense spiritual emotion taken up by the spiritual vision that sees exactly the state or experience and gives it its exact revelatory words. It is an Overmind vision and experience

and condition that is given a full power of expression by the word and the rhythm — there is a success in "embodying" them or at least the sight and emotion of them which gives the lines their force.

4-5-1937

Q: It is a bit of a surprise to me that Virgil's

Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt

is now considered by you "an almost direct descent from the Overmind consciousness".[1] *I was under the impression that, like that other line of his —*

O passi graviora! dabit deus his quoque finem

it was a perfect mixture of the Higher Mind with the Psychic; and the impression was based on something you had yourself written to me in the past. Similarly I remember you definitely declaring Wordsworth's

The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep

to be lacking precisely in the Overmind note and having only the note of Intuition in an intense form.[2] *What you write now means a big change of opinion in both the instances — but how and why the change?*

A: Yes, certainly, my ideas and reactions to some of the lines and passages about which you had asked me long ago, have developed and changed and could not but change. For at that time I was new to the overhead regions or at least to the highest of them — for the higher thought and the illumination were already old friends — and could not be sure or complete in my

[1] See "Letters on *Savitri*" in *Savitri* (Centenary Edition, 1972), p. 803.

[2] See "Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art" in *The Future Poetry* (Centenary Edition, 1972), p. 368.

perception of many things concerning them. I hesitated therefore to assign anything like Overmind touch or inspiration to passages in English or other poetry and did not presume to claim any of my own writing as belonging to this order. Besides, the intellect took still too large a part in my reactions to poetry; for instance, I judged Virgil's line too much from what seemed to be its surface intellectual import and too little from its deeper meaning and vision and its reverberations of the Overhead. So also with Wordsworth's line about the "fields of sleep": I have since then moved in those fields of sleep and felt the breath which is carried from them by the winds that came to the poet, so I can better appreciate the depth of vision in Wordsworth's line. I could also see more clearly the impact of the Overhead on the work of poets who wrote usually from a mental, a psychic, an emotional or other vital inspiration, even when it gave only a tinge.

20-11-1946

GRADES OF POETIC STYLE — SOME EXAMPLES

Q: You have distinguished five kinds of poetic style — the adequate, the effective, the illumined, the inspired, the inevitable. In what kind are the following lines from my "Ne plus ultra"? —

Is the keen voice of tuneful ecstasy
To be denied its winged omnipotence,
Its ancient kinship to immensity
And the swift suns?

A: This seems to me the effective style at a high pitch.

*

Q: Or take these lines — from your early "Urvasie":

But plunged o'er difficult gorge and prone ravine

And rivers thundering between dim walls,
Driven by immense desire, until he came
To dreadful silence of the peaks and trod
Regions as vast and lonely as his love.

A: This is also high-pitch effective except the last line which is in the inspired style — perhaps!

23-9-1934

*

Q: Some more lines to classify, the close of a sonnet by me — the sestet following the last four words of the octave:

For I have viewed,
Astir within my clay's engulfing sleep,
An alien astonishment of light!
Let me be merged with its unsoundable deep
And mirror in futile farness the full height
Of a heaven barred for ever to my distress,
Rather than hoard life's happy littleness!

A: This is indeed an example of the effective style at its best, that is to say rising to something of illumination, especially in the second, fourth and sixth lines.

16-9-1934

*

Q: Will you please comment on this new sonnet of mine, "Mystic Mother"?

Seeing you walk our little ways, they wonder
That I who scorn the common loves of life
Should kneel to You in absolute surrender,
Deeming Your visible perfection wife
Unto my spirit's immortality.
They think I have changed one weakness for another,
Because they mark not the new birth of me —

This body which by You, the Mystic Mother,

Has now become a child of my vast soul!
Loving Your feet's earth-visitation, I
Find each heart-throb miraculously flower
Out of the unplumbable God-mystery
Behind dark clay; and, hour by dreamful hour,
Upbear that fragrance like an aureole.

A: Exceedingly good. Here you have got to inevitability. I forgot to say that all the styles "adequate", "effective" etc. can be raised to inevitability in their own line. The octet here is adequateness raised to inevitability except the fourth and fifth lines in which the effective undergoes the same transformation. In the sestet on the other hand it is the illumined style that becomes inevitable.

17-9-1934

*

Q: Would you describe the following poem of mine as "coin of the fancy"? What is the peculiarity of poetic effect, if any, here?

NIGHT

No more the press and play of light release
Thrilling bird-news between high columned trees.
Upon the earth a blank of slumber drops:
Only cicadas toil in grassy shops —
But all their labours seem to cry "Peace, peace."
Nought travels down the roadway save the breeze;
And though beyond our gloom — throb after throb —
Gathers the great heart of a silver mob,
There is no haste in heaven, no frailty mars
The very quiet business of the stars.

A: It is very successful — the last two lines are very fine and the rest have their perfection. I should call it a mixture of inspiration

and cleverness — or perhaps ingenious discovery would be a better phrase. I am referring to such images as "thrilling bird-news", "grassy shops", "silver mob". Essentially they are conceits but saved by the note of inspiration running through the poem — while in the last line the conceit "quiet business" is lifted beyond itself and out of conceitedness by the higher tone at which the inspiration arrives there.

20-8-1936

*

Q: I feel my poem "The Triumph of Dante" has now been sufficiently quintessenced. If it satisfies you, will you make whatever analysis is possible of its inspirational qualities?

These arms, stretched through ten hollow years,
have brought her
Back to my heart! A light, a hush immense
Falls suddenly upon my voice of tears,
Out of a sky whose each blue moment bears
The shining touch of that omnipotence.
Ineffable the secrecies supreme
Pass and elude my gaze — an exquisite
Failure to hold some nectarous Infinite!
The uncertainties of time grow shadowless —
And never but with startling loveliness,
A white shiver of breeze on moonlit water,
Flies the chill thought of death across my dream.

For, how shall earth be dark when human eyes
Mirror the love whose smile is paradise? —
A love that misers not its golden store
But gives itself and yearns to give yet more,
As though God's light were inexhaustible
Not for His joy but this one heart to fill!

A: There are three different tones or pitches of inspiration in the poem, each in its own manner reaching inevitability. The first

seven lines up to "gaze" bear as a whole the stamp of a high elevation of thought and vision — height and illumination lifted up still farther by the Intuition to its own inspired level; one passage (lines 3, 4) seems to me almost to touch in its tone of expression an Overmind seeing. But here "A light, a hush...a voice of tears" anticipates the second movement by an element of subtle inner intensity in it. This inner intensity — where a deep secret intimacy of feeling and seeing replaces the height and large luminosity — characterises the rest of the first part. This passage has a seizing originality and authenticity in it — it is here that one gets a pure inevitability. In the last lines the intuition descends towards the higher mental plane with less revelatory power in it but more precise in its illumination. That is the difference between sheer vision and thought. But the poem is exceedingly fine as a whole; the close also is of the first order.

14-9-1936

*

Q: According to your five kinds of poetic style — the adequate, the effective, the illumined, the inspired and the pure inevitable which is something indefinable — how would you class Dante's style? It has a certain simplicity mixed with power which suggests what I may call the forceful adequate — of course at an inevitable pitch — as its definition. Or is it a mixture of the adequate and the effective? A line like —

E venni dal martirio a questa pace[1] —

is evidently adequate; but has this the same style —

Sì come quando Marsïa traesti
Della vagina delle membra sue?[2]

A: The "forceful adequate" might apply to much of Dante's writing, but much else is pure inevitable; elsewhere it is the ins-

[1] "And came from that martyrdom into this peace."

[2] "As when you pulled Marsyas out of the scabbard of his limbs."

pired style as in the last lines quoted. I would not call the other line merely adequate; it is much more than that. Dante's simplicity comes from a penetrating directness of poetic vision, it is not the simplicity of an adequate style.

3-11-1936

*

Q: I am drawn to Dante especially by his conception of Beatrice which seems to me to give him his excellence. How would you define that conception?

A: Outwardly it was an idealisation, probably due to a psychic connection of the past which could not fulfil itself in that life. But I do not see how his conception of Beatrice gives him his excellence — it was only one element in a very powerful and complex nature.

10-7-1932

"TRANCE"[1] — SOME METRICAL AND OTHER POINTS

Q: Is it not the case that, in this metre[2]*, either one must keep a rather staccato movement, pausing with almost unbroken regularity at the end of each foot, or else risk the iambic pentameter approximation by the use of an easy and fluent movement, as in your very beautiful line,*

Mute the body aureate with light,

that would seem least out of place if inserted amidst other iambic pentameters?

A: Possibly — though the line does not read to my ear very well as an iambic pentameter — the movement sounds then common and rather lame. It goes better as a trochaic rhythm. It is true that there is this dilemma and the whole skill will then be in

[1] *Collected Poems* (Centenary Edition, 1972), p. 572. [2] Quantitative Trimeter.

avoiding the staccato effect, but that necessitates a very light movement.

*

I think the principle of this metre[1] should be to say a few very clear-cut things in a little space. At least it looks so to me at present — though a more free handling of the metre might show that the restriction was not justifiable.

I had chosen this metre — or rather it came to me and I accepted it — because it seemed to me both brief and easy, so suitable for an experiment. But I find now that it was only seemingly easy and in fact very difficult. The ease with which I wrote it only came from the fact that by a happy inspiration the right rhythm for it came into my consciousness and wrote itself out by virtue of the rhythm being there. If I had consciously experimented I might have stumbled over the same difficulties as have come in your way.

The *Bird of Fire*[2] was written on two consecutive days and afterwards revised. The *Trance* at one sitting — it took only a few minutes. You may have the date as they were both completed on the same day and sent to you the next.

*

Q: In the line —

Halo-moon of ecstasy unknown —

is the "o" assonance satisfactory, or does the ear feel the two sounds come too close or for some reason are too insistent?

A: It seems to me that there is sufficient space between to prevent the assonance from being too prominent; it came like that and I kept it because the repetition and the prolongation of the full "o" sound seemed to me to carry in it a certain unexpressed (and inexpressible) significance.

*

[1] Quantitative Trimeter. [2] *Op. cit.*, p. 571.

Q: What exactly does "Halo-moon" signify? In line 2 there was the concrete physical moon ringed with a halo. Is the suggestion of line 10 that a glory of indefinable presence is imaged by a lunar halo — the moon as a distinct object now being swallowed up in the halo? My difficulty is that if it is "halo" simply it cannot be a "moon" as well. But possibly the compound "halo-moon" is elliptical for "moon with its surrounding halo".

A: Well, it is of course the "moon with its halo", but I wanted to give a suggestion if not of the central form being swallowed up in the halo, at least of moon and halo being one ecstatic splendour as when one is merged in ecstasy.

*

Q: The last line —

Ocean self enraptured and alone —

I took as meaning "Self, who art symbolised by this ocean", since otherwise you would probably have written "self-enraptured"?

A: Yes, that is right.

IAMBIC PENTAMETER

Q: How is it that one slips so easily into the iambic pentameter when one wants to say things of most significance? Have you also a penchant *for it?*

A: An inspiration which leans more on a sublimated or illumined thought than on some strong or subtle or very simple psychic or vital intensity and swiftness of feeling, seems to call naturally for the iambic pentameter, though it need not confine itself to

that form. I myself have not yet found another metre which gives room enough along with an apposite movement — shorter metres are too cramped, the longer ones need a technical dexterity (if one is not to be either commonplace or clumsy) for which I have not leisure.

5-3-1932

AIM OF QUANTITATIVE EFFORTS IN ENGLISH POETRY

X's poem in *laghu-guru* is splendid. But perhaps Y would say that it is a pure Bengali rhythm, which means, I suppose, that it reads as well and easily in Bengali as if it were not written on an unusual rhythmic principle. I suppose that must necessarily be the aim of a new metre or metrical principle; it is what I am trying to do with quantitative efforts in English.

THE LOOSE ALEXANDRINE

Q: Robert Bridges has invented what is called the loose Alexandrine. Lascelles Abercrombie explains its principle thus: "The novelty is to make the number of syllables the fixt base of the metre; but these are the effective syllables, those which pronunciation easily slurs or combines with following syllables being treated as metrically ineffective. The line consists of 12 metrically effective syllables; and within this constant scheme the metre allows of any variation in the number and placing of the accents. Thus the rhythm attained is purely accentual, in accordance with the genius of the English language, but a new freedom is achieved within the confines of a new kind of discipline." What do you think of the principle?

A: I do not understand how this can be called an accentual rhythm except in the sense that all English rhythm, prose or verse, is accentual. What one usually means by accentual verse is verse with a fixed number of accents for each line, but here accents can

be of any number and placed anywhere as it would be in a prose cut up into lines. The only distinctive feature is thus of the number of "effective" syllables. The result is a kind of free verse movement with a certain irregular regularity in the lengths of the lines.

1936

THE PROBLEM OF BLANK VERSE QUATRAINS

Q: I have begun a poem on Parvati in blank verse quatrains. Here are the first five stanzas. If at all you think I should continue, will not the closed stanza plan adopted so far prove monotonous?

Men dreamed of her strange hair and saw it fall
A cataract of nectar through their sleep,
Crushing the soul with sweetness — and woke a-dread,
In all their limbs a speechless heaven of pain!

Her voice reached to Creation's highest peak,
And though a music most delicate its rapture
Swept through the seven worlds and found the gods
Helpless like flames swaying in a huge wind!

A terror beautiful were those dark eddies,
Her fathomless vague-glimmering pure eyes,
Wherein the spirits that rashly plunged their love
Whirled through a lifetime of bewildered bliss!

But all in vain her voice and gaze and hair
Before the snowy calm immutable
Of Shiva's meditation, a frozen fire
Of omnipotence alone with its self-splendour!

Like an immortal death his far face glowed —
Inaudible disclosure of some white
Eternity of unperturbed dream-vast
Behind the colour and passion of time's heart-beat!

A: It looks as if you were facing the problem of blank verse by attempting it under conditions of the maximum difficulty. Not content with choosing a form which is based on the single-line blank verse (I mean, of course, each line a clear-cut entity by itself) as opposed to the flowing and freely enjambed variety you try to unite flow-lines and single-line and farther undertake a form of blank verse quatrains! I have myself tried the blank verse quatrain; even, when I attempted the single-line blank verse on a large scale in *Savitri* I found myself falling involuntarily into a series of four-line movement. But even though I was careful in the building, I found it led to a stiff monotony and had to make a principle of variation — one line, two line, three line, four line or longer passages (paragraphs as it were) alternating with each other; otherwise the system would be a failure.

In attempting the blank verse quatrain one has to avoid like poison all flatness of movement — a flat movement immediately creates a sense of void and sets the ear asking for the absent rhyme. The last line of each verse especially must be a powerful line acting as a strong close so that the rhyming close-cadence is missed no more. And, secondly, there must be a very careful building of the structure. A mixture of sculpture and architecture is indicated — there should be plenty of clear-cut single lines but they must be built into a quatrain that is itself a perfect structural whole. In your lines it is these qualities that are lacking, so that the poetic substance fails in its effect owing to rhythmic insufficiency. One closing line of yours will absolutely not do — that of the fourth stanza — its feminine ending is enough to damn it; you may have feminine endings but not in the last line of the quatrain, and its whole movement is an unfinished movement. The others would do, but they lose half their force by being continuations of clauses which look back to the previous line for their sense. They can do that sometimes, but only on condition of their still having a clear-cut wholeness in themselves and coming in with a decisive force. In the structure you have attempted to combine the flow of the lyrical quatrain with the force of a single-line blank verse system. I suppose it can be done, but here the single-line has interfered with the flow and the flow has interfered with the single-line force.

In my version —

> Men dreamed of her strange hair; they saw it fall
> A cataract of nectar through their sleep,
> Crushing the soul with sweetness; they woke from dread,
> With all their limbs a speechless heaven of pain!
>
> Her voice soared to Creation's highest peak,
> And that most delicate music with its rapture
> Sweeping through seven worlds found out the gods
> Helpless like flames swaying in a huge wind!
>
> A beautiful terror were those dark conscious eddies,
> Her pure vague-glimmering and fathomless eyes;
> Therein the spirits that rashly plunged their love
> Fell whirled through lifetimes of bewildering bliss!
>
> But all in vain, her voice and gaze and hair
> Before the snow-pale and immutable calm
> Of Shiva's meditation, a frozen fire
> Of lone omnipotence locked in self-light!
>
> His far face glowed like an immortal death:
> The inaudible disclosure of some white
> Eternity, some unperturbed dream-vast,
> It slew the colour and passion of time's heart-beat! —

I have made only minor changes for the most part, but many of them in order to secure what I feel to be the missing elements. I have indicated in the places where my reasons for change were of another kind what those reasons were;[1] the rest are dictated by the two considerations of rhythmic efficiency and quatrain structure. In the first verse this structure is secured by putting two pauses in the middle of lines, each clause taking up the sense

[1] Line 3: "'A-dread' seems to me rather feeble."
Line 5: "'Reached' is very weak."
Line 17: "Why this inversion? It spoils the power and directeness of the line."
Lines 18 & 19: "The double 'of' is very awkward and spoils both force and flow."

from there and enlarging into amplitude and then bringing to a forceful close. In the second verse and in the fourth I have attempted a sweeping continuous quatrain movement but taken care to separate them by a different structure so as to avoid monotony. The third is made of two blank verse couplets, each complementary in sense to the other; the fifth is based on a one-line monumental phrase worked out in sense by a three-line development with a culminating close-line. The whole thing is not perhaps as perfect as it needs to be, but it is in the nature of a demonstration, to show on what principles the blank verse quatrain can be built if it has to be done at all — I have founded it on the rule of full but well-sculptured single lines and an architectural quatrain structure: others are possible, but I think would be more difficult to execute.

I had half a mind to illustrate my thesis by quotations from *Savitri*, but I resist the temptation, warned by the scowling forehead of Time — this will do.

P.S. I don't consider the proximity of the closing words "light" and "white" in the last stanzas an objection since the quatrains stand as separate entities — so I did not alter; of course in continuous blank verse an objection would be.

18-7-1933

REGULAR AND IRREGULAR SONNET RHYMES

The two regular sonnet rhyme sequences are (1) the Shakespearean ab ab cd cd ef ef gg — that is, three quatrains with alternate rhymes with a closing couplet and (2) the Miltonic with an octet abba abba (as in your second and third quatrains) and a sestet of three rhymes arranged according to choice. The Shakespearean is closer to the natural lyric rhythm, the Miltonic to the ode movement — i.e. something large and grave. The Miltonic is very difficult, for it needs either a strong armoured structure of the thought or a carefully developed unity of the building which all poets can't manage. However there have been attempts at an irregular sonnet rhyme sequence. Keats tried his hand at one a

century ago and I vaguely believe (but that may be only an illusion or Maya) that modern poets have played loose fantastic tricks of their own invention; but I don't have much first hand knowledge of modern (contemporary) poetry. Anyhow I have myself written a series of sonnets with the most heterodox rhyme arrangements, so I couldn't very well go for you when you do the same. One who has committed many murders can't very well rate another for having done a few. All the same this sequence is rather — a Miltonic octet with Shakespearean close would be more possible. I think I have done something of the kind with not too bad an effect, but I have no time to consult my poetry file and am not sure. In the sonnet too it might be well for you to do the regular thing first soberly and well, and afterwards when you are sure of your steps, frisk and dance.

22-2-1936

SOME VERBAL SUBTLETIES AND TECHNICAL POINTS

Q: I should like to know what exactly the meaning of the word "absolve" is in the following lines from your "Love and Death". I have been puzzled because the ordinary dictionary meanings don't seem to fit in.

> *But if with price, ah God! what easier! Tears*
> *Dreadful, innumerable I will absolve,*
> *Or pay with anguish through the centuries...*

There is another passage a few pages later where the same word is used:

> *For late*
> *I saw her mid those pale inhabitants*
> *Whom bodily anguish visits not, but thoughts*
> *Sorrowful and dumb memories absolve,*
> *And martyrdom of scourged hearts quivering.*

A: In the second passage it is used in its ordinary sense. "Abso-

lution" means release from sins or from debts — the sorrowful thoughts and memories are the penalty or payment which procures the release from the debt which has been accumulated by the sins and errors of human life.

In the first passage "absolve" is used in its Latin and not in its English sense, — "to pay off a debt", but here the sense is stretched a little. Instead of saying "I will pay off with tears", Ruru says: "I will pay off tears" as the price of the absolution. This Latinisation and the inversion of syntactical connections are familiar licences in English poetry — of course, it is incorrect, but a deliberate incorrectness, a violence purposely done to the language in order to produce a poetic effect. The English language, unlike the French and some others, likes, as Stephen Phillips used to say, to have liberties taken with it. But, of course, before one can take these liberties, one must be a master of the language — and, in this case, of the Latin also.

1931

*

Q: In my lines —

> *This heart grew brighter when your breath's proud chill*
> *Flung my disperse life-blood more richly in —*

a terminal "d" will at once English that Latin fellow "disperse", but is he really objectionable? At first I had "Drove" instead of "Flung" — so the desire for a less dental rhythm was his raison d'être, *but if he seems a trifle weaker than his English Avatar, he can easily be dispensed with now.*

A: I don't think "disperse" as an adjective can pass — the dentals are certainly an objection but do not justify this Latin-English neologism.

12-6-1937

*

Q: Why should that poor "disperse" be inadmissible

when English has many such Latin forms — e.g. "consecrate", "dedicate", "intoxicate"? I felt it to be a natural innovation and not against the genius of the language: I discover now from the Standard Dictionary that it is not even a neologism — it is only an obsolete word. I have a substitute ready, however:

Flung my diffuse life-blood more richly in.

But is not "disperse" formed on exactly the same principle as "diffuse"? By the way, does "dispersed" make the line really too dental, now that "Flung" is there and not the original "Drove"?

A: I don't think people use "consecrate", "intoxicate" etc. as adjectives nowadays — at any rate it sounds to me too *recherché*. Of course, if one chose, this kind of thing might be perpetrated —

O wretched man intoxicate,
Let not thy life be consecrate
To wine's red yell (spell, *if you want to be "poetic"*).
Else will thy soul be dedicate
To Hell —

but it is better not to do it. It makes no difference if there are other words like "diffuse" taken from French (not Latin) which have this form and are generally used adjectives. Logic is not the sole basis of linguistic use. I thought at first it was an archaism and there might be some such phrase in old poetry as lids disperse, but as I could not find it even in the Oxford which claims to be exhaustive and omniscient, I concluded it must be a neologism of yours. But archaism or neologism does not matter. "Dispersed life-blood" brings three d's so near together that they collide a little — if they were farther from each other it would not matter — or if they produced some significant or opportune effect. I think "diffuse" will do.

13-6-1937

Q: What do I find this afternoon? Just read:

Suddenly
From motionless battalions as outride
A speed disperse of horsemen, from that mass
Of livid menace went a frail light cloud
Rushing through heaven, and behind it streamed
The downpour all in wet and greenish lines.

This is from your own "Urvasie", written in the middle nineties of the last century! Of course it is possible that the printer has omitted a terminal "d" — but is that really the explanation?

A: I dare say I tried to Latinise. But that does not make it a permissible form. If it is obsolete, it must remain obsolete. I thought at first it was an archaism you were trying on, I seemed to remember something of the kind, but as I could find it nowhere I gave up the idea — it was probably my own crime that I remembered.

29-6-1937

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Q: The English reader has digested Carlyle and swallowed Meredith and is not quite unwilling to REJOYCE *in even more startling strangenesses of expression at the present day. Will his stomach really turn at the novelty of that phrase which you wouldn't approve: "the voice of a devouring eye"? "The voice of an eye" sounds rather idiotic, but if the adjective "devouring" is added the phrase seems to become effective. "Devouring eye" is then a synecdoche — isolating and emphasising Shakespeare's most remarkable quality, his eager multitudinous sight, and the oral epithet provides a connection with the idea of a voice, thus preventing the catachresis from being too startling. If Milton could give us "blind mouths" and Wordsworth*

Thou eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, readst the eternal deep,

is there very much to object to in this visioned voice?

A: Can't accept all that. A voice of a devouring eye is even more re-Joycingly mad than a voice of an eye pure and simple. If the English language is to go to the dogs, let it go, but the Joyce cut by the way of Bedlam does not recommend itself to me.

The poetical examples have nothing to do with the matter. Poetry is permitted to be insane — the poet and the madman go together: though even there there are limits. Meredith and Carlyle are tortuous or extravagant in their style only — though they can be perfectly sane when they want. In poetry anything can pass — for instance, my "voice of a tilted nose":

O voice of a tilted nose,
Speak but speak not in prose!

Nose like a blushing rose,
O Joyce of a tilted nose!

That is high poetry, but put it in prose and it sounds insane.

5-5-1935

*

Q: In the lines,

O Grace that flowest from the Master's Will,
How fondly thou dost mitigate the power
Of utter summit for our valleyed sake...

What do you think of the turn "our valleyed sake"? Can it pass?

A: "For our valleyed sake" is a locution that offers fascinating possibilities but fails to sound English. One might risk, "Let fall some tears for my unhappy sake" in defiance of grammar or

humourously, "Oh shed some sweat-drops for my corpulent sake"; but "valleyed sake" carries the principle of the *ārṣa prayoga*[1] beyond the boundaries of the possible.

Q: Is there any advantage in changing the phrase —

as though a press
Of benediction lay on me unseen —

to

as though the press
Of a benediction lay on me unseen?

A: No, no. The first was immeasurably better. "A press of benediction" is striking and effective; "the press of a benediction" is flat and means nothing. Besides, it is not good English. You can say "a press of affairs", "a press of matter"; you can say "the pressure of this affair", but you cannot say "the press of an affair".

1931

*

Q: Here is a sonnet for your judgment. It deals with the massive spiritual light descending into the brain like an inverted pyramid. The final phrase has a historical allusion:

...a conscious hill
Down-kindled by some Cheops of the skies
To monument his lordship over death.

You must have heard of Cheops, the Egyptian King who built the Great Pyramid at Gizeh?

A: Of course I have heard of Cheops, but did not expect to hear

[1] Rishi's licence.

of him again in this context. Don't you think the limiting proper name brings in an excessive touch of intellectual ingenuity, almost as if the poem were built for the sake of this metaphor and not for its subject? I would myself prefer a general term so as to prevent any drop from sublimity, e.g.

Down-sloped by some King-Builder of the skies.

But it is a good sonnet and there is certainly both vision and poetry in it.

25-9-1933

*

"Revealed her mateless beauty the true paradise" is not permissible in prose, but it is one of those contracted expressions which are allowed in poetry and it is quite intelligible.

8-10-1934

*

Q: In your sonnet "The Human Enigma" occurs the magnificent line:

His heart is a chaos and an empyrean.

But I am much saddened by the fact that the rhythm of these words gets spoiled at the end by a mis-stressing in "empyrean". "Empyrean" is stressed currently in the penultimate syllable, thus: "empyre'an". Your line puts the stress on the second syllable. It is in the adjective "empyreal" that the second syllable is stressed, but the noun is never stressed that way, so far as I know. Perhaps you have a precedent in the Elizabethans? Or have you deliberately taken liberty with the accentuation? The same mis-stressing occurs also in Book II, Canto 11, of Savitri[1]*: page 270, line 6:*

Surprised in their untracked empyrean.

[1] Centenary Edition, 1972.

But you certainly do not always stress the noun like the adjective. In Book I, Canto III, line 5 from below on page 25 is the splendid verse:

An empyrean vision saw and knew.

Here the penultimate syllable gets the ictus. May I have some explanation? Perhaps there are acknowledged alternative accentuations and I am just ignorant? I really hope so, for otherwise, while the line from Book II of 'Savitri' can easily take a noun after "empyrean" or get its "empyrean" changed to "empyreal" and then take a noun, the sonnet-line will not have the same absolute grandeur of phrase as now if it is rewritten:

His heart is a chaos and an empyrean's span.

If it is to rhyme with "man", "plan" and "scan" in your sonnet-scheme it must bring in "span" — mustn't it?

A: I find in the Chambers's Dictionary the noun "empyrean" is given two alternative pronunciations, each with a different stress, — the first, "empyre'an" and secondly, "empy'rean". Actually in the book the accent seems to fall on the consonant "r" instead of the vowel. That must be a mistake in printing; it is evident that it is meant to fall on the second vowel. If that is so, my variation is justified and needs no further defence. The adjective "empyreal" the dictionary gives as having the same alternative accentuation as the noun, that is to say, either "empyre'al" with the accent on the long "e" or "empy'real" with the accent on the second syllable, but the "e" although unaccented still keeps its long pronunciation. Then? But even if I had no justification from the dictionary and the noun "empy'rean" were only an Aurobindonian freak and a wilful shifting of the accent, I would refuse to change it; for the rhythm here is an essential part of whatever beauty there is in the line.

P.S. Your view is supported by the small Oxford Dictionary which, I suppose, gives the present usage, Chambers being an older authority. But Chambers must represent a former usage and I am entitled to revive even a past or archaic form if I choose to do so.

4-8-1949

Q: As between the forms — "with a view to express" and "with a view to expressing" — the Concise Oxford Dictionary calls the former vulgar.

A: I don't agree with Oxford. Both forms are used. If "to express" is vulgar, "to expressing" is cumbrous and therefore inelegant.

Q: The Oxford Dictionary seems to leave one no choice as regards counting the number of syllables in the word "vision" and its likes. I quote below some of the words explained as monosyllables in the same way as "rhythm" and "prism":

Fa'shion (-shn)
Passion (pa'shn)
Prison (-zn)
Scission (si'shn)
Trea'son (-ezn)
Vi'sion (-zhn)

As X would say, qu'en dites vous? *Chambers's Dictionary makes "vision" a dissyllable, which is quite sensible, but the monosyllabic pronunciation of it deserves to be considered at least a legitimate variant when H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler — the name of Fowler is looked upon as a synonym for authority on the English language — give no other. I don't think I am mistaken in inter-*

preting their intention. Take "realm", which they pronounce in brakets as "relm"; now I see no difference as regards syllabification between their intention here and in the instances above.

P.S. I must admit, however, what struck me after typing the preceding. In the preface to the Oxford Dictionary it is said that it has not been thought necessary to mention certain pronunciations which are familiar to the normal reader, such as that of the suffix "-ation" (āshn). Does this mean that a word like "meditation" is to be taken as three syllables only? According to my argument there seems no alternative; and yet the example looks very much like a reductio ad absurdum.

A: You may not have a choice — but I have a choice, which is to pronounce and scan words like vision and passion and similar words as all the poets of the English language (those at least whom I know) have consistently pronounced and scanned them — as dissyllables. If you ask me to scan Shakespeare's line in the following manner to please H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler,

Ĭn māī|dĕn mēd|ĭtatīōn | fān|cў frēē,

I shall decline without thanks. Shakespeare wrote, if I remember right, "treasons, strategems and spoils"; Shelley, Tennyson, any poet of the English language, I believe would do the same — though I have no books with me to give chapter and verse. I lived in both northern and southern England, but I never heard vision pronounced vizhn, it was always vizhun; treason, of course, is pronounced trez'n, but that does not make it a monosyllable in scansion because there is in these words a very perceptible slurred vowel sound in pronunciation which I represent by the '; in poison also. If realm, helm etc. are taken as monosyllables, that is quite reasonable, for there is no vowel between "l" and "m" and none is heard, slurred or otherwise in pronunciation. The words rhythm and prism are technically monosyllables, because they are so pronounced in French (i.e.

that part of the word, for there is a mute "e" in French): but in fact most Englishmen take the help of a slurred vowel-sound in pronouncing rhythms and it would be quite permissible to write in English as a blank verse line, "The unheard rhythms that sustain the world".

This is my conviction and not all the Fowlers in the world will take it away from me. I only hope the future lexicographers will not "fowl" the language any more in that direction; otherwise we shall have to write lines like this —

> O vizhn! O pashn! m'd'tashn! h'rr'p'lashn!
> Why did the infern'l Etern'l und'take creash'n?
> Or else, creat'ng, could he not have afford'd
> Not to allow the Engl'sh tongue to be Oxford'd?

P.S. I remember a book (Hamerton's? some one else's? I don't remember) in which the contrast was drawn between the English and French languages, that the English tongue tended to throw all the weight on the first or earliest possible syllable and slurred the others, the French did the opposite — so that when an Englishman pretends to say strawberries, what he really says is strawb's. That is the exaggeration of a truth — but all the same there is a limit.

27-9-1934

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> *Q: Of course a language is not made altogether according to logical rules. Originally, or aboriginally, it came, I suppose, out of the entrails and in spite of all Volapuks and Esperantos natural languages will flourish. But I should like to ask you a few questions suggested by your falling foul of the Fowlers. The poetic pronunciation of words cannot be accepted as a standard for current speech — can it? On your own showing, "treason" and "poison" which are monosyllables in prose or current speech can be scanned as dissyllables in verse; Shelley makes "evening" three syllables and X has used even "realm" as a dissyllable, while the practice of taking*

"precious" and "conscious" to be three syllables is not even noticeable, I believe. All the same, current speech, if your favourite Chambers's Dictionary as well as my dear Concise Oxford is to be believed, insists on "evening", "precious" and "conscious" being dissyllabic and "realm" monosyllabic. I am mentioning this disparity between poetic and current usages not because I wish "meditation" to be robbed of its full length or "vision" to lose half its effect but because it seems to me that Shelley's or Tennyson's or any poet's practice does not in itself prove anything definitely for English as it is spoken. And spoken English, very much more than written English, undergoes change; even the line you quote from Shakespeare was perhaps not scanned in his time as you would do it now, for "meditation" — as surely "passion" and "fashion" also and most probably "vision" as well — was often if not always given its full vowel-value and the fourth foot of the line in question might to an Elizabethan ear have been very naturally an anapaest:

In mai|den me|dita|tĭŏn fān|cy free.

