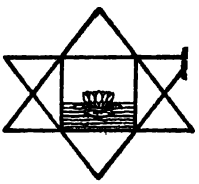

Correspondence With Sri Aurobindo

NIRODBARAN

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

For many years the disciples used to write down daily in a note-book the progress of their sadhana, and send it to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for their comments. Usually they asked questions only about the practice of their Yoga, but sometimes they also sought guidance regarding literary things. To some the Mother answered, to others Sri Aurobindo —the two usually consulting each other before sending the replies. All through the night till the early hours of the morning Sri Aurobindo used to sit up looking through the note-books and making his comments in the margin. Those on the letters of Nirodbaran—previously published in two volumes—are here brought together in two parts and arranged with the letters in the form of question and answer. The questions, being at times rather lengthy, have been condensed to some extent. As far as possible the order in which they occur in the note-books has been preserved so that the run of the correspondence may not be disturbed. For the same reason a very broad classification which can cover the different subjects discussed at a time has been adopted, though for the First Part a detailed contents is there for more precise information under each head. The chronological sequence, however, has not always been strictly followed, because the letters have been arranged so as to centre upon Sri Aurobindo's personality and his spiritual work.

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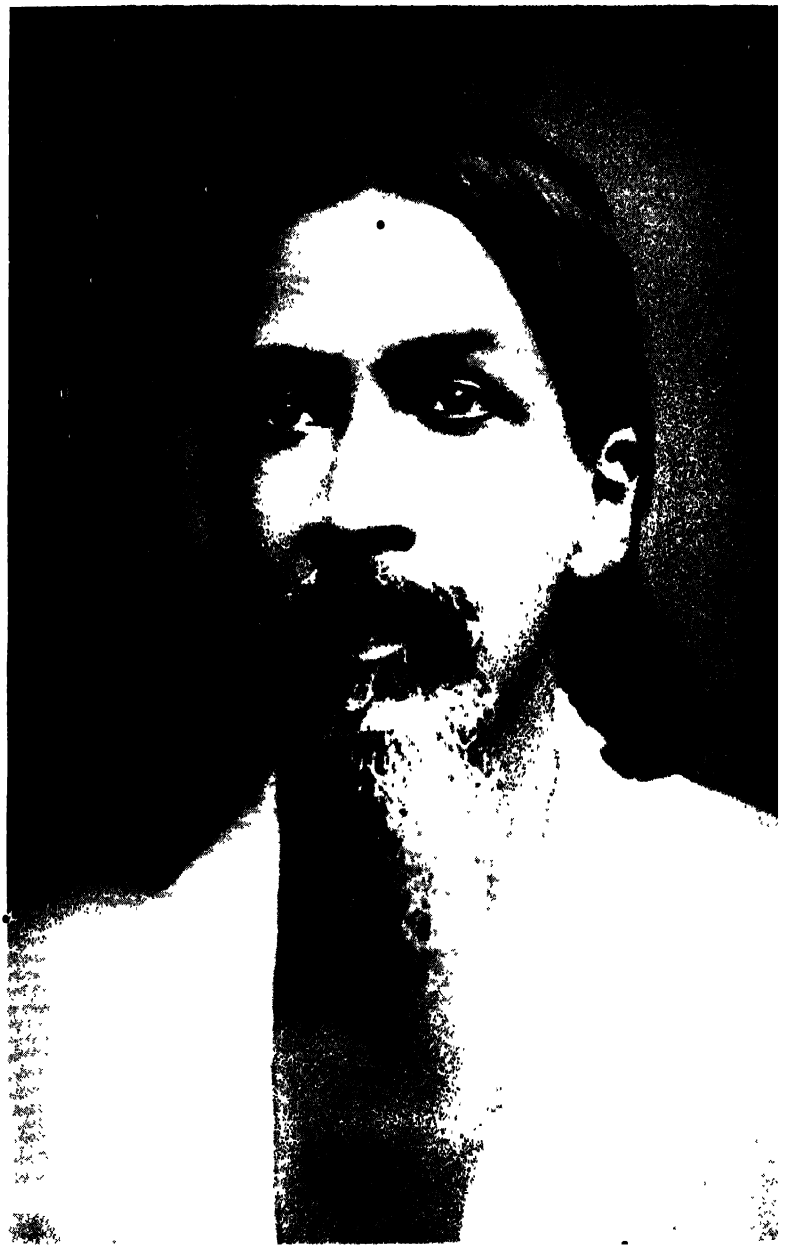
My Yoga is done not for myself who need nothing and do not need salvation or anything else, but precisely for the earth-consciousness, to open a way for the earth-consciousness to change. Has the Divine need to come down to prove that he can do this or that or has he any personal need of doing it?

*
**

There are two sides to 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.

SRI AUROBINDO

First Series



SRI AUROBINDO

PREFACE

The history of this correspondence dates back to the early thirties, 1933 to be exact, when I made the Ashram my permanent home. In 1930 I came here for my first "Darshan" and stayed for a month. Before leaving I wrote a letter to Sri Aurobindo about my future course of life, and intimated to him my disposition towards Karmayoga rather than a life of meditation; I also asked him how the practice of yoga could at all be compatible with life in the world, and in what way my being could be prepared, if at a later date I wanted to take up Yoga. He wrote a fairly long reply, which was rather unusual for him, especially as I was an outsider. Sri Aurobindo explained to me in this letter how the outer life can be made a field of yoga and how work done as a part of Karmayoga, with the right attitude, can be a very good training for the completely yogic life. But very little of this advice was put into practice: the flicker of light kindled in the Ashram got enveloped by the darkness of the world around.

However, when I returned in 1933 and decided to stay on, I found that correspondence with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo was a regular feature of that period of our Yoga. Piles and piles of note-books and letters used to be written, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo poring over them the whole night month after month, answering all sorts of questions, sublime and ridiculous, put by the sadhaks and sadhikas. This went on for eight years. On some the writing was obligatory, for others voluntary; but nobody wanted to miss such an opportunity, and all the old disciples of that period treasure that correspondence which has now become a hundred times more precious to them. I too began to write, but the answers received were for a year or so quite formal and matter of fact. It never occurred to me even in my wildest dreams that this relationship would soon take an intimate personal turn. Yet it did, and in a surprisingly sudden manner. I was at that time

working in one of the Ashram departments,—not the medical one; even though a doctor, I had a strong distaste for the medical profession. One day, when my notebook came back from Sri Aurobindo, I began to read what he had written, when to my utter bewilderment I came across the sentence, "Well, sir, do you understand now?" I was so taken aback that I could not believe my eyes. "Is this a joke or a slip of the pen?" I asked myself, for I did not remember his having addressed anybody as "sir!" Neither could I ask him about this strange phenomenon. But he did not keep me long in doubt, for, from that day the whole correspondence changed its character and bore to me the *rasa* of Heaven's delight which Sri Aurobindo's pen alone could give and his many-faceted personality alone could create, for he was to me the very incarnation of *raso vai saḥ*.[1]

From now on life became a song. Every morning I would wait in suspense for the arrival of the "divine post", as we used to call it. As soon as it arrived, I would just fall upon it. How great was the thrill when I saw pages filled with a fine close handwriting, though written at a tremendous speed! "Oh, how much he has written!" would be the first thought. And the contents used to be indeed a feast for the gods, though I must say it was for him a god's labour to answer to so many letters and note-books in one single night. Sometimes, when least expected, the replies would be very generous in length, and when most expected, very meagre; but they always had on me an enlivening effect. The lightning flash of humour, the brilliant passage at arms, the arguments exposing to ridicule the utter hollowness of my unripe reasoning were things beyond my usual mortal fare. With great joy, I used to run to Dilip Roy to share the sumptuous feast. How we would roar with laughter and enjoy all the thrashings given me for my wooden-headed logic! Dilip used to remark, "In your correspondence Sri Aurobindo has revealed himself in a totally new aspect... How lucky we are to have such a Guru!" Friends

[1] "He is verily the Delight."

wondered how I dared to take such an extraordinary liberty with Sri Aurobindo; to some it even appeared sacrilegious. They often asked me, "Don't you tremble with fear when you face him during 'Darshan'?" Fear? Where was the question of fear when his face, his eyes would say *mā bhaiḥ*,[1] his lips parted in a sweet smile and his whole body bending in love and sweetness to bless the head lying at his feet?

So we went on, Guru and disciple, with our daily literary duels, the Guru encouraging and allowing himself to be attacked on all fronts but ultimately throwing the puny adversary down with a benign laughter. But the disciple would shake off the dust, get prepared for another tussle and "though vanquished, would argue still." Readers may sometimes find the questions rather silly; but in those days when the smaller books had not been published and we had only the *Arya* to fall back upon, we did not know much about this Yoga—for most of us the *Arya* was very difficult to understand. Secondly, the temptation to draw Sri Aurobindo out was so irresistible that we did not much weigh the wisdom of our queries. He gave us this exceptional privilege and we employed all our skill and art to dispossess him of his vast wealth of knowledge. As I have said, sometimes he was rather miserly, at other times he was abundantly lavish, reminding me of Sri Krishna in AE's poem.

A miser with a heart grown cold;
And yet He is the Prodigal, the Spendthrift of the Heavenly Gold.

The total result has been a long and invaluable series of letters on various subjects which will shine forever like jewelled letters on the breast-plate of Time.

This phase of correspondence stopped after some years, but for a few of us the privilege continued. For myself, the necessity of mental reasoning was over and a fresh channel opened up, again in an unexpected manner. I started writing poetry in

[1] "Have no fear."

English, and Sri Aurobindo began to help me with his inspiration, his comments, instructions on rhythm, metre, etc., in one word, all the intricacies of poetic composition. This is an episode which is no less remarkable in its import as well as its appeal, though limited to the literary connoisseur. The correspondence, however, came to an abrupt end in 1938, when owing to an accident he injured his leg, and I came face to face with the *raso vai saḥ*. For me nothing on this earth could have surpassed the *rasa* and the beauty that we enjoyed all these years excepting, of course, the personal contact with him to which the accident now opened the way.

How an indirect contact through letters could be made so close, vivid and tangible is an art whose magic Sri Aurobindo alone seemed to know. A phrase like "hold on! hold on!" when the sadhak was in a mood of despair, or "move on, move on," when he was curious to know whether he was moving at all, or a simple exclamation mark in the margin are things that can be immensely enjoyed only if the context is known. Besides, his way of dealing with different sadhaks according to their psychological make-up, discussing the same subject from different levels of consciousness appropriate to the stature of each, reveals a profound mastery of the art of penmanship. The charm of the correspondence would be half lost without knowing the person to whom it was addressed. It is generally admitted that the power of his pen has been equalled by very few either here or in Europe, and he has been acknowledged as a master of the English language by literary men. If Sri Krishna has bewitched the hearts of men by his flute, Sri Aurobindo has captured their hearts and minds by the magic of his pen.

What, however, remains to me a deep mystery and shall ever remain so, is his treating me like a close and intimate comrade when I had nothing in me to deserve such a privilege. My repeated questioning on that score failed to elicit any reply. His only answer was, "Find it out for yourself." At one time in a semi-humorous vein he wrote to me, "I have been trying to intellectualise you, but all seems to be in vain." This could hardly have been the reason,—but is there any use speculating on

divine dispensation? "God's *līlā* cannot be understood," the saints have said.

This in short is the story of our correspondence. As it lies before me memories spring up from the submerged history of the past and colour my inner horizon with their rainbow hues. Many things have happened since then, many convulsions have shaken the earth casting their sombre shadows upon it, but receding when his power has intervened; one great dream of his life, the independence of India, has already been realised; the others are in the process of being realised. Our own life has passed through many upheavals, but through all this flux and reflux things have advanced very far indeed in our inner world. Few there are who know even a little of the Herculean labour the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have unitedly and separately put forth, pursuing subtle, swift or slow methods according to the exigencies of time, now taking up one method, discarding it only to take up another, opening fresh viaducts, closing or blocking old ones, even risking their own lives to work for the divine goal. This unprecedented symbolic history has to be written in the future; that will be our epic,—as *Savitri* is Sri Aurobindo's —in which our great mass of correspondence with him will find its proper place.

I cannot but dwell, at least for a while, in a reminiscent vein on that glorious past as I look again at this correspondence. Most men live in their past; we here live in our future, but the past contributes to the high consummation of that future, and such a past recorded through the correspondence is like a brilliant page of one's ever-present life. The picture of the past floats again before my eyes: I look at his chamber from the corner of my room and imagine that he must now be busy at our letters. Then passing through the corridors of dream, I wake up to wait at the threshold of the morning hours for the divine post. There it comes carrying the heavenly breath and bearing the Spirit-touch. I pore on it and seem for a moment to touch the very hands that struck those harmonious chords.

Moments pass, but I still taste the "strange-ecstasied fruit" The aroma of His unbodied Presence recreates the "Darshan"

before my vision—calm and serene, golden and majestic, eyes reflecting the Unfathomed, smile and gravity on the lips in succession as known and unknown pass by. Are these the hands that have culled from the vineyeards of his luminous mind the luscious fruits of knowledge and filled our mortal jars with its sparkling wine? Those the eyes that have passed sleepless nights over our daily tales of joy and woe, our babbles and stupid reasonings? Is this the mouth that has uttered through an eloquent pen volumes of speech just to assure one single person of his spiritual destiny, or to promise all help and succour in the battle-field of Yoga?

Many other vivid associations renew the contact of the soul with the veiled summit-source. Who can exhaust these iridescent memories, who can extinguish their flames? Worship and prayer, work and an intense desire for the fulfilment of his mission—the things with which he has inspired our souls, and the path that he has hewn through the virgin forest of our life, are a tale whose beginning only is disclosed, but whose end waits to be revealed by the future development of events. Above all, how much of his inner consciousness he has transfused into our blood through the medium of this correspondence, no one will ever know; indeed, very few will be able even to appraise it correctly. Only those who have been the recipients of that rejuvenating energy of the Divine Consciousness will understand its action, slowly, in the gradual process of self-unfolding. Our heart repeats the marvel of his name and waits his arrival through the very pathway that he has built with so much labour of love and compassion.

NIRODBARAN

PART ONE

I.

SRI AUROBINDO ON HIS EARLY LIFE, DEVELOPMENT AND YOGA

(I) His Development—Spiritual, Literary and Philosophic

Sri Aurobindo's style—His reading not enormous—Literary, philosophic, and artistic development through Yoga—His writing everything out of a silent mind—Prāṇāyāma and poetry—Mental (literary) results easier than spiritual results—Inner knowledge and outer knowledge—Early spiritual experiences and the flow of poetry—The experience of Nirvāṇa—The coming out of the latent philosopher—Had to plod and do honest work on each plane—No resort to miracles.

MYSELF: I would like to ask something about style in literature. Don't you think that for creating something really good, style is very important—*le style, c'est l'homme*, as they say?

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course; without style there is no literature—except in fiction where a man with a bad style like Dickens or Balzac can make up by vigour and the power of his substance.

MYSELF: For an effective style, reading is very necessary. In order to manufacture your style, which is incomparable, your enormous reading must have helped a lot, I am sure.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

MYSELF: 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 Dilip'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."

SRI AUROBINDO: Will you explain to me how Dilip 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 Pranayama 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.

MYSELF: So about your style too, it is difficult to understand how much the Force has contributed towards its perfection.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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 to "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, Pranayama, 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), 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?

14-11-1934

MYSELF: 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?

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

MYSELF: Suppose you had not studied English literature; would it be still possible for you to say something about it by Yogic experience?

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

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By the way, what is this story about my four or five hour's 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 Pranayama—which is quite another matter. And what flow do you speak of? The flow of poetry came down while I was doing Pranayama, not some years afterwards. If it is the flow of experiences, that did come after some years, but after I had stopped the Pranayama 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 Pranayama 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.

*
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MYSELF: 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.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

*
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4-4-1935

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

(2) The Realisation of the Self

London—Bombay—Baroda

31-10-1935

MYSELF: I have read what you wrote to Dilip 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!

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

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

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

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

SRI AUROBINDO: 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?

(3) Early Life and Political Activity

On "Living dangerously"—Poverty had no terrors for him—

Carrying on the revolutionary movement—Seeing India as the living Mother.

MYSELF: You wrote the other day that you had lived dangerously.[1] All that we know is that you did not have enough money in England,—also in Pondicherry in the beginning. In Baroda you had a handsome pay, and in Calcutta you were quite well off.

SRI AUROBINDO: I was so astonished by this succint, complete and impeccably accurate biography of myself that I let myself go in answer! But I afterwards thought that it was no use living more dangerously than I am obliged to. So I rubbed all out. My only answer now is!!!!!!!!!! I thank you for the safe rich comfortable and unadventurous career you have given me. I note also that the only danger man can run in this world is that of the lack of money. Karl Marx himself could not have made a more economic world of it! But I wonder whether that was what Nietzsche meant by living dangerously?