When, however, you say that your personal experience in England, both north and south, never recorded a monosyllabic "vision", we are on more solid ground, but the Concise Oxford Dictionary is specially stated to be in its very title as "of Current English": is all its claim to be set at nought? It is after all a responsible compilation and, so far as my impression goes, not unesteemed. If its errors were so glaring as you think, would there not be a general protest? Or is it that English has changed so much in "word of mouth" since your departure from England? This is not an ironical query — I am just wondering.

P.S. Your exclamatory-interrogatory elegiacs illustrating the predicament we should fall into if the Fowlers

were allowed to spread their nets with impunity were very enjoyable. But I am afraid the tendency of the English language is towards contraction of vowel-sounds, at least terminal ones; and perhaps the Oxford Dictionary has felt the need to monumentalise — clearly and authoritatively — the degree to which this tendency has, in some cases more definitely, in others less but still perceptibly enough, advanced? The vocalised "e" of the suffix "-ed" of the Spenserian days is now often mute; the trisyllabic suffix "-ation" of the "spacious times" has shrunk by one syllable, and "treason" and "poison" and "prison", all having the same second-vowel sound if fully pronounced as in the second syllable of "-ation", are already monosyllables in speech — so, if "passion" and "fashion" which too have lost their Elizabethan characteristic like "meditation" should contract by a natural analogy, carrying all "ation"-suffixed words as well as "vision" and "scission" and the like with them, it would be quite as one might expect. And if current speech once fixes these contractions, they will not always keep outside the pale of poetry. What do you think?

A: Where the devil have I admitted that "treason" and "poison" are monosyllables or that their use as dissyllables is a poetic licence? Will you please quote the words in which I have made that astounding and imbecile admission? I have said distinctly that they are dissyllabic, — like risen, dozen, maiden, garden, laden and a thousand others which nobody (at least before the world went mad) ever dreamed of taking as monosyllables. On my own showing, indeed! After I had even gone to the trouble of explaining at length about the slurred syllable "e" in these words, for the full sound is not given, so that you cannot put it down as pronounced maid-en, you have to indicate the pronunciation as maid'n. But for that to dub maiden a monosyllable and assert that Shakespeare, Shelley and every other poet who scans maiden as a dissyllable was a born fool who did not know the "current" pronunciation or was indulging in a constant poetic licence

whenever he used the words garden, maiden, widen, sadden etc. is a long flight of imagination. I say that these words are dissyllables and the poets in so scanning them (not as an occasional licence but normally and every time) are much better authorities than any owl — or fowl — of a dictionary-maker in the universe. Of course the poets use licences in lengthening out words occasionally, but these are exceptions; to explain away their normal use of words as a perpetually repeated licence would be a wild wooden-headedness (5 syllables, please). That these words are dissyllables is proved farther by the fact that "saddened", "maidenhood" cannot possibly be anything but respectively dissyllabic and trisyllabic, yet "saddened" could, I suppose, be correctly indicated in a dictionary as pronounced "saddnd". A dictionary indication or a dictionary theory cannot destroy the living facts of the language.

I do not know why you speak of my "favourite" Chambers. Your attachment to Oxford is not balanced by any attachment of mine to Chambers or any other lexicographer. I am not inclined to swear by any particular dictionary as an immaculate virgin authority for pronunciation or a papal Infallible. It was you who quoted Chambers as differing from Oxford, not I. You seem indeed to think that the Fowlers are a sort of double-headed Pope to the British public in all linguistic matters and nobody could dare question their dictates or ukases — only I do so because I am antiquated and am living in India. I take leave to point out to you that this is not yet a universally admitted catholic dogma. The Fowlers indeed seem to claim something of the kind, they make their enunciations with a haughty papal arrogance condemning those who differ from them as outcasts and brushing them aside in a few words or without a mention. But it is not quite like that. What is current English? As far as pronunciation goes, every Englishman knows that for an immense number of words there is no such thing — Englishmen of equal education pronounce them in different ways, sometimes in more than two different ways. "Either"-"neither" is a current pronunciation, so is "eether" "neether". In some words the "th" is pronounced variably as a soft "d" or a soft "t" or as "th" — and so on. If the Oxford pronunciation of "vision" and "meditation" is cor-

rect current English, then the confusion has much increased since my time, for then at least every body pronounced "vizhun", "meditashun", as I do still and shall go on doing so. Or if the other existed, it must have been confined to uneducated people. But you suggest that my pronunciation is antiquated, English has advanced since then as since Shakespeare. But I must point out that you yourself quote Chambers for "vizhun" and following your example — not out of favouritism — I may quote him for "summation" — "summashun", not "shn". The latest edition of Chambers is dated 1931 and the editors have not thought themselves bound by the decisive change of the English language to change "shun" into "shn". Has the decisive change taken place since 1931? Moreover in the recent dispute about the standard Broadcast pronunciation, the decisions of Bernard Shaw's Committee were furiously disputed — if Fowler and Oxford were papal authorities in England for current speech (it was current speech the Committee was trying to fix through the broadcasts), would it not have been sufficient simply to quote the Oxford in order to produce an awed and crushed silence?

So your P.S. has no solid ground to stand on since there is no "fixed" current speech and Fowler is not its Pope and there is no universal currency of his vizhn of things. Language is not bound by analogy and because "meditatĭŏn" has become "meditashun" it does not follow that it must become "meditashn" and that "tation" is now a monosyllable contrary to all common sense and the privilege of the ear. It might just as well be argued that it will necessarily be clipped farther until the whole word becomes a monosyllable. Language is neither made nor developed in that way — if the English language were so to deprive itself of all beauty by turning vision into vizhn and then into vzhn and all other words into similar horrors, I would hasten to abandon it for Sanskrit or French or Bengali — or even Swahili.

P.S. By the way, one point. Does the Oxford pronounce in cold blood and so many set words that vision, passion (and by logical extension treason, maiden, garden etc.) are monosyllables? Or is it your inference from "realm" and "prism"?

If the latter, I would only say, "Beware" of too rigidly logical inferences. If the former, I can only say that Oxford needs some gas from Hitler to save the English mind from its pedants. This quite apart from the currency of vizhns.

20-9-1934

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Q: I am sincerely sorry for mistaking you on an important point. But before my argumentative wooden-headedness gives up the ghost under your sledge-hammer it is bursting to cry a Themistoclean "Strike, but hear". Please try to understand my misunderstanding. What you wrote was: "'Treason' of course is pronounced 'trēz'n', but that does not make it a monosyllable in scansion because there is in these words a very perceptible slurred vowel sound in pronunciation which I represent by the '; in 'poison' also." I think it must have been the word "scansion" which led me astray — as if you had meant that these words were non-monosyllabic in poetry only. But am I really misjudging Chambers as well as the Fowlers when I draw the logical inference that, since a dictionary is no dictionary if it does not follow a coherent system and since these people absolutely omit to make any distinction between the indicated scansion of "prism", "realm", "rhythm" etc., and that of "treason" and "poison", they definitely mean us to take all these words as monosyllables? If Chambers who writes "vizhun" but "trezn" and "poizn" just as he writes "relm" and "rithm", intends us to understand that there is some difference between the scansions of the latter pairs he, in my opinion, completely de-dictionaries his work by so illogical an expectation. He and the Fowlers may not say in cold blood and so many set words that "treason" and "poison" are monosyllables but it is their design, in most freezing blood and more eloquently than words can express, that they should fall into the same category as "realm" and "rhythm". Else, what could have prevented them from inventing some such sign as your ' to

mark the dissimilarity? My sin was to have loved logic not wisely but too well where logicality had been obstreperously announced in flaring capitals on the title page and throughout the whole book by a fixed system of spelling and pronunciation. My Othellolike extremity of love plunged me into abysmal errors, but oh the Iagoistic "motiveless malignity" of lexicographers!

I am grateful to you for disabusing my mind of its trust in these self-appointed Popes. Your contentions I accept: I also see that the beauty of the English language is at stake when these Fowlers and their ilk start their word-clipping business. You could at least turn to Sanskrit or French or Bengali, but I without English would be quieter than the grave.

A: It seemed to me impossible that even the reckless Fowler — reckless in the excess of his learning — should be so audacious as to announce that this large class of words accepted as dissyllables from the beginning of (English) time were really monosyllables. After all, the lexicographers do not set out to give the number of syllables in a word. Pronunciation is a different matter. Realm cannot be a dissyllable unless you violently make it so, because l is a liquid like r and you cannot make a dissyllable of words like "charm", unless you Scotchify the English language and make it char'r'r'm or vulgarise it and make it charrum — and even char'r'r'm is after all a monosyllable. Prism, the ism in Socialism and pessimism, rhythm can be made dissyllabic; but by convention (convention has nothing to do with these things) the ism, rhythm are treated as a single syllable, because of the etymology. But there is absolutely no reason to bring in this convention with treason, poison, garden or maiden (coming from French *trahison, poison* and some O.E. equivalent of the German *garten, madchen*). The dictionaries give the same mark of pronunciation for thm, sm and the den (dn) of maiden and son (sn) of treason because they are phonetically the same. The French pronounce rhythme — reethm (I make English sound indications) without anything to help them out in passing from th to m, but the English tongue

can't do that, there is a very perceptible quarter vowel or one-eighth vowel sound between th and m — if it were not so the plural rhythms would be unpronounceable. I remember in my French class at St. Paul's our teacher (a Frenchman) insisted on our pronouncing *ordre* in the French way — in his mouth orrdrr; I was the only one who succeeded, the others all made it auder, orrder, audrer, or some such variation. There is the same difference of habit with words like rhythm, and yet conventionally the French treatment is accepted so far as to impose rhythm as a monosyllable. Realm on the other hand is pronounced truly as a monosyllable without the help of any fraction of a vowel.

30-9-1934

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Q: Why have you bucked at my "azure" as a line-ending? And why so late in the day? Twice before I have used the same inversion and it caused no alarm. Simple poetic licence, Sir. If Wordsworth could write

What awful pérspective; while from our sight...

and leave no reverberation of "awful" in the reader's mind, and if Abercrombie boldly come out with

To smite the horny eyes of men
With the renown of our Heaven

and our horny eyes remain unsmitten by his topsyturvy "Heaven" — why, then, I need not feel too shy to shift the accent of "azure" just because of poor me happening to be an Indian. Not that an alternative line getting rid of that word is impossible — quite a fine one can be written with "obscure". But why does this particular inversion shock you? There is nothing un-English or unpoetic about it — so far as I can see, though of course such things should not be done often. What do you say?

Your "through whom" in place of my "where-through" in another line is an improvement, but it is

difficult to reject that word as a legal archaism inadmissible in good poetry. Your remark about "whereas" in my A.E. essay seemed to me just in pointing out the obscurity of connection it introduced between the two parts of my sentence, but the term itself has no stigma on it of obsolescence as does for instance "whenas": in poetry it would be rather prosaic, while "wherethrough" is a special poetic usage as any big dictionary will tell us, and in certain contexts it would be preferable to "through which", just as "whereon", "wherein", and "whereby" would sometimes be better than their ordinary equivalents. I wonder why you have become so ultra-modern: I remember you jibbing also at "from out" — a phrase which has not fallen into desuetude yet, and can be used occasionally even in a common context: e.g. "from out the bed".

A: I can swallow "pérspective" with some difficulty, but if anybody tried to justify by it a line like this (let us say in a poem to Miss Mayo):

O ínspectór, why súggestive of drains?

I would buck. I disapprove totally of Abercrombie's bold wriggle with Heaven, but even he surely never meant to put the accent on the second syllable and pronounce it Hevénn. I absolutely refuse to pronounce "azure" as "azúre". "Perspective" can just be managed by making it practically atonal or unaccented or evenly accented, which comes to the same thing. "Sapphire" can be managed at the end of a line, e.g. "strong sapphire", because "phire" is long and the voice trails over it, but the "ure" of "azure" is more slurred into shortness than trailed out into length as if it were "azyoore".

I didn't suggest that "whereas" was obsolete. It is a perfectly good word in its place, e.g. He pretended the place was empty whereas in reality it was crowded, packed, overflowing; but its use as a loose conjunctive turn which can be conveniently shoved into any hole to keep two sentences together is altogether re-

prehensible. None of these words is obsolete, but "wherethrough" is rhetorically pedantic, just as "whereabout" or "wherewithal" would be. It is no use throwing the dictionary at my head — the dictionary admits many words which poetry refuses to admit. Of course you can drag any word in the dictionary into poetry if you like, e.g.:

> My spirit parenthetically wise
> Gave me its obiter dictum; à propos
> I looked within with weird and brilliant eyes
> And found in the pit of my stomach the juste mot.

But all that is possible is not commendable. So if you seek a pretext wherethrough to bring in these heavy visitors I shall buck and seek a means whereby to eject them.

P.S. It is not to the use of "azure" in place of an iamb in the last foot that I object but to your blessed accent on the last syllable. I will even, if you take that sign off, allow you to rhyme "azure" with "pure" and pass it off as an Abercrombiean acrobacy by way of fun. But not otherwise — the accent mark must go.

2-10-1936

SHAKESPEARE'S INSPIRATION

Q: From what plane are the substance and rhythm of this phrase from Shakespeare? —

> *the prophetic soul*
> *Of the wide world dreaming on things to come.*

Are they really from his usual plane — the vital?

A: The origin of the inspiration may be from anywhere, but in Shakespeare it always comes through the vital and strongly coloured by it as in some others it comes from the poetic intelli-

gence. What play or poem is this from? I don't remember it. It sounds almost overmental in origin.

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Q: The phrase occurs in Sonnet CVII beginning,

> *Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul*
> *Of the wide world, dreaming on things to come,*
> *Can yet the lease of my true love control,*
> *Suppos'd as forfeit to a confin'd doom.*

What I am eager to know is whether the rhythm of the words I have picked out is a fusion of the overmental and the vital; or is only the substance from the Overmind?

A: There is something from the Above in the rhythm also, but it is rather covered up by the more ordinary rhythm of the first half line and the two lines that follow. It is curious that this line and a half should have come in as if by accident and have nothing really to do with the restricted subject of the rest.

19-5-1934

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Q: Is there something definitely in the rhythm or language of a line of poetry which would prove it to be from a certain plane? Take the lines I am sending you. From what you once wrote to me I gather that my first quotation from Shakespeare has an Overmind movement as well as substance coming strongly coloured by the vital. But where and in what lies the vital colour which makes it the highest Shakespearian and not, say, the highest Wordsworthian — the line inspired by Newton? How does one catch here and elsewhere the essential differentiae*?*

A: It is a question of feeling, not of intellectual understanding. The second quotation from Shakespeare —

Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brows' bent, none our parts so poor
But was a race of heaven —

is plainly vital in its excited thrill. Only the vital can speak with that thrill of absolute passion — the rhythm too is vital.[1] I have given the instance[2] of Shakespeare's

it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

That is a "thought", a judgment on life, so would naturally be assigned to the intellect, but as a matter of fact it is a throw-up from Macbeth's vital, an emotional or sensational, not an intellectual judgment and its whole turn and rhythm are vital.

About the first quotation, Shakespeare's

the prophetic soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come,

there might be some doubt, but still it is quite different in tone from Wordsworth's line on Newton —

Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone —

which is an above-head vision — and the difference comes because the vision of the "dreaming soul" is felt through the vital mind and heart before it finds expression. It is this constant vitality, vital surge in Shakespeare's language, which makes it a sovereign expression not of mind or knowledge but of life.

27-2-1935

HAMLET

Q: Would you take, as many critics do, Hamlet as

[1] Alongside the lines themselves Sri Aurobindo wrote: "Tremendously vital."
[2] In *The Future Poetry*.

typically a mental being? How would you characterise his essential psychology?

A: Hamlet is a Mind, an intellectual, but like many intellectuals a mind that looks too much all round and sees too many sides to have an effective will for action. He plans ingeniously without coming to anything decisive. And when he does act, it is on a vital impulse. Shakespeare suggests but does not bring out the idealist in him, the man of bright illusions.

INTERPRETATION OF A PASSAGE IN SHAKESPEARE

Q: On that famous passage of Shakespeare's —

> *Our revels now are ended. These our actors,*
> *As I foretold you, were all spirits, and*
> *Are melted into air, into thin air:*
> *And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,*
> *The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,*
> *The solemn temples, the great globe itself,*
> *Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve*
> *And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,*
> *Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff*
> *As dreams are made on, and our little life*
> *Is rounded with a sleep. —*

would it be legitimate to comment as follows? — "The meaning, on the surface, is that for each of us life will pass away as if it were a dream and what will remain is the sleep of death, an undetailed everlasting rest. But there is a deeper implication: just as the actor-spirits have not been destroyed and only their visible play has vanished while they themselves, seeming to melt into 'thin air', have returned to their unknown realm of consciousness, so too the sleep of death is but an annihilation in appearance — it is really an unknown state which is our original mode of existence. Nor is this all: from the fourth line

onward the language and the rhythm serve to evoke by a certain large and deep suggestiveness an intuition of some transcendental God-self — a being, rapt and remote, who experiences through each individual life a dream-interlude between a divine peace and peace, an 'insubstantial pageant' conjured up for a while by its creative imagination between two states of self-absorbed superconsciousness. We are reminded of the Upanishad's description of the mystic trance in which the whole world fades like an illusion and the individual soul enters the supreme Spirit's unfeatured ecstasy of repose. Shakespeare's intuition is not pure Upanishad, the supreme Spirit is not clearly felt and whatever profundity is there is vague and unintentional; still, a looming mystic light does appear, stay a little, find a suggestive contour before receding and falling away to a music sublimely defunctive."

A: I don't think Shakespeare had any such idea in his mind. What he is dwelling on is the insubstantiality of the world and of human existence. "We are such stuff" does not point to any God-self. "Dream" and "sleep" would properly imply Somebody who dreams and sleeps, but the two words are merely metaphors. Shakespeare is not an intellectual or philosophic thinker nor a mystic one. All that you can say is that there comes out here an impression or intimation of the illusion of Maya, the dream-character of life, but without any vision or intimation of what is behind the dream and the illusion. There is nothing in the passage that even hints vaguely the sense of something abiding — all is insubstantial, "into air, into thin air", "baseless fabric," "insubstantial pageant", "*we* are such stuff as dreams are made on". "Stuff" points to some inert material rather than a spirit dreamer or sleep. Of course one can always read things into it for one's own pleasure, but ...

8-3-1935

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Q: I admit that Shakespeare was not a philosophic or

mystic thinker; also that he had no wish to mysticise in this passage. But is great poetry always a matter of one's conscious intention? — do not unconscious or accidental effects occur which have implications beyond the poet's personal aim or at least unrealised in full by him? A genuinely mystic accident of a high order is the quotation I sent you some days back —

the prophetic soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come.

If we take this in connection with Prospero's lines we may have not only an intuition of the illusion of Maya but also that of an abiding something behind the illusory appearance: the word "dream" common to the two passages is extremely suggestive. But as Shakespeare was not a systematic thinker it might not be right to construct like this a philosophy of any sort. And in my essay I do not wish to do so. What, however, surprises me is your saying that there is not the vaguest hint of something abiding. In the magic performance which Prospero gave to Ferdinand and Miranda it was spirits that produced a simulacrum of material reality — a very convincing simulacrum and the young lovers must have been quite taken in, until Prospero reminded them of what he had said before — namely, that "these our actors...were all spirits." They melt into thin air but do not disappear from existence, from conscious being of some character however unearthly: they just become invisible and what disappears is the visible pageant produced by them, a seemingly material construction which yet was a mere phantom. From this seeming, Prospero catches the suggestion that all that looks material is like a phantom, a dream, which must vanish, leaving no trace. But as the actor-spirits are not destroyed with the fabric of their visionary pageant, the terms "baseless" and "insubstantial" assume a meaning not quite what you give them. They mean that the pageant

has no basis in materiality, in substantiality as opposed to spirit-nature; and by "we *are such stuff as dreams are made on*" *the outer human earthly personalities are regarded as dreamlike, as having no permanent basis of material reality. I may be going beyond the premises in speaking of a God-self, but, all things considered, what strikes me as* analogically *implicit in the passage is that* "*we*" *and earth-existence are projected as a visionary pageant by some immaterial being or beings. I can't exactly say whether spirits akin to Ariel and his crew are implied or some superconscious God-self; but a general implication of occult if not mystic reality responsible for the pageant of human life and earth-existence seems to me inescapable. If pressed to choose on the side either of occult or of mystic implication, I would incline towards the latter: the intuition of Maya is so strong that the implicit significance may very well be some vague shadow of its Upanishadic complement, and the word* "*sleep*" *may be a far hint of some rapt, remote, self-absorbed superconsciousness. The whole thing is vague and far-looming because in Shakespeare's case a mystic inspiration would be mostly accidental and his was not a mind that would transmit it easily. The difficulty would be increased since this inspiration was mystic rather in the Indian than the Christian way. Only in that line and a half about the prophetic soul did an ultra-Christian mystic intuition come out more or less explicit — a miracle not to be expected always.*

I may be quite at fault in all this complex impression and if you tell me again after considering the points I have broached that it is absolutely off the mark I shall at once scrap it.

A: One can read anything into anything. But Shakespeare says nothing about the material world or there being a base somewhere else or of our being projected into a dream. He says, "We *are* such stuff." The spirits vanish into air, into thin air, as Shakespeare emphasises by repetition, which means to any plain

interpretation that they too are unreal, only dream-stuff; he does not say that they disappear from view but are there behind all the time. The whole stress is on the unreality and insubstantiality of existence, whether of a pageant or of the spirits or of ourselves — there is no stress anywhere, no mention or hint of an eternal spiritual existence. Shakespeare's idea here as everywhere is the expression of a mood of the vital mind, it is not a reasoned philosophical conclusion. However, if you like to argue that, logically, this or that is the true philosophical consequence of what Shakespeare says and that therefore the Daemon who inspired him must have meant that, I have no objection. I am simply interpreting the passage as Shakespeare's transcribing mind has put it.

9-3-1934

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Q: Just a word more about that passage. If it is taken in vacuo, *there is no internal justification for my idea which turns on the survival of the spirits after the pageant has faded. But almost immediately after the stage indication: "...to a strange, hollow and confused noise, they heavily vanish", occurs this aside on the part of Prospero: (To the Spirits) "Well done; avoid; no more." The quoted passage follows a little later. Then again Prospero says after Ferdinand and Miranda are gone: "Come with a thought: — I thank you: — Ariel, come." Thereupon Ariel enters.*

Ariel: Thy thoughts I cleave to. What's thy
pleasure? Spirit,
Prospero: We must prepare to meet with Caliban.

What do you make of all this? And when Ariel reports how he has lured Prospero's enemies into a "foul lake", Prospero commends him:

This was well done, my bird.
Thy shape invisible retain thou still.

Still later, comes another stage-direction: "A noise of hunters heard. Enter divers Spirits, in shape of hounds...; Prospero and Ariel setting them on." Even if this is taken to refer to Spirits other than those who produce that masque, the previous quotations are sufficient to prove that only the visible shapes and formations vanished — the entities themselves remained behind all the time.

To echo X: "Qu'en dites vous?"

A: I don't see what all that has to do with the meaning of the passage in question which plainly insists that nothing endures. Obviously Ariel had an invisible shape — invisible to human eyes, but the point of the passage is that all shapes and substances and beings disappear into nothingness. We are concerned with Prospero's meaning, not with what actually happened to the spirits or for that matter to the pageant in total which we might conceive also of having an invisible source or material. He uses the disappearance of the pageant and the spirits as a base for the idea that all existence is an illusion — it is the idea of the illusion that he enforces. If he had wanted to say, "We disappear, all disappears to view but the reality of us and of all things persists in a greater immaterial reality", he would surely have said so or at least not left it to be inferred or reasoned out by you in the twentieth century. I repeat, however, that this is my view of Shakespeare's meaning and does not affect any possibility of reading into it something that Shakespeare's outer mind did not receive or else did not express.

10-3-1935

H. BELLOC

Q: I think what Belloc meant in crediting Virgil with the power to give us a sense of the Unknown Country was that Virgil specialises in a kind of wistful vision of things across great distances in space or time, which renders them dream-like and invests them with an air of ideality. He mentions as an instance the passage (perhaps in the

sixth book of the Aeneid) where the swimmer sees all Italy from the top of a wave:

Prospexi Italiam summa sublimis ab unda.

I dare say —

Sternitur infelix alieno volnere coelumque
Aspicit et dulces moriens reminiscitur Argos[1]

as well as

Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore[2]

belong to the same category. To an ordinary Roman Catholic mind like Belloc, which is not conscious of the subtle hierarchy of unseen worlds, whatever is vaguely or remotely appealing — in short, beautifully misty — is mystical, and "revelatory" of the native land of the soul. Add to this that Virgil's rhythm is exquisitely euphonious and it is no wonder Belloc should feel as if the very harps of heaven were echoed by the Mantuan.

He couples Shakespeare with Virgil as a master of (to put it in a phrase of X) "earth-transforming gramarye". The quotations he gives from Shakespeare struck me as rather peculiar in the context: I don't exactly remember them but something in the style of

Night's tapers[3] *are burnt out and jocund day*
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops

seems to give him a wonderful flash of the Unknown Country!

[1] "Unhappy, he fell by a stranger's wound and looked at the sky and, dying, remembered sweet Argos."

[2] "They stretched their hands for love of the other shore" (Flecker's translation.)

[3] The word in the original is "candles".

He also alludes to the four magical lines of Keats about Ruth "amid the alien corn" and Victor Hugo's at-least-for-once truly delicate, unrhetorical passage on the same theme in "La Légende des Siècles". I wonder if you recollect the passage: its last two stanzas are especially enchanting:

Tout reposait dans Ur et dans Jérimadeth;
Les astres émaillaient le ciel profond et sombre;
Le croissant fin et clair parmi ces fleurs de l'ombre
Brillait à l'occident, et Ruth se demandait,

Immobile, ouvrant l'œil à moitié sous ses voiles,
Quel dieu, quel moissonneur de l'éternel été
Avait, en s'en allant, négligemment jeté
Cette faucille d'or dans le champ des étoiles.[1]

What do you think of them?

A: If that is Belloc's idea of the mystic, I can't put much value on his Roman Catholic mind! Shakespeare's lines and Hugo's also are good poetry and may be very enchanting, as you say, but there is nothing in the least deep or mystic about them. Night's tapers are the usual poetic metaphor, Hugo's *moissonneur* and *faucille d'or* are an ingenious fancy — there is nothing true behind it, not the least shadow of a mystical experience. The lines quoted from Virgil are exceedingly moving and poetic, but it is pathos of the life plane, not anything more — Virgil would have stared if he had been told that his *ripae ulterioris* was revelatory of the native land of the soul. These sentimental modern intellectuals are terrible: they will read anything into anything; that is because they have no touch on the Truth, so they make up for it by a gambolling fancy.

1-4-1932

[1] "All were asleep in Ur and in Jerimadeth; the stars enamelled the deep and sombre sky; the thin clear crescent shone in the West among these flowers of the darkness, and Ruth, standing still and gazing through her half-parted veils, asked herself: 'What god, what reaper of the eternal summer has thrown, while going home, this sickle of gold in the starry field?' "

SAMAIN AND FLECKER

Q: I am sending you two poems — one is Albert Samain's famous "Pannyre aux talons d'or" and the other is Flecker's much-praised translation of it. I shall be very much interested in your comparison of the two. Here is Samain:

Dans la salle en rumeur un silence a passé...
Pannyre aux talons d'or s'avance pour danser.
Un voile aux mille plis la cache tout entière.
D'un long trille d'argent la flûte, la première,
L'invite; elle s'élance, entre-croise ses pas,
Et, du lent mouvement imprimé par ses bras,
Donne un rythme bizarre à l'étoffe nombreuse,
Qui s'élargit, ondule, et se gonfle et se creuse,
Et se déploie enfin en large tourbillon...
Et Pannyre devient fleur, flamme, papillon!
Tous se taisent; les yeux la suivent en extase.
Peu à peu la fureur de la danse l'embrase.
Elle tourne toujours; vite! plus vite encor!
La flamme éperdument vacille aux flambeaux d'or!...
Puis, brusque, elle s'arrête au milieu de la salle;
Et le voile qui tourne autour d'elle en spirale,
Suspendu dans sa course, apaise ses long plis,
Et se collant aux seins aigus, aux flancs polis,
Comme au travers d'une eau soyeuse et continue,
Dans un divin éclair, montre Pannyre nue.

Here is Flecker:

The revel pauses, and the room is still,
The silver flute invites her with a trill,
And buried in her great veils, fold on fold,
Rises to dance Pannyra, Heel of Gold.
Her light steps cross, her subtle arm impels
The clinging drapery, it shrinks and swells,

Hollows and floats, and bursts into a whirl;
She is a flower, a moth, a flaming girl.
All lips are silent; eyes are all in trance,
She slowly wakes the madness of the dance;
Windy and wild the golden torches burn;
She turns, and swifter yet she tries to turn,
Then stops; a sudden marble stiff she stands,
The veil that round her coiled its spiral bands,
Checked in its course, brings all its folds to rest,
And clinging to bright limb and pointed breast
Shows, as beneath silk waters woven fine,
Pannyra naked in a flash divine!

"All here," says a critic, "is bright and sparkling as the jewels on the dancer's breast, but there is one ill-adjusted word — pointed *breast* — *which is perhaps more physiological than poetic." Personally I don't somehow react very happily to the word "girl" in line 8.*

A: Samain's poem is a fine piece of work, inspired and perfect; Flecker's is good only in substance, an adequate picture, one may say, but the expression and verse are admirable within their limits. The difference is that the French has vision and the inspired movement that comes with vision — all on the vital plane, of course, — but the English version has only physical sight, sometimes with a little glow in it, and the precision that comes with that sight. I don't know why your critical sense objects to "girl". This line,

She is a flower, a moth, a flaming girl,

and one other,

Windy and wild the golden torches burn,

are the only two that rise above the plane of physical sight. But

both these poems have the distinction of being perfectly satisfying in their own kind.

P.S. "Flaming girl" and "pointed breast" might be wrong in spirit as a translation of the French — but that is just what Flecker's poem is not, in spite of its apparent or outward fidelity, it is in spirit quite a different poem.

23-6-1932

HOPKINS AND KIPLING

Q: I should like to have a few words from you on the poetic style and technique of these two quotations. The first is an instance of Gerard Manley Hopkins' polyphony "at its most magnificent and intricate":

Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable, / vaulty,
voluminous...stupendous
Evening strains to be time's vast, / womb-of-all,
home-of-all, hearse-of-all night.
Her fond yellow hornlight wound to the west, / her
wild hollow hoarlight hung to the height
Waste: her earliest stars, earl-stars, / stars
principal, overbend us,
Fire-featuring heaven. For earth her being has
unbound, her dapple is at an end as-
tray or aswarm, all through her in throngs; / self in
self steeped and pashed — quite
Disremembering, dismembering / all now. Heart,
you round me right
With: Our evening is over us; our night whelms,
whelms, and will end us....

The next quotation illustrates Kipling's Tommy-Atkins-music at its most vivid and onomatopoeic — lines considered by Lascelles Abercrombie to be a masterly fusion

of all the elements necessary in poetic technique:

'Less you want your toes trod off you'd better get
back at once,
For the bullocks are walking two by two,
The "byles" are walking two by two,
The bullocks are walking two by two,
An' the elephants bring the guns!
Ho! Yuss!
Great — big — long — black forty-pounder guns:
Jiggery-jolty to and fro,
Each as big as a launch in tow —
Blind — dumb — broad-breached beggars o'
battering guns!

A: My verdict on Kipling's lines would be that they are fit for the columns of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and nowhere else. I refuse to accept this journalistic jingle as poetry. As for Abercrombie's comment, — unspeakable rubbish, unhappily spoken!

Hopkins is a different proposition; he is a poet, which Kipling never was nor could be. He has vision, power, originality; but his technique errs by excess; he piles on you his effects, repeats, exaggerates and in the end it is perhaps great in effort, but not great in success. Much material is there, many new suggestions, but not a work realised, not a harmoniously perfect whole.

30-12-1932

HOUSMAN

Q: I have been waiting for a long time to take a look at A. E. Housman's little book "The Name and Nature of Poetry". It's been with you for months now. Perhaps you could spare it for a while? How did you like it?

A: Here is the book. I kept it with the intention of noting down my own ideas on Housman's theory, but all this time has elapsed

without my being able to do it. Apart from the theory Housman, judging from the book, has a fine sense of poetic quality in others. For his own poetry, from the extracts I have seen, looks rather thin. I have read the book three or four times and always with satisfaction to my solar plexus.

18-9-1936

EDWARD SHANKS

Q: I am sending you a sonnet by Edward Shanks, considered to be "one of our best younger poets":

O Dearest, if the touch of common things
Can taint our love or wither, let it die.
The freest-hearted lark that soars and sings
Soon after dawn amid a dew-brushed sky

Takes song from love and knows well where love lies,
Hid in the grass, the dear domestic nest,
The secret, splendid, common paradise.
The strangest joys are not the loveliest.

Passion far-sought is dead when it is found
But love that's born of intimate common things
Cries with a voice of splendour, with a sound
That over stranger feeling shakes and rings.

The best of love, the highest ecstasy
Lies in the intimate touch of you and me.

A: Shanks — Phoebus, what a name!! I am not in love with the sonnet, though it is smoothly and musically rhythmed. The sentiment is rather namby-pamby, some of the lines weak, others too emphatic, e.g. the twelfth. It just misses being a really good poem, or is so, like the curate's egg, in parts: e.g. the two opening lines of the third verse are excellent, but they are immediately spoiled by two lines that shout and rattle. So too the last couplet

promises well in its first line, but the last disappoints, it is too obvious a turn and there is no fusion of the idea with the emotion that ought to be there and isn't. Still, the writer is evidently a poet and the sonnet very imperfect but by no means negligible.

12-6-1931

TAGORE

Tagore has been a wayfarer towards the same goal as ours in his own way — that is the main thing, the exact stage of advance and putting of the steps are minor matters. His exact position as a poet or a prophet or anything else will be assigned by posterity and we need not be in haste to anticipate the final verdict. The immediate verdict after his departure or soon after it may very well be a rough one, — for this is a generation that seems to take a delight in trampling with an almost Nazi rudeness on the bodies of the ancestors, specially the immediate ancestors. I have read with an interested surprise that Napoleon was only a bustling and self-important nincompoop all whose great achievements were done by others, that Shakespeare was "no great things" and that most other great men were by no means so great as the stupid respect and reverence of past ignorant ages made them out to be! What chance has then Tagore? But these injustices of the moment do not endure — in the end a wise and fair estimmate is formed and survives the changes of time.

Tagore, of course, belonged to an age which had faith in its ideas and whose very denials were creative affirmations. That makes an immense difference. Your strictures on his later development may or may not be correct, but this mixture even was the note of the day and it expressed a tangible hope of fusion into something new and true — therefore it could create. Now all that idealism has been smashed to pieces by the immense adverse event and everybody is busy exposing its weaknesses — but nobody knows what to put in its place. A mixture of scepticism and slogans, "Heil-Hitler" and the Fascist salute and Five-Year-Plan and the beating of everybody into one amorphous shape, a disabused denial of all ideals on one side and on the other a blind

"shut-my-eyes and shut-everybody's-eyes" plunge into the bog in the hope of finding some firm foundation there, will not carry us very far. And what else is there? Until new spiritual values are discovered, no great enduring creation is possible.

24-3-1934

Section Seven

REMINISCENCES AND OBSERVATIONS

REMINISCENCES AND OBSERVATIONS

LAST WORD IN HUMAN NATURE

Lies? Well, a Punjabi student at Cambridge once took our breath away by the frankness and comprehensive profundity of his affirmation: "Liars! But we are all liars!" It appeared that he had intended to say "lawyers", but his pronunciation gave his remark a deep force of philosophic observation and generalisation which he had not intended! But it seems to me the last word in human nature. Only the lying is sometimes intentional, sometimes vaguely half-intentional, sometimes quite unintentional, momentary and unconscious. So there you are !...

Of course you are right about the lies — these are of all sorts — and also about all men being *durācāra*, — only some are *virtuous durācāras*, some sinful ones and some a mixed lot ! I don't mean to deny that there are Harischandras and Shukadevas here and there but one has to take a microscope or a telescope to find them.

I.C.S. PAPERS

Q: Do you think your I.C.S. examination answer papers of 1892 have been preserved by the authorities? I was thinking of getting them if possible, in order to preserve them as a relic with us. Perhaps they do not give them out or they might have disposed of them.

A: Not likely that they keep such things.

1-5-1936

TASTE OF MAHRATTA COOKERY

I hope your dinner at Dewas did not turn out like my first taste of Mahratta cookery — when for some reason my dinner was *non*

est and somebody went to my neighbour, a Mahratta Professor, for food. I took one mouthful and only one. O God! Sudden fire in the mouth could not have been more surprising. Enough to bring down the whole of London in one wild agonising swoop of flame!

CHARM OF KASHMIR

Quite agree with your estimate of Kashmir. The charm of its mountains and rivers and the ideal life dawdling along in the midst of a supreme beauty in the slowly moving leisure of a houseboat — that was a kind of earthly Paradise — also writing poetry on the banks of the Jhelum where it rushes down Kashmir towards the plains. Unfortunately there was the over-industrious Gaekwar to cut short the Paradise! His idea of Paradise was going through administrative papers and making myself and others write speeches for which he got all the credit. But after all, according to the nature, to each one his Eden.

7-11-1938

THE GAEKWAR

When I knew him the Gaekwar was a free-thinker without any religion; I don't know if he has altered his views since. Formally, he is of course a Hindu.

7-7-1936

THE AGE OF SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

There is no incontrovertible proof. 400 years is an exaggeration. It is known however that he lived on the banks of the Narmada for 80 years and when he arrived there, he was already in appearance at the age when maturity turns toward overripeness. He was when I met him just before his death a man of magnificent physique showing no signs of old age except white beard and hair,

extremely tall, robust, able to walk any number of miles a day and tiring out his younger disciples, walking too so swiftly that they tended to fall behind, a great head and magnificent face that seemed to belong to men of more ancient times. He never spoke of his age or of his past either except for an occasional almost accidental utterance. One of these was spoken to a disciple of his well known to me, a Baroda Sardar, Mazumdar (it was on the top storey of his house by the way that I sat with Lele in Jan. 1909 and had a decisive experience of liberation and Nirvana). Mazumdar learned that he was suffering from a bad tooth and brought him a bottle of Floriline, a toothwash then much in vogue. The Yogi refused saying, "I never use medicines. My one medicine is Narmada water. As for the tooth I have suffered from it since the days of Bhao Girdi." Bhao Girdi was the Maratha General Sadashiv Rao Bhao who disappeared in the Battle of Panipat[1] and his body was never found. Many formed the conclusion that Brahmananda was himself Bhao Girdi, but this was an imagination. Nobody who knew Brahmananda would doubt any statement of his — he was a man of perfect simplicity and truthfulness and did not seek fame or to impose himself. When he died he was still in full strength and his death came not by decay but by the accident of blood-poisoning through a rusty nail that entered into his foot as he walked on the sands of the Narmada. I had spoken to the Mother about him, that was why she mentioned him in her *Conversations*[2] which were not meant for the public — otherwise she might not have said anything, as the longevity of Brahmananda to more than 200 years depends only on his own casual word and is a matter of faith in his word. There is no "legal" proof of it. I may say that three at least of his disciples to my knowledge kept an extraordinary aspect and energy of youth to a comparatively late or quite advanced age — but this perhaps may be not uncommon among those who practise both Raja and Hatha Yoga together.

1-2-1936

[1] 14.1.1761.

[2] See July 1971 Edition, p. 103.

SISTER NIVEDITA AND SISTER CHRISTINE

I knew very well Sister Nivedita (she was for many years a friend and a comrade in the political field) and met Sister Christine, — the two closest European disciples of Vivekananda. Both were Westerners to the core and had nothing at all of the Hindu outlook; although Sister Nivedita, an Irish woman, had the power of penetrating by an intense sympathy into the ways of life of the people around her, her own nature remained non-oriental to the end. Yet she found no difficulty in arriving at realisation on the lines of Vedanta.

"THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN IN INDIA"

The Divine may be difficult, but His difficulties can be overcome if one keeps at Him. Even my smilelessness was overcome which Nevinson had remarked with horrors more than twenty years before — "the most dangerous man in India", Aurobindo Ghosh who "never smiles". He ought to have added: "but who always jokes" — but he did not know that, as I was very solemn with him, or perhaps I had not developed sufficiently on that side then. Anyhow, if you could overcome *that* — my smilelessness — you are bound to overcome all the other difficulties also.

11-2-1937

AUSTERE AND GRAND!

Q: The Overmind seems so distant from us, and your Himalayan austerity and grandeur takes my breath away, making my heart palpitate!

A: O rubbish! I am austere and grand, grim and stern! every blasted thing I never was! I groan in an un-Aurobindian despair when I hear such things. What has happened to the common sense of all of you people? In order to reach the Overmind it is not at all necessary to take leave of this simple but useful quality.

Common sense by the way is not logic (which is the least commonsense-like thing in the world), it is simply looking at things as they are without inflation or deflation — not imagining wild imaginations — or for that matter despairing "I know not why" despairs.

23-2-1935

PAIN AND PHYSICAL ANANDA

As for Divine rapture, a knock on head or foot or elsewhere can be received with the physical Ananda of pain or pain and Ananda or pure physical Ananda — for I have often, quite involuntarily, made the experiment myself and passed with honours. It began by the way as far back as in Alipore Jail when I got bitten in my cell by some very red and ferocious-looking warrior ants and found to my surprise that pain and pleasure are conventions of our senses. But I do not expect that unusual reaction from others. And I suppose there are limits.

13-2-1932

PRAYER, NOT A MACHINERY

As for prayer, no hard and fast rule can be laid down. Some prayers are answered, all are not. An example? The eldest daughter of my Mesho, K. K. Mitra, editor of *Sanjibani*, not by any means a romantic, occult, supraphysical or even imaginative person, was abandoned by the doctors after using every resource, all medicines stopped as useless. The father said "There is only God now, let us pray". He did, and from that moment the girl began to recover, typhoid fever and all its symptoms fled, death also. I know any number of cases like that. Well? You may ask why should not then all prayers be answered? But why should they be? It is not a machinery — put a prayer in the slot and get your asking. Besides, considering all the contradictory things mankind is praying for at the same moment, God would

be in a rather awkward hole, if he had to grant all of them — it wouldn't do.

7-10-1936

GURUGIRI

X's objection to Grace would be valid if the religionists mattered, but in spiritual things they don't. Their action naturally is to make a formula and dry shell of everything, not Grace alone. Even "Awake, Arise, Arise" leads to the swelled head or the formula — can't be avoided when Mr. Everyman deals with things divine. I had the same kind of violent objection to Gurugiri, but you see I was obliged by the irony of things or rather by the inexorable truth behind them to become a Guru and preach the Guruvada. Such is Fate.

16-1-1936

SHIVA TEMPERAMENT

I have no special liking for the ideal of Shiva, though something of the Shiva temperament must necessarily be present. I never had any turn for rejection of the money power nor any attachment to it. One has to rise above these things; but it is precisely when one has risen above that one can more easily command them.

15-1-1936

TRUE ASCETICISM

It depends on what is meant by asceticism. I have no desires but I don't lead outwardly an ascetic life, only a secluded one. According to the Gita, *tyāga* the inner freedom from desire and attachment, is the true asceticism.

9-7-1937

POVERTY

Poverty has never had any terrors for me nor is it an incentive. You seem to forget that I left my very safe and "handsome" Baroda position without any need to it, and that I gave up also the Rs. 150 of the National College Principalship, leaving myself with nothing to live on. I could not have done that if money had been an incentive.

If you don't realise that starting and carrying on for ten years and more a revolutionary movement for independence in a country wholly unprepared for it is not living dangerously, no amount of puncturing of your skull with words will give you that simple perception. And as to the Yoga, you yourself were perorating at the top of your voice about its awful, horrible, pathetic and tragic dangers. So —

SOCIETY MANNERS AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

But when on earth were politeness and good society manners considered as a part or a test of spiritual experience or true Yogic Siddhi? It is no more a test than the capacity of dancing well or dressing nicely. Just as there are very good and kind men who are boorish and rude in their manners, so there may be very spiritual men (I mean here by spiritual men those who have had deep spiritual experiences) who have no grasp over physical life of action (many intellectuals too, by the way, are like that) and are not at all careful about their manners. I suppose I myself am accused for rude and arrogant behaviour because I refuse to see people, do not answer letters, and a host of other misdemeanours. I have heard of a famous recluse who threw stones at anybody coming to his retreat because he did not want disciples and found no other way of warding off the flood of candidates. I, at least, would hesitate to pronounce that such people had no spiritual life or experience. Certainly, I prefer that Sadhaks should be reasonably considerate towards each other, but that is for the rule of collective life and harmony, not as a Siddhi of the Yoga or an indispensable sign of inner experience.

December, 1935

YOGIC PEACE AND SATTWIC TEMPERAMENT

Q: People of sattwic temperament in ordinary life behave practically in the same manner as the Sadhaks who realise spiritual peace as a result of Yoga. Can it be said that in the sattwic people the peace descends but in a hidden manner, or is it due to their past lives that they have the sattwic temperament?

A: Of course they have gained their power to live in the mind by a past evolution. But the spiritual peace is something other and infinitely more than the mental peace and its results are different, not merely clear thinking or some control or balance or a sattwic state. But its greater results can only be fully and permanently manifest when it lasts long enough in the system or when one feels spread out in it above the head and on every side stretching towards infinity as well as penetrated by it down to the very cells. Then it carries with it the deep and vast and solid tranquillity that nothing can shake — even if on the surface there is storm and battle. I was myself of the sattwic type you describe in my youth, but when the peace from above came down, that was quite different. *Sattvaguṇa* disappeared into *nirguṇa* and negative *nirguṇa* into positive *traiguṇyātīta.*

22-7-1935

TRAINING FOR PHYSICAL WORK

It is not a question of liking but of capacity — though usually (not always) liking goes with the capacity. But capacity can be developed and liking can be developed or rather the *rasa* you speak of. One cannot be said to be in the full Yogic condition — for the purposes of this Yoga — if one cannot take up with willingness any work given to one as an offering to the Divine. At one time I was absolutely unfit for any physical work and cared only for the mental, but I trained myself in doing physical things with care and perfection so as to overcome this glaring defect in my being and make the bodily instrument apt and

conscious. It was the same with some others here. A nature not trained to accept external work and activity becomes mentally top-heavy — physically inert and obscure. It is only if one is disabled or too physically weak that physical work can be put aside altogether. I am speaking of course from the point of view of the ideal — the rest depends upon the nature.

As for the deity presiding over the control of servants, godown work as well as over poetry or painting, it is always the same — the Shakti, the Mother.

11-12-1934

GENIUS FOR LOLLING

As for your pious desire to loll a little now after your bout of stupendous work, well, there is no *how* about it: one just lolls if one has the genius for it. I have, though opportunities are now lacking for showing my genius. But it can't be taught nor any process invented: it is just a gift of Nature.

SEEING UNKNOWN PEOPLE BY INNER VISION

Yes, of course, I remember about X — I can't say I remember him because I never saw him, at least in the flesh. What he probably means by the Supramental is the Above Mind — what I now call Illumined Mind - Intuition - Overmind. I used to make that confusion myself at the beginning.

There is not enough to go upon to say whether he really sees the Mother or an image of her as reflected in his own mind. But there is nothing extraordinary, much less improbable in seeing a person whom one has never seen — you are thinking as if the inner mind and sense, the inner vision, were limited by the outer mind and sense, the outer vision, or were mere reflection of that. There would be not much use in an inner mind and sense and vision if they were only that and nothing more. This faculty is one of the elementary powers of the inner sense and inner seeing, and not only Yogins have it, but the ordinary clairvoyants,

crystal-gazers, etc. The latter can see people they never saw or heard of before, doing certain precise things in certain very precise surroundings, and every detail of the vision is confirmed afterwards by the persons seen — there are many striking and indubitable cases of that kind. The Mother is always seeing people whom she does not know; some afterwards come here or their photographs come here. I myself have these visions, only I don't usually try to remember or verify them. But there were two curious instances which were among the first of this kind and which therefore I remember. Once I was trying to see a recently elected deputy here and saw someone quite different from him, someone who afterwards came here as Governor. I ought never to have met him in the ordinary course, but a curious mistake happened and as a result I went and saw him in his bureau and at once recognised him. The other was a certain Y whom I had to meet, but I saw him not as he was when he actually came, but as he became after a year's residence in my house. He became the very image of that vision, a face close-cropped, rough, rude, energetic, the very opposite of the dreamy smooth-faced enthusiastic Vaishnava who came to me. So that was the vision of a man I had never seen, but as he was to be in the future — a prophetic vision.

24-10-1934

THE SWAYING SENSATION

Q: I was standing on the scaffolding [on the wall] which was swinging to and fro. Once I saw the walls nearby swinging like a pendulum. I understood the reason, but the sight of swinging walls was so vivid that I put my hand on the wall nearby to be convinced that it was not moving — yet the "eye-mind" refused to accept the evidence of the "touch-mind"!

A: But what was it due to? The sense of swinging of the scaffolding communicating itself to the walls as it were in the impression upon some brain centre? After travelling long in a boat I had

once or twice the swaying sense of it after coming off it, as if the land about me was tossing like the boat — of course a subtle physical impression, but vivid enough.

4-4-1935

THINKING FROM OUTSIDE THE BODY

Q: Owing to much reading I feel a strain and dryness in the head and find it difficult to sleep. But while reading and remembering I feel as if the process goes on somewhere in the chest and not in the head and yet the strain is felt in the head. Why is this so?

A: The chest action is rather curious, because it is the vital mind that is there and the Romans always spoke of the mind as if it were in the heart. But memory and reading would rather be in the physical mind. But anyhow the brain is a conveying instrument for all these activities and can feel the strain if there is any. The best relief for the brain is when the thinking takes place outside the body and above the head (or in space or at other levels but still outside the body). At any rate it was so in my case; for as soon as that happened there was an immense relief; I have felt body strain since then but never any kind of brain-fatigue. I have heard the same thing from others.

19-12-1934

A HINT

Q: I concentrate so much on reading that no room is left for Sadhana-thinking with the result that as soon as I come out of that concentration anything can enter in my mind. Is this not an undesirable practice from the point of view of discipline in Sadhana?

A: I should say... that if you could divide your attention between the reading and Sadhana thought and concentration move, it

might be better from the point of view you mention. I mean that there should be sufficient concentration to create in your mind a Sadhana atmosphere which you can bring up to the surface as soon as you leave reading or whenever it is needed to set right an invading movement. Otherwise the subconscient forces have free play and gain power. Besides the condition becomes subconscient, i.e. inert and like a drift. At least that is what I have seen recently in my dealings with my own subconscient, so I pass on the hint to you.

27-5-1935

SUBCONSCIENT DREAMS

Q: I do not find any change in the character of my dreams as yet — I get the usual kind of dreams about home-life, eating, meeting strange people, moving about, etc. Why has there been no change in this respect in spite of my three years of Sadhana here?

A: Dreams of this kind can last for years and years after the waking consciousness has ceased to interest itself in things of that kind. The subconscient is exceedingly obstinate in the keeping of its old impressions. I find myself even recently having a dream of revolutionary activities or another in which the Maharaja of Baroda butted in, people and things I have not even thought of passingly for the last twenty years almost. I suppose it is because the very business of the subconscient in the human psychology is to keep all the past inside it and, being without conscious mentality, it clings to its office until the light has fully come down into it, illumining even its corners and crevices.

17-12-1934

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Q: For the last few days I am having frequent dreams of eating. Does it indicate greed for food or a need in the body or is it a sign of coming illness as they believe in the villages?

A: I don't think so — it is probably old impressions from the subconscient material (not vital — therefore a memory rather than desire) rising up in sleep. I remember a time when I was always seeing dishes of food even though I did not care a hang about food at that time.

2-4-1934

DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES

Q: I am still not able to maintain the right attitude in my own Sadhana and yet I give advice to others in their difficulties. Is this not hypocrisy and insincerity?

A: Well, one can give good advice even when one does not follow it oneself — there is the old adage "Do what I preach and not what I practise." More seriously, there are different personalities in oneself and the one that is eager to advise and help may be quite sincere. I remember in days long past when I still had personal struggles and difficulties, people came to me from outside for advice etc. when I was in a black depression and could not see my way out of a sense of hopelessness and failure, yet nothing of that came out and I spoke with an assured conviction. Was that insincerity? I think not, — the one who spoke in me was quite sure of what he spoke. The turning of all oneself to the Divine is not an easy matter and one must not be discouraged if it takes time and other movements still intervene. One must note, rectify and go on — *anirviṇṇacetasā.*

24-2-1935

HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

My experience shows me that human beings are much less deliberate and responsible for their acts than the moralists, novelists and dramatists make them, and I look rather to see what forces drove them than what the man himself may have seemed by inference to have intended or purposed — our inferences are often

wrong and even when they are right touch only the surface of the matter.

22-6-1934

HOROSCOPES AND ASTROLOGY

I can't say anything about the horoscope, as I have forgotten the little astrology I knew.

14-9-1936

Astrologers tell all sorts of things that don't come true. According to one I was to have died last year, according to another I was to have gone out from Pondicherry in March or May last year and wandered about India with my disciples till I disappeared in a river (in a ferry). Even if the prediction were accurate according to the horoscope it need not fulfil itself, because by entering the spiritual life one opens to a new force which can change one's destiny.

22-8-1937

> *Q: X told me that today [April 4, 1936] is the birthday of Pondicherry because you came here on this date. If one can place oneself in the year 2036 A.D. he may find that 4th April is celebrated as the birthday of the earth's spiritual life. Perhaps the horoscope of the earth may show this more accurately; but is there a horoscope of the earth as there are horoscopes of some villages?*

A: Pondicherry was born long ago — but if X means the rebirth, it may be, for it was absolutely dead when I came. I don't know that there is a horoscope of the Earth. There was nobody present to note the year, day, hour, minute when she came into existence. But some astrologer could take the position of the stars at the moment when I got out of the boat and build up the terrestrial

consequences upon that perhaps! Unfortunately he would probably get everything wrong, like the astrologer who predicted that I would leave Pondicherry in March 1936 and wander about India till 1948 and then disappear while bathing in a river among my disciples. I believe he predicted it on the strength of Bhrigu Samhita — the old dodge; but I am not sure. Long ago I had a splendiferous Mussolinic-Napoleonic prediction of my future made to me on the strength of the same old mythological Bhrigu.

4-5-1936

THE OLD AND THE NEW BUILDINGS

Q: Some people here are very glad to know that I was preparing the roof of the house by adopting the old method used by forefathers for generations. In this case old may be good but to some people all old is gold. Perhaps they would be happy if the new European systems of medicine like homeopathy and naturopathy are rejected and the old Ayurveda only allowed. But I wonder they cannot see how superior are reinforced concrete buildings and roads to old methods — and for earthquakes, would the Ayurvedic buildings stand the shocks?

A: Well, if it is done really according to old methods, an Ayurvedic building can stand many earthquakes. I remember at the time of the Bengal earthquake all the new buildings in the place where the Provincial Conference was held went down but an old house of the Raja of the place was the sole thing that survived unmoved and unshaken. Also when the Guest House roof was being repaired, (it was an old building) the mason (one of the most skilful we have met) said that this roof had been built in a way that astonished him, it was so solid and strong, no houses now were being built like that. So perhaps it is not Ayurveda, but the degenerate ways of the descendants of Charaka that is responsible for the poor and bad building we see around us. I have also seen a remark by an English architect in Madras that it was surprising to see how old ramshackle buildings survived

and stood all shocks while others built in the most scientific modern way "sat down" unexpectedly. The really old things whether in India or Europe were always solid; shoddy I think began in between — before the discovery of concrete. We have to leave the old things but progress to equally or more solid new things.

29-3-1937

LEARNING FRENCH

Q: It seems most people who want to learn French read more than they assimilate. They read rapidly lots of French stories, novels, dramas, and as a result they hardly assimilate the idioms, phrases, grammatical peculiarities, etc. I think one ought to read a book three to four times. Rapid reading of French books creates an illusion that one understands all that one reads.

A: I suppose most learn only to be able to read French books, not to know the language well.... It is not many who know French accurately and idiomatically.... I don't think many people would consent to make a principle of reading each book 3 or 4 times in the way you advocate, for very few have the scholarly mind — but two or three books should be so read. I learnt Sanskrit by reading the Naladamayanti episode in the Mahabharata like that with minute care several times.

25-3-1937

SPIRITUAL LIFE AND OUTWARD UTILITY

Q: What is the need for so many here to learn French? Are you preparing them for giving lectures or opening centres in France or French-knowing countries?

A: Are life and mind to be governed only by material utility or outward practicality? Spiritual life would then be inferior even

to ordinary mental life where people learn for the sake of acquiring knowledge and culturing the mind and not only for the sake of some outward utility.

24-3-1937

DISADVANTAGE OF FAMILIARITY

Q: Is it true that the deep significance of mantras like "Om Śānti" and words like "paix" (peace in French) is lost because of too much familiarity?

A: Yes, it must be the familiarity — for I remember when I first read the Om Shanti Shanti Shanti of the Upanishads it had a powerful effect on me. In French it depends on the form or the way in which it is put.

14-2-1936

RECORD IN BOOK-PRODUCTION

Q: X told me that Y has translated a novel in English half of which is corrected by you; this practically means that X makes you translate somebody's novel instead of himself translating "Arya" which would be more reasonable. What ordeals for you to pass through! Perhaps the person who remarked in a London paper that you had written five hundred books was not quite wrong; by this time your letters to Sadhaks would make three or four books for each of them and if to these are added your poems, translations and other writings the total would not be less than five hundred.

A: The idea of Y translating *Arya* makes the hair stand on end! It would be much easier for me to write five hundred books. Perhaps I have done so — if all I have scribbled is to be taken into account against me. But most of it will not see the light of day —

at least of public day; I may still escape establishing the record in book-production.

3-2-1935

THE "ARYA"

Q: It is said that the "Arya" began on the day the World War broke out or just before it. Has this not some significance? Was it not a kind of parallel movement?

A: The *Arya* was decided on the 1st June [1914] and it was agreed that it would start on the 15th August. The war intervened on the 4th. "Parallelism" of dates if you like, but it was not very close and certainly nothing came down at that time.

9-9-1935

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The *Arya* was, in fact, a financial success. It paid its way with a large surplus.

... "global" also has established itself and it is too useful and indeed indispensable to reject; there is no other word that can express exactly the same shade of meaning. I heard it first from X who described the language of *Arya* as expressing a global thinking and I at once caught it up as the right and only word for certain things, for instance, the thinking in masses which is a frequent characteristic of the Overmind.

2-4-1947

"THE SYNTHESIS OF YOGA"

The Synthesis of Yoga was not meant to give a method for all to follow. Each side of the Yoga was dealt with separately with all its possibilities, and an indication as to how they meet so that

one starting from knowledge could realise Karma and Bhakti also and so with each path. It was intended when the Self-Perfection[1] was finished, to suggest a way in which all could be combined, but this was never written. *The Mother* and the *Lights* were not intended to be a systematic treatment of the Sadhana as a whole; they only touch on various elements in it.

18-5-1936

At the time when the last chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga* were written in the *Arya*, the name "Overmind" had not been found, so there is no mention of it. What is described in those chapters is the action of the Supermind when it descends into the Overmind plane and takes up the Overmind workings and transforms them. The highest Supermind or Divine gnosis existent in itself, is something that lies beyond still and quite above. It was intended in latter chapters to show how difficult even this was and how many levels there were between the human mind and Supermind and how even Supermind descending could get mixed with the lower action and turned into something that was less than the true Truth. But these latter chapters were not written.

13-4-1932

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Q: In the "Arya" there is no mention of the Overmind. You have mentioned the supramental or Divine Reason in the gradations of the Supermind, but from its description it is quite different from the Overmind. Why was the Overmind not mentioned and clearly distinguished from the Supermind in the "Arya"?

A: The distinction has not been made in the *Arya* because at that time what I now call the Overmind was supposed to be an inferior plane of the Supermind. But that was because I was seeing them from the Mind. The true defect of Overmind, the limitation in it which gave rise to a world of Ignorance is seen fully only when one looks at it from the physical consciousness, from the

[1] "The Yoga of Self-Perfection", *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part Four.

result (Ignorance in Matter) to the cause (Overmind division of the Truth). In its own plane Overmind seems to be only a divided, many-sided play of the Truth, so can easily be taken by the Mind as a supramental province. Mind also when flooded by the Overmind lights feels itself living in a surprising revelation of Divine Truth. The difficulty comes when we deal with the vital and still more with the physical. Then it becomes imperative to face the difficulty and to make a sharp distinction between Overmind and Supermind — for it then becomes evident that the Overmind Power (in spite of its lights and splendours) is not sufficient to overcome the Ignorance because it is itself under the law of Division out of which came the Ignorance. One has to pass beyond and supramentalise Overmind so that mind and all the rest may undergo the final change.

20-11-1933

Q: What about the publication of the "Synthesis"? They are all asking me about it. So many are eager that it should see the light, fed up as we all are with the analysis of the universe through science of mind and ignorance of life, what?

A: I hope you are not referring to the whole colossal mass of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, — though that too *may* be ready for publication before the next world-war(?) or after the beginning of the Satya-yuga (New World Order?). If you mean the "Yoga of Works", I am writing or trying to write four or five additional chapters for it. I hope they will be ready in a reasonable time; but my daily time is short and chapters are long. In the absence of exact prophetic power, that is all I can say.

2-3-1944

"ESSAYS ON THE GITA"

Q: I had read your "Essays on the Gita" thrice before,

still when I started reading it again recently I found that there were so many ideas in it which I had missed before. I think if I read it over and over again I would find newer and newer ideas every time.

A: That is a common experience — most books with any profundity of knowledge in them have that effect. Almost all spiritual problems have been briefly but deeply dealt with in the Gita and I have tried to bring out all that fully in the *Essays*.

1-11-1936

"THE FUTURE POETRY"

It was not the intention to make a long review of Cousins' book in *The Future Poetry*, that was only a starting-point; the rest was drawn from Sri Aurobindo's own ideas and his already conceived view of Art and life.

"THE MOTHER"

The Mother had not the same origin as the other books mentioned.[1] The main part of this book describing the four Shaktis, etc., was written independently and not as a letter, so also the first part.

Q: I sent you a review of "The Mother" a few days back. Have you seen it?

A: Yes. I think it will give the reader the impression that *The Mother* is a philosophical or practical exposition of Yoga — while its atmosphere is really not that at all.

1-3-1937

[1] *Lights on Yoga, Bases of Yoga, The Riddle of This World.*

EARLY POLITICAL VIEWS AND CURRENT PROBLEMS

Q: Have you seen my review of "The Ideal of the Karmayogin"?

A: Yes, I have seen it, but I don't think it can be published in its present form as it prolongs the political Aurobindo of that time into the Sri Aurobindo of the present time. You even assert that I have "thoroughly" revised the book and these articles are an index of my latest views on the burning problems of the day and there has been no change in my views in 27 years (which would surely be proof of a rather unprogressive mind). How do you get all that? My spiritual consciousness and knowledge at that time was as nothing to what it is now — how would the change leave my view of politics and life unmodified altogether? There has been no such thorough revision; I have left the book as it is, because it would be useless to modify what was written so long ago — the same as with *The Yoga and its Objects*. Anyway the review would almost amount to a proclamation of my present political views — while on the contrary I have been careful to pronounce nothing — no views whatever on political questions for the last I don't know how many years.

21-4-1937

"THE YOGA AND ITS OBJECTS"

The book represents an early stage of Sri Aurobindo's Sadhana and only a part of it is applicable to the Yoga as it has at present taken form after a lapse of more than twenty years.

28-10-1934

"YOGIC SADHAN"

Your friend writes about my disapproval of Vairagya in *Yogic Sadhan*. But *Yogic Sadhan* is *not* my composition, nor its contents the essence of my Yoga, whatever the publishers may

persist in saying in their lying blurb, in spite of protests.

4-5-1934

The Yogi from the North (Uttara Yogi) was my own name given to me because of a prediction made long ago by a famous Tamil Yogi, that thirty years later (agreeing with the time of my arrival) a Yogi from the North would come as a fugitive to the South and practise there an integral Yoga (Poorna Yoga), and this would be one sign of the approaching liberty of India. He gave three utterances as the mark by which this Yogi could be recognised and all these were found in the letters to my wife.

As for *Yogic Sadhan* it was not I exactly who wrote it, though it is true that I am not a Mayavadin.

A. G.

I do not use the initials A.G. — They have been discarded long ago.

14-9-1933

"SRI AUROBINDO PRASANGE"

It is not about Baroda nor my own writing — it is some conversations, I do not know how far correctly reported, by a young man who came from Chandernagore here for a short time. I don't know if it is of any value. It belongs to the long ago and things have changed much since then.

25-1-1935

PHILOSOPHY WITHOUT LOGICAL ARGUMENT

Q: One thing more I would like to ask you about logic. You wrote to X that though people call you a philosopher you have never learnt philosophy. Well, what you have

written in the "Arya" is so philosophical that the greatest philosopher of the world can never expect to write it. I don't mean here the bringing down of the new Truth, but the power of expression, the art of reasoning and arguing with intellect and logic.

A: There is very little argument in my philosophy — the elaborate metaphysical reasoning full of abstract words with which the metaphysician tries to establish his conclusions is not there. What is there is a harmonising of the different parts of a many-sided knowledge so that all unites logically together. But it is not by force of logical argument that it is done, but by a clear vision of the relations and sequences of the Knowledge.

4-11-1936

WRITING PHILOSOPHY — FAME AND PROPAGANDA

Look here! Do these people expect me to turn myself again into a machine for producing articles? The times of the *Bande Mataram* and *Arya* are over, thank God! I have now only the Ashram correspondence and that is "overwhelming" enough in all conscience without starting philosophy for standard books and the rest of it.

And philosophy! Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher — although I have written philosophy which is another story altogether. I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry — I was a poet and a politician, not a philosopher. How I managed to do it and why? First, because X proposed to me to co-operate in a philosophical review — and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything, I could not very well refuse; and then he had to go to the war and left me in the lurch with sixty-four pages a month of philosophy all to write by my lonely self. Secondly, because I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there automatically. But that is not being a philosopher!

I don't know how to excuse myself to Y — for I can't say all that to him. Perhaps you can find a formula for me? Perhaps: "so occupied, not a moment for any other work, can't undertake because he might not be able to carry out his promise". What do you say?

4-9-1934

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As to Y, I don't care whether he is right or wrong in his eagerness to get the blessed contribution from me. But the first fact is that it is quite impossible for me to write philosophy to order. If something comes to me of itself, I can write, if I have time. But I have no time. I had some thought of writing to Z pointing out that he was mistaken in his criticism of my ideas about consciousness and intuition and developing briefly what were my real views about these things. But I have never been able to do it. I might as well think of putting the moon under my arm, Hanuman-like — although in his case it was the sun — and going for a walk. The moon is not available and the walk is not possible. It would be the same if I promised anything to Y — it would not get done, and that would be much worse than a refusal.