MYSELF: I am rather grieved to know that you rubbed off what you wrote, and that my attempts to draw you out have failed. Everybody says that unless we do this we shall never be able to know anything about your life. (Sri Aurobindo here wrote in the margin: "Why the devil should you know anything about it") So I dared to make this hazardous statement—forgive me.

Of course, I don't mean that lack of money is the only danger one can be in. Nevertheless, is it not true that poverty is one of the greatest dangers as well as incentives? The lives of many great men illustrate this. Therefore living poorly seems to me to be akin to living dangerously. I know that my contention has obvious fallacies in it, but isn't this mostly true?

[1] Sri Aurobindo had written: "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 Nirods in my train."

SRI AUROBINDO: Not in the least. You are writing like Samuel Smiles. 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—

MYSELF: I beg to submit my apologies. I committed this folly because of ignorance of facts. Believe me, I did not know that you were the brain behind the revolutionary movement and its real leader till I read the other day what X had written about you. Now I really know what is meant by the phrase "living dangerously." Of course I was not referring to anything about Yoga or the inner life. But why put me to shame by dragging my poor self into it? My dangers don't prove anything, do they?

SRI AUROBINDO: Wait a sec. I have admitted nothing about "X"—only to having conspired and started and maintained while I was in the field a movement for independence. That used at least to be a matter of public knowledge. I do not commit myself to more than that. My dear fellow, I was acquitted of sedition twice, and of conspiracy to wage war against the British Raj once and each time by expressibly British magistrates, judges or judge. Does not that prove conclusively my entire harmlessness and that I was a true Ahimsuk?

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MYSELF: 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?

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

(4) His Spiritual Action for India's Independence

16-9-1935

MYSELF: 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.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

18-9-1935

MYSELF: (*After writing a number of illogical things*): Please don't think of what India is going to do with her Independence.

Give her that first, and then let her decide her fate for herself. Independence anyhow—your Supermind will do the rest.

SRI AUROBINDO: You are a most irrational creature. I have been trying to logicise and intellectualise you, but it seems in vain. Have I not told you that the indepencence is all arranged for and will evolve itself all right. Then what's the use of my bothering about that any longer? It's what she will do with her independence that is not arranged for—and so it is that about which I have to bother. To drag in the Supermind by the tail here is perfectly irrelevant. We have been talking all the time on an altogether infra-supramental basis—down down low in the intellect with an occasional illumined intuitive or overmental flash here and there. Be faithful to the medium, if you please. If you do not become perfectly and luminously logical and rational, how can you hope to become a candidate for the next higher stage even? Be a little practical and reasonable.

(5) The Necessity of His Doing Physical Work

12-12-1934

MYSELF: If a sadhak is asked to offer himself through a work for which he has a natural liking, the offering becomes a joyous one, and therefore easier,—the very "rasa" of the Divine for which we are all here; isn't that so?

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

(6) Work and Meditation in His Yoga

19-12-1934

MYSELF: Is it possible to attain the highest realisation in your Yoga through work alone, or is work to be used only as a means up to a certain stage and then left aside, as Ramakrishna said in his well-known analogy of a pregnant woman and the gradual falling off of her work with the nearing of her full time?

SRI AUROBINDO: Am I Ramakrishna or is there no difference between my Yoga and his?

MYSELF: If I remember right, you wrote to me that work is only a means for the preparation of the spiritual life; otherwise, it does not have much value.

SRI AUROBINDO: Lord God! When did I make this stupendous statement which destroys at one fell sweep the two volumes of the *Essays on the Gita* and all the seven volumes of the *Arya*? Work by itself is only a preparation, so is meditation by itself, but work done in the increasing yogic consciousness is a means of realisation as much as meditation is.

MYSELF: You wrote, I think, in Dilip's letter also that work only prepares one for the direct contact with the inmost.

SRI AUROBINDO: I have not said, I hope, that work *only* prepares.... Meditation also prepares for the direct contact. If we are to do work only as a preparation and then become motionless meditative ascetics, then all my spiritual teaching is

false and there is no use for supramental realisation or anything else that has not been done in the past.

MYSELF: My own impression is that work is an excellent means as a preparation, but the major experiences and realisations are not likely to come in doing works.

SRI AUROBINDO: I see. When the time for preparation is over, one will sit immobile for ever after and never do any work —for, as you say, work and realisation cannot go together. Hurrah, for the Himalayas! Well, but why not then the old Yoga? If work is so contrary to realisation! That is Shankara's teaching. In that case I am entirely worng in preaching a dynamic Yoga. Let us go back to the cave and the forest.

MYSELF: My theory about work hampering one-pointed concentration finds some support, I think, from your own example. You have said that 9/10 of your time is spent in doing correspondence, works etc., whereas only 1/10 is devoted to concentration.

SRI AUROBINDO: For me, correspondence alone. I have no time left for other "works etc." Concentration and meditation are not the same thing. One can be concentrated in work or bhakti as well as in meditation. For God's sake be very careful about your vocabulary, or else you will tumble into many errors and loosenesses of thinking.

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 force. 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.

MYSELF: Did you not retire for five or six years for an exclusive and intensive meditation?

SRI AUROBINDO: I am not aware that I did so. But my biographers probably know more about it than I do.

MYSELF: If the Supramental Divine himself differentiates between work and concentration and finds it difficult to radiate his force contemporaneously with his work of correspondence,

etc., what about undivines and infra-mentals like us?

SRI AUROBINDO: Between concentration on correspondence alone and the full many-sided work—*not* between work and correspondence. 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.

(Sri Aurobindo underlined the words in my letter "contemporaneously with his work of correspondence," and wrote):

Say "by correspondence alone." 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 Supramenal 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 on 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.

II

SRI AUROBINDO ON THE MOTHER—AND ON HIS OWN SUBTLE FORMS

(1) The Mother's Capacity for Knowing—and Her Emanations

16-7-1935

MYSELF: (*regarding a certain incident that had recently occurred*): I was under the impression that Mother could at once know of such things. Some even say that she knows everything—all that is material or spiritual. Others maintain that she knows when the question of consciousness is involved, e.g. sex movements, etc., but not so much about material things.

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord! You don't expect her mind to be a factual encyclopaedia of all that is happening on all the planes and in all the universes? Or even on this earth, e.g. what Lloyd George had for dinner yesterday?

Questions of consciousness, of course, she always knows even with her outermost physical mind. Material facts she can know but is not bound to do it. What would be true to say, is that she can know if she concentrates or if her attention is called to it and she decides to know. I often know from her what has happened before it is reported by anyone. But she does not care to do that on a general scale.

MYSELF: What is then the exact significance of your statement: "Behave as if the Mother was looking at you, for indeed, She is always present."?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the emanation of the Mother that is with each sadhak all the time. In former days when she was spending the night in a trance and not working in the Ashram, she brought back with her the knowledge of all that was

happening to everybody. Nowadays she has no time for that.

MYSELF: All this is very interesting; and I suppose you have an equal number of emanations yourself. Their object must be to give us protection.

SRI AUROBINDO: I am not aware of any emanations of mine. As for the Mother's, they are not there for protection, but to support the personal relation or contact with the sadhak, and to act so far as he will allow them to act.

MYSELF: This question of Mother's knowledge became even more interesting for me today. She gave me the flower signifying "Discipline." I began to wonder why this particular flower was given; at last I remembered that yesterday I had not observed the right discipline in the matter of taking food with X and Y.

SRI AUROBINDO: In this respect the Mother is guided by her intuitions which tell her which flower is needed at the moment or helpful. Sometimes it is accompanied by a perception of a particular state of consciousness, sometimes by that of a material fact; but only the bare fact, usually e.g.—it would not specify that it was "that particular thing" that was done or how X or Y came in. Not that that is impossible, but it is unnecessary and does not happen unless needed.

19-7-1935

MYSELF: Kindly enlighten us a little more regarding the emanations. How do they support the personal relation? I thought that all personal relations were with the Mother direct, not through a deputy! When X says that he feels the Mother's physical touch, with whom does he have the contact—the Mother or the emanation? Then again, the different forms of the Mother that one sees in dreams—are they also her emanations?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is terribly difficult to write of these things, for you are all as ignorant as blazes about these things and misunderstand at every step. The Emanation is not a deputy, but the Mother herself. She is not bound to her body, but can put herself out (emanate) in any way she likes. What ema-

nates, suits itself to the nature of the personal relation she has with the sadhak which is different with each, but that does not prevent it from being herself. Its presence with the sadhak is not dependent on his consciousness of it. If everything were dependent on the surface consciousness of the sadhak, there would be no possibility of the divine action anywhere; the human worm would remain the human worm and the human ass the human ass, for ever and ever. For if the Divine could not be there behind the veil, how could either ever become conscious of anything but their wormhood and asshood even throughout the ages?

(By the side of my question, "When X says that he feels the Mother's physical touch, with whom does he have the contact...?" he wrote "With the Mother—the emanation helping—which is its business.")

(2) Seeing the Divine in the Mother

23-7-1935

MYSELF: I hear that X saw the Divine in the Mother at first sight. It seems that he has come to the top rung of your spiritual ladder. In your heavenly Parliament he must have been in charge of a very important portfolio!

SRI AUROBINDO: What top rung and what Parliament? There is no such thing as a heavenly parliament. X progressed smoothly and rapidly from the beginning in Yoga, first, because he was in dead earnest; secondly, because he had a clear and solid mind and a strong and tenacious will in complete control of the nerves, thirdly, because his vital being was calm, strong and solid, finally and chiefly, because he had a complete faith and devotion to the Mother.

As for seeing the Divine in the Mother at first sight, he is not the only one to do that. Plenty of people have done that, who had no chance of any portfolios, e.g. Z's cousin, a Musulman girl, who as soon as she met her declared, "This is not a woman, she is a goddess", and has been having significant

dreams of her ever since, and whenever she is in trouble, thinks of her and gets helped out of the trouble. It is not so difficult to see the Divine in the Mother as you make it out to be.

29-7-1935

MYSELF: I don't know what the Musulman lady exactly saw. From what you say it seems to be a flash of intuition.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not at all, it was a direct sense of the Godhead in her—for I suppose you mean by intuition a sort of idea that comes suddenly? That is what people usually understand by intuition. It was not that in her case nor in X's.

MYSELF: But is it not extremely difficult to see the fully flaming resplendent Divine Mother?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't believe X or anybody would have that at first view. That can only come if one has already developed the faculty of vision in the occult planes. What is of more importance is the clear perception or intimate inner feeling or direct sense, "This is She". I think you are inclined to be too romantic and poetic and too little spiritually realistic in these things.

With many people the faculty of this kind of occult vision is the first to develop when they begin sadhana. With others it is there naturally or comes on occasions without any practice of yoga. But with people who live mainly in the intellect (a few excepted) this faculty is not usually there by nature and most have much difficulty in developing it. It was so even with me.

It would be something of a miracle to see things without the faculty of seeing. We don't deal much in miracles of that kind.

(3) Subtle Forms—His Own and the Mother's

23-5-1935

MYSELF: I had a queer dream last night: I was bowing with

love and devotion before a dark-complexioned gentleman, and he with equal affection raised me up and said, "You will require 18 years (Good Lord!!) to realise the Divine, out of which 12 years will pass away in just knocking about and playing." Heart-rending prophecy! But who is this old gentleman, and what does his prophecy amount to—please?

SRI AUROBINDO: The old dark-complexioned gentleman must be Old Nick, I suppose, and his prophecy amounts to Old Nickery.

MYSELF: So I bowed down to the devil, and devotionally too! But is it not possible to develop some kind of discrimination in these things? Usually it is only after the ceremony that I begin to doubt the credentials of the persons. I clearly saw that this devil did not resemble you, but still I bowed. But when we often see Mother in various forms, looking quite different, you say that it *is* the Mother; how can one differentiate then?

SRI AUROBINDO: Necessarily, Mother can manifest in many other forms besides her physical one, and though I am rather less multitudinous, I can also. But that does not mean that you can take any gentleman for me or any she for her. Your dream-self has to develop a certain discrimination. That discrimination cannot go by signs and forms, for the vital beggars can imitate almost anything—it must be intuitive.

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11-12-1934

MYSELF: 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!

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

(4) A Discussion Regarding the Mother and His Own Divinity

MYSELF: How many Mothers are there? Who is the universal Mother? How many universal Mothers are there? Who is the Mother and who is Sri Aurobindo? And who is this fellow you call the universal Brahman? Again who is Shiva and who is Krishna and what is an Ishta Devata? There is only one Divine and a thousand Divines! I know you are an Avatar but sometimes it stupefies one to think of you as the Supreme.

SRI AUROBINDO: But there was no question about my being the Supreme...

I don't see why it should stupefy one (you?) in spite of your absence of personal objections to think of me as such (the Supreme). Why, you are yourself the Supreme, aren't you? *So'ham, tattvam asi Nirada, Ishwara kôn betā, āmi i Ishwara*[1] (Vivekananda). "I" in this formula means not V. but anyone, that is to say Nirod. Also vide K. So what's this stupefaction about I should like to know. When everybody is the Supreme and of everybody it can be said that he is God, why should I alone as such stupefy you?

Leave aside the question of Divine or undivine, no spiritual man who acts dynamically is limited to physical contact—the idea that physical contact through writing, speech, meeting is indispensable to the action of the spiritual force is self-contradictory, for then it would not be a spiritual force. The spirit is not limited by physical things or by the body. If you have the spiritual force, it can act on people thousands of miles away who do not know and never will know that you are acting on them or that they are being acted upon—they only know that there is a force enabling them to do things and may very well suppose it is their own great energy and genius.

What was said was that Krishna as a manifestation on earth opened the possibility of the Overmind consciousness here to

[1] Sri Aurobindo wrote this in Bengali script. It means: "Who is this person Ishwara—I am Ishwara".

men and stood for that, as Rama was the incarnation in the mental Man? If Krishna was *an* overmind "god" that means he was not an Incarnation, not the Divine, but somebody else who claimed to be the Divine—i.e. he was a god who somehow thought he was God.

MYSELF: If there is only one Divine Mother, it explains how all prayers and aspirations of God-seekers reach your ears and get response from you.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why my ears? Ears are not necessary for the purpose. You might just as well say, reaches me by the post.—

It is not the Divine Rule on earth that I am after, but the supramental rule.

MYSELF: Why it should stupefy me? Good Lord! Have you forgotten how Arjuna was stupefied by Krishna's Vishwarupa? No, Sir, for me Sri Aurobindo alone—pure and simple.

III

SRI AUROBINDO ON THE WORKING OF HIS OWN FORCE

(1) The Nature of the Force

A report of a discussion—A sadhak gets cured by Sri Aurobindo's Force—"What is Sri Aurobindo's Force?"—On Śūnyam—Development through Yoga.

6-2-1935

My letter to Sri Aurobindo:

"Yesterday X and I had a discussion about the action of your Force. Try as I would, I could not convince him of its reality. Let me put before you the discussion in dialogue form as it actually took place.

X: I just can't believe that D was cured by Sri Aurobindo's Force, unless I hear to this effect from Sri Aurobindo himself.

MYSELF: But the facts and figures are there; they show quite clearly that something utterly miraculous happened,—an abdominal abscess being cured without any material intervention, —symptoms subsiding, the temperature coming down from 103 degree to 102, and then dropping to 99. As a doctor, I think I am in a position to judge these things.

X: May be all this happened, but how do you know it was Sri Aurobindo's Force that brought about this sudden change?

MYSELF: Everybody knows here that Sri Aurobindo's Force is constantly acting on us with a tremendous power. Almost all of us have experienced it some time or other. D was brought here under the Mother's instructions even though his condition was precarious; now, as he is also a sadhak like us, he will naturally be subjected to Sri Aurobindo's Force; so it seems

quite obvious to me that he had been cured by this Force just as others have been. What other blessed force could have acted upon him, and if some force did act, why not the Force under which we are living and which is all the time animating us?

X: If that is so, what about the instances where the Divine Force has failed, and why does it succeed in some cases and not in others?"

Sri Aurobindo made the following marginal comment on this first part of my letter:

"The mistake is to think that it 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*[1] 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."

My letter, describing the discussion with X, continued:

"MYSELF: I don't see how you can deny the reality of this Force. Were you able to write with such vigour before you came here?

X: Yes, I could work a lot. Surely that was not Sri Aurobindo's force! And what about world figures like Y and Z,

[1] "Let it be so."

and the giants who sway men—is that also the Divine Force?

The discussion went on in this vein. Kindly throw some light on the matter."

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

"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 move-

ment 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."