And the second fact is that I do not care a button about having my name in any blessed place. I was never ardent about fame even in my political days; I preferred to remain behind the curtain, push people without their knowing it and get things done. It was the confounded British Government that spoiled my game by prosecuting me and forcing me to be publicly known and a "leader". Then, again, I don't believe in advertisement except for books etc., and in propaganda except for politics and patent medicines. But for serious work it is a poison. It means either a stunt or a boom — and stunts and booms exhaust the thing they carry on their crest and leave it lifeless and broken high and dry on the shores of nowhere — or it means a movement. A movement in the case of a work like mine means the founding of a school or a sect or some other damned nonsense. It means that hundreds or thousands of useless people join in and corrupt the work or reduce it to a pompous farce from which the Truth that was coming down recedes into secrecy and silence. It is

what has happened to the "religions" and is the reason of their failure. If I tolerate a little writing about myself, it is only to have a sufficient counter-weight in that amorphous chaos, the public mind, to balance the hostility that is always aroused by the presence of a new dynamic Truth in this world of ignorance. But the utility ends there and too much advertisement would defeat that object. I am perfectly "rational", I assure you, in my methods and I do not proceed merely on any personal dislike of fame. If and so far as publicity serves the Truth, I am quite ready to tolerate it; but I do not find publicity for its own sake desirable.

This "Contemporary Philosophy", British or Indian, looks to me very much like book-making and, though the "vulgarisation" of knowledge — to use the French term — by book-making may have its use, I prefer to do solid work and leave that to others. You may say that I can write a solid thing in philosophy and let it be book-made. But even the solid tends to look shoddy in such surroundings. And, besides, my solid work at present is not philosophy but something less wordy and more to the point. If that work gets done, then it will propagate itself so far as propagation is necessary — if it were not to get done, propagation would be useless.

These are my reasons. However, let us wait till the book is there and see what kind of stuff it is.

2-10-1934

ANSWER TO A REQUEST FOR MESSAGE

Q: What has happened to my letter of request for a Message to grace the Special Number of "Mother India" of August 15? I have heard nothing from you.

A: I have been trying to get you informed without success about the impossibility of your getting your expected Message from me for the 15th August. I had and have no intention of writing a Message for my birthday this year. It is psychologically impossible for me to manufacture one to command; an inspiration would have to come and it is highly improbable that any will

come in this short space of time; I myself have no impulse towards it. But how is it that you have clean forgotten my rule of not writing any article for an outside paper, magazine or journal — I mean other than those conducted from the Ashram by the Ashram — and even for these I write nothing new except for the *Bulletin* at the Mother's request, — also my reasons for this fixed rule? If I started doing that kind of thing, my freedom would be gone; I would have to write at everybody's command, not only articles but blessings, replies on public questions and all the rest of that kind of conventional rubbish. I would be like any ordinary politician publishing my views on all and sundry matters, discoursing on all sorts of subjects, a public man at the disposal of the public. That would make myself, my blessings, my views and my Messages exceedingly cheap; in fact, I would no longer be Sri Aurobindo. Already the *Hindusthan Standard*, the *Madras Mail* and I know not what other journals and societies are demanding at the pistol's point special messages for themselves and I am supposed to stand and deliver. I won't. I regret that I must disappoint you, but self-preservation is a first law of nature.

3-8-1949

OBJECT OF SPECIAL ISSUES[1]

The object of such special issues is not to exhibit me to the public and show them all ends of me, i.e., to make me go through all my possible performances on a public stage. The object is to make the reading public better acquainted with the nature of this Yoga and the principle of what is being done in the Ashram. The private matters of the Ashram itself are *not* for the public — at most only so much as the public can see. *A fortiori* anything personal and private about me is also taboo. I come in only so far as it is necessary for the public to know my thought and what I stand for. You will notice that my life itself is so written as to give only the grey precise surface facts, nothing more. All propensity to make me figure in the big Barnum circus of jour-

[1] Special issues of some daily or weekly periodicals on Sri Aurobindo.

nalistic "features" along with or in competition with Joe Zones the prize-fighter, Douglas Fairbanks, H. G. Wells, King George and Queen Mary, Haile Selassie, Hobbs, Hitler, Jack the Ripper (or any modern substitute of his) and Mussolini should be strictly banished from the mentality for evermore and the day after.

24-9-1935

TO A BIOGRAPHER

I see that you have persisted in giving a biography — is it really necessary or useful? The attempt is bound to be a failure, because neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been on the surface for men to see.

You have given a sort of account of my political action, but the impression it makes on me and would make, I believe, on your public is that of a fiery idealist rushing furiously at an impossible aim (knocking his head against a stone wall, which is not a very sensible proceeding) without any grasp of realities and without any intelligible political method or plan of action. The practical people of the West would hardly be well impressed by such a picture and it would make them suspect that, probably, my Yoga was a thing of the same type!

MISUNDERSTANDING OF SRI AUROBINDO'S WRITING

People do not understand what I write because the mind by itself cannot understand things that are beyond it. It constructs its own idea out of something that it catches or that it has caught and puts that idea as the whole meaning of what has been written. Each mind puts its own ideas in place of the Truth.

6-6-1936

I do not mind if you find inconsistencies in my statements. What people call consistency is usually a rigid or narrow-minded inability to see more than one side of the truth or more than their

own narrow personal view or experience of things. Truth has many aspects and unless you look on all with a calm and equal eye, you will never have the real or the integral knowledge.

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I do not believe in human judgments because I have always found them fallible — also perhaps because I have myself been so blackened by human judgments that I do not care to be guided by them with regard to others. All this, however, I write to explain my own point of view; I am not insisting on it as a law for others. I have never been in the habit of insisting that everybody must think as I do — any more than I insist on everybody following me and my Yoga.

December, 1934

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If I write about these questions from the Yogic point of view, even though on a logical basis, there is bound to be much that is in conflict with the current opinions, e.g., about miracles, the limits of judgment by sense-data etc. I have avoided as much as possible writing about these subjects because I would have to propound things that cannot be understood except by reference to other data than those of the physical senses or of reason founded on these alone. I might have to speak of laws and forces not recognised by reason or physical science. In my public writings and my writings to Sadhaks I have not dealt with these because they go out of the range of ordinary knowledge and the understanding founded on it. These things are known to some, but they do not usually speak about them, while the public view of much of those as are known is either credulous or incredulous, but in both cases without experience or knowledge.

December, 1935

SECRECY IN SPIRITUAL MATTERS

Q: Would it not sometimes be dangerous to speak truth, e.g., in politics, war, revolution? The truth-

speaking moralist who would always insist on not concealing anything may bring disaster by revealing the plans and movements of one side to the opposite side.

A: Politics, war, revolution are things of stratagem and ambush — one cannot expect the truth there. From what I have heard X himself has played tricks and dodges there. Y told me it was impossible to lead men in politics or get one's objects without telling falsehoods by the yard and he was often feeling utterly disgusted with himself and his work, but supposed he would have to go through with it to the end.

There is no necessity to reveal one's plans and movements to those who have no business to know it, who are incapable of understanding or who would act as enemies or spoil all as a result of their knowledge. Secrecy is perfectly admissible and usual in spiritual matters except in special relations like that of the Shishya to the Guru. We do not let people outside know what is going on in the Ashram but we do not tell any lies about it either. Most Yogis say nothing about their spiritual experiences to others or not until long afterwards and secrecy was a general rule among the ancient Mystics. No moral or spiritual law commands us to make ourselves naked to the world or open up our hearts and minds for public inspection. Gandhi talked about secrecy being a sin but that is one of his many extravagances.

17-5-1936

It is not very advisable to discuss either myself or the Ashram or spiritual things with hostile minds or unbelievers. These discussions usually bring on the Sadhak a stress of the opposing atmosphere and cannot be helpful to his progress. Reserve is the best attitude; one need not be concerned to dispel their bad will or their ignorance.

13-9-1932

THE ASHRAM'S PRESTIGE

Queer idea all you fellows seem to have of "the prestige of the

Ashram". The prestige of an institution claiming to be a centre of spirituality lies in its spirituality, not in newspaper columns or famous people.

30-6-1938

CONFUSION OF A GOOD THINKER

Q: One X has written a book in which he says that your "language" has been responsible for creating confusion etc. Y seems to have written to him about this and got a reply that he has not been satisfied with your philosophy nor with any of your disciples whom he has seen, but that he may change his views if he gets a quarter of an hour's talk with you. So far has he understood the "Arya" that some years back when I had asked him what was Supermind, he had replied that it was something like power of clairvoyance! I had laughed in my sleeves at his being considered a good thinker.

A: Well, there seems evidently to be a confusion in his ideas about my philosophy though what has been responsible for creating it — well, it is perhaps the goodness of his thinking! I fear the pleasure and honour of having a quarter of an hour's talk with the Yogi X is too high a thing for me to wish to attain to it in this life. I must try to obtain *pūṇya* first and strive to be born again in order to deserve it.

13-4-1935

ETHICS AND SADHANA

Q: I am thinking of writing a book on your teachings in a systematic Western form in three main sections: (1) Metaphysics (2) Psychology (3) Ethics. But to make it presentable in the academic fashion would require a large reading of some past and present Western philosophers and psychologists. And where is the time for it?

A: I am afraid it would be a rather too colossal affair. But why ethics? I don't think there is any ethics; because ethics depends upon fixed principles and rules of conduct, whereas here any such thing can only be for Sadhana purposes as conditions for getting the spiritual or higher consciousness and afterwards everything is freely determined by that consciousness and its movements and dictates.

26-7-1936

OBVIOUS THEFTS

Q: X in his lecture published in "The Hindu" has stolen not only most of your ideas but has actually lifted several sentences en masse. *It seems he is well-known in this profession. But I wonder how such piracy in philosophical literature passes unchastised. I am thinking either of writing to him deploring the theft or of informing "The Hindu".*

A: I don't think it is worth while doing anything. The thefts are obvious but if he wants to add some peacock plumes to his dun colours!

23-7-1936

PRESSURE IN THE ASHRAM AND OUTSIDE HAPPENINGS

Q: If the pressure here has an effect on the outside world in some way, have incidents happening here any connection with outside happenings? For example, I noted that on the day X and Y went from here the Italians finally conquered Abyssinia. There is a story of an occultist in Ahmedabad (in the 16th century or so) in which it is related that he was making and unmaking mats and accordingly the wall round the city which was built during the day fell down during the night — the time when he was taking away the chips of the mat.

A: The story of the occultist contains a truth, and it would be a mistake to suppose that there is no connection between the pressure here and outside happenings. But I don't know about particular coincidences. The departure of X and Y does not seem easily relatable to the event in Abyssinia.

10-10-1936

VIVEKANANDA

Q: I am thinking of reading Vivekananda. What he has said in his lectures — is it all truth, something directly inspired?

A: I cannot say that it is all truth — he had his own opinions about certain things (like everybody else) which can be questioned. But most of what he said was of great value.

25-9-1935

Q: I wish to read books. Will you please give me some names?

A: I am not sure what books would interest you and am myself so far away from books that it is difficult to remember names. If you have not read Vivekananda's things you can read them or any books that would give you an idea of Vedanta schools and Sankhya. There is Mahendra Sircar's "Eastern Lights". It is Indian philosophy you want, I suppose.

25-9-1935

ARISTOTLE'S DRY PHILOSOPHY

Q: I tried to read Aristotle but found him very dry and abstract.

A: I always found him exceedingly dry. It is a purely mental philosophy, not like Plato's.

W. JAMES

James' book[1] is certainly a very interesting one. I read it a long time ago and do not remember it very well except that it was very interesting and not at all an ordinary book in its kind, but full of valuable suggestions.

1-7-1933

MATERIALISTIC SCIENCE AND MYSTICISM

I am afraid I have lost all interest in these speculations; things are getting too serious for me to waste time on these inconclusive intellctualities. I do not at all mind your driving your point triumphantly home and replacing a dogmatism from materialistic science on its throne of half a century ago from which it could victoriously ban all thought surpassing its own narrow bounds as mere wordy metaphysics and mysticism and moonshine. Obviously, if material energies alone can exist in the material world, there can be no possibility of a life divine on the earth. A mere metaphysical "sleight of mind", as one might call it, could not justify it against the objections of scientific negation and concrete common sense. I had thought that even many scientific minds on the Continent had come to admit that science could no longer claim to decide what was the real reality of things, that it had no means of deciding it and could only discover and describe the how and process of the operations of material Force in the physical front of things. That left the field open to higher thought and speculation, spiritual experience and even to mysticism, occultism and all those greater things which almost everyone had come to disbelieve as impossible nonsense. That was the condition of things when I was in England. If that is to return or if Russia and her dialectical materialism are to lead the world, well, fate must be obeyed and life divine must remain content to wait perhaps for another millennium. But I do not like the idea of one of our periodicals being the arena for a wrestle of that kind. That is all. I am writing under the im-

[1] *Psychology* by William James.

pression of your earlier article on this subject, as I have not gone carefully through the later ones; I dare say these later ones may be entirely convincing and I would find after reading them that my own position was wrong and that only an obstinate mystic could still believe in such a conquest of Matter by the Spirit as I had dared to think possible. But I am just such an obstinate mystic; so, if I allowed your exposition of the matter to be published in one of our own periodicals, I would be under the obligation of returning to the subject in which I have lost interest and therefore the inclination to write, so as to re-establish my position and would have to combat the claim of materialistic Science to pronounce anything on these matters on which it has no means of enquiry nor any possibility of arriving at a valid decision. Perhaps I would have practically to rewrite *The Life Divine* as an answer to the victorious "negation of the materialist"! This is the only explanation which I can give, apart from sheer want of time to tackle the subject, for my long and disappointing silence.

17-5-1949

RUSSELL, EDDINGTON, JEANS[1]

I don't understand why X expects me to bow to the criticism of Bertrand Russell.

1. Russell's opinions are as much determined by his upbringing, temperament etc. as those of Jeans or Eddington. He was born in the heyday of the most uncompromising materialism; he is unwilling to change the ideas which have got embedded in his nature. It is this that determines his view of the result of the recent developments of science, it is not a clear infallible logic; logic can serve any turn proposed to it by the mind's preferences. Nor is it a dispassionate impersonal view of facts dictated by unbiassed reason as opposed to Eddington's

[1] These are unfinished notes written by Sri Aurobindo around 1942. They were meant to be part of a letter which was never sent. One passage, though meant to be included in the letter, was written separately. It has now been put at its most appropriate place in the letter — as the penultimate paragraph.

personal outlook, imaginative fancies and idealistic prejudices. This idea of pure mental impersonality in the human reason is an exploded superstition of the rationalist mind; psychology in its recent inquiries has shown that this supposed impersonal observation of pure objective facts and impartial conclusion from them, an automatic writing of truth on the blank paper of the pure mind is a myth; it has shown that the personal factor is inevitable; we think according to what we are.

2. Russell is not, I believe, a great scientist or pre-eminent in any field of science. Eddington is, I am told, one of the finest authorities in astrophysics. Jeans and Eddington, though not great discoverers, are otherwise in the front rank. Russell ranks as a great mathematician, but there too Eddington has one superiority over him; he is supposed to be the only one, so say some, one of the only five, say others, who have a complete understanding of Einstein's mathematical formulation; Russell is not counted among them and that perhaps disables him from understanding the full consequences of Relativity. Russell, however, is an eminent philosopher, though not one of the great ones. I would count him rather as a strong and acute thinker on philosophy and science. Here he has an advantage, for Jeans and Eddington are only amateur philosophers with a few general ideas for their stock in trade.

3. As for their general intellectual standing Russell is a clear and strong materialistic intellect with a wide and general play of its own kind and range; the others are strong in their own field, trained in scientific knowledge and judgment, outside that they do not count: Eddington's mind is more intuitive and original in its limits but often shooting beyond the mark. Russell, when he goes outside his limits, can flounder and blunder. Well, then where is there any foundation for exalting the authority of Russell at the expense of the other two? I disagree with the conclusions of all three; I am neither a mentalist nor a vitalist nor a materialist. Why then throw Russell at me? I am not likely to change my decision in the matter in deference to his materialistic bias. And to what does his judgment or his argument amount to? He admits as against X that there has been a "revolution" in science; he admits that the old material-

istic philosophy has no longer even half a rotten leg to stand upon; its dogmatic theory of Matter has been kicked out God knows where. But still, says Russell, Matter is there and everything in this world obeys the laws (? whatever they may be or become from time to time?) of physical science. This is merely a personal opinion on a now very doubtful matter: he is fighting a rearguard action against what he feels to be the advanced forces of the future; his gallant but tremulous asseveration is a defensive parade not an aggressive blow; it lacks altogether the old assured self-confidence.

As for Russell's logic, a dry and strong or even austere logic is not a key to Truth; an enthusiastic vision often reaches it more quickly. The business of logic is to give order to a thinker's ideas, to establish firm relations between them and firm distinctions from other people's ideas, but when that is done, we are no nearer to indisputable truth than we were before. It is vision that sees Truth, not logic — the outer vision that sees facts but not their inner sense, the inner vision that sees inner facts and can see the inner sense of them, the total vision (not belonging to mind) that sees the whole. A strong and clear and powerful intellect, Russell, but nothing more — not certainly an infallible authority whether in science or anything else. Jeans and Eddington have their own logical reasoning; I do not accept it any more than I accept Russell's.

Let us, however, leave the flinging of authorities, often the same authority for opposing conclusions, Russell quoted against Russell and Darwin against Darwin, and let us come to the point....

ANSWER TO LEONARD WOOLF[1]

The answer to Woolf was written long ago at the time Woolf's article appeared in the *New Statesman and Nation* — a London weekly. It was X who drew my notice to it and asked for an answer. Y this time wanted something of mine for the *Onward* August 15th number and chose this one.

24-8-1934

[1] See *Letters on Yoga* (Centenary Edition, 1972), Vol. 22, pp. 185-189.

LENIN

Q: Somebody told X that Sri Aurobindo brought about the Russian revolution through Lenin. X told Y that people here were over-credulous and believed such things. Y said that if it is possible to cure dangerous diseases of the body by Yogic power, why should it not be possible to act on the mind of another person and pour in him immense vital force which can bring about such results as the Russian revolution?

A: The statement made to X was not quite correct; it is putting things in too physical a form. A spiritual and occult working supplies forces and can watch over the members of the execution of a world event, but to put it like that makes the actual workers too much of automata which they are not.

25-1-1937

HITLER — GOERING — GOEBBELS

Hitler and his chief lieutenants Goering and Goebbels are certainly vital beings or possessed by vital beings, so you can't expect common sense from them. The Kaiser, though all-satanical, was a much more human person; these people are hardly human at all. The nineteenth century in Europe was a pre-eminently human era — now the vital world seems to be descending there.

18-9-1936

MOTHER INDIA

Q: When you wrote that you look upon India not as an inert, dead mass of matter, but as the very Mother, the living Mother, I believe you saw *that Truth — or was it just the expression of a poetic or patriotic sentiment?*

A: My dear Sir, I am not a materialist. If I had seen India as

only a geographical area with a number of more or less interesting people in it, I would hardly have gone out of my way to do all that for the said area.

Merely a poetic or patriotic sentiment — just as in yourself only your flesh, skin, bones and other things...are real; but what you call your mind and soul do not self-exist, being merely psychological impressions created by the food you eat and the activity of the glands. Poetry and patriotism have of course the same origin and the things they speak of quite unreal.

THE QUESTION FOR INDIA AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Q: It is rather depressing to hear about the atrocities committed by some Mohamedans on Hindu families in Bengal.

With the coming of Independence I hope such things will stop. Now I would like to ask you something. In your scheme of things do you definitely see a free India? You have stated that for the spreading of spirituality in the world India must be free. I suppose you must be working for it! You are the only one who can do something really effective by the use of your spiritual Force.

A: That is all settled. It is a question of working out only. The question is what is India going to do with her Independence? The above kind of affair? Bolshevism? Goonda-raj? Things look ominous.

16-9-1935

RATIONALITY OF POLITICIANS

Poor X! But he is a politician and the rationality of politicians has perforce to move within limits: if they were to allow themselves to be as clear-minded as that, their occupation would be gone! It is not everybody who can be as cynical as a Birkenhead or as philosophical as a C. R. Das and go on with political

reason or political humbug in spite of knowing what it all came to from *arrivisme* in the one and patriotism in the other case.

A MESSAGE ON C. R. DAS[1]

Chittaranjan's death is a supreme loss. Consummately endowed with political intelligence, constructive imagination, magnetism, a driving force combining a strong will and an uncommon plasticity of mind for vision and tact of the hour, he was the one man after Tilak who could have led India to Swaraj.

AN EARLY PREDICTION[2]

Since 1907, we are living in a new era which is full of hope for India. Not only India, but the whole world will see sudden upheavals and revolutionary changes. The high will become low and the low high. The oppressed and the depressed shall be elevated. The nation and humanity will be animated by a new consciousness, new thought and new efforts will be made to reach new ends. Amidst these revolutionary changes, India will become free.

January, 1910

[1] Given in response to a request from the *Bombay Chronicle* on the occasion of C. R. Das's death and published in its issue of 22.6.1925.

[2] In January 1910, Sri Aurobindo gave this prediction to the correspondent of the Tamil Nationalist weekly *India*, who met him in Krishnakumar's house at Calcutta. It was published with Sri Aurobindo's authorisation.

Section Eight

MESSAGES

MESSAGES

ON THE WAR

[1]Some forces are working for the Divine, some are quite anti-divine in their aim and purpose.

If the nations or the governments who are blindly the instruments of the divine forces were perfectly pure and divine in their processes and forms of action as well as in the inspiration they receive so ignorantly they would be invincible, because the divine forces themselves are invincible. It is the mixture in the outward expression that gives to the Asura the right to defeat them.

To be a successful instrument for the Asuric forces is easy, because they take all the movements of your lower nature and make use of them, so that you have no spiritual effort to make. On the contrary, if you are to be a fit instrument of the Divine Force you must make yourself perfectly pure, since it is only in an integrally divinised instrument that the Divine Force will have its full power and effect.

4-7-1940

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[2]We feel that not only is this a battle waged in just self-defence and in defence of the nations threatened with the world-domination of Germany and the Nazi system of life, but that it is a defence of civilisation and its highest attained social, cultural and spiritual values and of the whole future of humanity. To this cause our support and sympathy will be unswerving whatever may happen; we look forward to the victory of Britain and, as the eventual result, an era of peace and union among the nations and a better and more secure world-order.

19-9-1940

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[1] From a letter to a disciple.

[2] This letter was addressed to the Governor of Madras covering a contribution to the Viceroy's War Purposes Fund, made as a token of a complete adhesion to the

[1]You have said that you have begun to doubt whether it was the Mother's war and ask me to make you feel again that it is. I affirm again to you most strongly that this is the Mother's war. You should not think of it as a fight for certain nations against others or even for India; it is a struggle for an ideal that has to establish itself on earth in the life of humanity, for a Truth that has yet to realise itself fully and against a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overwhelm the earth and mankind in the immediate future. It is the forces behind the battle that have to be seen and not this or that superficial circumstance. It is no use concentrating on the defects or mistakes of nations; all have defects and commit serious mistakes; but what matters is on what side they have ranged themselves in the struggle. It is a struggle for the liberty of mankind to develop, for conditions in which men have freedom and room to think and act according to the light in them and grow in the Truth, grow in the Spirit. There cannot be the slightest doubt that if one side wins, there will be an end of all such freedom and hope of light and truth and the work that has to be done will be subjected to conditions which would make it humanly impossible; there will be a reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race such as people in this country do not dream of and cannot yet at all realise. If the other side that has declared itself for the free future of humanity triumphs, this terrible danger will have been averted and conditions will have been created in which there will be a chance for the Ideal to grow, for the Divine Work to be done, for the spiritual Truth for which we stand to establish itself on the earth. Those who fight for this cause are fighting for the Divine and against the threatened reign of the Asura.

29-7-1942

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[2]What we say is not that the Allies have not done wrong things,

Allied cause. It was written at the time of the collapse of France and the threatened collapse of Britain. It was placed at the disposal of the Governor for publicity in case of need.

[1] This letter was written to a disciple in answer to his doubts about Sri Aurobindo's publicly declared standpoint with regard to the War.

[2] These are extracts from a letter written to a disciple in answer to certain doubts and misgivings regarding Sri Aurobindo's unconditional and all-out help to the Allies in the War.

but that they stand on the side of the evolutionary forces. I have not said that at random, but on what to me are clear grounds of fact. What you speak of is the dark side. All nations and governments have been that in their dealings with each other, — at least all who had the strength and got the chance. I hope you are not expecting me to believe that there are or have been virtuous governments and unselfish and sinless peoples! But there is the other side also. You are condemning the Allies on grounds that people in the past would have stared at, on the basis of modern ideals of international conduct; looked at like that all have black records. But who created these ideals or did most to create them (liberty, democracy, equality, international justice and the rest)? Well, America, France, England — the present Allied nations. They have all been imperialistic and still bear the burden of their past, but they have also deliberately spread these ideals and spread too the institutions which try to embody them. Whatever the relative worth of these things — they have been a stage, even if a still imperfect stage of the forward evolution. (What about the others? Hitler, for example, says it is a crime to educate the coloured peoples, they must be kept as serfs and labourers.) England has helped certain nations to be free without seeking any personal gain; she has also conceded independence to Egypt and Eire after a struggle, to Iraq without a struggle. She has been moving away steadily, if slowly, from imperialism towards co-operation; the British Commonwealth of England and the Dominions is something unique and unprecedented, a beginning of new things in that direction: she is moving in idea towards a world-union of some kind in which aggression is to be made impossible; her new generation has no longer the old firm belief in mission and empire; she has offered India Dominion independence — or even sheer isolated independence, if she wants that, — after the war, with an agreed free constitution to be chosen by Indians themselves.... All that is what I call evolution in the right direction — however slow and imperfect and hesitating it may still be. As for America she has forsworn her past imperialistic policies in regard to Central and South America, she has conceded independence to Cuba and the Philippines. ... Is there a similar trend on the side of the Axis? One has to

look at things on all sides, to see them steadily and whole. Once again, it is the forces working behind that I have to look at, I don't want to go blind among surface details. The future has to be safeguarded; only then can present troubles and contradictions have a chance to be solved and eliminated....

For us the question does not arise. We made it plain in a letter which has been made public that we did not consider the war as a fight between nations and governments (still less between good people and bad people) but between two forces, the Divine and the Asuric. What we have to see is on which side men and nations put themselves; if they put themselves on the right side, they at once make themselves instruments of the Divine purpose in spite of all defects, errors, wrong movements and actions which are common to human nature and all human collectivities. The victory of one side (the Allies) would keep the path open for the evolutionary forces: the victory of the other side would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its eventual failure as a race, as others in the past evolution failed and perished. That is the whole question and all other considerations are either irrelevant or of a minor importance. The Allies at least have stood for human values, though they may often act against their own best ideals (human beings always do that); Hitler stands for diabolical values or for human values exaggerated in the wrong way until they become diabolical (e.g. the virtues of the Herrenvolk, the master race). That does not make the English or Americans nations of spotless angels nor the Germans a wicked and sinful race, but as an indicator it has a primary importance....

The Kurukshetra example is not to be taken as an exact parallel but rather as a traditional instance of the war between two world-forces in which the side favoured by the Divine triumphed, because the leaders made themselves His instruments. It is not to be envisaged as a battle between virtue and wickedness, the good and the evil men. After all, were even the Pandavas virtuous without defect, quite unselfish and without passions?...

Were not the Pandavas fighting to establish their own claims and interests just and right, no doubt, but still personal claims and self-interest? Theirs was a righteous battle, *dharmya-yuddha*,

but it was for right and justice, in their own case. And if imperialism, empire-building by armed force, is under all circumstances a wickedness, then the Pandavas are tinted with that brush, for they used their victory to establish their empire, continued after them by Parikshit and Janamejaya. Could not modern humanism and pacifism make it a reproach against the Pandavas that these virtuous men (including Krishna) brought about a huge slaughter that they might become supreme rulers over all the numerous free and independent peoples of India? That would be the result of weighing old happenings in the scales of modern ideals. As a matter of fact such an empire was a step in the right direction then, just as world-union of free peoples would be a step in the right direction now, — in both cases the right consequences of a terrific slaughter....

We should remember that conquest and rule over subject peoples were not regarded as wrong either in ancient or mediaeval or quite recent times but as something great and glorious; men did not see any special wickedness in conquerors or conquering nations. Just government of subject peoples was envisaged but nothing more — exploitation was not excluded. The modern ideas on the subject, the right of all to liberty, both individuals and nations, the immorality of conquest and empire, or such compromises as the British idea of training subject races for democratic freedom, are new values, an evolutionary movement; this is a new Dharma which has only begun slowly and initially to influence practice, — an infant Dharma which would have been throttled for good if Hitler succeeded in his "Avataric" mission and established his new "religion" over all the earth. Subject nations naturally accept the new Dharma and severely criticise the old imperialisms; it is to be hoped that they will practise what they now preach when they themselves become strong and rich and powerful. But the best will be if a new world-order evolves, even if at first stumblingly or incompletely, which will make the old things impossible — a difficult task, but not absolutely impossible.

The Divine takes men as they are and uses men as His instruments even if they are not flawless in virtue, angelic, holy and pure. If they are of good will, if, to use the Biblical phrase, they

are on the Lord's side, that is enough for the work to be done. Even if I knew that the Allies would misuse their victory or bungle the peace or partially at least spoil the opportunities opened to the human world by that victory, I would still put my force behind them. At any rate things could not be one-hundredth part as bad as they would be under Hitler. The ways of the Lord would still be open — to keep them open is what matters. Let us stick to the real, the central fact, the need to remove the peril of black servitude and revived barbarism threatening India and the world, and leave for a later time all side-issues and minor issues or hypothetical problems that would cloud the one all-important tragic issue before us.

3-9-1943

P.S. Ours is a Sadhana which involves not only devotion or union with the Divine or a perception of Him in all things and beings but also action as workers and instruments and a work to be done in the world or a force to be brought in the world under difficult conditions; then one has to see one's way and do what is commanded and support what has to be supported, even if it means war and strife carried on whether through chariots and bows and arrows or tanks and cars and American bombs and planes, in either case *ghoram karma*: the means and times and persons differ but it does not seem to me that X is wrong in seeing in it the same problem as in Kurukshetra. As for violence etc. the old command rings out for us once again after many ages: "*Mayaivaite nihatāḥ pūrvameva nimittamātram bhava Savyasācin.*"[1]

Who are these people who have such a tenderness for Hitler and object to his being compared to Duryodhana? I hope they are not among those — (spiritual people among them, I am told,) — who believe Hitler to be the new Avatar and his religion (God help us!) to be the true religion which we must help to establish throughout the wide world? or among those who regard Hitler as a great and good man, a saint, an ascetic and all that is noble and god-like?

[1] "By Me and none other already even are they slain, do thou become the occasion only. O Savyasachin." *Gita*, Ch. XI, 33.

GERMANY AFTER THE WAR

This is no time for patting the Germans on the back or embracing and consoling them. If they are allowed to get on their legs again without trouble or without making an atonement for the horror of darkness and suffering they have inflicted on the world, they will rise only to repeat their performance — unless somebody else forestalls them. The only help we can give to Germany now is silence.

19-3-1946

MESSAGE TO SIR STAFFORD CRIPPS

I have heard your broadcast. As one who has been a nationalist leader and worker for India's independence, though now my activity is no longer in the political but in the spiritual field, I wish to express my appreciation of all you have done to bring about this offer. I welcome it as an opportunity given to India to determine for herself, and organise in all liberty of choice, her freedom and unity, and take an effective place among the world's free nations. I hope that it will be accepted, and right use made of it, putting aside all discords and divisions. I hope too that friendly relations between Britain and India replacing the past struggles, will be a step towards a greater world union in which, as a free nation, her spiritual force will contribute to build for mankind a better and happier life. In this light, I offer my public adhesion, in case it can be of any help in your work.[1]

31-3-1942

SRI AUROBINDO'S POSITION ON INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE[2]

Sri Aurobindo thinks it unnecessary to volunteer a personal

[1] SIR S. CRIPPS' TELEGRAM IN REPLY TO SRI AUROBINDO'S MESSAGE:

I am most touched and gratified by your kind message allowing me to inform India that you who occupy unique position in imagination of Indian youth, are convinced that declaration of His Majesty's Government substantially confers that freedom for which Indian Nationalism has so long struggled. 1-4-1942

[2] This statement was given in reply to a request from *Amrita Bazar Patrika* for Sri

pronouncement, though he would give his views if officially approached for them. His position is known. He has always stood for India's complete independence which he was the first to advocate publicly and without compromise as the only ideal worthy of a self-respecting nation. In 1910 he authorised the publication of his prediction[1] that after a long period of wars, world-wide upheavals and revolutions beginning after four years, India would achieve her freedom. Lately he has said that freedom was coming soon and nothing could prevent it. He has always foreseen that eventually Britain would approach India for an amicable agreement, conceding her freedom. What he had foreseen is now coming to pass and the British Cabinet Mission is the sign. It remains for the nation's leaders to make a right and full use of the opportunity. In any case, whatever the immediate outcome, the Power that has been working out this event will not be denied, the final result, India's liberation, is sure.

24-3-1946

THE FIFTEENTH OF AUGUST 1947

I

[2]August 15th is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age. But it has a significance not only for us, but for Asia and the whole world; for it signifies the entry into the comity of nations of a new power with untold potentialities which has a great part to play in determining the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity. To me personally it must naturally be gratifying that this date which was notable only for me because it was my own birthday celebrated annually by those who have accepted my gospel of

Aurobindo's views on the British Cabinet Mission, 1946.

[1] See p. 390.

[2] This message, given at the request of the All India Radio, Trichinopoly, for the 15th August 1947, is in two versions. The original version was found to be a little too long for the time allotted for the message; so in the second version it was slightly abridged and recast. It is this second version that was broadcast from the All India Radio on the 14th August 1947. Both the versions are published here consecutively.

life, should have acquired this vast significance. As a mystic, I take this identification, not as a coincidence or fortuitous accident, but as a sanction and seal of the Divine Power which guides my steps on the work with which I began life. Indeed almost all the world movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though at that time they looked like impossible dreams, I can observe on this day either approaching fruition or initiated and on the way to their achievement.

I have been asked for a message on this great occasion, but I am perhaps hardly in a position to give one. All I can do is to make a personal declaration of the aims and ideals conceived in my childhood and youth and now watched in their beginning of fulfilment, because they are relevant to the freedom of India, since they are a part of what I believe to be India's future work, something in which she cannot but take a leading position. For I have always held and said that India was arising, not to serve her own material interests only, to achieve expansion, greatness, power and prosperity, — though these too she must not neglect, — and certainly not like others to acquire domination of other peoples, but to live also for God and the world as a helper and leader of the whole human race. Those aims and ideals were in their natural order these: a revolution which would achieve India's freedom and her unity; the resurgence and liberation of Asia and her return to the great role which she had played in the progress of human civilisation; the rise of a new, a greater, brighter and nobler life for mankind which for its entire realisation would rest outwardly on an international unification of the separate existence of the peoples, preserving and securing their national life but drawing them together into an overriding and consummating oneness; the gift by India of her spiritual knowledge and her means for the spiritualisation of life to the whole race; finally, a new step in the evolution which, by uplifting the consciousness to a higher level, would begin the solution of the many problems of existence which have perplexed and vexed humanity, since men began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society.

India is free but she has not achieved unity, only a fissured and broken freedom. At one time it almost seemed as if she

might relapse into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. Fortunately there has now developed a strong possibility that this disastrous relapse will be avoided. The wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly makes it possible that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fissure. But the old communal division into Hindu and Muslim seems to have hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that the Congress and the nation will not accept the settled fact as for ever settled or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. The partition of the country must go, — it is to be hoped by a slackening of tension, by a progressive understanding of the need of peace and concord, by the constant necessity of common and concerted action, even of an instrument of union for that purpose. In this way unity may come about under whatever form — the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, the division must and will go. For without it the destiny of India might be seriously impaired and even frustrated. But that must not be.

Asia has arisen and large parts of it have been liberated or are at this moment being liberated; its other still subject parts are moving through whatever struggles towards freedom. Only a little has to be done and that will be done today or tomorrow. There India has her part to play and has begun to play it with an energy and ability which already indicate the measure of her possibilities and the place she can take in the council of the nations.

The unification of mankind is under way, though only in an imperfect initiative, organised but struggling against tremendous difficulties. But the momentum is there and, if the experience of history can be taken as a guide, it must inevitably increase until it conquers. Here too India has begun to play a prominent part and, if she can develop that larger statesmanship which is not limited by the present facts and immediate possibilities but looks into the future and brings it nearer, her presence may make all the difference between a slow and timid and a bold and swift

development. A catastrophe may intervene and interrupt or destroy what is being done, but even then the final result is sure. For in any case the unification is a necessity in the course of Nature, an inevitable movement and its achievement can be safely foretold. Its necessity for the nations also is clear, for without it the freedom of the small peoples can never be safe hereafter and even large and powerful nations cannot really be secure. India, if she remains divided, will not herself be sure of her safety. It is therefore to the interest of all that union should take place. Only human imbecility and stupid selfishness could prevent it. Against that, it has been said, even the gods strive in vain; but it cannot stand for ever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine Will. Nationalism will then have fulfilled itself; an international spirit and outlook must grow up and international forms and institutions; even it may be such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship and a voluntary fusion of cultures may appear in the process of the change and the spirit of nationalism losing its militancy may find these things perfectly compatible with the integrity of its own outlook. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.

The spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.

The rest is still a personal hope and an idea and ideal which has begun to take hold both in India and in the West on forward-looking minds. The difficulties in the way are more formidable than in any other field of endeavour, but difficulties were made to be overcome and if the Supreme Will is there, they will be overcome. Here too, if this evolution is to take place, since it must come through a growth of the spirit and the inner consciousness, the initiative can come from India and although the scope must be universal, the central movement may be hers.

Such is the content which I put into this date of India's liberation; whether or how far or how soon this connection will be fulfilled, depends upon this new and free India.

THE FIFTEENTH OF AUGUST 1947

II

August 15th, 1947 is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age. But we can also make it by our life and acts as a free nation an important date in a new age opening for the whole world, for the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity.

August 15th is my own birthday and it is naturally gratifying to me that it should have assumed this vast significance. I take this coincidence, not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work with which I began life, the beginning of its full fruition. Indeed, on this day I can watch almost all the world-movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though then they looked like impracticable dreams, arriving at fruition or on their way to achievement. In all these movements free India may well play a large part and take a leading position.

The first of these dreams was a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India. India today is free but she has not achieved unity. At one moment it almost seemed as if in the very act of liberation she would fall back into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. But fortunately it now seems probable that this danger will be averted and a large and powerful, though not yet a complete union will be established. Also, the wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly has made it probable that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fissure. But the old communal division into Hindus and Muslims seems now to have hardened into a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that this settled fact will not be accepted as settled for ever or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. India's internal development and prosperity may be impeded, her position among the nations weakened, her destiny impaired or even frustrated.

This must not be; the partition must go. Let us hope that that may come about naturally, by an increasing recognition of the necessity not only of peace and concord but of common action, by the practice of common action and the creation of means for that purpose. In this way unity may finally come about under whatever form — the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India's future.

Another dream was for the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilisation. Asia has arisen; large parts are now quite free or are at this moment being liberated: its other still subject or partly subject parts are moving through whatever struggles towards freedom. Only a little has to be done and that will be done today or tomorrow. There India has her part to play and has begun to play it with an energy and ability which already indicate the measure of her possibilities and the place she can take in the council of the nations.

The third dream was a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind. That unification of the human world is under way; there is an imperfect initiation organised but struggling against tremendous difficulties. But the momentum is there and it must inevitably increase and conquer. Here too India has begun to play a prominent part and, if she can develop that larger statesmanship which is not limited by the present facts and immediate possibilities but looks into the future and brings it nearer, her presence may make all the difference between a slow and timid and a bold and swift development. A catastrophe may intervene and interrupt or destroy what is being done, but even then the final result is sure. For unification is a necessity of Nature, an inevitable movement. Its necessity for the nations is also clear, for without it the freedom of the small nations may be at any moment in peril and the life even of the large and powerful nations insecure. The unification is therefore to the interests of all, and only human imbecility and stupid selfishness can prevent it; but these cannot stand for ever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine Will. But an

outward basis is not enough; there must grow up an international spirit and outlook, international forms and institutions must appear, perhaps such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship, willed interchange or voluntary fusion of cultures. Nationalism will have fulfilled itself and lost its militancy and would no longer find these things incompatible with self-preservation and the integrality of its outlook. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.

Another dream, the spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.

The final dream was a step in evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness and begin the solution of the problems which have perplexed and vexed him since he first began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society. This is still a personal hope and an idea, an ideal which has begun to take hold both in India and in the West on forward-looking minds. The difficulties in the way are more formidable than in any other field of endeavour, but difficulties were made to be overcome and if the Supreme Will is there, they will be overcome. Here too, if this evolution is to take place, since it must proceed through a growth of the spirit and the inner consciousness, the initiative can come from India and, although the scope must be universal, the central movement may be hers.

Such is the content which I put into this date of India's liberation; whether or how far this hope will be justified depends upon the new and free India.

A MESSAGE[1]

I would have preferred silence in the face of these circumstances

[1] Given in answer to a request from the All India Radio, Trichinopoly, on the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's death.

that surround us. For any words we can find fall flat amid such happenings. This much, however, I will say that the Light which led us to freedom, though not yet to unity, still burns and will burn on till it conquers. I believe firmly that a great and united future is the destiny of this nation and its peoples. The Power that brought us through so much struggle and suffering to freedom, will achieve also, through whatever strife or trouble, the aim which so poignantly occupied the thoughts of the fallen leader at the time of his tragic ending; as it brought us freedom, it will bring us unity. A free and united India will be there and the Mother will gather around her her sons and weld them into a single national strength in the life of a great and united people.

5-2-1948

MESSAGE TO THE ANDHRA UNIVERSITY[1]

You have asked me for a message and anything I write, since it is to the Andhra University that I am addressing my message, if it can be called by that name, should be pertinent to your University, its function, its character and the work it has to do. But it is difficult for me at this juncture when momentous decisions are being taken which are likely to determine not only the form and pattern of this country's Government and administration but the pattern of its destiny, the build and make-up of the nation's character, its position in the world with regard to other nations, its choice of what itself shall be, not to turn my eyes in that direction. There is one problem facing the country which concerns us nearly and to this I shall now turn and deal with it, however inadequately, — the demand for the reconstruction of the artificial British-made Presidencies and Provinces into natural divisions forming a new system, new and yet founded on the principle of diversity in unity attempted by ancient India. India, shut into a separate existence by the Himalayas and the ocean, has always been the home of a peculiar people with cha-

[1] This message was given by Sri Aurobindo to the Andhra University on the occasion of the presentation of the Sir Cattamanchi Ramalinga Reddy National Prize to him at the convocation held at the University on the 11th December 1948.

racteristics of its own recognisably distinct from all others, with its own distinct civilisation, way of life, way of the spirit, a separate culture, arts, building of society. It has absorbed all that has entered into it, put upon all the Indian stamp, welded the most diverse elements ino its fundamental unity. But it has also been throughout a congeries of diverse peoples, lands, kingdoms and, in earlier times, republics also, diverse races, sub-nations with a marked character of their own, developing different brands or forms of civilisation and culture, many schools of art and architecture which yet succeeded in fitting into the general Indian type of civilisation and culture. India's history throughout has been marked by a tendency, a constant effort to unite all this diversity of elements into a single political whole under a central imperial rule so that India might be politically as well as culturally one. Even after a rift had been created by the irruption of the Mohammedan peoples with their very different religion and social structure, there continued a constant effort of political unification and there was a tendency towards a mingling of cultures and their mutual influence on each other; even some heroic attempts were made to discover or create a common religion built out of these two apparently irreconcilable faiths and here too there were mutual influences. But throughout India's history the political unity was never entirely attained and for this there were several causes, — first, vastness of space and insufficiency of communications preventing the drawing close of all these different peoples; secondly, the method used which was the military domination by one people or one imperial dynasty over the rest of the country which led to a succession of empires, none of them permanent; lastly, the absence of any will to crush out of existence all these different kingdoms and fuse together these different peoples and force them into a single substance and a single shape. Then came the British Empire in India which recast the whole country into artificial provinces made for its own convenience, disregarding the principle of division into regional peoples but not abolishing that division. For there had grown up out of the original elements a natural system of sub-nations with different languages, literatures and other traditions of their own, the four Dravidian peoples,

Bengal, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, Sind, Assam, Orissa, Nepal, the Hindi-speaking peoples of the North, Rajputana and Bihar. British rule with its provincial administration did not unite these peoples but it did impose upon them the habit of a common type of administration, a closer intercommunication through the English language and by the education it gave there was created a more diffused and more militant form of patriotism, the desire for liberation and the need of unity in the struggle to achieve that liberation. A sufficient fighting unity was brought about to win freedom, but freedom obtained did not carry with it a complete union of the country. On the contrary, India was deliberately split on the basis of the two-nation theory into Pakistan and Hindustan with the deadly consequences which we know.

In taking over the administration from Britain we had inevitably to follow the line of least resistance and proceed on the basis of the artificial British-made provinces, at least for the time; this provisional arrangement now threatens to become permanent, at least in the main and some see an advantage in this permanence. For they think it will help the unification of the country and save us from the necessity of preserving regional sub-nations which in the past kept a country from an entire and thorough-going unification and uniformity. In a rigorous unification they see the only true union, a single nation with a standardised and uniform administration, language, literature, culture, art, education, — all carried on through the agency of one national tongue. How far such a conception can be carried out in the future one cannot forecast, but at present it is obviously impracticable, and it is doubtful if it is for India truly desirable. The ancient diversities of the country carried in them great advantages as well as drawbacks. By these differences the country was made the home of many living and pulsating centres of life, art, culture, a richly and brilliantly coloured diversity in unity; all was not drawn up into a few provincial capitals or an imperial metropolis, other towns and regions remaining subordinated and indistinctive or even culturally asleep; the whole nation lived with a full life in its many parts and this increased enormously the creative energy of the whole. There is no possibility any longer that this

diversity will endanger or diminish the unity of India. Those vast spaces which kept her people from closeness and a full interplay have been abolished in their separating effect by the march of Science and the swiftness of the means of communication. The idea of federation and a complete machinery for its perfect working have been discovered and will be at full work. Above all, the spirit of patriotic unity has been too firmly established in the people to be easily effaced or diminished, and it would be more endangered by refusing to allow the natural play of life of the sub-nations than by satisfying their legitimate aspirations. The Congress itself in the days before liberation came had pledged itself to the formation of linguistic provinces, and to follow it out, if not immediately, yet as early as may conveniently be, might well be considered the wisest course. India's national life will then be founded on her natural strengths and the principle of unity in diversity which has always been normal to her and its fulfilment the fundamental course of her being and its very nature, the Many in the One, would place her on the sure foundation of her Swabhava and Swadharma.

This development might well be regarded as the inevitable trend of her future. For the Dravidian regional peoples are demanding their separate right to a self-governing existence; Maharashtra expects a similar concession and this would mean a similar development in Gujarat and then the British-made Presidencies of Madras and Bombay would have disappeared. The old Bengal Presidency had already been split up and Orissa, Bihar and Assam are now self-governing regional peoples. A merger of the Hindi-speaking part of the Central Provinces and the U.P. would complete the process. An annulment of the partition of India might modify but would not materially alter this result of the general tendency. A union of States and regional peoples would again be the form of a united India.

In this new regime your University will find its function and fulfilment. Its origin has been different from that of other Indian Universities; they were established by the initiative of a foreign Government as a means of introducing their own civilisation into India, situated in the capital towns of the Presidencies and formed as teaching and examining bodies with purely academic

aims: Benares and Aligarh had a different origin but were all-India institutions serving the two chief religious communities of the country. Andhra University has been created by a patriotic Andhra initiative, situated not in a Presidency capital but in an Andhra town and serving consciously the life of a regional people. The home of a robust and virile and energetic race, great by the part it had played in the past in the political life of India, great by its achievements in art, architecture, sculpture, music, Andhra looks back upon imperial memories, a place in the succession of empires and imperial dynasties which reigned over a large part of the country; it looks back on the more recent memory of the glories of the last Hindu Empire of Vijayanagar, — a magnificent record for any people. Your University can take its high position as a centre of light and learning, knowledge and culture which can train the youth of Andhra to be worthy of their forefathers: the great past should lead to a future as great or even greater. Not only Science but Art, not only book-knowledge and information but growth in culture and character are parts of a true education; to help the individual to develop his capacities, to help in the forming of thinkers and creators and men of vision and action of the future, this is a part of its work. Moreover, the life of the regional people must not be shut up in itself; its youths have also to contact the life of the other similar peoples of India interacting with them in industry and commerce and the other practical fields of life but also in the things of the mind and spirit. Also, they have to learn not only to be citizens of Andhra but to be citizens of India; the life of the nation is their life. An *élite* has to be formed which has an adequate understanding of all great national affairs or problems and be able to represent Andhra in the councils of the nation and in every activity and undertaking of national interest calling for the support and participation of her peoples. There is still a wider field in which India will need the services of men of ability and character from all parts of the country, the international field. For she stands already as a considerable international figure and this will grow as time goes on into vast proportions; she is likely in time to take her place as one of the preponderant States whose voices will be strongest and their lead and their

action determinative of the world's future. For all this she needs men whose training as well as their talent, genius and force of character is of the first order. In all these fields your University can be of supreme service and do a work of immeasurable importance.

In this hour, in the second year of its liberation the nation has to awaken to many more very considerable problems, to vast possibilities opening before her but also to dangers and difficulties that may, if not wisely dealt with, become formidable. There is a disordered world-situation left by the war, full of risks and sufferings and shortages and threatening another catastrophe which can only be solved by the united effort of the peoples and can only be truly met by an effort at world-union such as was conceived at San Francisco but has not till now been very successful in the practice; still the effort has to be continued and new devices found which will make easier the difficult transition from the perilous divisions of the past and present to a harmonious world-order; for otherwise there can be no escape from continuous calamity and collapse. There are deeper issues for India herself, since by following certain tempting directions she may conceivably become a nation like many others evolving an opulent industry and commerce, a powerful organisation of social and political life, an immense military strength, practising power-politics with a high degree of success, guarding and extending zealously her gains and her interests, dominating even a large part of the world, but in this apparently magnificent progression forfeiting its Swadharma, losing its soul. Then ancient India and her spirit might disappear altogether and we would have only one more nation like the others and that would be a real gain neither to the world nor to us. There is a question whether she may prosper more harmlessly in the outward life yet lose altogether her richly massed and firmly held spiritual experience and knowledge. It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light. This must not and will surely not happen; but it cannot be said that the danger is not there. There are indeed other numerous and difficult problems

that face this country or will very soon face it. No doubt we will win through, but we must not disguise from ourselves the fact that after these long years of subjection and its cramping and impairing effects a great inner as well as outer liberation and change, a vast inner and outer progress is needed if we are to fulfil India's true destiny.

CURRENT POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IDEAS[1]

Sri Aurobindo is in no way bound by the present world's institutions or current ideas whether in political, social or economic field; it is not necessary for him either to approve or disapprove of them. He does not regard either capitalism or orthodox socialism as the right solution for the world's future; nor can he admit that the admission of private enterprise by itself makes the society capitalistic, a socialistic economy can very well admit some amount of controlled or subordinated private enterprise as an aid to its own working or a partial convenience without ceasing to be socialistic. Sri Aurobindo has his own views as to how far Congress economy is intended to be truly socialistic or whether that is only a cover, but he does not care to express his views on that point at present.

15-4-1949

A MESSAGE TO AMERICA[2]

I have been asked to send on this occasion of the fifteenth August a message to the West, but what I have to say might be delivered equally as a message to the East. It has been customary to dwell on the division and difference between these two sections of the human family and even oppose them to each other; but, for myself I would rather be disposed to dwell on oneness and unity than on division and difference. East and West have the same human

[1] A letter to a Sadhak.

[2] Given in response to a request for a message on the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's birth anniversary celebrations in New York on the 15th August 1949.

nature, a common human destiny, the same aspiration after a greater perfection, the same seeking after something higher than itself, something towards which inwardly and even outwardly we move. There has been a tendency in some minds to dwell on the spirituality or mysticism of the East and the materialism of the West; but the West has had no less than the East its spiritual seekings and, though not in such profusion, its saints and sages and mystics, the East has had its materialistic tendencies, its material splendours, its similar or identical dealings with life and Matter and the world in which we live. East and West have always met and mixed more or less closely, they have powerfully influenced each other and at the present day are under an increasing compulsion of Nature and Fate to do so more than ever before.

There is a common hope, a common destiny, both spiritual and material, for which both are needed as co-workers. It is no longer towards division and difference that we should turn our minds, but on unity, union, even oneness necessary for the pursuit and realisation of a common ideal, the destined goal, the fulfilment towards which Nature in her beginning obscurely set out and must in an increasing light of knowledge replacing her first ignorance constantly persevere.

But what shall be that ideal and that goal? That depends on our conception of the realities of life and the supreme Reality.

Here we have to take into account that there has been, not any absolute difference but an increasing divergence between the tendencies of the East and the West. The highest truth is truth of the Spirit; a Spirit supreme above the world and yet immanent in the world and in all that exists, sustaining and leading all towards whatever is the aim and goal and the fulfilment of Nature since her obscure inconscient beginnings through the growth of consciousness is the one aspect of existence which gives a clue to the secret of our being and a meaning to the world. The East has always and increasingly put the highest emphasis on the supreme truth of the Spirit; it has, even in its extreme philosophies, put the world away as an illusion and regarded the Spirit as the sole reality. The West has concentrated more and more increasingly on the world, on the dealings of mind and life with our

material existence, on our mastery over it, on the perfection of mind and life and some fulfilment of the human being here: latterly this has gone so far as the denial of the Spirit and even the enthronement of Matter as the sole reality. Spiritual perfection as the sole ideal on one side, on the other, the perfectibility of the race, the perfect society, a perfect development of the human mind and life and man's material existence have become the largest dream of the future. Yet both are truths and can be regarded as part of the intention of the Spirit in world-nature; they are not incompatible with each other: rather their divergence has to be healed and both have to be included and reconciled in our view of the future.

The Science of the West has discovered evolution as the secret of life and its process in this material world; but it has laid more stress on the growth of form and species than on the growth of consciousness: even, consciousness has been regarded as an incident and not the whole secret of the meaning of the evolution. An evolution has been admitted by certain minds in the East, certain philosophies and Scriptures, but there its sense has been the growth of the soul through developing or successive forms and many lives of the individual to its own highest reality. For if there is a conscious being in the form, that being can hardly be a temporary phenomenon of consciousness; it must be a soul fulfilling itself and this fulfilment can only take place if there is a return of the soul to earth in many successive lives, in many successive bodies.

The process of evolution has been the development from and in inconscient Matter of a subconscient and then a conscious Life, of conscious mind first in animal life and then fully in conscious and thinking man, the highest present achievement of evolutionary Nature. The achievement of mental being is at present her highest and tends to be regarded as her final work; but it is possible to conceive a still further step of the evolution: Nature may have in view beyond the imperfect mind of man a consciousness that passes out of the mind's ignorance and possesses truth as its inherent right and nature. There is a Truth-Consciousness as it is called in the Veda, a Supermind, as I have termed it, possessing Knowledge, not having to seek after it and

constantly miss it. In one of the Upanishads a being of knowledge is stated to be the next step above the mental being; into that the soul has to rise and through it to attain the perfect bliss of spiritual existence. If that could be achieved as the next evolutionary step of Nature here, then she would be fulfilled and we could conceive of the perfection of life even here, its attainment of a full spiritual living even in this body or it may be in a perfected body. We could even speak of a divine life on earth; our human dream of perfectibility would be accomplished and at the same time the aspiration to a heaven on earth common to several religions and spiritual seers and thinkers.

The ascent of the human soul to the supreme Spirit is that soul's highest aim and necessity, for that is the supreme reality; but there can be too the descent of the Spirit and its powers into the world and that would justify the existence of the material world also, give a meaning, a divine purpose to the creation and solve its riddle. East and West could be reconciled in the pursuit of the highest and largest ideal, Spirit embrace Matter and Matter find its own true reality and the hidden Reality in all things in the Spirit.

11-8-1949

ON KOREA[1]

I do not know why you want a line of thought to be indicated to you for your guidance in the affair of Korea. There is nothing to hesitate about there, the whole affair is as plain as a pike-staff. It is the first move in the Communist plan of campaign to dominate and take possession first of these northern parts and then of South East Asia as a preliminary to their manoeuvres with regard to the rest of the continent — in passing, Tibet as a gate opening to India. If they succeed, there is no reason why domination of the whole world should not follow by steps until they are ready to deal with America. That is, provided the war can be staved off with America until Stalin can choose his time. Truman seems

[1] A letter to a Sadhak.

to have understood the situation if we can judge from his moves in Korea, but it is to be seen whether he is strong enough and determined enough to carry the matter through. The measures he has taken are likely to be incomplete and unsuccessful, since they do not include any actual military intervention except on sea and in the air. That seems to be the situation; we have to see how it develops. One thing is certain that if there is too much shilly-shallying and if America gives up now her defence of Korea, she may be driven to yield position after position until it is too late: at one point or another she will have to stand and face the necessity of drastic action even if it leads to war. Stalin also seems not to be ready to face at once the risk of a world war and, if so, Truman can turn the tables on him by constantly facing him with the onus of either taking that risk or yielding position after position to America. I think that is all that I can see at present; for the moment the situation is as grave as it can be.

28-6-1950

NOTE[1]

I do not know that it is necessary for me to say much about the details of this *projet*, except that it seems to me to need to be elaborated and elucidated so as to give a more complete and exact idea of the constitution meant for the new Territory, the powers reserved for it and those reserved for the central authority and the scope and limits of the rights to be conceded by the India Government to France and French nationals under the agreement.

Incidentally, what exactly is meant by the *droits de douanes* to be exercised by the local Government? I presume that the old Customs will be re-established at the Port and there will be

[1] A *projet de loi*, drafted by some local notables of Pondicherry in 1950 regarding the transfer of the French Settlements in India, was submitted to Sri Aurobindo for his advice and comment. This Note given by Sri Aurobindo on the *projet* was addressed to Mr. S. K. Banerji, Consul General at Pondicherry in 1950.

none between the Territory and the rest of India: only, certain limited rights will be given for the introduction of goods from France to be carefully restricted to the amount necessary for local use; if so, there can be no scope for any levy of Customs by local authority. As to the U.N.O., I presume that as between the India Government and the Government of people of a Territory subordinate to it there could not be, as things now stand, any intervention on any matter between them but only as between the India Government and the Government of France.

There is one point on which I would like to make an observation which I consider of primary importance. The French Government would naturally want the democratic rights it has conceded to the local Assembly and local bodies to continue in full and the India Government would also, no doubt, like this new Territory of its own to have a constitution as democratic as that of the other parts of India. But if nothing is changed in local conditions and freedom is left for a certain type of politicians and party leaders to make use of their opportunities to pervert everything to their own profit, how are they to be prevented from prolonging the old state of things, in which case the Territory would easily be turned into a sink of misgovernment and corruption and things will become worse even than in the past. Only a strong control, a thorough purification of the administration and a period of political discipline in which the population could develop public spirit, the use and the right use of the powers and the democratic institutions placed at their disposal, could ensure a change for the better and even that only after a long lapse of time. It cannot be ensured by a paper constitution; the right type of men in the right place could alone ensure it.

I would myself have thought it safer if the principle of the agreement between the two Governments and its main features had at first been agreed upon and the rest worked out afterwards by careful consideration and discussion. Otherwise there is a risk of disagreements and disaccord in the points of view arising and holding up or even endangering the successful working out of the agreement. But I understand that their position in this matter

has obliged the Government in Paris to prefer the method actually taken. I hope that the advice you will give will help the India Government to make the best of things as they are.

12-2-1950

SECTION NINE

SOME EARLY LETTERS

This Section consists of some letters written by Sri Aurobindo during the early period of his stay at Pondicherry after his arrival there in 1910.

Part I includes letters relating to his personal Sadhana written during 1911 to 1916.

Part II contains two letters written in 1920 in reply to appeals to him from two Indian nationalist leaders to come back to British India to resume leadership of Indian politics.

Part III contains three letters written in 1922 relating to the plan that he had then conceived to extend his work outside after his long retirement in inner Sadhana.

SOME EARLY LETTERS

I. EARLY SADHANA IN PONDICHERRY[1]

I need some place of refuge in which I can complete my Yoga unassailed and build up other souls around me. It seems to me that Pondicherry is the place appointed by those who are Beyond, but you know how much effort is needed to establish the thing that is purposed upon the material plane....

I am developing the necessary powers for bringing down the spiritual on the material plane, and I am now able to put myself into men and change them, removing the darkness and bringing light, giving them a new heart and a new mind. This I can do with great swiftness and completeness with those who are near me, but I have also succeeded with men hundreds of miles away. I have also been given the power to read men's characters and hearts, even their thoughts, but this power is not yet absolutely complete, nor can I use it always and in all cases. The power of guiding action by the mere exercise of will is also developing, but it is not so powerful as yet as the other. My communication with the other world is yet of a troubled character, though I am certainly in communication with some very great powers. But of all these things I will write more when the final obstacles in my way are cleared from the path.

What I perceive most clearly, is that the principal object of my Yoga is to remove absolutely and entirely every possible source of error and ineffectiveness, of error in order that the Truth I shall eventually show to men may be perfect, and of ineffectiveness in order that the work of changing the world, so far as I have to assist it, may be entirely victorious and irresistible. It is for this reason that I have been going through so long a discipline and that the more brilliant and mighty results of Yoga have been so long withheld. I have been kept busy laying down the foundation, a work severe and painful. It is only now that the

[1] These letters, except the first two and the last, were written to the Mother.

edifice is beginning to rise upon the sure and perfect foundation that has been laid.

12-7-1911

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My Yoga is proceeding with great rapidity, but I defer writing to you of the results until certain experiments in which I am now engaged, have yielded fruit sufficient to establish beyond dispute the theory and system of Yoga which I have formed and which is giving great results not only to me, but to the young men who are with me.... I expect these results within a month, if all goes well.

20-9-1911

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All is always for the best, but it is sometimes from the external point of view an awkward best....

The whole earth is now under one law and answers to the same vibrations and I am sceptical of finding any place where the clash of the struggle will not pursue us. In any case, an effective retirement does not seem to be my destiny. I must remain in touch with the world until I have either mastered adverse circumstances or succumbed or carried on the struggle between the spiritual and physical so far as I am destined to carry it on. This is how I have always seen things and still see them. As for failure, difficulty and apparent impossibility I am too much habituated to them to be much impressed by their constant self-presentation except for passing moments....

One needs to have a calm heart, a settled will, entire self-abnegation and the eyes constantly fixed on the beyond to live undiscouraged in times like these which are truly a period of universal decomposition. For myself, I follow the Voice and look neither to right nor to left of me. The result is not mine and hardly at all now even the labour.

6-5-1915

*

Heaven we have possessed, but not the earth; but the fullness of

the Yoga is to make, in the formula of the Veda, "Heaven and Earth equal and one".

20-5-1915

*

Everything internal is ripe or ripening, but there is a sort of locked struggle in which neither side can make a very appreciable advance (somewhat like the trench warfare in Europe), the spiritual force insisting against the resistance of the physical world, that resistance disputing every inch and making more or less effective counter-attacks.... And if there were not the strength and Ananda within, it would be harassing and disgusting work; but the eye of knowledge looks beyond and sees that it is only a protracted episode.

28-7-1915

*

Nothing seems able to disturb the immobility of things and all that is active outside our own selves is a sort of welter of dark and sombre confusion from which nothing formed or luminous can emerge. It is a singular condition of the world, the very definition of chaos with the superficial form of the old world resting apparently intact on the surface. But a chaos of long disintegration or of some early new birth? It is the thing that is being fought out from day to day, but as yet without any approach to a decision.

16-9-1915

*

The difficulties you find in the spiritual progress are common to us all. In this Yoga the progress is always attended with these relapses into the ordinary mentality until the whole being is so remoulded that it can no longer be affected either by any downward tendency in our own nature or by the impressions from the discordant world outside or even by the mental state of those associated with us most closely in the Yoga. The ordinary Yoga is usually concentrated on a single aim and therefore less exposed to such recoils; ours is so complex and many-sided and

embraces such large aims that we cannot expect any smooth progress until we near the completion of an effort, — especially as all the hostile forces in the spiritual world are in a constant state of opposition and besiege our gains; for the complete victory of a single one of us would mean a general downfall among them. In fact by our own unaided effort we could not hope to succeed. It is only in proportion as we come into a more and more universal communion with the Highest that we can hope to overcome with any finality. For myself I have had to come back so often from things that seemed to have been securely gained that it is only relatively that I can say of any part of my Yoga, "It is done." Still I have always found that when I recover from one of these recoils, it is always with a new spiritual gain which might have been neglected or missed if I had remained securely in my former state of partial satisfaction. Especially, as I have long had the map of my advance sketched out before me, I am able to measure my progress at each step and the particular losses are compensated for by the clear consciousness of the general advance that has been made. The final goal is far but the progress made in the face of so constant and massive an opposition is the guarantee of its being gained in the end. But the time is in other hands than ours. Therefore I have put impatience and dissatisfaction far away from me.

An absolute equality of the mind and heart and a clear purity and calm strength in all the members of the being have long been the primary condition on which the power working in me has insisted with an inexhaustible patience and an undeviating constancy of will which rejects all the efforts of other powers to hasten forward to the neglect of these first requisites. Wherever they are impaired it returns upon them and works over and again over the weak points like a workman patiently mending the defects of his work. These seem to me to be the foundation and condition of all the rest. As they become firmer and more complete the system is more able to hold consistently and vividly the settled perception of the One in all things and beings, in all qualities, forces, happenings, in all this world-consciousness and the play of its workings. That founds the Unity and upon it the deep satisfaction and growing rapture of the Unity. It is this

to which our nature is most recalcitrant. It persists in the division, in the dualities, in the sorrow and unsatisfied passion and labour, it finds it difficult to accustom itself to the divine largeness, joy and equipoise — especially the vital and material parts of our nature; it is they that pull down the mind which has accepted and even when it has long lived in the joy and peace and oneness. That, I suppose, is why the religions and philosophies have had so strong a leaning to the condemnation of Life and Matter and aimed at an escape instead of a victory. But the victory has to be won; the rebellious elements have to be redeemed and transformed, not rejected or excised.