MYSELF: Your letter has given us quite a new and interesting point to think about. Our idea was that the Divine is always omnipotent, independent of all conditions and not limited by the particular plane from which He acts. But you give so many causes under which the Force can operate successfully! K then seems to be right when he says that if one has not got a particular possibility in him the Divine cannot make him develop in that direction. Pushing this a little farther, I would say that one must have a talent or capacity as a nucleus in him for the spiritual development he is going to have later. One *must* have it, the Divine cannot make anything out of Shunyam. (Void)

SRI AUROBINDO: What is Shunyam? It is out of the Silence that all things originated. All is contained in what you call Shunyam.

MYSELF (continuing): But I may be wrong. It again seems possible that the Divine can do these things—even change an atom into a mountain. If He does not, He has reasons of His own for not doing it. But then how is it that you spent so much Force on Z. but to no avail? Is it that you did not use the supramental Force, which alone can work irresistibly without the necessity of adapting itself to existing conditions?

SRI AUROBINDO: Certainly, Supramental Force was not the force used in that case, it was mental-spiritual. In such cases the object of the Force has always the right to say No. I put the force on him because he said he wanted to change, but his vital refused as it had the right to do. If nothing in him had asked for the change, I would not have tried it, but simply put another force on him for another purpose.

MYSELF: There may be conditions and qualifications for the success of the Divine Force, but is it not also true that the Divine can rise above all conditions and act, and get a thing done

if He wants to? You make a distinction between the Yogic force and the Divine Force; but is not the former an outcome of the latter?

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course, but all force is the Divine Force. It is only the egoism of the individual which takes it as his own. He uses it, but it is not his own.

MYSELF: Coming back to the cure you effected in D by your Force, X says that it might have been due to a combination of unseen factors—not due to your Force.

SRI AUROBINDO: How does he know? Why can't my poor force be there among the invisibles, since invisibles there are? If only visibles were admitted, then of course—

In that case all the trouble I took for D was sheer waste of energy, hallucination and chimera. Hallucination is also the fact that D's improvement agreed exactly with the thought I put out in the force? Well, it may be so. Modern science says there is no such thing as cause and effect, only conditions and statistics. But what are these unseen factors? (The Doctor at any rate thought it miraculous. And what about the hundreds of cases of healing by suggestion or other mental forces everywhere?)

MYSELF: By the way, X did not question the reality of your Force for his poetry or other literary activities, but he said he could not admit that all his activities were through and through permeated by your Force, because he used to work with great vigour and energy even before he came here. Does this imply that if one had great energy previously, it would operate in the same way when one took to the spiritual life, and the conditions changed?

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course not—all the activities cannot be that. It is only in the Yogic realisation that one feels all one's activities to be from the one source—something from above or the Yogashakti or the Guru Shakti or the Cosmic Force or whatever it may be (all names for the same thing in different formations) driving the whole consciousness and being. What is one's own energy after all? You mean Nature's energy in you? It may in new conditions remain extant in some things,

develop in others, fail or change in others. One can't make a rule.

I put a P.S. : After the 'preface,' is any chapter likely to follow, or is it going to be like so many other prefaces—nothing coming after them?

This letter brought forth a very interesting reply, making him speak about his own sadhana:

"Perhaps in some weeks or some months or some centuries the chapter may follow! But 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."

(2) The Development of Faculties and The Problem of Avatarhood

(i)

Sri Aurobindo's sadhana not a miracle outside the laws of Nature—The Compiler's problem about the development of latent faculties—On the Divine Omnipotence—A discussion about the Compiler's problem—A point regarding the Avatars.

9-2-1935

MYSELF: We are a little puzzled when you give your own example to prove your arguments and defend your views, because that really proves nothing. I need not explain why —what Avatars can achieve is not possible for ordinary mortals like us to achieve. So when you say that you had a sudden 'opening' in the appreciation and understanding of painting, or that you freed your mind from all thoughts in three days, or transformed your nature, it is very poor consolation for us. Then again, when you state that you developed something that was not originally there in your nature, can it not be said that it was already there in your *divya aṁśa*?[1]

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know what you mean. 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.

MYSELF (continuing): There are many who admit that faculties which are latent can be developed, but they maintain that things which are not there in latency cannot be made manifest. My belief is that even that can be done. The Divine is every-

[1] The divine part of your nature.

where, and wherever He is, there everything exists. Still,—I don't think that I could be turned into, say, an artist or a musician!

SRI AUROBINDO: How do you know that you can't?

MYSELF: As for your statement: "All is possible, but all is not licit—except by a recognisable process....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", people say that there is no point in saying this, because it is no use knowing that a thing can be done when it is not licit, and is therefore not done.

Sri Aurobindo made the following brief marginal comment on this remark but gave a longer answer to it at the end of the letter:

"You had said it can't be done or somebody had said it."

MYSELF (continuing): About your changing 'cowards into heroes', they put forward the same 'latency theory'.

Sri Aurobindo's comment: How do they prove their theory —when they don't know what is or is not latent? In such conditions the theory can neither be proved nor refuted. To say 'O, it was latent' when a thing apparently impossible is done, is a mere *post factum* explanation which amounts to an evasion of the difficulty.

MYSELF: They state very strongly that a servant of the Ashram like Muthu, for example, cannot be changed into a Ramakrishna, or a Yogi for that matter, even by the Divine.

SRI AUROBINDO: If he were, they would say, "O, it was latent in him."

MYSELF: Another point, one can't say categorically and absolutely that the Divine is omnipotent, because there are different planes from which He works. It is when He acts from the Supramental level that his Power is omnipotent. The fact that X was not changed by the mental-spiritual force put on him proves that.

In answer to the first part of the question Sri Aurobindo wrote: "If the Divine were not in essence omnipotent, he could not be omnipotent anywhere—whether in the Supramental or

anywhere else. Because He chooses to limit or determine his action by conditions, it does not make him less omnipotent. His self-limitation is itself an act of omnipotence."

To the second part of the question he replied: "It does not prove it for a minute. It simply means that the omnipotent unconditioned Supramental force was not put out there—any more than it was when Christ was put on the cross or when after healing thousands he failed to heal in a certain district (I forget the name) because people had no faith (faith being one of the conditions imposed for his working) or when Krishna after fighting eighteen battles with Jarasanda failed to prevail against him and had to run away from Mathura. Why should the Divine be tied down to succeed in all His operations? What if failure suits him better and serves better the ultimate purpose? What if the gentleman in question had to be given his chance as Duryodhan was given his chance when Krishna went to him as ambassador in a last effort to avoid the massacre of Kurukshetra? What rigid primitive notions are these about the Divine! And what about my explanation of how the Divine acts through the Avatar? It seems all to have gone into water.

By the way, about the ass becoming an elephant—what I meant to say was that the only reason why it can't be done is because there is no recognisable process for it. But if a process can be discovered whether by a scientist (let us say transformation or redistribution of the said ass's atoms or molecules or what not) or by an occultist or by a Yogi, then there is no reason why it should not be done. In other words certain conditions have been established for the game and so long as those conditions remain unchanged certain things are not done—so we say that they are impossible, can't be done. If the conditions are changed then the same things are done or at least become licit—allowable, legal according to the so-called laws of Nature and then we say they can be done. The Divine also acts according to the conditions of the game. He may change them, but he has to change them first, not proceed, while maintaining the conditions, to act by a series of miracles."

10-2-1935

MYSELF: You say that since 'these things' have been possible in you, they are possible in the earth-consciousness. Quite true; but have they been done? Has any sweeper or street-begger been changed into a Buddha or a Chaitanya by the Divine? We see in the whole history of spirituality only one Christ, one Buddha, one Krishna, one Sri Aurobindo and one Mother. Has there been any breaking of this rule? Since it has not been done, it can't be done.

SRI AUROBINDO: What a wonderful argument! Since it has not been done, it can't be done! At that rate the whole history of the earth must have stopped long before the protoplasm. When it was a mass of gases, no life had been born, *ergo*, life could not be born—when only life was there, mind was not born, so mind could not be born. Since mind is there but nothing beyond, as there is no Supermind manifested in anybody, so Supermind can never be born. *Sobhanallāh!* Glory, Glory, Glory to the human reason! Luckily the Divine or the Cosmic Spirit or Nature or whatever is there cares a damn for the human reason. He or She or It does what He or She or It has to do, whether it can or can't be done.

The question was not whether it had been done but whether it could be done. The street-beggar is a side-issue. 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.

MYSELF: Kindly excuse the impudence of the next question; it has been hovering at the back of my mind for some time. Can a Muthu or a sadhak be ever a Sri Aurobindo, even if he is supramentalised! I say that it is absolutely impossible.

SRI AUROBINDO: What need has he to be a Sri Aurobindo? He can be a supramentalised Muthu! This part of your argument is perfectly correct—but it is also perfectly irrelevant.

MYSELF: And how can it be otherwise? You are looked upon by us here, and even by many outside, as a full Incarnation of the Divine. The sadhaks here at best are misty sparks of the Divine. I cannot by any empyrean flight of imagination conceive of this possibility even for a second.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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?

MYSELF: Can anybody become Sri Aurobindo or Mother?

SRI AUROBINDO: Certainly not, it is not intended and I never said that he could as a practical matter.

MYSELF: All this is really too much for me. Please give a more direct answer—is it possible or not? Can a Muthu be changed into a being as great as an Avatar? If he can be, I have nothing further to say; if not, there is a limit to the omnipo-

tence of the Divine. It is for this reason that I said that your own example doesn't prove much.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not at all; you are always making the same elementary baby stumble. It is not because the Divine cannot manifest his greatness anywhere, but because it is not in the conditions of the game, because he has chosen to manifest his centrality in a particular line that it is practically impossible.

MYSELF: Next point; it is hoped that the sadhaks will be supramentalised. Since it is a state surpassing the Overmind, am I to deduce that the sadhaks would be greater than Krishna, who was the Avatar of the Overmind level. Logically it follows; but looking at others and at myself, I wonder if such a theory will be practically realised. Past history does not seem to prove it. In Krishna's time, no disciple of his was a greater spiritual figure than the preceding Avatar Rama, even though Krishna was an Avatar of a higher plane.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is all this obsession of greater or less? In the Yoga we do not strive after greatness. It is not a question of Sri Krishna's disciples but of the earth-consciousness. Rama was a mental man, there is no touch of the Overmind consciousness (direct) in anything he said or did, but what he did was done with the greatness of the Avatar. But there have since been men who did live in touch with the planes above mind—higher mind, illumined mind, intuition. There is no question of asking whether they were "greater" than Rama; they might have been less "great", but they were able to live from a new plane of consciousness. And Krishna's opening the Overmind certainly made it possible for the attempt at bringing Supermind to the earth to be made.

MYSELF: I would not mind your fury in revenge if only you would crush me with a convincing assault. I hope to close the chapter on 'Divine Omnipotence' with this last letter, but you keep me hoping with that promise of yours to write at length some day—

This remark brought forth a magnificent reply, written in the half-humorous half-serious style he often adopted with me:

" 'Peace, peace, O fiery furious spirit—Calm thyself and be

at rest'. Your fury or furiousness is wasted because your point is perfectly irrelevant to the central question on which all this breath (or rather ink) is being spent. Muthu and the sadhaks who want to equal or distance or replace the Mother and myself —there have been several—have appeared only as meaningless foam and froth on the excited crest of the dispute. I fear you have not grasped the internalities and modalities and causalities of my high and subtle reasoning. It is not surprising as you are down down in the troughs of the rigidly logically illogical human reason while I am floating in the heights and the infinite plasticities of the Overmind and the lightning-like subtleties and swiftnesses of the Intuition. There! What do you think of that? However!!

More seriously, I have not stated that any Muthu has equalled Ramakrishna and I quite admit that Muthu here *in ipsa persona* has no chance of performing that feat. I have not said that anyone here can be Sri Aurobindo or the Mother—I have pointed out what I meant when I objected to your explaining away my sadhana as a perfectly useless piece of Avatarian fireworks. So in my comment on the Muthu logic I simply pointed out that it was bad logic—that some one quite ignorant and low in the social scale can manifest a great spirituality and a great spiritual knowledge. I hope you are not bourgeois enough to deny that or to contend that the Divine or the spiritual can only manifest in somebody who has some money in his pocket and some University education in his pate! For the rest—I have myself been pointing out all the time there is a difference between essential truth and conditional truth, *paramārtha* and *vyavahārika*, the latter being relative and conditional and mutable. In Mathematics one works out problems in infinite and in unreal numbers which exist nowhere on earth and yet these are very important and can help scientific reasoning and scientific discovery and achievement. The question of a Muthu becoming a Ramakrishna or a great spiritual man may look to you like being an exercise in unreal numbers or magnitudes because it exceeds the actual observable facts in the case of this Muthu who very evidently is not going to be a great spiritual

man—but we are arguing the matter of essential principle. 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.

About greater and less, one point. Is Captain John Higgins of S.S. Mauretania a greater man than Christopher Columbus because he can reach America without trouble in a few days? Is a University graduate in philosophy greater than Plato because he can reason about problems and systems which had never even occurred to Plato? No, only humanity has acquired greater scientific power which any good navigator can use or a wider intellectual knowledge which anyone with a philosophic training can use. You will say greater scientific power and wider knowledge is not a change of consciousness. Very well, but

there are Rama and Ramakrishna. Rama spoke always from the thinking intelligence, the common property of developed men; Ramakrishna constantly from a swift and luminous spiritual intuition. Can you tell me which is the greater? The Avatar recognised by all India? Or the saint and Yogi recognised as an Avatar only by his disciples and some others who follow them?"

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MYSELF: How is it that later Avatars often find fault with the actions and movements of their predecessors? Avatars are supposed to be infallible!

SRI AUROBINDO: Who finds fault with whom? I have not found fault with any Avatar. To discern what they expressed and what they did not express, is not to find fault. What is infallible? I invite your attention again to Rama and the Golden Deer. The Avatar need have no theoretical "Knowledge" from above—he acts and thinks whatever the Divine within him intends that he should act and think for the work. Was everything that Ramakrishna said or thought infallible?

Myself: Are you suggesting that what an Avatar does, he does absolutely consciously? If he follows a golden deer, he knows that it is a golden deer?

SRI AUROBINDO: No—I did not suggest that. I suggested that if it is necessary to veil his consciousness so that the work may be done, the Avatar does it or rather the Divine in the Avatar does it. The other also is quite possible. Krishna could have killed Jarasandha as he did Kansa; why did he not do it instead of fighting eighteen unprofitable battles, running away to Dwarka, and then getting J. killed by others?

(ii)

Some pointers to the Compiler regarding his bad logic—The problem of latent faculties taken up again—On the Omnipotence of the Divine—Sri Aurobindo's own development of consequence to others—On Avatarhood.

11-2-1935

MYSELF: I would like to know something about my "bad logic" before I write anything further to you.

SRI AUROBINDO: Helps to finding out your bad logic.

I give instances expressed or implied in your reasonings.

Bad logic No. 1. Because things have not been, therefore they can never be.

No. 2. Because Sri Aurobindo is an Avatar, his sadhana can have no meaning for humanity.

No. 3. What happens in Sri Aurobindo's sadhana cannot happen in anybody else's sadhana (i.e. neither descent nor realisation, nor transformation, nor intuitions, nor budding of new powers or faculties)—because Sri Aurobindo is an Avatar and the sadhaks are not.

No. 4. A street beggar cannot have any spirituality or at least not so much as, let us say, a University graduate—because; well, one doesn't know why the hell not.

No. 5. (and last because of want of space). Because I am a doctor I can't see a joke when it is there.

(The last remark was in reference to something that had passed between us about my seriousness).

13-2-1935

MYSELF: (continuing the discussion of the 10th): Excuse me—I did not say that a street beggar or a proletarian can't manifest a great spirituality; I know that there have been cases where fishermen, barbers and robbers have been transformed into spiritual men by the touch of saints, prophets and Avatars. So I don't deny the action and the effectiveness of the Divine Power.

Sri Aurobindo's marginal comment: Then why bring in the poor street beggar at all?

MYSELF (continuing): But others say—and it was the central question—that wherever the Divine Power has successfully acted upon and miraculously changed those who were in their external nature robbers and social pariahs, there was probably in them, interiorly, something latent. And they say—excuse my reiteration—that from those who have evidently no music or poetry latent in them the Divine cannot bring out these elements, in spite of His omnipotence.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is the use of this argument based on a "probably"? You say that in one in whom poetry and music are not *evident*, the omnipotent Divine is impotent to create poetry and music. Yet in one in whom virtue and sainthood is not *evident* at all, criminals, debauchees etc., he can produce sainthood and virtue. When it appears, it is supposed to have been "probably" latent. But why can't poetry and music also be "probably" latent even when they are not evident? To say that only moral capacities are latent and mental capacities cannot be, is a sheer absurdity. There are plenty of examples of particular mental capacities manifesting in men who had them not before. A man makes one magnificent speech in his life, writes one or two splendid poems—all the rest is either silence or twaddle. The eye dull to beauty of painting becomes aware of line and colour; the man who was "no good" at logic or philosophy can develop into a logician or a philosopher. When he was no good these capacities were not evident,—they become evident only when they appear.

Moreover, what is meant by "latency"—where do these things lie in their latency? If you say in the surface mind, show me how their secret existence can be discovered while they are still latent. Otherwise, how can we affirm an undiscoverable latency? If you say it is in the subliminal, I answer that the subliminal is the inner being which is open to the universal and plastic to it. All things exist in the universal, so it is impossible to say what will or will not manifest in the inner being, once the universal acts on it.

If the Divine is omnipotent, he can do it. If he can't do it, he is not omnipotent. What is this absurd self-contradiction of an Omnipotent who is impotent? If the Divine does not, it is because he does not choose to for some reason or another and I have tried to explain to you how the thing works—it is because he conditions his own working to suit his own self-made law and purpose.

MYSELF: When I argue with these people I say that may be these things are latent, but even if they are not, the Divine *can* make them manifest if He chooses to. "Then you mean to say", they reply, "that a Muthu can be metamorphosed into a saint or an Avatar? A very big jump indeed!" I tell them, "Leave out the Avatars; they are perilous examples. But a Muthu can surely be turned into a great spiritual man by the omnipotent Divine; that is quite possible." Then these people answer, "Yes, may be it is possible, but we are in no way wiser for it, because it is not done".

Now we don't know what is latent and what is not latent, but great Yogis and Avatars do; so we request you to tell us what is meant by *mūkam karoti vācālam*, and whether the Divine can sow a seed in a barren, unproductive plot of land and reap the harvest of music, poetry and spirituality out of it, or whether He brings these things out from seeds which are already there in the soil—latent?

SRI AUROBINDO: It [*mūkam karoti vācālam*] means exactly what it says—that a man in whom there was no evident capacity can suddenly or rapidly manifest that capacity by the Divine Grace. Indeed such things happen even without the direct intervention of the Divine Grace—so *a fortiori* the Grace can do it. He can make barren, unproductive land productive and fertile. Even a man can do that, say, Mussolini or the Japanese agriculturist. Seeds are thrown into the soil—they don't lie there for a thousand years and then sprout. But first make clear what is meant by the soil? The surface man? The subliminal man? In every human being there are these two and if you can say something about the first, how much can you say about the other?

MYSELF: The examples of an unlettered Ramakrishna or a St. Peter and others do not prove much; one may say that big spiritual figures can and do take birth in humble social disguises. When all is said and done, the "latent" theory cannot be entirely waved aside. It seems that the Divine too normally follows the path of least resistance—I mean he brings out generally those tendencies and capacities that one is born with, that is, things that are latent.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a mere word—this "latent". It is like the materialist's "coincidence" and "hallucination" to explain away the appearance of the supernormal. At least it is so unless you define its action and modalities. Certainly, it is the usual case. But the usual is not the limit of the possible.

MYSELF: Now, about your personal example. You speak of the evolution theory to prove that "it can be done", though the domain I touched upon was only the spiritual. If the scientists say that man has not been able to create living things up to now, and therefore he will not be able to do so in the future—that "it can't be done", what will be your answer? And if similarly, I say that a Tom, Dick or Harry cannot be a Rama, Krishna or Sri Aurobindo, what reply will you give?

SRI AUROBINDO: I have brought in the evolution theory or rather fact of evolution to disprove your argument that because a thing has not been done, it is thereby proved that it could not be done. I don't understand your argument. If a scientist says that, he is using bad logic.—I have never said it can't be done as I dare say some day in the right conditions the creation of life will become possible.

They may not be Rama or Krishna or Sri Aurobindo but they may become spiritualised super-Tom, super-Dick, super-Harry. I have answered about the Avatar.

MYSELF: I have never said that you are only a big human person. On the contrary, you are not, and hence nobody can be like you. Nevertheless, I don't quite follow what you mean when you state that whatever you achieve is possible for humanity to achieve, your attainments opening the way for others to follow.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is singular that you cannot understand such a simple thing. 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.

MYSELF: I should say that Avatars are like well-fitted, well-equipped Rolls Royce machines; they do have plenty of difficulties on their journey, but just because they are like Rolls Royce they can surmount them—whilst the rest of humanity is like either loose and disjointed machines or wagons to be dragged along by Avatars and great spiritual personages. Floating on the heights of the Overmind, you have overlooked what this earth-bound clod crawling over low plateaus has meant.

SRI AUROBINDO: All sufficient to themselves—perfect and complete from the beginning, hey? Just roll, royce and ripple. Great Scott! What a penal servitude for the great personages and the Avatars! And where are they leading them? All that rubbish into Paradise? How is that more possible than creating a capacity where there is none! If the disjointed machines cannot be jointed, isn't it more economical to leave them where they are in the lumber-shed?—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.

You may not have mentioned it but it was implied in it without your knowing that it was implied. Logic has its own consequences which are not apparent to the logician. It is like a move in chess by which you intend to overcome the opponent but it leads, logically, to consequences which you didn't intend and ends in your own checkmate. You can't invalidate the consequences by saying that you didn't intend them.

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.

As for the Muthu affair, that was only a joke as ought to have been clear to you at once. Nobody has any intention of making Muthu a saint or an Avatar. But that is only because the Divine is not going to play the fool, not because he is impotent; Muthu's only business in life is to prepare himelf for something hereafter and exhaust some of his lowest tendencies in the meantime. That is not the question—the question is whether as a general rule rigid and unalterable man is bound down to his outward nature as it appears to be built at the moment and the Divine cannot or will not under any circumstances change it or develop something new in it, something not yet "evident", not yet manifested, or is there a chance for human beings be-

coming more like the Divine?[1] If not, there is no use in anybody doing this Yoga; let the Krishnas and Ramakrishnas rocket about gloriously and uselessly in the empty Inane and the rest wriggle about for ever in the clutch of the eternal Devil. For that is the logical conclusion of the whole matter.

(iii)

The discussion on Avatarhood continues—In the Gita not the full statement of the issue—On the evident and the latent.

14-2-1935

MYSELF: It seems that before I could come out of the pit of 'latency', the Avatar pyramid has fallen on my head, sending me down to the bottom again. But, I am afraid, you are making me admit something I never wrote, nor implied in what I wrote. However, I shall consult your *Essays on the Gita* to see what you say about the Avatar.

SRI AUROBINDO: Can you not understand that it was the natural logical result of the statements made on either side about the unbridgeable distance between "Man Divine" and the human being moving in the darkness towards the Divine? If you admit the utility of my sadhana the controversy ceases. But so long as you declare that what I have done in my sadhana has no connection with what can be done, I shall go on beating you. (What the Avatar says in the "Essays" is only an explanation of the Gita; it is not the full statement of the issue). But still if you read three or four chapters there you will get some idea of the general principles. For the rest I propose that all discussion be postponed till after the 21st (not immediately after). This will give time for you to clear your ideas and for me to pursue my "Avataric" sadhana (not for myself, but for this confounded and too confounded earth race.)

[1] Sadrishya mukti, swadharmyam agatah.

15-2-1935

MYSELF: I accept your proposal of postponement and send this last letter, which incidentally brings to an end the topic of latency and omnipotence. We shall all be anxiously waiting to hear what you have gained in two weeks for "this confounded earth race" for which you always seem to have such great love. (Please don't forget this confounded little earth creature).

Now, I would like to mention one thing more. Sometimes I think that the Avatar's work,—Buddha's sadhana, Christ's preaching about the Kingdom of Heaven etc.—were not so unselfish. I don't mean that they did anything for personal gain; nevertheless, wasn't it a kind of selfishness—let us say of the noblest kind?

Sri Aurobindo made the following marginal comment: "No objection—if to do things for the Divine in the world rather than for individual gain is a high selfishness, that is all right. Only selfishness usually means doing something for one's sole profit.

MYSELF (considerably subdued after the beating I had received): I am beginning to understand what you say about omnipotence, the conditions of the game that have to be observed, latency etc. This letter is not to dispute any of the things you have stated but just to express that I am boiling inside with impotent rage to see how you have "unfairly" cornered me with the very arguments I was maintaining all the while. Alas! my pen derives its power only from terrestrial planes!

SRI AUROBINDO: You were the reporter of the discussion; so naturally you had to be the whipping boy for all sides. You can't complain of that. There must be somebody to tilt at—otherwise how the deuce is the argument to be done?

MYSELF (continuing): I have, however, jotted down a few points for you to see.

Point No. 1. I never said that only moral capacities can be latent, and not mental.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, but it was implied in the argument to which you gave voice. It may not have been your argument, but what does it matter?

MYSELF: Point No. 2. I did not say that poetry or music, or any art not evident, cannot be manifested. I distinctly used the word *latent*, and not evident.

SRI AUROBINDO: Evident is the opposite of latent; so "not evident" or "evidently not there" as you put it is equal to "latent"—my use of the word is therefore perfectly apposite.

MYSELF: Our point was that faculties not yet evident may be made evident because they may be unmanifest, latent, in some inner region of the being; just as in Shunyam everything exists, so also in man—whatever comes out of him. (The whole discussion collapses if we deny that the unevident can be made evident).

Sri Aurobindo's comment on the first part of the sentence was: "How can they be evident when they are latent? 'Latent' means 'hidden', therefore not evident.—When you say that a capacity is not there, you mean only that to all evidence it is not there; there is no evidence of its being there to the observer; *ergo*, the observer concludes that it is not there. All that you can really say is that it *appears* to be non-existent. You cannot say with certitude more than that.

"You said 'people who evidently had no music in them'—that can only mean people in whom music is not evident—for none can say whether it is or is not there latent."

Regarding the second part of my statement, where I spoke about the discussion collapsing, he wrote: "It does so also if you admit that the unevident can be made evident."

MYSELF: By latency we mean what is not evident, that is, not on the surface, but somewhere behind or below. If it is in the surface mind, it is no longer latent, because one can say with some certitude that such faculties exist, though not quite developed yet—that is, neither latent nor fully evident.

SRI AUROBINDO: Evidently not there on the surface, but how can you say that it is evidently not there below?

MYSELF: You say, if I understand you right, that since the inner being is open to the universal, anything can manifest through it even if it is not there latent; you further add that it is impossible to say what will or will not manifest once the uni-

versal acts upon it. But is this impossible for Yogis also? For example, can't you say whether a man has a capacity for Yoga or for something else? Do you simply gamble when you accept someone?

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

MYSELF: You have raised another new point about the universal.

SRI AUROBINDO: These are not new points; they are as old as the hills.

MYSELF: "You can cut me, Sir, or beat me, but don't forsake me." (In imitation of the librarian of my College who came out with a similar appeal when the professor of English caught him smoking one day).

SRI AUROBINDO: Never! But beat—a lot.

MYSELF: I repeat—a little pathetically—that my brain is sclerotic and psychic smoky; no intellect and no Yogic capacity, as you yourself must have realised by now.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, to see that they are non-evident shows you at once that they are latent and will be evident and even if they are not latent they are waiting for you in the universal. So in every blessed way you are very quite all right. Be consoled therefore.

MYSELF: Rather a long letter, because a closing one. When will these two weeks be over! Give me a little extra force for doing something, just to keep me out of mischief—an idle brain

is the devil's workshop. Who knows what I'll be up to!

SRI AUROBINDO: Man, don't talk lightly like that of the devil. He is too active to be trifled with in that way.

(iv)

The untenable consequences of the Compiler's logic—Further discussion on Avatarhood—Divinity and humanity—Sri Aurobindo not interested in the personal question but in the general one.

8-3-1935

MYSELF: I hasten to write this letter so that you may revise your opinion about my logic.

SRI AUROBINDO: You have won all along the line; who could resist such a lava-torrent of logic? Slightly mixed but still! You have convinced me (1) that there never was nor could be an Avatar, (2) that all the so-called Avatars were chimerical fools and failures, (3) that there is no Divinity or divine element in man, (4) that I have never had any true difficulties or struggles, and that if I had any it was all my fun (as K.S. said of my new metres that they were only Mr. Ghose's fun), (5) that if ever there was or will be a real Avatar, I am not he..., (6) that all I have done or the Mother has done is mere sham sufferings, struggles, conquests, defeats, the Way found, the Way followed, the call to others to follow, everything—it was all make-believe since I was the Divine and nothing could touch me and none follow me. That is truly a discovery, a downright knock-out which leaves me convinced, convicted, amazed, gasping. I won't go on, there is no space; but there are a score of other luminous convictions that your logic has forced on me. But what to do next? You have put me in a terrible fix and I see no way out of it. For if the Way, the Yoga is merely sham fun and chimera—then?

MYSELF: You seem to attribute to me things which I never said, or is it my clumsy way of putting things? Probably that.

But even then, you have put into my mouth exactly the opposite of what I have been trying to say. For instance—when did I say that you are not an Avatar? On the contrary I wrote to you that you *are* an Avatar.

SRI AUROBINDO: You don't say, but if your theory or description of an Avatar is right, I am not one. I am proceeding on the necessary consequences of your logic.

MYSELF: When did I say that you or Mother had no difficulties or struggles? Did I not write that the Avatar accepts all terrestrial conditions, etc.? However, I did say that the difficulties and struggles are all shams, that is, not as real as our difficulties.

SRI AUROBINDO: If they are shams, they have no value for others or for any true effect. If they have no value for others or for any true effect, they are perfectly irrational and unreal and meaningless. The Divine does not need to suffer, or struggle for himself; if he takes on these things it is in order to bear the world-burden and help the world and men; and if the sufferings and struggles are to be of any help, they must be real. A sham or falsehood cannot help. They must be as real as the struggles and sufferings of men themselves—the Divine bears them and at the same time shows the way out of them. Otherwise his assumption of human nature has no meaning and no utility and no value. It is strange that you cannot understand or refuse to admit so simple and crucial a point. What is the use of admitting Avatarhood if you take all the meaning out of it?

MYSELF: I don't think I said that there is no divinity in man. In the quotation I gave from the Gita it is said that man is made out of the divine substance but has a thick coating on him.

SRI AUROBINDO: If your argument is that the life, actions, struggles of the Avatar (*e.g.* Rama's, Krishna's) are unreal because the Divine is there and knows it is all a Maya, in man also there is a self, a spirit that is immortal, untouched, divine; you can say that man's sufferings and ignorance are only put on, sham, unreal. But if man feels them as real and if the Avatar feels his work and the difficulties to be serious and real?

If the existence of the Divinity is of no practical effect, what

is the use of a theoretical admission? The manifestation of the Divine in the Avatar is of help to man because it helps him to discover his own divinity, find the way to realise it. If the difference is so great that the humanity by its very nature prevents all possibility of following the way opened by the Avatar, it merely means that there is no divinity in man that can respond to the divinity in the Avatar.

You make a flourish of reasonings and do not see the consequence of your reasonings. It is no use saying "I believe this or that" and then reasoning in a way which leads logically to the very negation of what you believe.

MYSELF: Also, I find that some important points on which my whole case stands and without which my "fury" has no meaning, have been left out by you. I admitted that Avatars have many difficulties, but because they know, as Mother did, that they are Avatars, because the "real substance" shines through the alloy in all that they do, they have a fixed faith and conviction that they will never fail. Now take the case of man; he has usually no such conviction because of the blessed "coating." So he groans and writhes in agony, doubt and despair. How many times in the midst of struggles have I not said to myself that Yoga is beyond my capacities! Now, if I knew for certain that I was an extraordinary being, say an Avatar, I would not despair. This is why I said that the difficulties of Avatars are not real, but shams—not that they have no sting in them, but that the luminous consciousness bears them easily and goes on in spite of them.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

MYSELF (continuing): Regarding the divinity in man—what is the use of this divinity if it is coated layer after layer with Maya? How many can really become conscious of it?

SRI AUROBINDO: Exactly! Why admit any divinity then at all, if humanity is an insuperable bar to any following in the way pointed out by the Avatar? That was your contention that humanity and divinity are unbridgeably opposite things, that it is no use the Avatar asking others (except Arjuna) to follow in his Path—they being human cannot do it.

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.

(3) The Action of his Force in a Medical Case

MYSELF: I was under the impression that it is quite possible to know intuitively the exact condition of a patient without any error in the diagnosis, but from your recent remarks about some patients I find that it is not so. On the contrary you say that the Force can act better and quicker when we give you a proper diagnosis. But what is the use of our doing so when you have the inner Yogic vision, which is much more powerful than our mortal optical faculties?

SRI AUROBINDO: It can if you train it to act in that field and if you can make it the real Intuition which sees the things without ranging among potentialities. 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 quiescence 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 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 things also.

MYSELF: I hope it is not "again expectation of miracles."

SRI AUROBINDO: I am afraid it is.

MYSELF: But if Yogic vision and knowledge can at once see a man through and through, his past, present, and future, why can it not see this?