When the Unity has been well founded, the static half of our work is done, but the active half remains. It is then that in the One we must see the Master and His Power, — Krishna and Kali as I name them using the terms of our Indian religions; the Power occupying the whole of myself and my nature which becomes Kali and ceases to be anything else, the Master using, directing, enjoying the Power to his ends, not mine, with that which I call myself only as a centre of his universal existence and responding to its workings as a soul to the Soul, taking upon itself his image until there is nothing left but Krishna and Kali. This is the stage I have reached in spite of all set-backs and recoils, imperfectly indeed in the secureness and intensity of the state, but well enough in the general type. When that has been done, then we may hope to found securely the play in us of his divine Knowledge governing the action of his divine Power. The rest is the full opening up of the different planes of his world-play and the subjection of Matter and the body and the material world to the law of the higher heavens of the Truth. To these things towards which in my earlier ignorance I used to press forward impatiently before satisfying the first conditions — the effort, however, was necessary and made the necessary preparation of the material instruments — I can now only look forward as a subsequent eventuality in a yet distant vista of things.

To possess securely the Light and the Force of the supramental being, this is the main object to which the power is now turning. But the remnant of the old habits of intellectual thought and mental will come so obstinate in their determination

to remain that the progress is hampered, uncertain and always falls back from the little achievement already effected. They are no longer within me, they are blind, stupid, mechanical, incorrigible even when they perceive their incompetence, but they crowd round the mind and pour in their suggestions whenever it tries to remain open only to the supramental Light and the higher Command, so that the Knowledge and the Will reach the mind in a confused, distorted and often misleading form. It is, however, only a question of time: the siege will diminish in force and be finally dispelled.

26-6-1916

II. CALLS TO RETURN TO INDIAN POLITICS[1]

Pondicherry
Jan. 5, 1920

Dear Baptista,

Your offer is a tempting one, but I regret that I cannot answer it in the affirmative. It is due to you that I should state explicitly my reasons. In the first place I am not prepared at present to return to British India. This is quite apart from any political obstacle. I understand that up to last September the Government of Bengal (and probably the Government of Madras also) were opposed to my return to British India and that practically this opposition meant that if I went back I should be interned or imprisoned under one or other of the beneficent Acts which are apparently still to subsist as helps in ushering in the new era of trust and cooperation. I do not suppose other Governments would be any more delighted by my appearance in their respective provinces. Perhaps the King's Proclamation may make a difference, but that is not certain since, as I read it, it does not mean an amnesty, but an act of gracious concession and benevolence limited by the discretion of the Viceroy. Now I have too much work on my hands to waste my time in the leisured ease of an involuntary Government guest. But even if I were assured of an entirely free action and movement, I should yet not go just now. I came to Pondicherry in order to have freedom and tranquillity for a fixed object having nothing to do

[1] About ten years after Sri Aurobindo withdrew from Indian political scene and settled in Pondicherry, two prominent nationalist leaders wrote to him appealing to him to come back to British India and to resume leadership of Indian politics.

One was Joseph Baptista who requested Sri Aurobindo to return to British India to take up the editorship of an English daily paper which was proposed to be brought out from Bombay as the organ of a new political party which Tilak and others were intending to form at that time.

The second was Dr. Munje who requested Sri Aurobindo to return to British India to take up the Presidentship of the Indian National Congress. Dr. Munje was one of the most prominent leaders of the Congress at Nagpur. He had also come to Pondicherry in 1920 and had long talks on current Indian politics with Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo's replies to both these appeals are reproduced here.

with present politics — in which I have taken no direct part since my coming here, though what I could do for the country in my own way I have constantly done, — and until it is accomplished, it is not possible for me to resume any kind of public activity. But if I were in British India, I should be obliged to plunge at once into action of different kinds. Pondicherry is my place of retreat, my cave of tapasya, not of the ascetic kind, but of a brand of my own invention. I must finish that, I must be internally armed and equipped for my work before I leave it.

Next in the matter of the work itself. I do not at all look down on politics or political action or consider I have got above them. I have always laid a dominant stress and I now lay an entire stress on the spiritual life, but my idea of spirituality has nothing to do with ascetic withdrawal or contempt or disgust of secular things. There is to me nothing secular, all human activity is for me a thing to be included in a complete spiritual life, and the importance of politics at the present time is very great. But my line and intention of political activity would differ considerably from anything now current in the field. I entered into political action and continued it from 1903 to 1910 with one aim and one alone, to get into the mind of the people a settled will for freedom and the necessity of a struggle to achieve it in place of the futile ambling Congress methods till then in vogue. That is now done and the Amritsar Congress is the seal upon it. The will is not as practical and compact nor by any means as organised and sustained in action as it should be, but there is the will and plenty of strong and able leaders to guide it. I consider that in spite of the inadequacy of the Reforms, the will to self-determination, if the country keeps its present temper, as I have no doubt it will, is bound to prevail before long. What preoccupies me now is the question what it is going to do with its self-determination, how will it use its freedom, on what lines is it going to determine its future?

You may ask why not come out and help, myself, so far as I can, in giving a lead? But my mind has a habit of running inconveniently ahead of the times, — some might say, out of time altogether into the world of the ideal. Your party, you say, is going to be a social democratic party. Now I believe in some-

thing which might be called social democracy, but not in any of the forms now current, and I am not altogether in love with the European kind, however great an improvement it may be on the past. I hold that India having a spirit of her own and a governing temperament proper to her own civilisation, should in politics as in everything else strike out her own original path and not stumble in the wake of Europe. But this is precisely what she will be obliged to do, if she has to start on the road in her present chaotic and unprepared condition of mind. No doubt people talk of India developing on her own lines, but nobody seems to have very clear or sufficient ideas as to what those lines are to be. In this matter I have formed ideals and certain definite ideas of my own, in which at present very few are likely to follow me, — since they are governed by an uncompromising spiritual idealism of an unconventional kind and would be unintelligible to many and an offence and stumbling-block to a great number. But I have not as yet any clear and full idea of the practical lines; I have no formed programme. In a word, I am feeling my way in my mind and am not ready for either propaganda or action. Even if I were, it would mean for some time ploughing my lonely furrow or at least freedom to take my own way. As the editor of your paper, I should be bound to voice the opinion of others and reserve my own, and while I have full sympathy with the general ideas of the advanced parties so far as concerns the action of the present moment and, if I were in the field, would do all I could to help them, I am almost incapable by nature of limiting myself in that way, at least to the extent that would be requisite.

Excuse the length of this screed. I thought it necessary to explain fully so as to avoid giving you the impression that I declined your request from any affectation or reality of spiritual aloofness or wish to shirk the call of the country or want of sympathy with the work you and others are so admirably doing. I repeat my regret that I am compelled to disappoint you.

Yours sincerely,
AUROBINDO GHOSE

*

Pondicherry
Aug. 30, 1920

Dear Dr. Munje,

As I have already wired to you, I find myself unable to accept your offer of the Presidentship of the Nagpur Congress. There are reasons even within the political field itself which in any case would have stood in my way. In the first place I have never signed and would never care to sign as a personal declaration of faith the Congress creed, as my own is of a different character. In the next place since my retirement from British India I have developed an outlook and views which have diverged a great deal from those I held at the time and, as they are remote from present actualities and do not follow the present stream of political action, I should find myself very much embarrassed what to say to the Congress. I am entirely in sympathy with all that is being done so far as its object is to secure liberty for India, but I should be unable to identify myself with the programme of any of the parties. The President of the Congress is really a mouthpiece of the Congress and to make from the presidential chair a purely personal pronouncement miles away from what the Congress is thinking and doing would be grotesquely out of place. Not only so, but nowadays the President has a responsibility in connection with the All India Congress Committee and the policy of the Congress during the year and other emergencies that may arise which, apart from my constitutional objection and, probably, incapacity to discharge official duties of any kind or to put on any kind of harness, I should be unable to fulfil, since it is impossible for me to throw over suddenly my fixed programme and settle at once in British India. These reasons would in any case have come in the way of my accepting your offer.

The central reason however is this that I am no longer first and foremost a politician, but have definitely commenced another kind of work with a spiritual basis, a work of spiritual, social, cultural and economic reconstruction of an almost revolutionary kind, and am even making or at least supervising a sort of practical or laboratory experiment in that sense which needs all the attention and energy that I can have to spare. It is impossible

for me to combine political work of the current kind and this at the beginning. I should practically have to leave it aside, and this I cannot do, as I have taken it up as my mission for the rest of my life. This is the true reason of my inability to respond to your call.

I may say that in any case I think you would be making a wrong choice in asking me to take Tilak's place at your head. No one now alive in India, or at least no one yet known, is capable of taking that place, but myself least of all. I am an idealist to the marrow, and could only be useful when there is something drastic to be done, a radical or revolutionary line to be taken, (I do not mean revolutionary by violence) a movement with an ideal aim and direct method to be inspired and organized. Tilak's policy of "responsive cooperation", continued agitation and obstruction whenever needed — and that would be oftener than not in the present circumstances — is, no doubt, the only alternative to some form of non-cooperation or passive resistance. But it would need at its head a man of his combined suppleness, skill and determination to make it effective. I have not the suppleness and skill — at least of the kind needed — and could only bring the determination, supposing I accepted the policy, which I could not do practically, as, for any reasons of my own, nothing could induce me to set my foot in the new Councils. On the other hand a gigantic movement of non-cooperation merely to get some Punjab officials punished or to set up again the Turkish Empire which is dead and gone, shocks my ideas both of proportion and of common sense. I could only understand it as a means of "embarrassing the Government" and seizing hold of immediate grievances in order to launch an acute struggle for autonomy after the manner of Egypt and Ireland, — though no doubt without the element of violence. All the same, it could be only on a programme involving an entire change of the creed, function and organisation and policy of the Congress, making it a centre of national reconstruction and not merely of political agitation that I could — if I had not the other reason I have spoken of — re-enter the political field. Unfortunately the political mind and habits created by the past methods of the Congress do not make that practicable at the moment. I think you will see

that, holding these ideas, it is not possible for me to intervene and least of all on the chair of the President.

Might I suggest that the success of the Congress can hardly depend on the presence of a single person and one who has long been in obscurity? The friends who call on me are surely wrong in thinking that the Nagpur Congress will be uninspiring without me. The national movement is surely strong enough now to be inspired with its own idea especially at a time of stress like the present. I am sorry to disappoint, but I have given the reasons that compel me and I cannot see how it is avoidable.

Yours sincerely,
AUROBINDO GHOSE

III. EARLY PLANS TO TAKE UP EXTERNAL WORK

Arya Office,
Pondicherry
The 18th November 1922

Dear Barin,[1]

I understand from your letter that you need a written authority from me for the work I have entrusted to you and a statement making your position clear to those whom you have to approach in connection with it. You may show to anyone you wish this letter as your authority and I hope it will be sufficient to straighten things for you.

I have been till now and shall be for some time longer withdrawn in the practice of a Yoga destined to be a basis not for withdrawal from life, but for the transformation of human life. It is a Yoga in which vast untried tracts of inner experience and new paths of Sadhana had to be opened up and which, therefore, needed retirement and long time for its completion. But the time is approaching, though it has not yet come, when I shall have to take up a large external work proceeding from the spiritual basis of this Yoga.

It is, therefore, necessary to establish a number of centres small and few at first but enlarging and increasing in number as I go on, for training in this Sadhana, one under my direct supervision, others in immediate connection with me. Those trained there will be hereafter my assistants in the work I shall have to do, but for the present these centres will be not for external work but for spiritual training and Tapasya.

The first, which will be transferred to British India when I go there, already exists at Pondicherry, but I need funds both to maintain and to enlarge it. The second I am founding through you in Bengal. I hope to establish another in Gujerat during the ensuing year.

Many more desire and are fit to undertake this Sadhana than I can at present admit and it is only by large means being placed

[1] Barindra Kumar Ghose, Sri Aurobindo's younger brother.

at my disposal that I can carry on this work which is necessary as a preparation for my own return to action.

I have empowered you to act for me in the collection of funds and other collateral matters. I have an entire confidence in you and I would request all who wish me well to put in you the same confidence.

I may add that this work of which I have spoken is both personally and in a wider sense my own and it is not being done and cannot be done by any other for me. It is separate and different from any other work that has been or is being carried on by others under my name or with my approval. It can be done by myself aided closely by those like you who are being or will in future be trained directly under me in my spiritual discipline.

AUROBINDO GHOSE

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Arya Office
Pondicherry, the 18th Nov. 1922

Dear Chitta,[1]

It is a long time, almost two years I think, since I have written a letter to anyone. I have been so much retired and absorbed in my Sadhana that contact with the outside world has till lately been reduced to minimum. Now that I am looking outward again, I find that circumstances lead me to write first to you — I say, circumstances because it is a need that makes me take up the pen after so long a disuse.

The need is in connection with the first outward work that I am undertaking after this long inner retirement. Barin has gone to Bengal and will see you in connection with it, but a word from me is perhaps necessary and therefore I send you through Barin this letter. I am giving also a letter of authority from which you will understand the immediate nature of the need for which I

[1] Chittaranjan Das, one of Sri Aurobindo's Nationalist collaborators and a famous lawyer. He had defended Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Bomb Case.

have sent him to raise funds. But I may add something to make it more definite.

I think you know my present idea and the attitude towards life and work to which it has brought me. I have become confirmed in a perception which I had always, less clearly and dynamically then, but which has now become more and more evident to me, that the true basis of work and life is the spiritual, — that is to say, a new consciousness to be developed only by Yoga. I see more and more manifestly that man can never get out of the futile circle the race is always treading until he has raised himself on to the new foundation. I believe also that it is the mission of India to make this great victory for the world. But what precisely was the nature of the dynamic power of this greater consciousness? What was the condition of its effective truth? How could it be brought down, mobilised, organised, turned upon life? How could our present instruments, intellect, mind, life, body be made true and perfect channels for this great transformation? This was the problem I have been trying to work out in my own experience and I have now a sure basis, a wide knowledge and some mastery of the secret. Not yet its fulness and complete imperative presence — therefore I have still to remain in retirement. For I am determined not to work in the external field till I have the sure and complete possession of this new power of action, — not to build except on a perfect foundation.

But still I have gone far enough to be able to undertake one work on a larger scale than before — the training of others to receive this Sadhana and prepare themselves as I have done, for without that my future work cannot even be begun. There are many who desire to come here and whom I can admit for the purpose, there are a greater number who can be trained at a distance; but I am unable to carry on unless I have sufficient funds to be able to maintain a centre here and one or two at least outside. I need therefore much larger resources than I at present command. I have thought that by your recommendation and influence you may help Barin to gather them for me. May I hope that you will do this for me?

One word to avoid a possible misunderstanding. Long ago I gave to Motilal Roy of Chandannagar the ideas and some

principles and lines of a new social and economical organisation and education and this with my spiritual force behind him he has been trying to work out in his own way in his Sangha. This is quite a separate thing from what I am now writing about, — my own work which I must do myself and no one can do for me.

I have been following with interest your political activities, specially your present attempt to give a more flexible and practically effective turn to the non-cooperation movement. I doubt whether you will succeed against such contrary forces, but I wish you success in your endeavour. I am most interested however in your indications about Swaraj; for I have been developing my own ideas about the organisation of a true Indian Swaraj and I shall look forward to see how far yours will fall in with mine.

Yours,
AUROBINDO

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Pondicherry
1st December 1922

Dear Barin,

I waited for your letter in order to know precisely what portions Chittaranjan wanted to publish and why. It turns out to be as I saw, but I wanted confirmation. I must now make clear the reasons why I hesitated to sanction the publication.

I should have had no objection to the publication of the portion about the spiritual basis of life or the last paragraph about Swaraj. But that about non-cooperation would lead, I think, to a complete misunderstanding of my real position. Some would take it to mean that I accept the Gandhi programme subject to the modifications proposed by the committee. As you know, I do not believe that the Mahatma's principle can be the true foundation or his programme the true means of bringing out the genuine freedom and greatness of India, her Swarajya and Samrajya. On the other hand others would think that I was sticking to the school of Tilakite nationalism. That also is not the fact, as I hold that school to be out of date. My own policy, if

I were in the field, would be radically different in principle and programme from both, however it might coincide in certain points. But the country is not yet ready to understand its principle or to execute its programme.

Because I know this very well, I am content to work still on the spiritual and psychic plane, preparing there the ideas and forces, which may afterwards at the right moment and under the right conditions precipitate themselves into the vital and material field, and I have been careful not to make any public pronouncement as that might prejudice my possibilities of future action. What that will be will depend on developments. The present trend of politics may end in abortive unrest, but it may also stumble with the aid of external circumstances into some kind of simulacrum of self-government. In either case the whole real work will remain to be done. I wish to keep myself free for it in either case.

My interest in Das's actions and utterances apart from all question of personal friendship, arises first from the fact that the push he is giving, although I do not think it likely to succeed at present, may yet help to break the narrow and rigid cadre of the "Constructive" Bardoli programme which seems to me to construct nothing and the fetish-worship of non-cooperation as an end in itself rather than a means, and thereby to create conditions more favourable for the wide and complex action necessary to prepare the true Swarajya. Secondly, it arose from the rapidity with which he seems to be developing many of the ideas which I have long put down in my mind as essentials of the future. I have no objection to his making use privately of what I have written in the letter. But I hope he will understand why the publication of it does not recommend itself to me.

AUROBINDO

Part Two

SRI AUROBINDO ON HIMSELF AND ON THE MOTHER

Section One

LEADERS OF EVOLUTION

LEADERS OF EVOLUTION

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER AS AVATARS

Q: We believe that both you and the Mother are Avatars. But is it only in this life that both of you have shown your divinity? It is said that you and she have been on the earth constantly since its creation. What were you doing during the previous lives?

A: Carrying on the evolution.

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Q: I find it difficult to understand so concise a statement. Can't you elaborate it?

A: That would mean writing the whole of human history. I can only say that as there are special descents to carry on the evolution to a farther stage, so also something of the Divine is always there to help through each stage itself in one direction or another.

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Q: The common mass of mankind in the past may not have recognised your presence amongst them, especially when outwardly both of you may have had personalities like those of ordinary human beings. But how is it that even Sri Krishna, Buddha or Christ could not detect your presence in this world?

A: Presence where and in whom? If they did not meet, they would not recognise, and even if they met there is no reason why the Mother and I should cast off the veil which hung over these personalities and reveal the Divine behind them. Those lives were not meant for any such purpose.

*

Q: If you were on the earth all the time it would mean that you were here when those great beings descended. Whatever your external cloak, how could you hide your inner self — the true divinity — from them? It could not have mattered whether you and any of them were born in the same country or not. They ought to have discovered by their own higher light that the Divine Consciousness from which they had descended was already here in a physical form.

A: But why can't the inner self be hidden from all in such lives? Your reasoning would only have some force if the presence on earth then were as the Avatar but not if it was only as a Vibhuti.

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Q: You have asked, "Presence where and in whom?" Why have you put those question-words? What exactly is conveyed by them?

A: ...It is "presence" in or behind some body and behind some outer personality. Also "presence" in what part of the world? If the Mother were in Rome in the time of Buddha, how could Buddha know as he did not even know the existence of Rome?

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Q: I did not mean that you or the Mother needed to cast off your veil. It is those Great Men who should have recognised you in spite of the veil.

A: One can be a great man without knowing such things as that. Great Men or even great Vibhutis need not be omniscient or know things which it was not useful for them to know.

*

Q: You said, "But why can't the inner self be hidden

from all in such lives?" I fail to understand how anyone could hide one's inner self from Avatars and Vibhutis.

A: An Avatar or Vibhuti have the knowledge that is necessary for their work, they need not have more. There was absolutely no reason why Buddha should know what was going on in Rome. An Avatar even does not manifest all the Divine omniscience and omnipotence; he has not come for any such unnecessary display; all that is behind him but not in the front of his consciousness. As for the Vibhuti, the Vibhuti need not even know that he is a power of the Divine. Some Vibhutis like Julius Caesar for instance have been atheists. Buddha himself did not believe in a personal God, only in some impersonal and indescribable Permanent.

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Q: Still I can't understand one thing: even though you did not cast off your veil, how could people like Buddha or Christ not help casting off their veil (of ignorance) in order to recognise you?

A: Why should they? The veil was there necessary for their work. Why should it be thrown off? So if the Mother was present in the life of Christ, she was there not as the Divine Manifestation but as one altogether human. For her to be recognised as the Divine would have created a tremendous disorder and frustrated the work Christ came to do by breaking its proper limits.

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Q: You must have heard that just before Christ was born some Rishis from India knew of the divine Descent and set out for Jerusalem merely by their intuition, though they had not known what and where Jerusalem was.

A: I never heard of Rishis from India going there. There is a legend of some Magi getting an intuition that a divine Birth was there on earth and following a-star that led them to the stable in

which Christ was born. But this is a legend, not history.

*

Q: Since you and the Mother were on earth constantly from the beginning what was the need for Avatars coming down here one after another?

A: We were not on earth as Avatars.

*

Q: You say that you both were not on earth as Avatars. And yet you were carrying on the evolution. Since the Divine Himself was on the earth carrying on the evolution, what was the necessity for the coming down of the Avatars who are portions of Himself?

A: The Avatar is necessary when a special work is to be done and in crises of the evolution. The Avatar is a special manifestation while for the rest of the time it is the Divine working within the ordinary human limits as a Vibhuti.

25-9-1935 — 25-7-1936

THE MYSTERY OF INCARNATION

Q: The Mother has written: "In our daily practices we are endeavouring to express the great mystery of Divine Incarnation." What does it mean?

A: It means that we act as we do because we take it as a fact that the Divine can manifest and is manifested in human body.

THE HIGHEST REALISATION AND EFFORT

Q: What is the utility of making effort for other reali-

sations once we have known the supreme secret (uttamam rahasyam) that you are the Divine Incarnate and the Mother is the Para-Shakti? That alone, I think, is the highest realisation and all others — the realisation of the cosmic consciousness, or of the Presence of the Immanent Divine, or even of the silent immutable Brahman — are lower or secondary in comparison with it. Whatever is to be done in the world will also be done by you and the Mother and hardly anyone else is even an instrument for that work.

A: Yes, but for that to be a constant realisation in its fullness the same effort has to be made and if made will bring the other realisations with it as parts of the main realisation.

30-10-1936

MANIFESTATION OF THE PERSONAL DIVINE

It is rather surprising that you should be unable to understand such a simple and familiar statement; for that has been always the whole reason of this Yoga that to follow after the Impersonal only brings inner experience or, at the most, *mukti.* Without the action of the integral Divine there is no change of the whole nature. If it were not so, the Mother would not be here and I would not be here if a realisation of the Impersonal were sufficient.

15-9-1936

SELF-VEILING OF THE DIVINE TO MEET THE HUMAN

Q: It seems to me that if the Supermind is not established in Mother's body-consciousness, it is not because she is not ready for it like us, but because in order to establish it she has first to prepare the physical of the Sadhaks and of the earth to a certain extent. But some people take it in the wrong way; they believe that the

Supermind has not been established in her body because she has not yet reached perfection. Am I right?

A: Certainly. If we had lived physically in the Supermind from the beginning nobody could have been able to approach us nor could any Sadhana have been done. There could have been no hope of contact between ourselves and the earth and men. Even as it is, Mother has to come down towards the lower consciousness of the Sadhaks instead of keeping always in her own, otherwise they begin to say, "How far away, how severe you were; you do not love me, I get no help from you, etc., etc." The Divine has to veil himself in order to meet the human.

PREPARING THE MANIFESTATION

Yes, of course. What is being done is meant to prepare the manifestation of the Supermind on the earth consciousness down to Matter itself, so it can't be for the physical of myself or the Mother alone.

If it [the Supermind] comes down into our physical it would mean that it has come down into Matter and so there is no reason why it should not manifest in the Sadhaks.

15-9-1935

WORK THROUGH AGES

Q: In her book "Conversations" the Mother says: "We have all met in previous lives...and have worked through ages for the victory of the Divine."[1] *Is this true of all people who come and stay here? What about so many who came and went away?*

A: Those who went away were also of these and still are of that circle. Temporary checks do not make any difference to the essential truth of the soul's seeking.

18-6-1933

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[1] July 1971 Edition, p. 6.

Q: In what way have we all "worked through ages for the victory of the Divine"? How much has been achieved till now?

A: By the victory is meant the final emergence of the embodied consciousness on earth from the bondage of the Ignorance. That had to be prepared through the ages by a spiritual evolution. Naturally, the work up till now has been a preparation of which the long spiritual effort and experience of the past has been the outcome. It has reached a point at which the decisive effort has become possible.

18-6-1933

Section Two

IDENTITY OF THEIR CONSCIOUSNESS

IDENTITY OF THEIR CONSCIOUSNESS

IDENTITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND PATH

The opposition between the Mother's consciousness and my consciousness was an invention of the old days (due mainly to X, Y and others of that time) and emerged in a time when the Mother was not fully recognised or accepted by some of those who were here at the beginning. Even after they had recognised her they persisted in this meaningless opposition and did great harm to them and others. The Mother's consciousness and mine are the same, the one Divine Consciousness in two, because that is necessary for the play. Nothing can be done without her knowledge and force, without her consciousness — if anybody really feels her consciousness, he should know that I am there behind it and if he feels me it is the same with hers. If a separation is made like that (I leave aside the turns which their minds so strongly put upon these things), how can the Truth establish itself — from the Truth there is no such separation.

13-11-1934

The Mother's consciousness is the divine Consciousness and the Light that comes from it is the light of the divine Truth, the Force that she brings down is the force of the divine Truth. One who receives and accepts and lives in the Mother's light, will begin to see the truth on all the planes, the mental, the vital, the physical. He will reject all that is undivine, — the undivine is the falsehood, the ignorance, the error of the dark forces; the undivine is all that is obscure and unwilling to accept the divine Truth and its light and force. The undivine, therefore, is all that is unwilling to accept the light and force of the Mother. That is why I am always telling you to keep yourself in contact with the Mother and with her Light and Force, because it is only so that you can come out of this confusion and obscurity and receive the Truth that comes from above.

When we speak of the Mother's Light or my Light in a special sense, we are speaking of a special occult action — we are speaking of certain lights that come from the Supermind. In this action the Mother's is the White Light that purifies, illumines, brings down the whole essence and power of the Truth and makes the transformation possible. But in fact all light that comes from above, from the highest divine Truth is the Mother's.

There is no difference between the Mother's path and mine; we have and have always had the same path, the path that leads to the supramental change and the divine realisation; not only at the end, but from the beginning they have been the same.

The attempt to set up a division and opposition, putting the Mother on one side and myself on another and opposite or quite different side, has always been a trick of the forces of the Falsehood when they want to prevent a Sadhak from reaching the Truth. Dismiss all such falsehoods from your mind.

Know that the Mother's light and force are the light and force of the Truth; remain always in contact with the Mother's light and force, then only can you grow into the divine Truth.

10-9-1931

Whatever one gets from the Mother, comes from myself also — there is no difference. So, too, if I give anything, it is by the Mother's Force that it goes to the Sadhak.

20-8-1936

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You consider that the Mother can be of no help to you.... If you cannot profit by her help, you would find still less profit in mine. But, in any case, I have no intention of altering the arrangement I have made for all the disciples without exception that they should receive the light and force from her and not directly from me and be guided by her in their spiritual progress. I have made the arrangement not for any temporary purpose but because it is the one way, provided always the disciple is open and receives, that is true and effective (considering what she is and her power).

The Mother and myself stand for the same Power in two forms — so the perception in the dream was perfectly logical. Ishwara-Shakti, Purusha-Prakriti are only the two sides of the one Divine (Brahman).

1933

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It is a very common experience, that of the identity between myself and the Mother (the perception that we are one) expressed in the fusing of the two images.

4-11-1935

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Q: From the intimations frequently received from the play of lights seen in visions I am having a deep feeling that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are the same though we see them in different bodies. Is my feeling right?

A: Yes.

25-4-1933

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The dream was an indication of what the Mother and myself are and represent — I do not think that it is necessary to say more than that. It indicates that the fulfilment of what we stand for is the Divine Love and Ananda.

1933

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Mother and I are one but in two bodies; there is no necessity for both the bodies to do the same thing always. On the contrary, as we are one it is quite sufficient for one to sign, just as it is quite sufficient for one to go down to receive Pranam or give meditation.

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Q: Is there or would there be any difference in the force

or effectivity in your working and the Mother's?

A: No, it is a single Power.

23-5-1933

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Q: Is it the same whether we write to Sri Aurobindo or to the Mother? Some say that both are one, so whether we write to Sri Aurobindo or to the Mother we are open to the Mother; is it correct?

A: It is true that we are one, but there is also a relation, which necessitates that one should be open to the Mother.

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Q: Can it happen that one who is open to Sri Aurobindo is not open to the Mother? Is it that whoever is open to the Mother is open to Sri Aurobindo?

A: The Mother-proposition is true. If one is open to Sri Aurobindo and not to the Mother it means that one is not really open to Sri Aurobindo.

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Q: Very often Sri Aurobindo says one should allow the Mother's force to govern. Does it mean that there is a difference between the two forces?

A: There is one force only, the Mother's force — or, if you like to put it like that, the Mother is Sri Aurobindo's Force.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE MOTHER'S DIVINITY

Q: I believe that on the 24th November 1926 Sri Aurobindo realised that the Mother is the Divine-Con-

sciousness and the Force. She alone can uplift the earth-consciousness to the Supreme and so she has taken up the work. Can it be true?

A: No. I knew that long before.

24-11-1935

MUTUAL HELP IN PERFECTING THE SADHANA

In Yogic or spiritual life the antecedents of a person are of little relevance; we have to see his or her spiritual attainments.

Mother was doing Yoga before she knew or met Sri Aurobindo; but their lines of Sadhana independently followed the same course. When they met, they helped each other in perfecting the Sadhana. What is known as Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is the joint creation of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother; they are now completely identified — the Sadhana in the Ashram and all arrangement is done directly by the Mother, Sri Aurobindo supports her from behind. All who come here for practising Yoga have to surrender themselves to the Mother who helps them always and builds up their spiritual life.

SADHANA BEFORE THE MOTHER'S COMING

It is not clear what your Guru meant by my sitting on the path; that could have been true of the period between 1915 and 1920 when I was writing the *Arya*, but the Sadhana and the work were waiting for the Mother's coming. In 1923 or 1924, I could not be described as sitting on the path, so far as the Sadhana was concerned, but it may perhaps be only a metaphor or symbol for the outward form of the work not yet being ready. The statement about my having gone too high to redescend for work in the world was made in almost the identical terms by another Yogi also; it referred to my condition at the time and cannot be taken as anything more.

16-9-1935

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Q: X seems to have told Y that the old Sadhaks, who were here before the Mother took up the work in 1926, had many experiences of Cosmic Consciousness and the Sadhana was much better and more serious than now. How far is this true?

A: Before the Mother came all were living in the mind with only some mental realisations and experiences. The vital and everything else were unregenerated and the psychic behind the veil. I am not aware that anyone of them at that time entered the Cosmic Consciousness. At that time I was still seeking my way for the transformation and the passage to the Supramental (all the part of the Yoga that goes beyond the ordinary Vedanta) and acted very much on a principle of *laissez faire* with the few Sadhaks who were there. X is one of those who have never ceased regretting that *laissez faire* — he regrets the vital liberty and absence of discipline they then had.

27-7-1934

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Q: Somebody told me: "Before Sri Aurobindo gave us the Mother as our Guru, he never used to teach us anything about the Yoga. He would tell us to follow our own knowledge." Did you really give this advice?

A: I am not aware of that. But now also the Mother does not teach, she asks all to open and receive. But she does not tell them and I don't think I told people to follow their own "knowledge".

26-4-1933

Section Three

DIFFICULTIES OF THE PATH-FINDERS

DIFFICULTIES OF THE PATH-FINDERS

THE DIFFICULT PATH

Nobody has found this Yoga a Grand Trunk Road, neither X nor Y nor even myself or the Mother. All such ideas are a romantic illusion.

August, 1935

THE BURDEN OF HUMANITY

We have had sufferings and struggles to which yours is a mere child's play; I have not made our cases equal to yours. I have said that the Avatar is one who comes to open the Way for humanity to a higher consciousness — if nobody can follow the Way, then either our conception of the thing, which is also that of Christ and Krishna and Buddha also, is all wrong or the whole life and action of the Avatar is quite futile. X seems to say that there is no way and no possibility of following, that the struggles and sufferings of the Avatar are unreal and all humbug, — there is no possibility of struggle for one who represents the Divine. Such a conception makes nonsense of the whole idea of Avatarhood; there is then no reason in it, no necessity in it, no meaning in it. The Divine being all-powerful can lift people up without bothering to come down on earth. It is only if it is a part of the world-arrangement that he should take upon himself the burden of humanity and open the Way that Avatarhood has any meaning.

7-3-1935

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You say that this way is too difficult for you or the likes of you and it is only "Avatars" like myself or the Mother that can do it. That is a strange misconception; for it is, on the contrary, the easiest and simplest and most direct way and anyone can do it, if he makes his mind and vital quiet, even those who have a tenth

of your capacity can do it. It is the other way of tension and strain and hard endeavour that is difficult and needs a great force of Tapasya. As for the Mother and myself, we have had to try all ways, follow all methods, to surmount mountains of difficulties, a far heavier burden to bear than you or anybody else in the Ashram or outside, far more difficult conditions, battles to fight, wounds to endure, ways to cleave through impenetrable morass and desert and forest, hostile masses to conquer — a work such as, I am certain, none else had to do before us. For the Leader of the Way in a work like ours has not only to bring down and represent and embody the Divine, but to represent too the ascending element in humanity and to bear the burden of humanity to the full and experience, not in a mere play or Lila but in grim earnest, all the obstruction, difficulty, opposition, baffled and hampered and only slowly victorious labour which are possible on the Path. But it is not necessary nor tolerable that all that should be repeated over again to the full in the experience of others. It is because we have the complete experience that we can show a straighter and easier road to others — if they will only consent to take it. It is because of our experience won at a tremendous price that we can urge upon you and others, "Take the psychic attitude; follow the straight sunlit path, with the Divine openly or secretly upbearing you — if secretly, he will yet show himself in good time, — do not insist on the hard, hampered, roundabout and difficult journey."