SRI AUROBINDO: To see what is in a man is quite a different matter—it is the direct sphere of Yogic vision. As for all past, present, future, one does not see that at a glance, one comes to know little by little if one has a special faculty and cares to use it. These things are not miracles, they are forces and faculties like others....The supramental is for physical things the only "dead cert."

MYSELF: But why should you have any latent medico in you to diagnose diseases? You have the direct intuition.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? I can begin to write poetry only if I have a poet either latent or suddenly introduced into me. I can lay down the law to Einstein only if I have a scientist similarly lodged inside.

Against the second part of my question he wrote;

"I have not—not just now at any rate. I am too busy handling the confounded difficulties of Matter. The material is subconscious and I would have to be subconscious myself to get its true intuition. I prefer to wait for the supramental."

IV

SRI AUROBINDO ON ESTABLISHING THE SUPERMIND ON EARTH

(1) The Descent of the Overmind —The Significance of 24th November, 1926

24th November, 1926—The Descent of the Divine in the material —Knowing the truth of the Supermind, and becoming thoroughly supramentalised.

29-8-1935

MYSELF: Today I shall request you to "stand and deliver" on a different subject.—What is exactly the significance of the day of your Siddhi? Different people have different ideas about it. Some say that the Avatar of the Supermind descended in you!

SRI AUROBINDO: Rubbish! Whose imagination was that?

MYSELF: Others say that you were through and through overmentalised.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, it is not quite the truth but nearer to the mark.

MYSELF: I myself understood that on that day you achieved the Supermind.

SRI AUROBINDO: There was never any mention of that from our side.

MYSELF: Some people, I think, declared at that time that you had conquered sleep, food, disease etc. Was there any truth in that statement?

SRI AUROBINDO: I am not aware of this gorgeous proclamation. What was said was that the Divine (Krishna or the Divine Presence or whatever you like) had come down into the mate-

rial. It was also proclaimed that I was retiring—obviously to work things out. If all that was achieved on November 24, 1926, what on earth remained to work out, and if the Supramental was there, for what blazing purpose did I need to retire? Besides, are these things achieved in a single day?

MYSELF: If you did not achieve the Supermind at that time, how was it possible for you to talk about it or know anything about it?

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, I am hanged. You can't know anything about anything before you have achieved it? Because I have seen it and am in contact with it, O logical baby that you are! But achieving it is another business.

Good Lord! And what do these people think I meant when I was saying persistently that I was trying to get the Supermind down into the material? If I had achieved it on Nov. 24th, 1926, it would have been there already for the last nine years, isn't it?

But really what a logic! One must become thoroughly supramental first (achieve supermind) and then only one can begin to know something about supermind? Well! However if I have time one day, I will deliver—for evidently with such ideas about, an *éclaircissement* is highly advisable.

MYSELF: You say that it was something like the descent of Krishna in the material.—Some say that the descent took place in you. But you are not matter, are you?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? Why can't I be matter? Or represent it at least? At least you will admit that I have got some matter in me and you will hardly deny that the matter in me is connected or even continuous (in spite of the Quantum theory) with matter in general? Well, if Krishna or the Overmind or something equivalent descended into my matter with an inevitable extension into connected general Matter, what is the lack of clarity in the statement of a descent into the material? What does logic say?

MYSELF: By your "trying to bring down the Supermind", we understand that the ascent is done and now the descent has to be made. Something like one going up to you at Darshan

and getting all the bliss, joy etc. and trying to bring it down and not lose it as soon as one steps out. And what is this again? You say you are in contact with it and then again that you are very near the tail of it, sounds queer! Contact and no contact?

SRI AUROBINDO: But, supposing I reached supermind in that way, then under such conditions would it be possible that I should come down again at the risk of losing it? Do you realise that I went upstairs and have not come down again? So it was better to be in contact with it until I had made the path clear between S and M. As for the tail, can't you approach the tail of an animal without achieving the animal? I am in the physical, in matter—there is no doubt of it. If I threw a rope up from Matter, noose or lasso the Supermind and pull it down, the first part of (it) that will come near me is its tail dangling down as it descends, and that I can seize first and pull down the rest of it by tail-twists. As for being in contact with it, well I can be in contact with you by correspondence without actually touching you or taking hold even of your tail, can't I? So there is nothing funny about it—perfectly rational, coherent and clear.

(2) The Descent of the Supermind and the Revolt of the Subconscient

(a) The Subconscient

The "descent" and the revolt—The Subconscient—People seeing red-crimson lights—The three sources of our action—Our nature can be changed—Heredity.

27-5-1935

MYSELF: We hear you are tremendously busy; hot speculations are in the air about near descents.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, thank you, sir! I have had enough of

them—the only result of the last descent was an upsurging of the subconscient mud.

MYSELF: Please tell us something so that we may prepare ourselves in time to bear the pressure.

SRI AUROBINDO: No pressure! I am simply busy trying to get out of the mud—in other words to see if the damned subconscient can be persuaded to subside into something less dangerous, less complexful and more manageable.

Of course the subconscient is universal as well as individual like all the other main parts of the Nature. But there are different parts or planes of the subconscient. All upon earth is based on the Inconscient as it is called, though it is not really inconscient at all, but rather a complete subconscience in which there is everything but nothing formulated or expressed. The subconscient of which I speak lies between the Inconscient and conscious mind, life and body. It contains all the reactions to life which struggle out as a slowly evolving and self-formulating consciousness, but it contains them not as ideas, perceptions or conscious reactions but as the fluid substance of these things. Also all that is consciously experienced sinks down into the subconscient not as experience but as obscure but obstinate impressions of experience and can come up at any time as dreams, as mechanical repetitions of past thought, feeling, action etc., as "complexes" exploding into action and event etc., etc. The subconscient is the main cause why all things repeat themselves and nothing ever gets changed except in appearances. It is the cause why people say, character cannot be changed, also of the constant return of things one hoped to have got rid of. All seeds are there and all the sanskaras of the mind, vital and body,—it is the main support of death and disease and the last fortress (seemingly impregnable) of the Ignorance. All that is suppressed without being wholly got rid of sinks down there and remains in seed ready to surge up or sprout up at any moment.

MYSELF: It seems another victory has been won by you. Some people saw red-crimson lights around the Mother a few days back.

SRI AUROBINDO: ??? Great heavens? which? who? But there is nothing new in that.

It was coming down before November 1934. But afterwards all the mud arose and it stopped. But there are red-crimson lights. One is supramental Divine Love. The other is supramental physical Force.

MYSELF: Would uprush of mud mean the descent of greater and greater light?

SRI AUROBINDO: In a certain sense it is true but it is not inevitable—it could have been done quietly. As it is, there is the Revolt of the Subconscient.

3-6-1935

MYSELF: Are there not periods or moments when we consciously bring back to memory certain things of the past, or are these impressions only due to the waves from the subconscious reaching up?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the conscious action of the mind.

MYSELF: I mean are our conscious or unconscious movements entirely influenced by the subconscious?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, certainly not—the subconscious is the evolutionary basis in us, it is not the whole nature. But things can rise from the subconscient and take shape in the conscious parts.

MYSELF: I also understand that this subconscient is more directly concerned with what we may call the more obscure and darker movements of our being. What is then the origin of the higher movements?

SRI AUROBINDO: There are three sources of our action—the superconscient, the subliminal, the subconscient of which we are not aware. What we are aware of is the surface being which is only an instrumental arrangement. The source of all is the general Nature, but the general Nature deposits certain habits of movement, personality, character, faculties, dispositions, tendencies in us. That is what we usually call ourselves.

Part of this is in habitual movement and use in our conscious part, part is concealed in the other three.

But what we are on the surface is being constantly set in motion, changed, developed or repeated by the laws of the general Nature coming in on us either directly or else indirectly, through others, through circumstances etc. Some of this comes straight into the conscious part and acts there, our minds etc., appropriating it as our own; part comes into the subconscient or sinks into it and waits for an opportunity of rising up into the conscious, part goes into the subliminal and may at any time turn up or may not. Part passes through and is rejected. It is a constant activity of forces supplied to us out of which (or rather out of a small amount of it) we make what we will or can. But in reality it is all a play of forces, a flux, nothing fixed or stable; the appearance of stability is given by constant repetition and recurrence of the same vibrations and formations. That is why our nature can be changed in spite of Vivekananda and Horace and the subconscient, but it is a difficult job because the master mode of Nature is this obstinate repetition and recurrence.

As for the things thrown away from us that come back, it depends on where you throw them. Very often there is a sort of procedure about it. The mind rejects its mentalities, the vital its vitalities, the physical its physicalities—these usually go into the corresponding domain of general Nature. It all stays in the environmental consciousness which we carry about with us, by which we communicate with the outside Nature, and persistently rushes back from there—until it is so absolutely rejected that it can't return. But when what the mind rejects is strongly supported by the vital, it sinks down into the vital, rages there and tries to rush up again and reoccupy the mind. When the vital rejects it, it sinks from the higher to the lower vital. When the lower vital too rejects it, it sinks into the physical consciousness and tries to stick by inertia or mechanical repetition. Rejected from there it goes into the subconscient and comes up in dreams, in passivity, in extreme tamas. The Inconscient is the last resort of the Ignorance.

As for the general Nature it is of course the natural tendency

of its inferior forces to try and perpetuate their action in the individual, so they return on him when they find their influence rejected. But they cannot last long once the environmental consciousness is cleared,—unless the Hostiles take a hand. Even then these can attack, but if the sadhak has established his position in the inner self, they can only attack and retire.

It is true that we bring most of ourselves from past lives. Heredity only affects the external being, and all the effects of heredity are not accepted, only those that are in consonance with what we are to be or not preventive of it at least. I may be the son of my father or mother in certain respects, but most of me is as foreign to them, as if I had been born in New York or Paraguay.

(b) Hostile Forces "Out of Date"

20-4-1935

MYSELF: In one letter you wrote that you were able to push on; in another, that the hostile forces were out of date. That was a year ago. When we read this we thought that it would be merry Christmas henceforth. But now I again feel a bit despondent because you speak of "the confounded atmosphere", "the uprush of mud" and the attacks.

SRI AUROBINDO: When I said "out of date", I did not mean that they are not going on, but they ought not to be going on—they were only kept up by the sadhaks opening themselves to them and so retaining them in the atmosphere. I thought that was clear from what I said—but the sadhaks seem always to put a comfortable interpretation even on uncomfortable statements.

MYSELF: I have heard that even X had a terrible attack recently.

SRI AUROBINDO: There are only 2 or 3 in the Ashram to whom this word "even" would apply. I won't mention their names lest the devil should be tempted to try with them also.

A solid mind, a solid nervous system, and a steady psychic flame seem to be the only safeguard against "terrible attacks". If such things did not happen there would be no need of a fight day and night. You put the things in an inverse order.

(c) The World and the Hostile Forces

6-4-1936

About the contact with the world and the hostile forces, that is of course always one of the sadhak's chief difficulties, but to transform the world and the hostile powers is too big a task and the personal transformation cannot wait for it. What has to be done is to come to live in the Power that these things, these disturbing elements cannot penetrate, or, if they penetrate, cannot disturb, and to be so purified and strengthened by it that there is in oneself no response to anything hostile. If there is a protecting envelopment, an inner purifying descent and, as a result, a settling of the higher consciousness in the inner being and finally, its substitution even in the most external outwardly active parts in place of the old ignorant consciousness, then the world and the hostile forces will no longer matter—for one's own soul at least; for there is a larger work not personal in which of course they will have to be dealt with; but that need not be a main preoccupation at the present stage.

(d) The Transformation of Overmind into Supermind—Right Down to the Subconscient

If better disciples had been called!—Knocks and shocks good for the soul!—Sri Aurobindo's new "mathematical formula"—The condition of the sadhaks—This time the "descent" only personal —A general "descent" not attempted —Busy with transformation of Overmind (down to the subconscient) into Supermind.

29-7-1935

MYSELF: Some souls like X and Y, I believe, have been born specially to help you in your work. For such, this Yoga must be not a hard path, but a Grand Trunk Road!

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

3-8-1935

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

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

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MYSELF: (referring to something personal): You really rescued me yesterday. My humble thanks. Got a few knocks though—

SRI AUROBINDO: Knocks and shocks are good for the soul, according to some philosophers. Agree?

MYSELF: I suppose I have to agree. But what about the other philosophers?

SRI AUROBINDO: Knocks can help—as man is now constituted—but it is not part of my philosophy, only a view-point of experience.

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

SRI AUROBINDO: *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.*

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16-8-1935

MYSELF: Well, Sir, have I covered a few milestones on the journey to the Infinite?

SRI AUROBINDO: Move on, move on!

MYSELF: What about the uprush of mud? Has it settled down, and are people now floating in the flood of the Supramental? (Some time back he had written to me: "Never has there been such an uprush of mud and brimstone as during the past few months. However the Caravan goes on and today there was some promise of better things.")

SRI AUROBINDO: It is still there, but personally I have become superior to it and am travelling forward like a flash of lightning, that is to say zig-zag but fairly fast. Now I have got the hang of the whole hanged thing—like a very Einstein I have got the mathematical formula of the whole affair (unintelligible as in his own case to anybody but myself) and am working it out figure by figure.

As for people, ro! They are not floating in the supramental—some are floating in the higher mind, others, rushing up into it and flopping down into the subconscient alternately, are swinging from heaven into hell and back into heaven, again back into hell *ad infinitum*, some are sticking fast contentedly or discontentedly in the mud, some are sitting in the mud and dreaming dreams and seeing visions, some have their legs in the mud and their head in the heavens etc., etc., an infinity of combinations, while many are simply nowhere. But console yourself—these things, it seems, are inevitable in the process of great transformations.

17-8-1935

MYSELF: You say that you are running fast—but you have been doing that all your life; how is it going to help us and our sadhana?

SRI AUROBINDO: Rubbish!—If my being able to solve the problem of the subconscient in the sadhana is of no importance, then of course it wont affect anybody. Otherwise it may.

MYSELF: I don't see any chances of our being speeded up by your running.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is of no importance at present. To get the closed doors open is just now the thing to be done and I am doing it. Speeding people through them can come in its own time when the doors and the people are ready.

MYSELF: What is this mathematical formula that you have all of a sudden found out?

SRI AUROBINDO: I told you it was unintelligible to anybody but myself, so how the deuce do you expect me to give it to you in a tangible form?—It is my mathematical discovery—don't seek for any other cause—my grand new, brand-new mathematical formula!

MYSELF: But any big deal near at hand?

SRI AUROBINDO: What great expectations! Besides I am not Roosevelt. I am only going ahead, therefore visibly cheerful though not yet demonstrably exuberant.

MYSELF: But whatever it may be, keep up this patting, Sir, for heaven's sake!

SRI AUROBINDO: Don't know. Provided no sadhak interprets my pattings as blows and cries "Why did you thrash me, Sir?"

25-11-1935

MYSELF: (After the November Darshan): Well, Sir, has your brand new formula worked out well? Has anything descended? From my own experience I am unable to say anything whatsoever.

SRI AUROBINDO: My formula is working out rapidly, but it has nothing to do with any Darshan descent. It is my private and particular descent, if you like, and that's enough for me at present. The tail of the Supermind is descending, descending, descending. It is only the tail at present, but where the tail can pass, the rest will follow.

MYSELF: I hope others felt the Force, the Descent. Some say there was a great descent; others say that nothing came down.

SRI AUROBINDO: How do they know, either of them? Personal experience? It was a personal descent or a personal non-descent.

MYSELF: Some say there was so much resistance that Sri Aurobindo could not do much in spite of himself.

SRI AUROBINDO: Didn't try, sir, so that's bosh. The attempt to bring a great general descent having only produced a great ascent of subconscient mud, I had given up that, as I already told you. At present, I am only busy with transformation of overmind (down to the subconscient) into supermind.

MYSELF: Since the descent of Supermind only will quicken up the process, why not retrench the whole staff and get it down quickly with the help of the few around you? We shall all flock together again when the descent takes place.

SRI AUROBINDO: How? I am not Hitler. Things cannot be done like that. You might just as well ask the Mother and myself to isolate ourselves in the Himalayas, get down the Supramental, then toss everybody up in a blanket into the Supreme. Very neat but it is not practical.

(3) Realisations in the Ashram

6-5-1935

MYSELF: I am really amazed to hear that Mother told a child, —X, I think—that only 5 or 6 here will realise the Divine. Then, Sir, what about the rest of us; have we to be content

with a little joy and peace only? Tell us something—give us a word of hope.

SRI AUROBINDO: There are already more than 5 or 6 in the Ashram who have had some realisation at least of the Divine—so take comfort.

19-5-1936

MYSELF: Seeing some of the failures in this Yoga, I sometimes wonder if anyone here is attaining anything at all; has anybody realised the Divine? Please don't ask me what I mean by the Divine; it is difficult to explain these things.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why shouldn't I ask? If you mean the Vedantic realisation, several have had it. Bhakti realisation also. If I were to publish the letters on sadhana experiences that come to me, people would marvel and think that the Ashram was packed full of great Yogis! Those who know something about Yoga would not mind about the dark periods, eclipses, hostile attacks, despairings, falls, for they know that these things happen to Yogis. Even the failures would have become Gurus, if I had allowed it, with circles of Shishyas! X did become one. Y of course. But all that does not count here, because what is a full realisation outside, is here only a beginning of Siddhi. Here the test is transformation of the nature, psychic, spiritual, finally supramental. That and nothing else is what makes it so difficult.

(4) A General Discussion about the Supermind

Experiences stopping after communication—On sadhaks getting supramentalised overnight—"Advanced sadhaks"!—Divine Love —Peace and balance needed first—It is very easy to be a critic—An argument about the Supermind and Divine Realisation—The measure of the soul's sincerity—Psychic, spiritual and supramental transformation—Krishna, Ramakrishna, Chaitanya, Buddha—Necessity of sadhana will remain even after the descent—The supra-

mental change is the important thing, conquest of death only its result—The possibility of supramentalisation in stages.

18-9-1935

MYSELF: I have observed that whenever I communicate an experience to you, the next moment it stops. I hope my Guru is not in some way connected with this! I remember a story of my childhood: I was dining with my father when I was obliged to go out, I turned round and said "Papa, see you don't eat my fish!" Well, fathers may not, but Gurus?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is a thing that we used often to note formerly when sadhana was in the early stages—viz. to speak of something experienced was to stop it. It is why many Yogis make it a rule never to speak of their experiences. But latterly it had altogether ceased to be like that. Why are you starting that curious old stunt all over again?

No, Sir, I don't eat your fish. I have oceans of fish at my disposal and have no need to consume your little sprats. It is Messers H.F. (hostile forces) who do that—the Dasyus or robbers. You display your fine new pen-knife and they say "Ah! he is fond of his fine new pen-knife, is he? We'll show him!" and they filch it at the first opportunity.

MYSELF: Do tell us how the supermind will make us great sadhaks overnight. We are hanging all our hopes on its "tail", which you said was descending.

SRI AUROBINDO: If you expect to become supramental overnight, you are confoundedly mistaken. The tail will keep the H.F. at a respectful distance and flap at you until you consent to do things in a reasonable time instead of taking 200 centuries over such a step as you seem to do just now. More than that I refuse to say. What is a reasonable time in the supramental view of things I leave you to discover.

MYSELF: But when did I tell you, Sir, that I expect to become supramental overnight? Good Gracious! Don't I realise that being an ass myself, it is not in my power to do so,—nor do I

conjure up any such phantasms of hope to cross the 'Ass's Bridge'?

SRI AUROBINDO: You said "Overnight", Sir, "Overnight". It was a logical inference from your desire to become a great sadhak overnight...I am proceeding strictly by mental (not supramental) reason and logic. A "great sadhak" in the supramental Yoga means a supramental—or ought to according to all rules of logic.

Asses seldom realise that. If they see a thistle on the other side, they try at once to go after it—so here again your logic fails.

MYSELF: I only wanted to know how the supermind is going to help us—by minimising our depressions? Removing our difficulties? Raising a fence against Universal Nature?

SRI AUROBINDO: (It) can do any or all of these...Overmind is obliged to respect the freedom of the individual—including his freedom to be perverse, stupid, recalcitrant and slow. Supermind is not merely a step higher than Overmind—it is beyond the line, that is a different consciousness and power beyond the mental limit.

MYSELF: Do you mean that Supermind will do no such thing —have no respect for persons?

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course I do! It will respect only the Truth of the Divine and the truth of things.

MYSELF (I sent my photograph with the note-book): What do you think of this snap—a Mussolini gone morbid? Anyhow, it looks as if you have at last succeeded in putting some intellect in this brain-box of mine!

SRI AUROBINDO: Good heavens, what a gigantic forehead they have given you! The Himalayas and the Atlantic in one brow! Well, well, you ought to be able to cross the Ass's bridge with that. Or do you think the bridge will break down under its weight?

MYSELF: But, really, Sir, I never expected you to take my "overnight" so literally. As a matter of fact I did not mean anything precise and particular. You could have allowed for a little exuberance in metaphor, surely!

SRI AUROBINDO: Don't understand your deep expressions—yeu did not mean that it would happen rapidly and suddenly? "Overnight" in English means that...May I ask, very humbly, what you did mean, if not a sudden and rapid development into great sadhaks?

MYSELF: As I said, I didn't mean anything precise. There might have been something *in the subconscious*, perhaps an idea about X being a great sadhak.

SRI AUROBINDO: There you go again! "Great sadhaks", "advanced sadhaks", "big sadhaks" like X.Y. and Z.? When shall I hear the last of these ego-building phrases which I have protested against times without number? And you object to being beaten!

MYSELF: I understand your protesting against "great" or "big" sadhaks; but why against "advanced" sadhaks? It is a fact that some are more advanced than others.

SRI AUROBINDO: Advanced indeed! Pshaw! Because one is 3 inches ahead of another, you must make a class of advanced and non-advanced? Advanced has the same puffing egoistic resonance as "great" or "big". It leads to all sorts of stupidities, rajasic self-appreciating egoism in some, tamasic self-depreciating egoism in others, round-eyed wonderings why X an advanced sadhak, one 3 inches ahead of Y, should stumble, tumble or fumble while Y, 3 inches behind X, still plods heavily and steadily on, etc. etc. Why, sir, the very idea in X that he is an advanced sadhak (like the Pharisee "I thank thee, O Lord, that I am not as other unadvanced disciples") would be enough to make him fumble, stumble, and tumble. So no more of that, sir, no more of that.

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8-4-1935

MYSELF: Come down, Sir,—for heaven's sake give us something and make life more substantial and concrete. I am really beginning to doubt if things like divine Love, Knowledge, etc. can be brought down in me!

SRI AUROBINDO: Unfortunately experience seems to show that one must be divine oneself before one can bear the pressure of divine love.

In the old days long before you came plenty of things were brought down—including the love. Hardly one could bear it and even then only in a small measure. Is it any better now, I wonder? It does not look like it. That is why I want the Supermind first—and especially the peace, the balance in an intensity unshakable. There are several who have been trying to push on with the intensities, but—.Well, let us hope for the best. For God's sake, peace, balance, an unshakable supramental poise and sanity first. Ecstasies and intensities of other kinds can come afterwards.

My insistence on the Supramental is of course apodiaskeptic. Don't search for the word in the dictionary. I am simply imitating the doctors who when they are in a hole protect themselves with impossible Greek. Peace supramental, if possible, but peace anyhow—a peace which will become supramental if it has a chance. The atmosphere is most confoundedly disturbed, that is why I am ingeminating "peace, peace, peace" like a summer dove or an intellectual under the rule of Hitler. Of course, I am not asking you to become supramental off-hand. That is my business, and I will do it if you fellows give me a chance, which you are not doing just now (you is not personal, but collective and indefinite) and will do less if you go blummering into buzzific intensities. (Please don't consult the dictionary, but look into the writings of Joyce and others).

MYSELF: You say that peace is absolutely necessary for bringing down Love, Knowledge, etc.—but don't you think purity is also required? And if peace and purity are to be established, a complete opening of the inner being is essential, and the bringing forward of the psychic. This will naturally take years—so we have to go on starving for love and knowledge and other things divine.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is logical and orthodox; but the supramental, once it is down is supposed to bring these things up generally and induce an aeroplanic tendency to accurate

swiftness in all who are on the road to it, and I presume it will come anyhow, but it is badly delayed...

MYSELF: I couldn't quite catch the meaning of your phrase, "if you fellows give me a chance..." Nowadays we don't see many vital outbursts in the atmosphere.

SRI AUROBINDO: O happy blindness!

MYSELF: We are wondering when exactly the supramental will come down. Some people are saying that it will take one century.

SRI AUROBINDO: One day, one week, one month, one year, one decade, one century, one millennium, one light-year—all is possible. Then why do people choose one century?

MYSELF: Cannot things like love and knowledge visit us now and then, and keep us going?

SRI AUROBINDO: They can if you keep the doors open.

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13-4-1935

MYSELF: X says that I have in me some capacity for "intuitive criticism"—whatever it may mean. I don't think I have got the right type of mind for criticism, or enough knowledge. Behind my bad logic, do you see any signs of a budding critic —intuitive or otherwise?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the easiest thing in the world to be a critic. Just look wise and slang the subject in grave well-timed sentences. It does not matter what you say.

MYSELF: What are the things, if any, that have a chance of getting manifested in me—poetry, prose, philosophy, etc., or medicine? I am asking for a yogic prophecy.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why bother your head? When the supramental comes, and you bloom into a superman, you will just pick up anything you want and become perfect in it with a bang.

MYSELF: I can only take this as a great sarcastic joke.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a joke and not a joke. One must rely on the Divine and yet do some enabling sadhana—the Divine

gives the fruits not by the measure of the sadhana but by the measure of the souls and its aspiration. Also worrying does no good—I shall be this, I shall be that, what shall I be? Say "I am ready to be not what I want but what the Divine wants me to be"—all the rest should go on that base.

15-4-1935

MYSELF: Your "blooming into a superman" reminds me of an interesting argument we had with some people. They contended that our aspiring for the Supermind was not something sober—that we should aspire for the Divine realisation only. I told them that it was you who wanted the Supermind for the earth, not we.

I don't see what is wrong in my aspiring for the Supermind in spite of knowing all my weaknesses. The Divine Grace is there on which we rely at every moment, and if the central sincerity is there, there is nothing wrong, I think, in entertaining such an aspiration.

SRI AUROBINDO: By Divine realisation is meant the spiritual realisation—the realisation of Self, Bhagwan or Brahman on the mental-spiritual or else the overmental plane. That is a thing (at any rate the mental-spiritual) which thousands have done. So it is obviously easier to do than the supramental. Also nobody can have the supramental realisation who has not had the spiritual. So far your opponent is right.

It is true that neither can be got in an effective way unless the whole being is turned towards it—unless there is a real and very serious spirit and dynamic reality of sadhana. So far you are right and the opponent also is right.

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. So there everybody is right.

"The central sincerity is the first thing and sufficient for an aspiration to be entertained—a total sincerity is needed for the aspiration to be fulfilled. Amen!

MYSELF: What do you exactly mean by the measure of the soul's sincerity?

SRI AUROBINDO: I mean by the measure of the soul's sincerity a yearning after the Divine and its aspiration towards the higher life.

17-4-1935

MYSELF: I find, Sir, that you have most skilfully steered clear between two troubled seas of argument. Allow me to bring the discussion back to the point from where it started.

I have seen K's letter. By transformation, I find, you mean wholly living in the Divine. Then where is the difference between the Divine realisation as you define it, and the transformation you are yourself seeking for us? Did not persons like Ramakrishna, for example, who had this realisation, merge their consciousness entirely in the Divine, and thus had this kind of transformation? I think there is a difference, because you speak of a complete transformation—of mind, life and even the body. Obviously then, those whose realisation of the Divine is on the mental-spiritual plane cannot have the physical consummation.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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 last 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 B.G.—he seems to have been brilliant but rather chaotic. All that is different from the supramental. Then take the vital of the Paramhansas. It is said their vital behaves either like a child (Ramakrishna) or like a madman or like a demon or like something inert (*cf. Jaḍabharata*). Well, there is nothing supramental in all that.

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

MYSELF: My main contention was that we *can* aspire for the Supermind since you had so emphatically stated that its realisation and the subsequent transformation of our entire existence was the ideal you stood for. Hence anyone ridiculing such an aspiration was arguing against our ideal. Of course, I admit that the necessary conditions must be fulfilled.

SRI AUROBINDO: X ridicules them because they are not yet fit for the spiritual realisation, some not even for the psychic and yet say they are aspirant for the supermind. He says let us sincerely try for and achieve the spiritual and not talk about the greater things still much beyond us. A rational attitude.

MYSELF: I feel that your reply is too conciliatory; otherwise, I don't see why the supramental realisation should be looked upon as a secondary thing or a by-product especially as you also say that the divinisation of the body cannot be done without it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not secondary or by-product at all, but ultimate.

(Against the last part of my sentence he wrote: "Not in the sense I want.")

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MYSELF: I was under the impression that with the descent of the Supermind all problems will be solved—conquest over death, immortality etc. would immediately follow. But from your recent letters to X and Y, it seems that a great deal depends on us poor folk even in this vital matter.

SRI AUROBINDO: I never said or thought that the supramental descent would automatically make everybody immortal. The supramental descent can only make the best conditions for anybody who can open to it then or thereafter attaining to the supramental consciousness and its consequences. But it would not dispense with the necessity of sadhana. If it did, the logical consequence would be that the whole earth, men, dogs and worms, would suddenly wake up to find themselves supramental. There would be no need of an Ashram or of Yoga.

Why vital? What is vital is the supramental change of consciousness—conquest of death is something minor and, as I have always said, the last physical result of it, not the first result of all or the most important—a thing to be added to complete the whole, not the one thing needed and essential. To put it first is to reverse all spiritual values—it would mean that the seeker was actuated not by any high spiritual aim but by a vital clinging to life or a selfish and timid seeking for the security of the body—such a spirit would not bring the spiritual change.

MYSELF: Can supramentalisation be done in stages, in parts, I mean,—mind first, vital next, and physical last, or some such process?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? Always the idea that there must be an instantaneous absolute miracle or else nothing! What about processes and things? You are ignorant of all that is between supreme Spirit and Matter, it seems. You know nothing of the occult processes of mind, life and all the rest—so you can think only of miraculous divinity or else law of Matter as known to Science. But for supramental Spirit to work itself out in Matter it must go through a process of transforming the immediate mental, vital and other connections must it not—so why should not the process be in parts? Immortality also can come by parts. First the mental being becomes immortal (not shed

and dissolved after death), then the vital, while the physical comes only last. That is a possible evolution recognised by occult science.

(5) A "Complete Realisation"

7-7-1936

MYSELF: Gandhi says in an article: I hold that complete realisation is impossible in this embodied life. Nor is it necessary. A living immovable faith is all that is required for reaching the full spiritual height attainable by human beings. Your opinion on the matter, please.

SRI AUROBINDO: I do not know what Mahatma Gandhi means by complete realisation. If he means a realisation with nothing more to realise, no farther development possible, then I agree—I have myself spoken of farther divine progression, an infinite development. But the question is not that; the question is whether the Ignorance can be transcended, whether a complete essential realisation turning the consciousness from darkness to light, from an instrument of the Ignorance seeking for Knowledge into an instrument or rather a manifestation of Knowledge proceeding to greater Knowledge, Light enlarging, heightening into greater Light, is or is not possible. My view is that this conversion is not only possible, but inevitable in the spiritual evolution of the being here. The embodiment of life has nothing to do with it. This embodiment is not of life, but of consciousness and its energy of which life is only one phase or force. As life has developed mind, and the embodiment has modified itself to suit this development (mind is precisely the main instrument of ignorance seeking for knowledge); so mind can develop supermind which is in its nature knowledge not seeking for itself but manifesting itself by its own automatic power, and the embodiment can again modify itself or be modified from above so as to suit this development. Faith is a necessary means for arriving at realisation because we are

ignorant and do not yet know that which we are seeking to realise; faith is indeed knowledge giving the ignorance an intimation of itself previous to its own manifestation, it is the gleam sent before by the yet unrisen Sun. When the Sun shall rise there will be no longer any need of the gleam. The supramental knowledge supports itself, it does not need to be supported by faith; it lives by its own certitude. You may say that farther progression, farther development will need faith. No, for the farther development will proceed on a basis of knowledge, not of Ignorance. We shall walk in the light of knowledge towards its own wider vistas of self-fulfilment.

(6) Past Seers and the Supramental Truth

A criticism of Sri Aurobindo's teaching—"This shocked reverence for the past!" says Sri Aurobindo—The Divine is Infinite, and the unrolling of the Truth an infinite process—Our Yoga is for the Divine—The object of this Yoga—Regarding the futility of writing more about the Supermind.

8-10-1935

MYSELF: You must have seen X's criticism of your *Lights on Yoga*. His remark about the divinisation of the individual and the emergence of the new race does not seem to be correct.

SRI AUROBINDO: He seems to think that D.I.=E.N.R. or C.S.R. (divinisation of the individual=emergence of new race or creation of supramental race.) So if D.I. is possible, C.S.R. is superfluous or out of the question. Why, I don't know, for it takes individuals to make a race and if a certain number of individuals are not divinised, I don't see how you are going to get a divinised race. As for it being out of the question, the great Panjandrum alone knows why if an individual is divinised (one obviously is not enough), it should be out of the question to go on divinising others until you have a new race. But I suppose, unless you create unnecesssry quibbles, there can be no "intellectual" philosophy.