5-5-1932

PREPARING THE SUNLIT PATH

Peace was the very first thing that the Yogis and seekers of old asked for and it was a quiet and silent mind — and that always brings peace — that they declared to be the condition for realising the Divine. A cheerful and sunlit heart is the fit vessel for the Ananda and who shall say that Ananda or what prepares it is an obstacle to the Divine union? As for despondency, it is surely a terrible burden to carry on the way. One has to pass through it sometimes like Christian of *The Pilgrim's Progress*

through the Slough of Despond but its constant reiteration cannot be anything but an obstacle. I know perfectly well that pain and suffering and struggle and accesses of despair are natural, though not inevitable on the way, not because they are helps but because they are imposed on us by the darkness of this human nature out of which we have to struggle into the Light.... Ramakrishna was not ignorant that there was a sunlit path of Yoga. He even seems to say that it is the quicker way as well as the better.

It is not because I have myself trod the sunlit way or flinched from difficulty and suffering and danger. I have had my full share of these things and the Mother has had ten times her full share. But that was because the finders of the Way had to face these things in order to conquer. No difficulty that can come on the Sadhak but has faced us on the path; against many we have had to struggle hundreds of times (in fact, that is an understatement) before we could overcome; many still remain protesting that they have a right until the perfect perfection is there. But we have never consented to admit their inevitable necessity for others. It is, in fact, to ensure an easier path to others hereafter that we have borne that burden. It was with that object that the Mother once prayed to the Divine that whatever difficulties, dangers, sufferings were necessary for the path might be laid on her rather than on others. It has been so far granted her as a result of daily and terrible struggles for years that those who put an entire and sincere confidence in her are able to follow the sunlit path and even those who cannot, yet when they do put the trust find their path suddenly easy and, if it becomes difficult again, it is only when distrust, revolt, *abhimān*, or other darknesses come upon them. The sunlit path is not altogether a fable.

But, you will ask, what of those who cannot? Well, it is for them I am putting forth all my efforts to bring down the supramental Force within a measurable time. I know that it will descend but I am seeking its near descent and, with whatever dark obstruction of the earth-nature or furious inroads of the Asuric forces seeking to prevent it, it is approaching the terrestrial soil. The Supramental is not, as you imagine, something cold, hard and rock-like. It bears within it the presence of the

Divine Love as well as the Divine Truth, and its reign here means for those who accept it, the straight and thornless path in which there is no wall or obstacle, of which the ancient Rishis saw the far-off promise.

The dark path is there and there are many who make, like the Christians, a Gospel of spiritual suffering; many hold it to be the unavoidable price of victory. It may be so under certain circumstances, as it has been in so many lives at the beginning, or one may choose to make it so. But then the price has to be paid with resignation, fortitude or a tenacious resilience. I admit that, if borne in that way, the attacks of the dark forces or the ordeals that they impose have a meaning. After each victory gained over them, there is then a sensible advance; often they seem to show us the difficulties in ourselves which we have to overcome and to say: "Here you must conquer"; but all the same it is a too dark and difficult way which nobody should follow on whom the necessity does not lie.

So many have done Yoga relying on Tapasya or anything else, but not confident of any Divine Grace. It is not that, but the soul's demand for a higher Truth or a higher Life that is indispensable. Where that is, the Divine Grace whether believed in or not will intervene. If you believe, that hastens and facilitates things; if you cannot yet believe, still the soul's aspiration will justify itself, with whatever difficulty and struggle.

VITAL SENSITIVENESS

Q: Does everybody have to pass through the stage of vital sensitiveness?

A: The Mother and myself have passed through it. It comes inevitably in the full opening of the being to the universal.

17-4-1936

JOYOUS SACRIFICE

By the way, do you think that the Mother or myself or others

who have taken up the spiritual life had not enjoyed life and that it is therefore that the Mother was able to speak of a joyous sacrifice to the Divine as a true spirit of spiritual sacrifice? Or do you think we spent the preliminary stages in longings for the lost fleshpots of Egypt and that it was only later on we felt the joy of the spiritual sacrifice? Of course we did not; we and many others had no difficulty on the score of giving up anything we thought necessary to give up and no hankering afterwards. Your rule is as usual a stiff rule that does not at all apply generally.

17-10-1935

YEARS OF SELF-IMPOSED BARENESS

(*Re somebody's remark about Sadhaks or Sadhikas putting on beautiful clothes etc.*)

After realisation whatever the Higher Will demands is the best — but first, detachment is the rule. To reach the freedom without the discipline and development is given to few. The Mother and myself went for years through the utmost self-imposed bareness of life.

15-11-1933

KNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN NATURE

I think I know as much about the dualities, weaknesses, ignorance of human nature as you do and a great deal more. The idea that the Mother or I are spiritually great but ignorant of everything practical seems to be common in the Ashram. It is an error to suppose that to be on a high spiritual plane makes one ignorant or unobservant of the world or of human nature. If I know nothing of human nature or do not consider it, I am obviously unfit to be anybody's guide in the work of transformation, for nobody can transform human nature if he does not know what human nature is, does not see its workings or even if he sees, does not take them into consideration at all. If I think that the

human plane is like the plane or planes of infinite Light, Power, Ananda, infallible Will Force, then I must be either a stark lunatic or a gibbering imbecile or a fool so abysmally idiotic as to be worth keeping in a museum as an exhibit.

30-4-1937

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No need of logic to see that — a little common sense is sufficient. If anyone, no matter who he be, thinks that this world of ignorance, limitation and suffering is a plane of eternal and infinite Light, Power and Ananda, infallible Will and Power, what can he be but a self-deceiving fool or lunatic? And where then would be the need of bringing down the said Light, Power etc. from the higher planes, if it was already gambolling about all over this blessed earth and its absurd troop of human-animal beings? But perhaps you are of the opinion of X, "The Divine is here, how can he descend from anywhere?" The Divine may be here, but if he has covered here his Light with darkness of Ignorance and his Ananda with suffering, that, I should think, makes a big difference to the plane and, even if one enters into that sealed Light etc., it makes a difference to the consciousness but very little to the Energy at work in this plane which remains of a dark or mixed character.

3-5-1937

FAITH FOUNDED ON KNOWLEDGE

I must remind you that I have been an intellectual myself and no stranger to doubts — both the Mother and myself have had one side of the mind as positive and as insistent on practical results and more so than any Russell can be. We could never have been contented with the shining ideas and phrases which a Rolland or another takes for gold coin of Truth. We know well what is the difference between a subjective experience and a dynamic outward-going and realising Force. So although we have faith, (and who ever did anything great in the world without having faith in his mission or the Truth at work behind him?) we do not found ourselves on faith alone, but on a great ground of know-

ledge which we have been developing and testing all our lives. I think I can say that I have been testing day and night for years upon years more scrupulously than any scientist his theory or his method on the physical plane. That is why I am not alarmed by the aspect of the world around me or disconcerted by the often successful fury of the adverse Forces who increase in their rage as the Light comes nearer and nearer to the field of earth and Matter.

If I believe in the probability and not only possibility, if I feel practically certain of the supramental Descent (I do not fix a date), it is because I have my grounds for the belief, not a faith in the air. I know that the supramental Descent is inevitable — I have faith in view of my experience that the time can be and should be now and not in a later age.... But even if I knew it to be for a later time, I would not swerve from my path or be discouraged or flag in my labour. Formerly I might have been, but not *now* — after all the path I have traversed. When one is sure of the Truth, or even when one believes the thing one pursues to be the only possible solution, one does not stipulate for an immediate success, one travels towards the Light taking as well worth while and facing every risk of the adventure. Still, like you, it is now, in this life that I insist on it and not in another or in the hereafter.

30-8-1932

STEPS IN ADVANCE

I am afraid I cannot endorse your reading of the situation, at least so far as the Mother and myself and the prospects of the work are concerned. I can agree only that we have had a heavy time of it recently and that there has been a strong attack on the plane of the physical and material — but that (heavy attacks) is a thing we have been accustomed to for the last 30 years and it has never prevented us from making any necessary advance. I have never had any illusions about the path being comfortable and easy; I knew all along that the work could only be done if all the essential difficulties rose and were faced; so their rising cannot tire or

dishearten me, whatever obstinacy there may be in the difficulties, whether our own or in the Sadhaks or in Nature.

No, I am not tired or on the point of giving up. I have made inwardly steps in front in the last two or three months which had seemed impossible because of the obstinate resistance for years together, and it is not an experience which pushes me to despair and to give up. If there is much resistance on one side, there have been large gains on the other — all has not been a picture of sterile darkness. You yourself are kept back only by the demon of doubt which bangs on you each door as you are opening it; you have only to set about resolutely slaying the Rakshasa and the doors will open to you as they have done to many others who were held up by their own mind or vital nature.

12-1-1934

THE INCREASING DESCENT

It is true that there is an increasingly powerful descent of the Higher Force. Many now see the lights and colours around the Mother and her subtle luminous forms — it means that their vision is opening to supraphysical realities, it is not a phantasy. The colours or lights you see are forces from various planes and each colour indicates a special force.

The supramental Force is descending, but it has not yet taken possession of the body or of matter — there is still much resistance to that. It is supramentalised Overmind Force that has already touched, and this may at any time change into or give place to the supramental in its own native power.

14-9-1934

THE LONG PROCESS OF THE DESCENT

I do not know who was X's informant, but certainly the Mother never said to anybody that the Supermind was to descend on the 24th November. Dates cannot be fixed like that. The descent of the Supermind is a long process, or at least a process with a

long preparation, and one can only say that the work is going on sometimes with a strong pressure for completion, sometimes retarded by the things that rise from below and have to be dealt with before further progress can be made. The process is a spiritual evolutionary process, concentrated into a brief period — it could be done otherwise (by what men would regard as a miraculous intervention) only if the human mind were more flexible and less attached to its ignorance than it is. As we envisage it, it must manifest in a few first and then spread, but it is not likely to overpower the earth in a moment. It is not advisable to discuss too much what it will do and how it will do it, because these are things the Supermind itself will fix, acting out of that Divine Truth in it, and the mind must not try to fix for it grooves in which it will run. Naturally, the release from subconscient ignorance and from disease, duration of life at will, and a change in the functionings of the body must be among the ultimate elements of a supramental change; but the details of these things must be left for the supramental Energy to work out according to the truth of its own nature.

18-10-1934

RESISTANCE TO THE DESCENT

When I wrote in my letters about the Supermind and the obstinate resistance, I spoke of course of something I had already spoken of before. I did not mean that the resistance was of an unexpected character or had altered anything essential. But in its nature the Descent is not something arbitrary and miraculous but a rapid evolutionary process compressed into a few years which proceeds by taking up the present nature into its Light and pouring its Truth into the inferior planes. That cannot be done in the whole world at a time, but it is done like all such processes, first through selected Adharas and then on a wider scale. We have to do it through ourselves first and through the circle of Sadhaks gathered around us in the terrestrial consciousness as typified here. If a few open, that is sufficient for the process to be possible. On the other hand, if there is a general misunderstand-

ing and resistance (not in all, but in many) that makes it difficult and the process more laborious, but it does not make it impossible. I was not suggesting that it has become impossible, but that if the circumstances were made unfavourable by our being unable to concentrate enough on this thing of capital importance and having too much work to do of an irrelevant kind, the Descent was likely to take longer than it would do otherwise. Certainly, when the Supramental does touch earth with a sufficient force to dig itself in into the earth consciousness, there will be no more chance of any success or survival for the Asuric Maya.

The rest that I spoke of about the human and the divine had to do with the intermediate period between before it is done. What I meant was that if the Mother were able to bring out the Divine Personalities and Powers into her body and physical being as she was doing for several months without break some years ago, the brightest period in the history of the Ashram, things would be much more easy and all these dangerous attacks that now take place would be dealt with rapidly and would in fact be impossible. In those days when the Mother was either receiving the Sadhaks for meditation or otherwise working and concentrating all night and day without sleep and with very irregular food, there was no ill-health and no fatigue in her and things were proceeding with a lightning swiftness. The Power used was not that of the Supermind, but of the Overmind but it was sufficient for what was being done. Afterwards, because the lower vital and the physical of the Sadhaks could not follow, the Mother had to push the Divine Personalities and Powers, through which she was doing the action, behind a veil and come down into the physical human level and act according to its conditions and that means difficulty, struggle, illness, ignorance and inertia. All has been for long, slow, difficult, almost sterile in appearance, and now it is again becoming possible to go forward. But for the advance to be anything like general or swift in its process, the attitude of the Sadhaks, not of a few only, must change. They must cling less to the conditions and feelings of the external physical consciousness and open themselves to the true consciousness of the Yogin and Sadhak. If they did that, the inner eye would open

and they would not be bewildered or alarmed if the Mother again manifested externally something of the Divine Personalities and Powers as she did before. They would not be asking her to be always on their level, but would be glad to be drawn swiftly or gradually up towards hers. The difficulties would be ten times less and a larger easier securer movement possible.

This was what I meant and, I suppose, I manifested some impatience at the slowness of so many to realise what is after all a logical conclusion from the very principle of our Yoga which is that of a transformation, all that is disharmonious in human nature being enlightened out of existence, all that makes for harmony being changed into its divine equivalent, purer, greater, nobler, more beautiful and much being added which has been lacking to the human evolution. I meant that things could move more swiftly towards this if the Sadhaks had a less ignorant attitude, but if they could not yet reach that, we had of course to go on anyhow until the supramental descent came down to the material level.

Finally, you must get rid of this gratuitous tendency to despair. The difficulty for you has been created by the indulgence given to the formation I speak of; that finally dismissed, the difficulty would disappear. Progress might be slow at first, but progress would come; it would quicken afterwards and with the supramental force here, there would be for you as for others the full speed and certitude.

18-10-1934

You will say, "But at present the Mother has drawn back and it is the Supramental that is to blame, because it is in order to bring down the Supramental into Matter that she retires." The Supramental is not to blame; the Supramental could very well have come down into Matter under former conditions, if the means created by the Mother for the physical and vital contact had not been vitiated by the wrong attitude, the wrong reactions in the Ashram atmosphere. It was not the direct supramental Force that was acting, but an intermediate and preparatory force that carried in it a modified Light derived

from the Supramental, but this would have been sufficient for the work of opening the way for the highest action, if it had not been for the irruption of these wrong forces on the yet unconquered lower (physical) vital material plane. The interference was creating adverse possibilities which could not be allowed to continue. The Mother would not have retired otherwise; and even as it is, it is not meant as an abandonment of the field but is only (to borrow a now current phrase from a more external enterprise) a temporary strategic retirement, *reculer pour mieux sauter*. The Supramental is therefore not responsible; on the contrary, it is the descent of the Supramental that would end all the difficulties.

14-1-1932

DESCENT OF SADHANA INTO THE PHYSICAL

Q: When the Sadhana is going on in the physical plane, have all the Sadhaks to come down into the physical consciousness, or only those who have much inertia and impurity in them, as in my case?

A: It is a little difficult to say whether all have to come down totally into the physical. The Mother and I had to do it because the work could not be otherwise done. We had tried to do it from above through the mind and higher vital, but it could not be because the Sadhaks were not ready to follow — their lower vital and physical refused to share in what was coming down or else misused it and became full of exaggerated and violent reactions. Since then the Sadhana as a whole has come down along with us into the physical consciousness. Many have followed — some immediately without sufficient preparation in the mind and vital, some holding on to the vital and mind and living still between the three, some totally but with a prepared mind and vital. The total descent into the physical is a very troublesome affair — it means a long and trying pressure of difficulties, for the physical is normally obscure, inert, impervious to the Light. It is a thing of habits, very largely a slave of the subconscient and its mechanical reactions. It is less open to violent attacks than the vital

except in the way of illness and some other movements, but it is dull and dreary to leave these until the Light, the Peace, the Force, the Joy come down from above and fix themselves. We would have preferred to do all the hard work ourselves there and called others down when an easier movement was established, but it did not prove possibie.

I don't think it has anything to do with impurity. Only you came down a little too soon. At the moment it happened, the peace and silence of the Atman and the movement upward to realisation of the Self above the head in the higher consciousness were about to establish themselves. If that had been done first, it would have been less difficult. It means a great struggle against the inertia to get these things done — but you have only to persevere and done they will surely be. The things will be much more easy for you.

31-12-1934

A NEW POWER

A successful cure of X's mother would be certainly a considerable achievement and though difficult owing to the tenacity and malignance and extreme intractability of the disease, it is not impossible. What you say is true, the Force was acting before, but it acted with immediate rapidity and completeness only with those who had sufficient faith and receptivity (mainly Sadhaks) or in other good conditions.

These cases seem to indicate a new power of the Force and a new technique. Your idea that it may spread and happen elsewhere is not without foundation; for, when once something is there in the earth-atmosphere that was not there before, it begins to work on many sides in an unforeseen way. Thus, since the Yoga has been in action, its particular opening movements have come to a number of people who were at a distance and not connected with us and who understood nothing of what was happening to them. These things are to be expected for Nature is still in evolution and new Lights and Powers have to be brought down in her and made part of the conscious earth-existence.

29-1-1936

FIGHT ON THE PHYSICAL PLANE

As for the question about the illness, perfection in the physical plane is indeed part of the ideal of the Yoga, but it is the last item and, so long as the fundamental change has not been made in the material consciousness to which the body belongs, one may have a certain perfection on other planes without having immunity in the body. We have not sought perfection for our own separate sake, but as part of a general change — creating a possibility of perfection for others. That could not have been done without our accepting and facing the difficulties of the realisation and transformation and overcoming them for ourselves. It has been done to a sufficient degree on the other planes — but not yet on the most material part of the physical plane. Till it is done, the fight there continues and, though there may be and is a force of Yogic action and defence, there cannot be immunity. The Mother's difficulties are not her own; she bears the difficulties of others and those that are inherent in the general action and working for the transformation. If it had been otherwise, it would be a very different matter.

August, 1936

Section Four

HELPERS ON THE WAY

HELPERS ON THE WAY

REASON FOR FORMING THE ASHRAM

There was no Ashram at first, only a few people came to live near Sri Aurobindo and practise Yoga. It was only some time after the Mother came from Japan that it took the form of the Ashram, more from the wish of the Sadhaks who desired to entrust their whole inner and outer life to the Mother than from any intention or plan of hers or of Sri Aurobindo.

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The facts are: In the meantime, the Mother, after a long stay in France and Japan, returned to Pondicherry on the 24th April, 1920. The number of disciples then showed a tendency to increase rather rapidly. When the Ashram began to develop, it fell to the Mother to organise it; Sri Aurobindo soon retired into seclusion and the whole material and spiritual charge of it devolved on her.

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Q: On what date in 1926 did Mother take up the full charge of the Ashram?

A: Mother does not at all remember the correct date. It may have been a few days after 15th August. She took up the work completely when I retired.

16-5-1936

THE ASHRAM PRECINCTS

What are the Ashram precincts? Every house in which the Sadhaks of the Ashram live is in the Ashram precincts. People have a queer way of talking of the houses in this compound as

the Ashram — it has no meaning. Or do they think that the Mother's influence or mine is shut up in a compound?

January, 1935

TWO ATMOSPHERES IN THE ASHRAM

There are two atmospheres in the Ashram, ours and that of the Sadhaks. When people with a little perceptiveness come from outside, they are struck by the deep calm and peace in the atmosphere and it is only when they mix much with the Sadhaks that this perception and influence fade away. The other atmosphere of dullness and unrest is created by the Sadhaks themselves — if they were open to the Mother as they should be, they would live in the calm and peace and not in unrest and dullness.

15-3-1937

THE ASHRAM EXTENSION

Q: If the Ashram expands very much and there are no houses available in the Pondicherry city, naturally the extension would be somewhere in the villages nearby?

A: There was some idea of that years ago, but circumstances took another turn and it did not materialise.

14-4-1935

NO EAGERNESS TO GET DISCIPLES

Your image of the Fishery is quite out of place. I fish for no one; people are not hauled or called here, they come of themselves by the psychic instinct. Especially I don't fish for big and famous or successful men. Such fellows may be mentally or vitally big, but they are usually quite contented with that kind of bigness and do not want spiritual things, or, if they do, their bigness stands in their way rather than helps them. The fishing for them

is X's idea — he wanted to catch hold of A, B, now C, etc., etc., but they would have been exceedingly troublesome Sadhaks if they ever really dreamed of anything of the kind. All these are ordinary ignorant ideas; the Spirit cares not a damn for fame, success or bigness in those who come to it. People have a strange idea that Mother and myself are eager to get people as disciples and if anyone goes away, it is a great blow, a terrible defeat, a dreadful catastrophe and cataclysm for us. Many even think that their being here is a great favour done to us for which we are not sufficiently grateful. All that is rubbish.

THE ASHRAM'S "PRESTIGE"

If the praise and blame of ignorant people is to be our standard, then we may say good-bye to the spiritual cause. If the Mother and I had cared for praise or blame we would have been crushed long ago. It is only recently that the Ashram has got "prestige" — before it was the target for an almost universal criticism, not to speak of the filthiest attacks.

TRUTH OF SPIRITUAL MOTHERHOOD — FALSEHOOD OF ALL RELIGIOUS FANATICISM

If you want the plain and simple truth, the plain truth is this that you have entered into a complete falsehood and have put yourself into the hands of a hostile Influence that lives by confusion and ignorance. You began by setting your own imperfect thinking power against a superior Truth and Knowledge. And by false and fantastic reasonings you have so clouded your mind that it has become entirely muddled and confused and incapable of understanding the plainest distinctions or discriminating between falsehood and Truth. This is evident in all you are saying and doing; it is not Truth and religion, but the false and inadequate ideas of your own confused and weakened mind that you are trying to force upon others.

The letter you wrote to me shows a surprising inability to understand the plainest distinctions and the simplest truths. The one who was an instrument for giving birth to the physical body of X, was no doubt in her lifetime his material mother. But the relation which exists between the Mother here and X (and between the Mother and all who accept her), is a psychic and spiritual motherhood. It is a far greater relation than that of the physical mother to her child; it gives all that human motherhood can give, but in a much higher way, and it contains in itself infinitely more. It can therefore, because it is greater and more complete, take altogether the room of the physical relation and replace it both in the inward and the outward life. There is nothing here that can confuse anyone who has common sense and a straightforward intelligence. The physical fact cannot in the least stand in the way of the greater psychic and spiritual truth or prevent it from being true. X is perfectly right when he says that this is his true mother; for she has given him a new birth in an inner life and is creating him anew for a diviner existence.

The idea of a spiritual motherhood is not an invention of this Ashram; it is an eternal truth which has been recognised for ages past both in Europe and in Asia. The distinction I have drawn between the physical relation and the psychic and spiritual relation, is also not a new invention; it is an idea known and understood everywhere and found to be perfectly plain and simple by all. It is the present confused state of your mind which prevents you from understanding what men have found natural and intelligible everywhere.

As for X and Y, you have no claim over them and no right to control their thoughts and actions. X is of an age to choose and decide; he can think and act for himself and has no need of you to think and act for him. You are not his guardian, nor Y's; you are not even the head of the family. On what ground do you claim to decide where he shall go or where he shall stay? Your pretension to have the responsibility for him or her before God is an arrogant and grotesque absurdity. Each one is responsible for himself before God unless he freely chooses to place the responsibility upon another in whom he trusts. No one has the right to impose himself on others as a religious or spiritual guide

against their free will. You have no claim at all to dictate to X or Y either in their inner or their outer life. It is again the confusion and incoherence of your mind in its present state that prevents you from recognising these plain and simple facts.

Again, you say that you ask only for the Truth and yet you speak like a narrow and ignorant fanatic who refuses to believe in anything but the religion in which he was born. All fanaticism is false, because it is a contradiction of the very nature of God and of Truth. Truth cannot be shut up in a single book, Bible or Veda or Koran, or in a single religion. The Divine Being is eternal and universal and infinite and cannot be the sole property of the Mussulmans or of the Semitic religions only, — those that happened to be in a line from the Bible and to have Jewish or Arabian prophets for their founders. Hindus and Confucians and Taoists and all others have as much right to enter into relation with God and find the Truth in their own way. All religions have some truth in them, but none has the whole truth; all are created in time and finally decline and perish. Mahomed himself never pretended that the Koran was the last message of God and there would be no other. God and Truth outlast these religions and manifest themselves anew in whatever way or form the Divine Wisdom chooses. You cannot shut up God in the limitations of your own narrow brain or dictate to the Divine Power and Consciousness how or where or through whom it shall manifest; you cannot put up your puny barriers against the divine Omnipotence. These again are simple truths which are now being recognised all over the world; only the childish in mind or those who vegetate in some formula of the past deny them.

You have insisted on my writing and asked for the Truth and I have answered. But if you want to be a Mussulman, no one prevents you. If the Truth I bring is too great for you to understand or to bear, you are free to go and live in a half-truth or in your own ignorance. I am not here to convert anyone; I do not preach to the world to come to me and I call no one. I am here to establish the divine life and the divine consciousness in those who of themselves feel the call to come to me and cleave to it and in no others. I am not asking you and the Mother is

not asking you to accept us. You can go any day and live either the worldly life or a religious life according to your own preference. But as you are free, so also are others free to stay here and follow their own way. You are not entitled to try to make yourself a centre of disturbance and an obstacle to their peace and their spiritual progress.

In answering you I am answering the ideas which have been put in you by the Power of darkness and ignorance that is just now using you for its own purpose. This Power is very obviously not the divine Power. It is a Power of Falsehood that is making you do and say extravagant things which are not Islamic but a caricature of Islamic faith and action; its intention is to make not only Islam but all spirituality and religion ridiculous through you. It hopes to disturb the divine work upon earth, even if it can only do it a little. It is trying to spoil your brain and destroy your intelligence, to make you say and do foolish and extravagant things and turn you into an object of sorrow and pity for your friends and well-wishers and a laughing-stock to others. If you have any respect for yourself or for God or religion, if you truly hope for the Truth and Light, if you wish for the awakening and the salvation of your soul, you must stop speaking and doing these extravagant things and you must throw away the Influence that is now driving you.

23-10-1929

LAW OF DEALING WITH SADHAKS

The Mother and myself deal with all according to the law of the Divine. We receive alike rich and poor, those who are high-born or low-born according to human standards, and extend to them an equal love and protection. Their progress in Sadhana is our main concern — for they have come here for that, not to satisfy their palates or their bellies, not to make ordinary vital demands or to quarrel about position or place or comforts. That progress depends on how they answer to the Mother's love or protection — whether they receive the forces she pours on all alike, whether they use or misuse what she gives them. But the

Mother has no intention or obligation to deal with all outwardly in the same way — the demand that she should do so is absurd and imbecile — and if she did it, she would prove false to the truth of things and the law of the Divine. Each Sadhak has to be dealt with according to his nature, his capacities, his real needs (not his claims or desires) and according to what is best for his spiritual welfare. As to how it is to be done, we refuse to be dictated to by the ignorance of those of the Sadhaks who consider that the Mother must act according to their standards or their ideas of equality or justice or the demands of their vital or the notions they have brought with them from the outside world. We act according to the Light within us and for the Truth that we are striving to establish in this earthly Nature.

11-12-1933

Each one has his own way of doing Sadhana and his own approach to the Divine and need not trouble himself about how the others do it; their success or unsuccess, their difficulties, their delusions, their egoism and vanity are in her care; she has an infinite patience, but that does not mean that she approves of their defects or supports them in all they say or do. The Mother takes no sides in any quarrel or antagonism or dispute, but her silence does not mean that she approves what they may say or do when it is improper. The Ashram or the spiritual life is not a stage in which some are to be prominent or take a leading part or a field of competition in which one has a claim or can rightly consider himself superior to others. These things are the inventions of the ordinary human attitude to the world and the tendency is to carry it over into the life of Sadhana, but that is not the spiritual truth of things. The Mother tolerates all; she does not forbid any criticism of the Sadhaks by each other nor does she give these criticisms any value. It is only when the Sadhaks see the futility of all these things from the spiritual level that there can be any hope that they will cease.

In all these things there is nothing that ought to drive a man from the spiritual life or make him go away from his Guru. It seems to me that it is only the Guru who can decide whether one

is fit or not; to accept the adverse opinion of someone else on that point seems to me absurd and to act on it an offence against one's own soul; to judge oneself unfit and act on that is most perilous, for this judgment may be merely a fit of depression or a vital disturbance raising the self-depreciation of the tamasic ego. If I did not see that you could progress in the Sadhana or had not seen any progress, I would not have persistently asked you to continue nor would I be now writing to you letter after letter (I write to no one else) to meet your difficulties.

P.S. As for your other *bête noire*, for the dislike of whom you want to leave the Ashram, do you think the Mother is so dull, unseeing as to take people and their Sadhana at their own valuation? that she cannot see their defects as well as whatever merits they have? that she is ignorant of the movements of their lower nature? or that they can dupe and influence and lead her?

CHILDISH ABHIMAN

It is very silly and childish to have *abhimāna*; for it means that you expect everyone including the Mother and myself to act always according to your ideas and do what you want us to do and never do anything which will not please you! It is for the Mother to do whatever she finds to be right or necessary; you must understand that; otherwise you will always be making yourself miserable for nothing.

28-4-1932

THE INITIAL DEMAND

What you say about those whom we receive — that if one part of them sincerely desires the Divine we give them their chance — is quite true. If we demanded more at the beginning, exceedingly few would be able even to commence this journey towards the Divine.

24-4-1935

OVERWHELMING COMPASSION

Q: I am overwhelmed at the patience and compassion with which you put up with our insincerities, disobediences and loosenesses.

A: Human nature is like that in its very grain; so if we are not patient, there would be little hope of its changing. But there is something else in the human being which is sincere and can be a force for the change. The difficulty in people like X is to get at that something (it is so covered up) and get it to act.

8-7-1934

SOLE DUTY TO SADHAKS

It is no question of fault or punishment — if we have to condemn and punish people for their faults and deal with the Sadhaks like a tribunal of justice, no Sadhana could be possible. I do not see how your reproach against us is justifiable. Our sole duty to the Sadhaks is to take them towards their spiritual realisation — we cannot behave like the head of a family intervening in domestic quarrels, supporting one, putting our weight against the other! However often X may stumble, we have to take him by the hand, lift him up again and get him to move once more towards the Divine. We have always done the same with you.

29-3-1933

THE REAL NEED

The psychic being is more than a spark at this stage of its evolution. It is a flame. Even if the flame is covered by mist or smoke, the mist or smoke can be dissipated. To do that and to open to the higher consciousness is what is wanted, not to become a Sri Aurobindo or equal to the Mother. But if we are the Divine, what is the harm of evolving into a portion of the Divine, living

in the divine Consciousness even if in a lesser degree?

10-2-1935

COMPARISON WITH SADHAKS

I did not mean anyone here could replace or equal myself and the Mother...but certainly it is possible for X, Y and Z to change, to throw off their present personalities or limitations and come nearer to us than they are now — if they have the sincere will and make the endeavour.

10-8-1935

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Even the Overmind is for all but the Mother and myself either unrealised or only an influence, mostly subjective.

24-3-1934

WORK FOR SADHAKS AND WORK FOR THE MOTHER

Is it beneath your dignity to do work for the Sadhaks? It is an entirely egoistic attitude and improper for a Sadhak. All the people in the D.R.[1], in the Building Service, in the Stores, in the carpentry department, in the Atelier and Smithy, are all the time doing work for the Sadhaks, the Mother herself is doing work for the Sadhaks all day; in writing this answer I am spending my time doing work for a Sadhak. Would you think it proper for the D.R. and Kitchen workers to say, "We are not going to cook for Sadhaks or serve them; it is beneath our dignity. We will consent only to cook food for the Mother alone." Do you want me to stop writing answers to your letter on the ground that I am doing work for a Sadhak and I will write only letters to the Mother and nobody else?

What was X doing in the kitchen so many years if not preparing the food of the Sadhaks? And what was Y doing in the granary if not work for the Sadhaks? All these ideas are perfectly idiotic. All work given by the Mother is work for the Mother.

November, 1938

[1] The Dining Room.

SOME RELIEF FROM ENORMOUS WORK

The books and letters are not going to be discontinued — but I shall have to take one day off in the week (Sunday). The volume of the correspondence is becoming enormous and it takes me all the night and a good part of the day — apart from the work done separately by the Mother who has also to work the greater part of the night in addition to her day's work. It is this that makes the Pranam later and later, for we do not finish till 7.30 or after. Also much work falls in arrears and piles up and many things that have their importance have had to be discontinued. Some relief is necessary.

19-12-1933

A GREAT LONGING

I feel a great longing that the Sadhaks should be free of all these strifes and doubts; for so long as the present state of things continues with fires of this kind raging all around and the atmosphere in a turmoil, the work I am trying to do (certainly not for my own sake or for any personal reason) will always remain under the stroke of jeopardy and I do not know how the descent I am labouring for is to fulfil itself. In fact, the Mother and I have to give nine-tenths of our energy to smoothing down things, to keeping the Sadhaks tolerably contented etc. etc. etc. One-tenth and in the Mother's case not even that can go to the real work; it is not enough.

September, 1934

NO PREVISING

Q: I thought that it is not possible to have spiritual experiences, especially major ones, without your previously having knowledge about it.

A: Previously? My God, we would have to spend all our time

prevising the Sadhaks' experiences. Do you think Mother has nothing else to do? As for myself, I never previse anything, I only vise and revise.

18-10-1936

RECEIVING HELP THROUGH WRITING

Q: You and the Mother are supposed to know what is going on in us, how and what we are aspiring for, how our nature is reacting to help and guidance. What is then the necessity of writing to you all that?

A: It is necessary for you to be conscious and to put your self-observation before us; it is on that that we can act. A mere action on our observation without any corresponding consciousness in that part of the Sadhak would lead to nothing.