MYSELF: I thought there was quite a difference, between divinisation, i.e. spiritualisation, and supramentalisation, the one being a step to the other.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, of course, but as I have never explained in these letters what I meant by supermind, these critics are necessarily all at sea. They think, pardonably enough, that anything above human mind must be supramental.

MYSELF: Then the critic writes: "An extravagant claim in as much as it gives a lie to logic and also to the lives and experiences of past seers". Well, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: 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? It is not only my ideas that baffle reason, but X's also! 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, Madhava 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.

MYSELF: What did you exactly mean when you wrote: "Our Yoga is not for our sake but for the Divine"? Is it something like the Vaishnava idea of absolute surrender, without even desiring to see Him, have *milan* with Him; only give, give and give? A very sublime conception, but is it possible and practical?

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite possible and practical and a very rapturous thing as anyone who has done it can tell you. It is also the easiest and most powerful way of "getting" the Divine. So it is the best policy also. The phrase, however, means that the object of the Yoga is to enter into and be possessed by the Divine Presence and Consciousness, to love the Divine for the Divine's sake alone, to be tuned in our nature into the nature of the Divine and in our will and works and life to be the instrument of the Divine. Its object is not to be a great Yogi or a Superman (although that may come) or to grab at the Divine for the sake of the ego's power, pride or pleasure. It is not for Moksha, though liberation comes by it and all else comes; but these must not be our objects. The Divine alone is our object.

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

SRI AUROBINDO: 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?

PART TWO

(1) THE SOUL AND THE EVOLUTION

September, 1935

MYSELF: You have said that the soul came into evolution for the sake of experience, the call of the Unknown, and passed through the depths of the abyss, to establish the possibilities of the Divine in the Ignorance and the Inconscience.

SRI AUROBINDO: One cannot establish the possibilities of the Divine through the depths of the abyss. It is only by the ceasing of the Ignorance and the Inconscience that the possibilities can be established. I have never said that the object of the creation is to keep up Ignorance and Inconscience perpetually and realise the possibilities of the Divine in that tenebrous amalgam (its possibilities of being more and more abysmally ignorant and inconscient).

MYSELF: If this theory were true, one can say that failures in sadhana, revolt etc.,—or worldly men's running after petty pleasures for that matter,—are there because the soul has still further experiences to acquire and wants to be fully rich and satisfied with chequered experiences before it can finally turn towards its ultimate purpose.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is only another way of putting the revolt of the lower nature. For it is not the soul, the psychic being, but the vital and the physical consciousness that refuses to go farther. How can petty pleasures be rich? Chequered is all right. But it is not when the soul is satisfied, but when it is dissatisfied that it turns towards its ultimate purpose. Of course when the soul no more wants the Ignorance, it will turn to the Light. Till then it can't. That is what I have always said is the reason why I reject the idea of converting the whole of mankind—because they don't want it.

MYSELF: It can also be said that people really don't know that a greater Ananda, Bliss etc. can be had, and if they are told this, they don't believe it, or even if they do, they are not ready to pay the price.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course they don't, but even if they did, it does not follow that they would prefer to follow it rather than their accustomed round of pain and pleasure. Many deliberately prefer that and say the other thing is too high for human nature—which is true, because you have to want to grow out of human nature before you can have the Ananda. Many struggle towards the Ananda but cannot reach it because though the soul and even the thinking mind and the higher vital want it the lower vital and physical want something else and are too animal and strong in them for control. Or the ego wants something that is not that or wants to misuse the Power for its own satisfaction.

MYSELF: Perhaps they are not ready to pay the price because the soul clings to the Ignorance for the sake of experience, if what you say about the origin of creation is true.

SRI AUROBINDO: What has the origin of creation to do with it? We are concerned with the growth of the soul out of the Ignorance, not its plunge into it. The lower nature is the nature of the Ignorance, what we seek is to grow into the nature of the Truth. How do you make out that when the soul has looked towards the Truth and is moving towards it, a pull back by the vital and the ego towards the Ignorance is a glorious action of the soul and not a revolt of the lower nature? I suppose you are floundering about in the confusion of the idea that the "desire-soul" in the vital is the true psyche of man. If you like—but that is no part of my explanation of things; I make a clear distinction between the two, so I refuse to sanctify the revolt of the lower nature by calling it the sanction of the soul. If it is the soul that wants to fail, why is there any struggle or sorrow over the business? It would be a perfectly smooth affair.

MYSELF: I was not at all "floundering about" between "desire-soul" and the true "psyche".

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, if you were not, why did you represent the experience of the lower nature as such a rich and glorious thing? It is the desire-soul or the life being that finds it (sometimes) like that.

MYSELF: If failures are due to the revolt of the lower nature,

why should that revolt occur in A's case and not in B's? Past Karma? And by what is this Karma decided?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because A is not B and B is not A. Why do you expect all to be alike and fare alike and run abreast all the way and all arrive together?

It is Prakriti and Karma, so long as the Ignorance is there. The hen lays an egg and the egg produces a hen and that hen another egg and so on ad infinitum—till you turn to the Light and get it.

MYSELF: And this Karma has its past and this past its own past and so on till we come to a state where there is no Karma and only central beings. This central being, it seems, chooses its particular sheath—mental, vital, etc., and upon that choice depends the evolutionary consequences. Is that correct?

SRI AUROBINDO: What is this central being you are speaking of—the Jivatma or the psychic being? Or an amalgam of both? —I don't quite understand. The psychic being is supposed not to choose, but rather to form in accordance with its past and future evolution a new mental, vital and physical sheath each time it is born. But the placid or tacit observation does not seem to apply to the psychic being, but to the Jivatma. Moreover you seem to say this is done at the beginning of the evolution and determines the whole evolution. But that has no meaning since it is through the evolution that the psychic does it. It has not got one fixed mental, vital, physical which remains the same in all lives.

MYSELF: You have said that the soul takes birth each time according to its past evolution and its *need for the future*, that it takes up with it as much of its Karma as is useful for *farther experience*. Now, since the soul can't at once take a leap like the prodigal son into the Kingdom of Light, I can say that the soul has failed this time because it "took up with it so much of its Karma" and requires farther evolutionary experience.

SRI AUROBINDO: A leap, no! But if it has got thoroughly disgusted, it can try its chance at Nirvana.

Excuse me,—if it goes on with its Karma, then it does not get liberation. If it wants only farther experience, it can just

stay there in the ordinary nature. The aim of Yoga is to transcend Karma. Karma means subjection to Nature; through Yoga the soul goes towards freedom.

MYSELF: It seems to me that the soul is searching, experimenting, analysing, and thus proceeding by steps and stages. It will move towards the Light and retrace its steps again and by a series of ups and downs finally arrive at its Home. And so the revolts are only steps and stages on the way. This is how I look at it. Is that all rot? No grain of truth in it?

SRI AUROBINDO: You are describing the action of the ordinary existence, not the Yoga. Yoga is a seeking (not a mental searching), it is not an experimenting in contraries and contradictories. It is the mind that does that and the mind that analyses. The soul does not search, analyse, experiment—it seeks, feels, experiences.

Logical rot! The only grain of truth is that the yoga is very usually a series of ups and downs till you get to a certain height. But there is a quite different reason for that—not the vagaries of the soul. On the contrary when the psychic being gets in front and becomes master, there comes in a fundamentally smooth action and although there are difficulties and undulations of movement, these are no longer of an abrupt or dramatic character.

MYSELF: You say that when the soul no more wants the Ignorance, it will turn to the Light; till then it can't. This is very significant, because if so, I should say that the soul is the Master of the House and if it says categorically—"No more of Ignorance, vitals and mentals have no go," it can refuse to go further. Because the soul wants more "fun" in the mud of Ignorance, people follow their "round of pleasure and pain", and their lack of faith etc. is due to their soul still wanting Ignorance.

SRI AUROBINDO: Perhaps the better phrase would be "consents to" the Ignorance. The soul is the witness, upholder, experiencer, but it is the master only in theory, in fact it is not-master, *anīś*, so long as it consents to the Ignorance. For that is a general consent which implies that the Prakriti gambols

about with the Purusha and does pretty well what she darn well likes with him. When he wants to get back his mastery, make the theoretical practical, he needs a lot of tapasya to do it.

That is contrary to experience. The psychic has always been veiled, consenting to the play of mind, physical and vital, experiencing everything through them in the ignorant mental, vital and physical way. How then can it be that they are bound to change at once when it just takes the trouble to whisper or say "Let there be Light"? They have a tremendous go and can refuse and do refuse point blank. The mind resists with an obstinate persistency in argument and a constant confusion of ideas, the vital with a fury of bad will aided by the mind's obliging reasonings on its side, the physical resists with an obstinate inertia and crass fidelity to old habit, and when they have done, the general Nature comes in and says "What, you are going to get free from me so easily? Not if I know it," and it besieges and throws back the old nature on you again and again as long as it can. Yet you say it is the soul that wants all this "fun" and goes off laughing and prancing to get some more, You are funny. If the poor soul heard you, I think it would say "Sir, methinks you are a jester".

Due to the soul's sense of fun? It seems to me more probably that it is due to the obstinacy of mental and vital sanskaras. Perhaps that is why the Buddhists insisted on breaking all sanskaras as the seeker of liberation's first duty.

MYSELF: But if you ask me, as you do, "Why then is there so much struggle and sorrow?" well, I am floundered, unless one can say that though the soul has given up, still a longing, lingering look is bound to be there.

SRI AUROBINDO: You call that a mere look! I suppose that if you saw an Irish row or a Nazi mob in action, you would say "These people are making slight perceptible gestures and I think I hear faint sounds in the air".

My dear Sir, be less narrowly logical (with a very deficient logic even as logic), take a wider sweep; swim out of your bathing pool into the open sea and waltz round the horizons! For anything that happens, there are a hundred factors at work

and not only the one just under your nose; but to perceive that you have to become cosmic and intuitive or overmental and what not. So, alas!

19-9-1935

MYSELF: In your Yoga the main issue seems to be to bring out the psychic to the front, after which everything becomes easy.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not quite that. The psychic is the first of two transformations necessary—if you have the psychic transformation it facilitates immensely the other, i.e. the transformation of the ordinary human into the higher spiritual consciousness—otherwise one is likely to have either a slow and dull or exciting but perilous journey.

MYSELF: I am not very clear about the transformation of the psychic.

SRI AUROBINDO: I never said anything about a "transformation of the psychic". I have always written about a "psychic transformation" of the nature which is a very different matter. I have sometimes written of it as a psychicisation of the nature. The psychic is in the evolution, part of human being, its divine part—so a psychicisation will not carry one beyond the present evolution but will make the being ready to respond to all that comes from the Divine or Higher Nature and unwilling to respond to the Asura, Rakshasa, Pishacha or Animal in the being or to any resistance of the lower nature which stands in the way of the divine change.

MYSELF: You have said that the psychic being is at this stage a flame, not a spark. Does it apply to the human species as a whole?

SRI AUROBINDO: I simply meant that there was a psychic being there and not merely a psychic principle as at the beginning of the evolution. The difference between one and the other is one of evolution. The psychic being is more developed in some but the soul-principle is the same in all.

MYSELF: Evidently then, you speak of two transformations —one psychic, and the other human.

The psychic takes thousands of lives to evolve and turn towards the Divine. Is the involution also a similar process, or is it one single descent all at once into the Inconscient?

SRI AUROBINDO: But the psychic is part of the human nature or of ordinary nature—it has been there even before the human began.

No, certainly not. The involution is of the Divine in the Inconscience and it is done by the interposition of intermediate planes (Overmind etc., mind, vital—then the plunge into the Incqnscient which is the origin of matter). But all that is not a process answering to the evolution in the inverse sense—for there is no need for that, but a gradation of consciousness which is intended to make the evolution upwards possible.

MYSELF: What is the first experience that the soul had in its descent?

SRI AUROBINDO: Partial separation from the Divine and the Truth—these things at the back and no longer in front and everywhere; division; diminished sense of unity with all, stress growing on separate existence, separate view-point, separate initiation, aim, action.

MYSELF: Some say that the Supermind will establish a direct connection with the psychic and give it a spur, so that it comes to the front quicker.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, it can do that but it is not bound to do that only and take no other way.

(2) ON BUDDHA

Karma—Liberation—Buddha concerned with the Permanent above and the chain of Karma below—Buddhist Yoga—The question of Buddha's Avatarhood—Buddha and Ramakrishna—Ahimsa, a Jain teaching—Buddha taught compassion—Ahimsa, all dharma, relative; action through unity with the Divine Will the highest way—The Impersonal Brhaman.

28-9-1935

MYSELF: You say that if the soul goes on with its Karma, it does not get liberation. But isn't liberation a consummation of the result of Karma, at least according to Buddhism? Buddhism seems to say that we are bound to the chain of Karma and so past Karma is always guiding our present and future. In that case would not Buddha's very attainment of Nirvana be due to his past Karma?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not that I know of, in the ordinary theory. Karma always produces fresh Karma; it is only the cut from Karma that produces liberation.

The only truth of that is that by the use of compassion and acts of compassion one is helped to become a Bodhisattwa—just as sattwic deeds and feelings help to become less murky with the Ignorance. But it is knowledge that liberates according to both Buddhism and Vedanta, not Karma.

MYSELF: Isn't it curious that no play of forces existed for Buddha? He seemed to have gone in for personal effort and struggle!

SRI AUROBINDO: Why should he? It was the play of sanskaras that interested him, the binding play of wrong ideas, and his whole aim was to get rid of that.

Yes, because individual liberation was his aim and for him God and Shakti did not exist—only the Permanent above and

a mechanical chain of Karma below. To undo the chain of sanskaras that create the individual is the point; the individual is a knot that must undo itself by disowning all that constitutes itself. The individual must undo it, because who else is going to do it for him? There isn't anybody. All else including the Gods are only other knots of sanskaras and no knot can undo another knot—each knot must undo itself. *Comprenez?*

Buddhist Yoga is an uphill business, like the Adwaita Vedanta. You have to do the whole thing off your own bat, and even Tota Puri, Ramakrishna's teacher in Adwaita, was after thirty years of sadhana far from his goal, so much so that he went off to the Ganges to drown himself there—only Ramakrishna and Kali interfered in a miraculous way; that at least is the story.

The Buddhist Church, however, as distinguished from the uncompromising theory of the thing, proved weak and admitted *śaraṇam*[1] in Buddha as well as in the Dharma and the Sangha.

MYSELF: This implies that he did not "pump" his force into his disciples as you do into us.

SRI AUROBINDO: Surely not. He would have considered it a wrong thing altogether—even if he had any idea about pumping force, which he probably never had. At least I never heard of his doing this operation. He might have given enlightenment, but I think only through *upadeś*[2]—not certainly by pumping light into them. An individual knot of sanskara can tell another how to dissolve itself, but where is the ground for a more direct interference? All that of course is only the conscious theory of Buddha's action. I won't swear that without meaning it he did not influence his disciples in more secret and subtle ways.

MYSELF: If Buddha was an Avatar, his denial of the existence of God amounts to the cutting of the very branch on which he was sitting; he makes man the sole arbiter of his destiny!

SRI AUROBINDO: Why so? On what branch was he sitting? He affirmed practically something unknowable that was Permanent and Unmanifested. Adwaita does the same. Buddha

[1] Refuge.
[2] Advice and instruction.

never said he was an Avatar of a Personal God but that he was the Buddha. It is the Hindus who made him an Avatar. If Buddha had looked upon himself as an Avatar at all, it would have been as an Avatar of the impersonal Truth.

MYSELF: How is it that Buddha's works and the manifestation of his realisation were greater than Ramakrishna's although the latter could rise to a higher plane?

SRI AUROBINDO: He had a more powerful vital than Ramakrishna's, a stupendous will and an invincible mind of thought. If he had led the ordinary life, he would have been a great organiser, conqueror and creator. If a man rises to a higher plane of consciousness, it does not necessarily follow that he will be a greater man of action or a greater creator. One may rise to spiritual planes of inspiration undreamed of by Shakespeare and yet not be as great a poetic creator as Shakespeare. "Greatness" is not the object of spiritual realisation any more than fame or success in the world—how are these things the standard of spiritual realisation?

MYSELF: What about his doctrine of Ahimsa, which you do not recognise! If it came from the Divine how is it that you disagree with it?

SRI AUROBINDO: Ahimsa the only dharma? What becomes of the eightfold Way? Did Buddha preach absolute Ahimsa? I thought it was a Jain teaching. What Buddha taught was compassion! And compassion—well, is it not written that Durga is full of compassion for the Asuras when she is exterminating them?