7-1-1936

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It is an undoubted fact proved by hundreds of instances that for many the exact statement of their difficulties to us is the best and often, though not always, an immediate, even an instantaneous means of release. This has often been seen by Sadhaks not only here, but far away, and not only for inner difficulties, but for illness and outer pressure of unfavourable circumstances. But for that a certain attitude is necessary — either a strong faith in the mind and vital or a habit of reception and response in the inner being. Where this habit has been established, I have seen it to be almost unfailingly effective, even when the faith was uncertain or the outer expression in the mind vague, ignorant or in its form mistaken or inaccurate. Moreover, this method succeeds most when the writer can write as a witness of his own movements and state them with an exact and almost impartial precision, as a phenomenon of his nature or the movement of a force affecting him from which he seeks release. On the other hand, if in writing his vital gets seized by the thing he is writing of and takes up the pen for him, — expressing and often supporting doubt, revolt,

depression, despair, it becomes a very different matter. Even here sometimes the expression acts as a purge; but also the statement of the condition may lend energy to the attack, at least for the moment, and may seem to enhance and prolong it, exhausting it by its own violence perhaps for the time and so bringing in the end a relief, but at a heavy cost of upheaval and turmoil — and the risk of the recurring decimal movement, because the release has come by temporary exhaustion of the attacking force, not by rejection and purification through the intervention of the Divine Force with the unquestioning assent and support of the Sadhak. There has been a confused fight, an intervention in a hurly-burly, not a clear alignment of forces — and the intervention of the helping force is not felt in the confusion and the whirl. This is what used to happen in your crises; the vital in you was deeply affected and began supporting and expressing the reasonings of the attacking force, — in place of a clear observation and expression of the difficulty by the vigilant mind laying the state of things in the light for the higher Light and Force to act upon it, there was a vehement statement of the case for the Opposition. Many Sadhaks (even "advanced") had made a habit of this kind of expression of their difficulties and some still do it; they cannot even yet understand that it is not the way. At one time it was a sort of gospel in the Ashram that this was the thing to be done, — I don't know on what ground, for it was never part of my teaching about the Yoga, — but experience has shown that it does not work; it lands one in the recurring decimal notation, an unending round of struggle. It is quite different from the movement of self-opening that succeeds, (here too not necessarily in a moment, but still sensibly and progressively) and of which those are thinking who insist on everything being opened to the Guru so that the help may be more effectively there.

17-12-1932

DIRECT COMMUNICATION

Q: X asked me if it would be possible to have direct communication with you and dispense with writing letters

to get your guidance. I replied that it would not be possible unless one has developed the power of telepathy and receives replies inwardly. But even then there would be the possibility of obscuration and distortion in reception unless there is complete psychicisation of consciousness. Even with complete psychicisation it would not be possible to know all from within, e.g. about the experiences of higher stages like Overmind and Supermind, because the psychic has no instrumentality to know about them. Communication through letters would, therefore, still be necessary. But perhaps a person in complete rapport with Mother might be able to dispense with the need of communicating through letters. But is even a person who has realised the Overmind capable of such complete rapport?

A: I think it would need the Supermind itself to establish such a complete rapport. The psychic can do much in that direction on condition it has a complete control. Overmind and Intuition could do it on their own plane, but here they have to descend into the physical consciousness and that interferes with its immense obscurity in addition to the distortions of mind and vital.

27-5-1934

ATTRIBUTION OF WRONG MOTIVES

You attribute too many motives — e.g. that the Mother tries to allure the vital by indulging it in the beginning. She has no such intention. She behaves naturally and simply with the being — whatever change there is is in the vital's impressions about her action rather than in the action itself — except in so far as there is a change necessitated by the change in the consciousness. Formerly you were writing from the higher mind mostly, but partly from the vital — the vital was often dissatisfied with my answers, so I ceased answering to it and wrote only what would help your higher mind and psychic. Now it is from the physical mind and vital that you often write and so my answers must be to them and they feel they are not given the answers they want

or in the tone of indulgence they would like. But to satisfy and indulge them would not be helpful to your Sadhana.

9-12-1935

MISINTERPRETATIONS AND WRONG CONCLUSIONS

I have always told you that you should not take what any Sadhak says or thinks as authoritative or coming from the Mother. Even when they say it is coming from me or her it cannot be accepted, for it is often an idea in their own minds that they *think* to be ours also or a misunderstanding of what we have said in a particular connection but which their minds apply to something with which it was not connected or to all things in general. No Sadhak whoever he may be can stand for us in our place or speak for us. Each must be taken as speaking on his own account his own thought or feeling.

3-6-1937

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People often catch hold of something written by me or said by the Mother, give it an interpretation quite other than or far beyond its true meaning and deduce from it a suddenly extreme and *logical* conclusion which is quite contrary to our knowledge and experience. It is natural, I suppose, and part of the game of the hostile forces; it is so much easier to come to vehement logical conclusions than to look at the Truth which is many-sided and whole.

May, 1933

TWO ELEMENTS IN SPIRITUAL SUCCESS

The help (I am not speaking of a divine intervention from above but of my help and the Mother's) will be there. It can be effective in spite of your physical mind, but it will be more effective if the steady working will of which I speak is there as its instrument. There are always two elements in spiritual success — one's

own steady will and endeavour and the Power that in one way or another helps and gives the result of the endeavour.

26-1-1934

RELIANCE IN PROTECTION

You have to develop the power and the habit of taking refuge in the protection of the Mother and myself. It is for this reason that the habit of criticising and judging by the outer mind or cherishing its preconceived ideas and formations must disappear. You should repeat always to yourself when it tries to rise, "Sri Aurobindo and the Mother know better than myself — they have the experience and knowledge which I have not — they must surely be acting for the best and in a greater light than that of ordinary human knowledge." If you can fix that idea in yourself so that it will remain even in clouded moments you will be able to face much more easily the suggestions of the Asuric Maya.

The Mother and I will do all to get rid of the cloud which the physical mind presents against the permanent consciousness of your soul's connection with the Mother, — but let your thinking mind be firm in its will to be rid of it and to call the aid of our Force.

6-2-1936

THE INNER PRESENCE

Be cheerful and confident. Doubt and desire & Co. are there, no doubt, but the Divine is there also inside you. Open your eyes and look and look till the veil is rent and you see Him or Her!

30-12-1933

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No — we do not put our picture inside anybody when we give

the first blessing. But if you go on looking inside, you will one day find the Mother there.

PRESSURE TO LIBERATE

We are sorry that you have suffered so much. It was not to hurt you that the Mother put the pressure, but to liberate. It has always been with a deep affection and sympathy with you in your struggles that she has tried to help you. I trust you will recover soon your ease of mind and peace. I will try to give you all the help possible.

23-1-1935

PERSONAL CONTACT AND RECEPTIVITY TO FORCE

It is not possible to accept the suggestion about joining with those who are in personal attendance upon me. They were not admitted as a help to their Sadhana but for practical reasons. In fact, here also there is some misconception. Continual personal contact does not necessarily bring out the action of the Force. Hriday had that personal contact with Sri Ramakrishna and the opportunity of personal service to him, but he received nothing except on one occasion and then he could not contain the force and the realisation which the Master had put into him. The feeling of losing himself which X had was on the special occasions of the Darshan and the Pranam to the Mother. That he had this response shows that he can answer to the Force, that he has the receptivity, as we say, and that is a great thing, for all do not have it and those who have it are not always conscious of its cause but only of its result. But he should reason less and rather try to keep himself open as he was in those moments. If I have written about Force, it is because both the Mother and myself have had many thousand experiences in which it acted and produced results of every kind. This idea of the Force has nothing to do with theory or reasoning but is felt constantly by every Yogi; it is part of his

normal Yogic consciousness and his constant spiritual activity.

18-5-1945

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Q: Is it not likely that more outward nearness and familiarity with you or the Mother may mean less aspiration and less inner growth?

A: It depends on the person. Some profit, some do not. No general statement can be made.

18-8-1933

UNCONSCIOUS RECEPTION OF FORCE

It is not true that you have never received Force from us: you have received it to any extent; it can only be said that you were not conscious of it, but that happens with many. Certainly none of the Sadhaks receives or uses all the Force that the Mother sends, but that is a general fact and not peculiar to you.

29-5-1936

Q: X seems to think that the Mother is harder than you.

A: That is because the Mother's pressure for change is always strong — even when she does not put it as force, it is there by the very nature of the Divine Energy in her.

11-3-1937

ACTION OF FORCE ON THE SUBTLE BODY

As to the dream, it was not a dream but an experience of the inner being in a conscious dream state, *svapna-samādhi.* The numbness and the feeling of being about to lose consciousness are always due to the pressure or descent of a Force to which the

body is not accustomed, but feels strongly. Here it was not the physical body that was being directly pressed, but the subtle body, *sūkṣma śarīra*, in which the inner being more intimately dwells and in which it goes out in sleep or trance or in the moment of death. But the physical body in these vivid experiences feels as if it was itself that was having the experience; the numbness was the effect in it of the pressure. The pressure on the whole body would mean a pressure on the whole inner consciousness, perhaps for some modification or change which would make it more ready for knowledge or experience; the third or fourth rib would indicate a region which belongs to the vital nature, the domain of the life-force, some pressure for a change there.

The strength of the hand, the weight would not necessarily indicate that it was mine — for it was an experience not of the physical hand or in the physical body, but in the subtle realms of the being and there the Mother's touch and pressure might well be stronger and heavier than mine. The Mother does not remember the date, but one night about that period she was thinking strongly about her and putting a pressure for the removal of some obstacle to a spiritual opening. It is possible that this was what produced the experience. If it was myself, it must have been at a time when I was concentrating and sending the force to different people, but I remember nothing precise. I have often thought of her of course and sent a force to help her.

It is not necessary for us always to be physically conscious of the action, for it is often carried out when the mind is occupied with outward things or when we sleep. The Mother's sleep is not sleep but an inner consciousness in which she is in connection with people or working everywhere. At the time she is aware, but she does not carry all that always into her waking consciousness or in her memory. A call would come in the occupied waking mind as the thought of the person coming — in a more free or in a concentrated state as a communication from the person in question; in a deeper concentration or in sleep or trance she would see the person coming and speaking to her or she herself going there. Besides that, wherever the Force is working, the Presence is there.

28-9-1936

DIFFERENT APPEARANCE ON THE VITAL PLANE

It is quite normal in dream to see the Mother or myself with another appearance than the present. These dreams are experiences on the vital plane where forms are not so rigid as in the physical world.

1-6-1937

THE CONSTANT PRESENCE

It is quite sure that we are with you day and night; even if you do not yet see the Mother in your dreams or feel her presence, you should think of her as there and supporting you and that will surely help you.

If there is a natural movement of your mind to identify Shiva in the way you speak of and it jumps to myself and the Mother, why not let it take the jump? Perhaps it is not a jump but a natural transition, and reconciliation and not a conflict. Certainly your Pranams are always accepted by us and always will be.

AN EXPERIENCE OF A DESCENT

Q: Yesterday after dusk, I felt as if some welcome revolution had taken place in the Divine order of things. I attended the meditation and felt the whole place filled with calm and silence. I seemed to be sitting alone in meditation in the midst of a boundless vastness. The Sadhaks had all become one, a solid mass; and over that massed body a light was flitting about, casting electric flashes. All was still, silent, calm, motionless. Anon I found within me numerous lotuses. Then descended a virāṭ mahāpuruṣa, Himalayan in proportions, in the form of Sri Aurobindo, who, as if on finding the earth incapable of bearing his weight, stood behind the Mother and placed his hands on her shoulders. The whole world

was surcharged with silence and Ananda. The sight is beyond my powers to describe. An immeasurable force rushed into me, wave upon wave. Quick and short grew my respiration. Slowly a silence fell over everything. This led me to think that the Mother might have withdrawn, leaving us thrown into Yogic sleep. Then stealthily, like a wary thief, I opened my eyes and saw in front a white figure of ice, calm, motionless, stiff, statue-like, as if without life. Was my experience true?

A: The experience you had was a true one, for something came down at that meditation which had not come down before and your experience was a translation of this descent in your consciousness. That you should have become aware of it in this way shows that your stay here has been very profitable to you and prepared your consciousness for the true realisation. The capacity for it is now there in you. Your future Sadhana should be a development from the experience to the realisation.

11-9-1936

A PSYCHIC EXPERIENCE

Q: On the Darshan Day (the 15th August) and the day before it, I felt an intense love for you and for the Mother. It possessed my whole being for some time. And then a high and profound reverence for both of you — and "a happiness that no worldly pleasure can give us".

A: That is obviously psychic.

25-8-1934

ACTION OF FORCE UNDER CONDITIONS

As for the Force, I shall write some other time. I have told you that it is not always efficacious, but works under conditions like all forces; it is only the supramental Force that works absolutely,

because it creates its own conditions. But the Force I am using is a Force that has to work under the present world conditions. It is not the less a Force for that. I have cured myself of all illnesses except three by it and those too when they come I have kept in check; the fact that I have not succeeded yet in eliminating the fact or probability of those three does not cancel the fact of my success with the others. As for the Mother, she used formerly to cure everything at once by the same Power — now she has no time to think about her body or to concentrate on it. The prevalence of illness just now is a fact; it is part of the struggle that is going on in the domain of Matter. But even so there are plenty of people in the Ashram who get rid of their ills by reliance on the Mother. If all cannot do it, what does that prove or disprove? It only proves that the power does not work absolutely, miraculously, impossibly, but it works by certain given means and under conditions. I have always said that, so what is there in that that is new or that annihilates the truth of the Yoga?

6-2-1935

RECEPTIVITY TO FORCE IN CURING ILLNESS

I mean a certain receptivity in the consciousness — mind, vital, physical, whichever is needed. The Mother or myself send a force. If there is no openness, the force may be thrown back or return (unless we put a great force which is not advisable to do) as from an obstruction or resistance: if there is some openness, the result may be partial or slow; if there is the full openness or receptivity, then the result may be immediate. Of course, there are things that cannot be removed all at once, being an old part of the nature, but with receptivity these also can be more effectively and rapidly dealt with. Some people are so open that even by writing they get free before the book or letter reaches us.

8-6-1933

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It depends on how far the inner being is awake — otherwise one needs a physical *avalambana*. There are some people who get the

relief only after we read a letter, others get it immediately they write or before it has reached us or after it has reached but before we have read. Others get it simply by referring the whole matter to us mentally. Idiosyncracies!

March, 1935

NEED OF CORRECT INFORMATION

Q: If, after the Mother or you start working spiritually on some relative or friend of ours reported to be ill, some wrong information is given about his or her identity, does the help sent miss its mark?

A: Wrong information coming across the working creates a confusion so that it is no longer possible to say what is the result. Of course, if the wrong information comes at the beginning, it would be still worse. It is very necessary that the information given should be correct.

10-6-1935

WORKING OF FORCE THROUGH ALLOPATHS AND HOMEOPATHS

The Mother and I have no preference for allopathy. The Mother thinks doctors very usually make things worse instead of better by spoiling Nature's resistance to illness by excessive and ill-directed use of their medicines. We have been able to work through X's homeopathy far better than through anything else — though it is likely that the Force working through homeopaths, who were not conscious instruments, might not have succeeded better than with the allopaths.

HELP TO THOSE WHO DIE IN THE ASHRAM

Q: What is the difference between a death in the Ashram

and a death outside? Does one get more benefit in the form of development of mind and other parts on the subtle planes so that one may get a better new birth?

A: I am not aware of any "development of mental" etc. in their planes; the development takes place on earth. The mental and other planes are not evolutionary.

The one who dies here is assisted in his passage to the psychic world and helped in his future evolution towards the Divine.

14-12-1936

SADHANA AND SPORTS

Certainly, Mother does not want only sportsmen in the Ashram: that would make it not an Ashram but a playground. The sports and physical exercises are primarily for the children of the school and they also do not play only but have to attend to their studies as well. Incidentally, they have improved immensely in their health and in discipline and conduct as one very valuable result. Secondarily, the younger Sadhaks are allowed, not enjoined or even recommended, to join in these sports, but certainly they are not supposed to be sportsmen only; they have other and more important things to do. To be a sportsman must necessarily be a voluntary choice and depends on one having the taste and inclination. There are plenty of people around the Mother herself — X for instance — who would never dream of frequenting the playground or engaging in sports and the Mother also would never think of asking them to do it. So, equally, she could not think of being displeased with you for shunning these delights. Some, of course, might ask why any sports at all in an Ashram which ought to be concerned only with meditation and inner experiences and the escape from life into Brahman. But that applies only to the ordinary kind of Ashram to which we have got accustomed and this is not that orthodox kind of Ashram. It includes life in Yoga, and once we admit life we can include anything that we find useful for life's ultimate and immediate purpose and not inconsistent with the works of the Spirit. After all, the orthodox

Ashram came into being only after Brahman began to shun all connection with the world and the shadow of Buddhism stalked over all the land and the Ashrams turned into monasteries. The old Ashrams were not entirely like that; the boys and young men who were brought up in them were trained in many things belonging to life: the son of Pururavas and Urvasie practised archery in the Ashram of a Rishi and became an expert bowman, and Karna became disciple of a great sage in order to acquire from him the use of powerful weapons. So there is no *a priori* ground why sports should be excluded from life of an Ashram like ours where we are trying to equate life with the Spirit. Even table-tennis and football need not be rigorously excluded. But putting all persiflage aside, my point is that to play or not to play is a matter of choice and inclination and it would be absurd for Mother to be displeased with you any more than with X for not caring to be a sportsman. So you need not have any apprehension on this score; that the Mother should be displeased with you for that is quite impossible. So the idea that she wished to draw away from you for anything done or not done was a misinterpretation without any real foundation since you have given no ground for it and there was nothing farther from her mind. She has herself explained that it was just the contrary that has been in her mind for sometime past and it was an increasing kindness that was her feeling and intention. The only change she could expect from you was to grow in your psychic and spiritual endeavour and inner progress and in this you have not failed — quite the contrary. Apart from that, the notion that she could be displeased with you because you did not change according to this or that pattern is a wild idea; it would be most arbitrary and unreasonable.

10-7-1948

The Mother does not want anybody to take up the sports if he has no inclination or natural bent for them; to join or not to join must be quite voluntary and those who do not join are not cold-shouldered or looked down upon by her for that reason. It would be absurd for her to take that attitude: there are those

who do her faithful service which she deeply appreciates and whom she regards with affection and confidence but who never go to the playground either because they have no turn for it or no time, — can you imagine that for that reason she will turn away from them and regard them with coldness? The Mother could never intend that sports should be the sole or the chief preoccupation of the inmates of the Ashram; even the children of the school for whose physical development these sports and athletic exercises are important and for whom they were originally intended, have other things to do, their work, their studies and other occupations and amusements in which they are as interested as in these athletics. There are other things more important: there are Yoga, spiritual progress, Bhakti, devotion, service....

I do not understand what you mean by my "giving time to sports": I am not giving any time to it except that I have written at Mother's request an article for the first number of the *Bulletin*[1] and another for the forthcoming number. It is the Mother who is doing all the rest of the work for the organisation of the sports and that she must do, obviously, till it is sufficiently organised to go on of itself with only a general supervision from above and her actual presence once in the day. I put out my force to support her as in all the other work of the Ashram, but otherwise I am not giving any time for the sports.

4-3-1949

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There is no need for anyone to take up sports as indispensable for Yoga or enjoying the Mother's affection and kindness. Yoga is its own object and has its own means and conditions; sports is something quite different as the Mother herself indicated to you when she said that the concentration practised on the playground was not meditation and was used for the efficacy in the movements and not for any purpose of Yoga.

14-3-1949

[1] *Bulletin of Physical Education*, a quarterly journal published by the Ashram.

It is also not a fact that either the Mother or I are turning away from Yoga and intend to interest ourselves only in sport; we have no intention whatever of altering the fundamental character of the Ashram and replacing it by a sportive association. If we did that it would be a most idiotic act and if anybody should have told you anything like that, he must be off his head or in a temporary crisis of delirious enthusiasm for a very upside-down idea. The Mother told you very clearly once that what was being done in the playground was not meditation or a concentration for Yoga but only an ordinary concentration for the physical exercises alone. If she is busy with the organisation of these things — and it is not true that she is busy with that alone — it is in order to get finished with that as soon as possible after which it will go on of itself without her being at all engrossed or specially occupied by it, as is the case with other works of the Ashram. As for myself, it is surely absurd to think that I am neglecting meditation and Yoga and interested only in running, jumping and marching! There seem to have been strange misunderstandings about my second message in the *Bulletin*. In the first, I wrote about sports and their utility just as I have written on politics or social development or any other matter. In the second, I took up the question incidentally because people are expressing ignorance as to why the Ashram should concern itself with sports at all. I explained why it had been done and dealt with the more general question of how this and other human activities could be part of a search for a total perfection of all parts of the being including the body and more especially what would be the nature of the perfection of the body. I indicated clearly that only by Yoga could there come a supreme and total perfection of all the instruments of the Spirit and the ascent of the whole being to the highest level and a divine life on earth and the assumption of a divine body. I made it clear that by human and physical means such as sports only a limited and precarious human perfection could come. In all this there is nothing to justify the idea that sport could be a means for jumping into the Supermind or that the Supermind was going to descend on the playground and nowhere else and only those who are there will receive it; that would be a bad look-out for me as I would have no chance!

I write all this in the hope of clearing away all the strange misconceptions with which the air seems to have become thick and by some of which you may have been affected.

27-4-1949

You ought to be able to see that your idea of our insistence on you to take up sport or to like it and accept it in any way has no foundation. I myself have never been a sportsman or — apart from a spectator's interest in cricket in England or a non-player member of the Baroda cricket club — taken up any physical games or athletics except some exercises learnt from Madrasi wrestlers in Baroda such as *daṇḍ* and *baiṭhak*, and those I took up only to put some strength and vigour into a frail and weak though not unhealthy body, but I never attached any other importance or significance to these things and dropped the exercises when I thought they were no longer necessary. Certainly, neither the abstinence from athletics and physical games nor the taking up of those physical exercises have for me any relevance to Yoga. Neither your aversion to sport nor the liking of others for it makes either you or them more fit or more unfit for Sadhana. So there is absolutely no reason why we should insist on your taking it up or why you should trouble your mind with the supposition that we want you to do it. You are surely quite free, as everybody is quite free, to take your own way in such matters.

28-4-1949

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Before coming to the main point I may as well clear out one matter not unconnected with it: my articles or messages, as they are called, in the *Bulletin*; for their appearance there and their contents seem to have caused some trouble, perplexity or misunderstanding in your mind and especially my speculations about the Divine Body. I wrote the first of these articles to explain about how and why sport came to be included in the programme of the Ashram activities and I think I made it clear, as I went on, that sport was not Sadhana, that it belonged to what I called the lower end of things, but that it might be used not merely for

amusement or recreation or the maintenance of health, but for a greater efficiency of the body and for the development of certain qualities and capacities, not of the body only but of morale and discipline and the stimulation of mental energies: but I pointed out also that these could be and were developed by other means and that there were limitations to this utility. In fact, it is only by Sadhana that one could go beyond the limits natural to the lower end means. I think there was little room for misunderstanding here, but the Mother had asked me to write on other subjects not connected in any way with sport and had suggested some such subjects as the possibilities of the evolution of a divine body; so I wrote on that subject and went on to speak of the Supermind and Truth-Consciousness which had obviously not even the remotest connection with sport. The object was to bring in something higher and more interesting than a mere record of gymnasium events but which might appeal to some of the readers and even to wider circles. In speaking of the divine body I entered into some far-off speculations about what might become possible in the future evolution of it by means of a spiritual force, but obviously the possibilities could not be anything near or immediate, and I said clearly enough that we should have to begin at the beginning and not attempt anything out of the way. Perhaps I should have insisted more on present limitations, but that I should now make clear. For the immediate object of my endeavours is to establish spiritual life on earth and for that the first necessity must always be to realise the Divine; only then can life be spiritualised or what I have called the Life Divine be made possible. The creation of something that could be called a divine body could be only an ulterior aim undertaken as part of this transformation, as, obviously, the development of such a divine body as was visioned in these speculations could only come into view as the result of a distant evolution and need not alarm or distract anyone. It might even be regarded as a phantasy of some remotely possible future which might one day happen to come true.

I then come to the main point, namely that the intention attributed to the Mother of concentrating permanently on sports and withdrawing from other things pertinent to Sadhana and

our spiritual endeavour is a legend and a myth and has no truth in it. Except for the time given to her own physical exercise — ordinarily, two hours or sometimes three in the evening on the playground — the Mother's whole day from early morning and a large part of the night also has always been devoted to her other occupations connected with the Sadhana — not her own but that of the Sadhaks — Pranam, blessings, meditation and receiving the Sadhaks on the staircase or elsewhere, sometimes for two hours at a time, and listening to what they have to say, questions about the Sadhana, results of their work or their matters, complaints, disputes, quarrels, all kinds of conferences about this or that to be decided and done — there is no end to the list: for the rest she had to attend to their letters, to reports about the material work of the Ashram and all its many departments, correspondence and all sorts of things connected with the contacts with the outside world including often serious trouble and difficulties and the settlement of matters of great importance. All this has certainly nothing to do with sports and she had little occasion to think of it at all apart from the short time in the evening. There was here no ground for the idea that she was neglecting the Sadhaks or the Sadhana or thinking of turning her mind solely or predominantly to sport and still less for imputing the same preoccupation to me. Only during the period before the first and second December this year Mother had to give a great deal of time and concentration to the preparation of the events of those two days because she had decided on a big cultural programme: her own play, *Vers l'Avenir*, dances, recitation from *Savitri* and from the *Prayers and Meditations* for the first December and also for a big and ambitious programme for the second of sportive items and events. This meant a good deal more time for these purposes but hardly any interruption of her other occupations except for one or two of them just at the end of this period. There was surely no sufficient ground here either for drawing the conclusion that this was going to be for the future a normal feature of her action or a permanent change in it or in the life of the Ashram ending in a complete withdrawal from spiritual life and an apotheosis of the Deity of Sport. Those who voiced this idea or declared that sport would henceforth be

obligatory on all were indulging in fantasies that have no claim to credibility. As a matter of fact, the period of tension is over and after the second December things have returned to normal or even to subnormal in the activities of the playground and as for the future you may recall the proverb that "once is not for ever."

But there seems to be still a survival of the groundless idea that sportsmanship is obligatory henceforth on every Sadhak and without it there is no chance of having the Mother's attention or favour. It is therefore necessary for me to repeat with the utmost emphasis the statement I made long ago when this fable became current for a time along, I think, with the rumour that the Supermind was to descend on the playground and the people who happen to be there at the time and nowhere else and on nobody else — which would have meant that I for one would never have it!! I must repeat what I said then, that the Mother had never imposed or has any idea of imposing any such obligation and had no reason for doing so. She does not want you or anybody else to take to sports if there is no inclination or turn towards it. There are any number of people who enjoy her highest favour, among them some of her best and most valued workers, some most near to her and cherished by her who do not even set foot on the playground. Nobody then could possibly lose her favour or her affection by refusing to take up sport or by a dislike of sport or a strong disinclination towards it: these things are a matter of idiosyncrasy and nothing else. The idea, whether advanced or not by someone claiming to have authority to voice the Mother's intentions, that sport is now the most important thing with her and obligatory for Sadhana is absurd in the extreme.

6-12-1949

The realisation of the Divine is the one thing needful and the rest is desirable only in so far as it helps or leads towards that or when it is realised, extends or manifests the realisation. Manifestation or organisation of the whole life for the Divine work: first, the Sadhana personal and collective necessary for the reali-

sation and a common life of the God-realised men, secondly, for help to the world to move towards that and to live in the Light, is the whole meaning and purpose of my Yoga. But the realisation is the first need and it is that round which all the rest moves, for apart from it all the rest would have no meaning. Neither the Mother nor myself ever dreamed or could dream of putting anything else in its place or neglecting it for anything else. Most of the Mother's day is in fact given to helping the Sadhaks in one way or another towards that end, most of the rest is occupied with work for the Ashram which cannot be neglected or allowed to collapse, for this is too work for the Divine. As for the gymnasium, the playground and the rest of it, the Mother has made it plain from the beginning what place she assigned to these things; she has never done anything so imbecile as to replace essential things by these accessories.

4-4-1950

QUIETUDE AND ACTION

Q: Learning languages makes the mind active. Does not the Yoga mean to keep the mind quiet and turn it always to the Divine?

A: Do you mean to say that in order to have quietness of the mind one must do nothing? Then neither the Mother nor I nor anyone else here has a quiet mind.

6-4-1937

READING NEWSPAPERS

Q: Is it very important in our Sadhana to give up reading newspapers? I find that almost all the Sadhaks including the best ones read them and you also. Moreover, if one does not read them one remains uninformed and blank.

A: These things depend on oneself and one's own conditions

— there can be no general rule. It is true that I read newspapers, but Mother never does unless her attention is called to a particular item. I dare say if X stopped reading papers for a year, it might be very good for him. One has to see what is one's necessity for the Sadhana. If the newspapers disperse the mind or externalise the consciousness too much, they should be avoided. If on the other hand one is dawdling over the Sadhana and having no particular inner endeavour one can read newspapers — it is no worse than anything else. On the other hand if the newspapers do not affect the formed or forming inner consciousness in any way (by dispersion, lowering, externalisation etc.) one can read them. I read the newspapers mainly because I have to see what events are happening which might any day have an effect on my work etc. I do not read for the interest of reading.

9-7-1936

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THE ONLY MANTRA USED IN THIS YOGA

As a rule the only *mantra* used in this Sadhana is that of the Mother or of my name and the Mother's. The concentration in the heart and the concentration in the head can both be used — each has its own result. The first opens up the psychic being and brings Bhakti, love and union with the Mother, her presence within the heart and the action of her Force in the nature. The other opens the mind to self-realisation, to the consciousness of what is above mind, to the ascent of the consciousness out of the body and the descent of the higher consciousness into the body.

13-10-1934

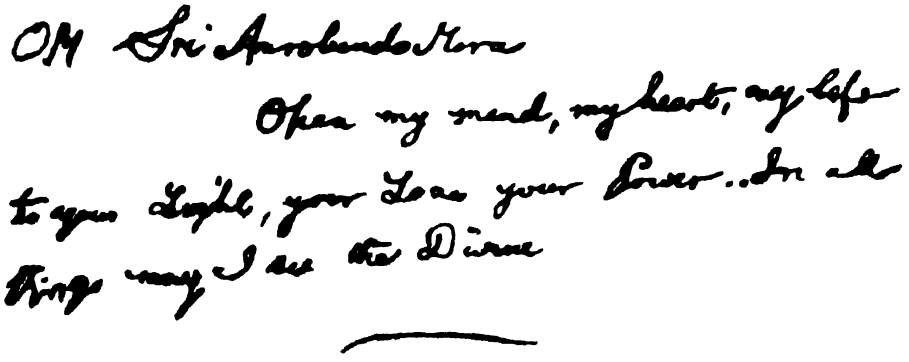
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Q: Is there any difference between the Force that helps when I call the Mother in sleep and the Force that comes when I repeat "Sri Aurobindo-Mira" ?

A: There is not necessarily any difference of Force. Usually the Mother's name has the full power in it ; but in certain states of consciousness the double Name may have a special effect.

29-8-1936

A MANTRA[1]



(*OM Sri Aurobindo Mira*

Open my mind, my heart, my life to your Light, your Love, your Power. In all things may I see the Divine.)

16-7-1938

[1] This was given by Sri Aurobindo to a Sadhak who had asked him for a brief prayer with Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's names to use as a *mantra*. While giving it, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

"I have written for you a brief prayer with the names in the form of a *mantra*. I hope it will help you to overcome your difficulty and get an inner foundation." (16-7-1938)

On receiving the *mantra* the Sadhak inquired:

"Have I to consider the names and the prayer as one *mantra*?"

Sri Aurobindo replied: "Yes". (18-7-1938)

SRI AUROBINDO'S GAYATRI

तत्सवितुर्वरं रूपं ज्योतिः परस्य
धीमहि।
यन्नः सत्येन दीपयेत्॥

(*Tat savitur varam rūpam jyotiḥ parasya dhīmahi,*
yannaḥ satyena dīpayet.[1])

A BENEDICTION

असतो मा सद् गमय।
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय।
मृत्योर्माऽमृतं गमय॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः॥[2]

(बृहदारण्यक उपनिषद् १.३.२८)

तथास्तु[3]

Sri Aurobindo

[1] Let us meditate on the most auspicious (best) form of Savitri, on the Light of the Supreme which shall illumine us with the Truth. (Sri Aurobindo's translation)

[2] From the non-being to true being,
from the darkness to the Light,
from death to Immortality.
OM Peace! Peace! Peace!

(*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, I.3.28)

[3] So be it.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

SRI AUROBINDO ON HIMSELF AND ON THE MOTHER was first published in 1953 as Volume I of the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre Collection. Part One of this volume consisted of Sri Aurobindo's notes and letters concerning his life and Yoga; Part Two contained his letters relating both to himself and to the Mother; and Part Three was a revised and enlarged version of the book LETTERS OF SRI AUROBINDO ON THE MOTHER, first published in 1951 by the Sri Aurobindo Circle, Bombay.

The present Volume (No. 26) of the SRI AUROBINDO BIRTH CENTENARY LIBRARY consists of Parts One and Two of the 1953 edition, revised and considerably enlarged by the addition of a large amount of new material including the messages given by Sri Aurobindo on various occasions.

Part Three of the 1953 edition containing Sri Aurobindo's letters on the Mother has been transferred to a separate Volume (No. 25) of the Centenary Library which also includes other writings of Sri Aurobindo on the Mother.