The impersonal Truth, precisely because it is impersonal, can contain quite opposite things. There is a truth in Ahimsa, there is a truth in Destruction also... I do not teach that you should go on killing everybody every day as a spiritual dharma. I say that destruction can be done when it is part of the Divine work commanded by the Divine. Non-violence is better than violence as a rule and still sometimes violence may be the right thing. I consider dharma as relative; unity with the Divine and action from the Divine Will, the highest way. Buddha did not aim at action in the world but at cessation from the world-

existence. For that he found the eightfold Path a necessary preparatory discipline and so proclaimed it.

It [Ahimsa] had nothing to do with the Yoga, but with the path towards liberation found by Buddha. There are many paths and all need not be one and the same in their teaching.

You speak of the Impersonal as if it were a Person. The Impersonal is not He, it is It. How can an It guide or help? The Impersonal Brahman is inactive, aloof, indifferent, not concerned with what happens in the universe. Buddha's Permanent is the same. Whatever impersonal Truth or Light there is, you have to find it, use it, do what you can with it. It does not trouble itself to hunt after you. It is the Buddhist idea that you must do everything for yourself, that is the only way.

(3) ON PARAMHANSAHOOD

The forms of Paramhansahood—They are good in their own place—In Sri Aurobindo's Yoga all vital movements to be under psychic and spiritual control—Sannyāsis and the display of temper —Rudrabhāva.

22-4-1935

MYSELF: Regarding the vital of the Paramhansa, the three signs you spoke of may not be those of the supramental, but they are indications of a divinely realised person—at least Ramakrishna used to say so. But I don't suppose you would very much approve of strong eruptions of vital bhakti and constant emotional outbursts.

SRI AUROBINDO: What three signs? If you refer to the four conditions (child, madman, demon, inert), it is not Ramakrishna who invented that. It is an old Sanskrit sloka *Bālonmādapiśācajaḍavat*[1] describing the Paramhansa or rather the various forms of Paramhansahood. 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 and peace. If they conflict with the psychic or the 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.

MYSELF: We read that among some advanced types of sannyasis barometric rise and fall of temper is quite the usual thing!

[1] Written in Sanskrit.

Sometimes they don't mind a display of their temper if they can preserve a complete inner calm. They say that only a real sannyasi can rise up in anger at one moment, and become as calm as ice the next.

SRI AUROBINDO: I thought a sannyasi in the ideal at any rate was supposed to become *jitakrodhaḥ jitendriyaḥ*[1]. That a bad temper should be a sign of fulfilment in the Brahman is a revolutionary doctrine.

That is a particular stage in the growth in or towards the cosmic consciousness. But it is surely not the last stage of siddhi. Of course it does happen like that—because at a certain stage the consciousness gets cut up into two and the outer may do things which the inner observes but does not participate in that movement. My only objection was to regarding this outward bad temper as a proof of the highest spiritual siddhi. One can also act with the Rudrabhava, but without anger, though people may mistake it for anger. That is a higher stage. There there is no disturbance even in the outer being, only a mass of very calm, but intense divine force in action.

[1] Written in Bengali. The phrase means—"One who has conquered anger and has attained control over the senses".

(4) HOMO PSYCHICUS AND HOMO INTELLECTUALIS

The intellectual man and the emotional man—The spiritual knowledge of Buddha, Ramakrishna and Christ—The higher knowledge and mental knowledge—The heart and the mind.

9-5-1935

MYSELF: I would like to know if a vertical opening can be there without the opening of the inner centre.

SRI AUROBINDO: It can—but that usually leads to *Moksha* and *Jnāna* only, what Ramakrishna called *Shushka Jnāna.*

MYSELF: I think that an intellectually developed man like X has an advantage over an emotional man like Y; he will have the vertical opening owing to his head concentration, and will most probably have also the experiences that Y had, when his inner centre opens.

SRI AUROBINDO: If the intellectual will always have a greater wideness and vastness, how can we be sure that he will have an equal fervour, depth and sweetness with the emotional men?

MYSELF: Will the emotional man have as much knowledge as the intellectual when their inner minds open up?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is more logical—but the logical is not necessarily true. It may be that homo-intellectualis will remain wider and homo psychicus will remain deeper in heart.

MYSELF: I am still not sure. Can we say that Ramakrishna's mind or Christ's mind was as powerful as that of Buddha? You may say that it is after all the realisation that is important and all three had that; nevertheless, I think that a powerful mind is an extra asset. In this intellectual age the mind is going to play a big part. Hasn't your great dashing intellect charmed many of the intellectuals of the age?

SRI AUROBINDO: Buddha's mind as a mind was more

powerful but had he as much or as many-sided a spiritual knowledge as Ramakrishna? I leave out Christ, because his spiritual knowledge was from the heart only and intense but limited.

Which intellectual age? The intellectual age is dead. Intellectuals are becoming less and less important. There is nothing dashing in my intellect. And what effect for the spiritual purpose has the charming of these ineffective intellectuals?

Please do not confuse the higher knowledge and mental knowledge. The intellectual man will be able to give a wider and more orderly expression to what higher knowledge he gets than the homo psychicus; but it does not follow he will have more of it. He will have that only if he rises to an equal width and plasticity and comprehensiveness of the higher knowledge planes. In that case he will replace his mental by his above-mental capacity. But for many intellectuals, so-called, their intellectuality may be a stumbling-block as they bind themselves with mental conceptions or stifle the psychic fire under the heavy weight of rational thought. On the other hand I have seen comparatively uneducated people expressing higher knowledge with an astonishing fullness and depth and accuracy which the stumbling movements of their brain could never have allowed one to suppose possible. Therefore why fix beforehand by the mind what will or will not be possible when the Above-mind reigns? What the mind conceives as "must be" need not be the measure of the "will be". Such and such a homo intellectualis may turn out to be a more fervent God-lover than the effervescent emotional man; such and such an emotionalist may receive and express a wider knowledge than his intellect or even the intellect of the intellectual man could have harboured or organised. Let us not bind the phenomena of the higher consciousness by the possibilities and probabilities of a lower plane.

But Ramakrishna was a homo-psychicus with no atom of intellectuality—yet he had plenty of knowledge.

MYSELF: By the higher knowledge, I understand, you mean spiritual knowledge about Atman, Brahman, etc. But can one deal with the problems of ordinary life with mastery by this

spiritual knowledge? For instance, if I am asked to criticise Shaw or other literary figures, how am I to do it with this knowledge alone?

SRI AUROBINDO: What has all that to do with spiritual knowledge. Criticism of Shaw is not a part of Brahma-jnana. If one has to do it, one does it with the mind, so long as one does not get into intuitive Overmind or Supermind—then one does it with those. This is quite another matter—it has nothing to do with the main question which is about the spiritual realisation—through love or through knowledge.

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SRI AUROBINDO (in reply to some questions regarding the heart and the mind): The heart has its intuitions as well as the mind and these are as true as any mental perceptions. But neither all the feelings nor all perceptions nor all rational conclusions can be true.

How can Reason be the sole arbiter? Whose reason? The reason in differnt men comes to different, opposite or incompatible conclusions. We can't say that reason is infallible, any more than feeling is infallible or the senses are infallible.

2-9-1935

MYSELF: I am really sorry X has gone away. He was a man with such extraordinary powers.

SRI AUROBINDO: A sincere heart is worth all the extraordinary powers in the world.

(5) THE SILENT MIND, THOUGHT-WAVES. INTUITIONS

Intuition comes in a quiet mind—Sri Aurobindo himself wrote everything out of a silent mind—Thoughts not manufactured by oneself—They occur in one's being—Nature shapes them under a certain compulsion—The same line of poetry comes to the Compiler and to another sadhak—Sri Aurobindo explains—The mind of thinkers and philosophers—Thought-waves—The pride of being an instrument sheer egoism—Bilwamangal—The Compiler asks for an essay on intuition—Sri Aurobindo has no time for it, things too strenuous for him—On Descartes—On Rishihood—Bankimchandra.

22-10-1935

MYSELF: I wrote to you that I was thinking of studying *The Life Divine* with R or N; it is not possible to do that as both of them are very busy. I guess I'll now have to study it by myself. As your Force is there to help me I should be able to make a go of it—but unfortunately, the Divine Force too seems to have its conditions.

SRI AUROBINDO: You might try. Read an unintelligible para from *The Life Divine*, then sit in vacant meditation and see what comes from the intuitive Gods. They will probably play jokes with you, but what does it matter? One learns by one's errors and marches to success through one's failures.

MYSELF: But do you mean that this method 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.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

MYSELF: Anyhow, joke or no joke, I will try the method. But the trouble is that the mind finds it difficult to believe that a vacancy can be filled up all of a sudden without any kind of thinking.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the silliness of the mind. Why should it be impossible to fill up a vacancy? It is easier for things to come into an empty space than into a full one. The error comes from thinking that your thoughts are your own and that you are their maker and if you do not create thoughts (i.e. think), there will be none. A little observation ought to show that you are not manufacturing your own thoughts, but rather thoughts occur in you. Thoughts are born, not made—like poets, according to the proverb. Of course, there is a sort of labour and effort when you try to produce or else to think on a certain subject, but that is a concentration for making thoughts come up, come in, come down, as the case may be, and fit themselves together. The idea that you are shaping the thoughts or fitting them together is an egoistic delusion. They are doing it themselves, or Nature is doing it for you, only under a certain compulsion; you have to beat her often in order to make her do it, and the beating is not always successful. But the mind or nature or mental energy—whatever you like to call it, does this in a certain way and carries on with a certain order of thoughts,—haphazard intelligentialities (excuse the barbarism) or asininities, rigidly ordered or imperfectly ordered intellectualities, logical sequences and logical inconsequences, etc., etc. How is an intuition to get in in the midst of that waltzing and colliding crowd? It does sometimes,—in some minds often intuitions do come in, but immediately the ordinary thoughts surround it and eat it up alive, and then with some fragment of the murdered intuition shining through their non-intuitive stomachs they look up smiling at you and say "I am an intuition,

sir." But they are only intellect, intelligence or ordinary thought with part of a dismembered and therefore misleading intuition inside them. Now in a vacant mind, vacant but not inert (that is important) intuitions have a chance of getting in alive and whole. But don't run away with the idea that all that comes into an empty mind, will be intuitive. Anything, any blessed kind of idea can come in. One has to be vigilant and examine the credentials of the visitor. In other words the mental being must be there, silent but vigilant, impartial but discriminating. That is, however, when you are in search of truth. For poetry so much is not necessary. There it is only the poetic quality of the visitor that has to be scrutinised and that can be done after he has left his packet—by results.

MYSELF: You have seen, I think, Prithwisingh's poem. Its very first line was hovering over my mind—I let it go, not thinking much of it, but he has obviously caught it! Many times similar instances have occurred. How is one to explain this?

SRI AUROBINDO: There is no difficulty about explaining. You are as naive and ignorant as a new-born lamb. That is the way things come, only one does not notice. Thoughts, ideas happy inventions etc., etc., are always wandering about (in thought-waves or otherwise) seeking a mind that may embody them. One mind takes, looks, rejects—another takes, looks, accepts. Two different minds catch the same thought-form or thought-wave, but the mental activities being different make different results out of them. Or it comes to one and he does nothing, then it walks off, and goes to another who promptly annexes it and it settles into expression with a joyous bubble of inspiration, illumination or enthusiasm of original discovery or creation and the recipient cries proudly, "I, I have done this." Ego, sir! ego! You are the recipient, the conditioning medium, if you like—nothing more.

26-10-1935

MYSELF: This silent mind you speak of seems to be a result of

Yoga. I don't suppose thinkers and philosophers usually write *from a silent mind.*

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course; the ordinary mind is never silent.

No, certainly not. It is the active mind they have; only of course they concentrate, so the common incoherent mentalising stops and the thoughts that rise or enter and shape themselves are coherently restricted to the subject or activity in hand. But that is quite a different matter from the whole mind falling silent.

MYSELF: If thoughts come like that, why is there a difference, sometimes a great difference, between the thought-substance of one person and that of another?

SRI AUROBINDO: First of all these thought-waves, thought-seeds or thought-forms or whatever they are, are of different values and come from different planes of consciousness. And the same thought substance can take higher or lower vibrations according to the plane of consciousness through which the thoughts come in (e.g. thinking mind, vital mind, physical mind, subconscient mind) or the power of consciousness which catches them and pushes them into one man or another. Moreover there is a stuff of mind in each man and the incoming thought uses that for shaping itself or translating itself (transcribing we usually call it), but the stuff is finer or coarser, stronger or weaker etc., etc., in one mind than in another. Also there is a mind-energy actual or potential in each which differs and this mind-energy in its recipience of the thought can be luminous or obscure, sattwic, rajasic or tamasic with consequences that vary in each case.

MYSELF: But there are chances of getting drawn into quagmires by any blessed idea; how is one to pick out the right intuition?

SRI AUROBINDO: *Experientia docet*—experience is the doctor. Also the habit of intuitivising if it is honestly done develops a discrimination that begins to know how to sort the sheep from the goats or the demis and semis and semi-demis from the real thing. By honestly I mean without ego or *parti pris.*

MYSELF: As for the ego—why can't I pride myself on being an instrument, a medium?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, you can't—or if you do, you'll make an unblessed mess. Why should the chisel pride itself because the sculptor uses it? He could just as well have used another and it would have done as well. But anyhow the point is that the ego brings a lack of poise and lack of receptive honesty and meddles with what is received.

28-10-1935

MYSELF: How does one have this "receptive honesty"? Is it by trying to have an inner silence and calm, and stopping all thoughts, as you point out in your letter?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the first condition, but not the whole process. I told you that one could not safely take whatever comes as the intuition and I gave you the reasons.

MYSELF: What I try to do now is to make my mind silent and wait for something to come.

SRI AUROBINDO: But how are you sure that what sits up is not a mental suggestion?

MYSELF: And what has ego to do with all this? What one has to do is to remain just silent; and this is true for writing poetry as well as for prescribing medicines to patients.

SRI AUROBINDO: Ego interferes in a general way—most of course in choosing medicines—and many ways, e.g., inviting pseudo-intuitions which flatter the ego. Also it may interfere when a mistake has been made and prevent you acknowledging it or even call in more pseudo-intuitions to justify and back up the original error. Innumerable are the tricks of the ego. Also, if you feel yourself becoming intuitive, rightly or wrongly intuitive, (more so if it is wrongly), then a too strong ego may develop in you megalomania and then you are gone. So don't justify ego.

MYSELF: I understand that Intuition will be one of the outstanding features of your Supramental creation; we will only have to shut the eyes and come off with an illumined intuition!

The result will be epoch-making discoveries, inventions, etc., etc. By Jove! What a grand period it will be!

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord, no! At least not till you live in the gnostic Intuition as your ordinary consciousness. So long as you are only receiving all sorts of things from everywhere, you will have to be on the *qui vive* to see that you don't make a pseudo-intuitive fool of yourself.

MYSELF: By the way, do not things like poetry, music, art, help the aspiration of the soul?

SRI AUROBINDO: They are first in life a preparation of the consciousness—but when one does Yoga they can become a part of the sadhana if done for the Divine and by the Divine Force. But one should not want to be a poet for the sake of being a poet only, or for fame, applause etc.

4-4-1935

MYSELF: How can one train oneself to have direct Intuition? Is there a special way?

SRI AUROBINDO: It can be done—but I should have to write an essay on the Intuition to make my explanation intelligible.

6-4-1935

MYSELF: You said that nothing comes in an "easy gallop" that one has to plod on and develop faculties.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, I did not say nothing comes in an easy gallop. Some things do. But one can't count on that as a rule.

MYSELF: I would like to make a contact with this Intuition, which I am sure will help me a great deal in my work. So kindly tell me how I should train myself—an essay on this subject should prove useful. Just to give you more time I shall stop now and write nothing more.

SRI AUROBINDO: I must still say that I am too busy tonight. Things are altogether too strenuous just now for

essays. You give time, but others take the given time. Just now I am fighting all day and all night—can't stop fighting to write. One day I may give not an essay but a few compendious aphorisms on intuition and how to get it.

MYSELF: I had a talk with X which has rather puzzled me. He said that intuitions are of various kinds and come to us from different planes.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite true.

MYSELF: There is a silencing of the mind, a kind of rapid thinking, concentration, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: True also, but how do they work or how are they put together or how do they avoid getting in the way of each other? And above all how to keep them pure from mixture with the ordinary mind. If he knows that and can tell you rightly, he will save me the labour of an essay.

MYSELF: Finally, he said that I should not worry about these things—everything would be developed in me by the Force. But I am afraid one cannot get anything like that for nothing—some kind of price has to be paid!

SRI AUROBINDO: It is Nature that grudges it. A price there always is. The price is sometimes labour and tapasya, sometimes it is faith, sincerity, simplicity, openness, surrender.

On Descartes

9-9-1935

MYSELF: I have three letters of yours before me, and all three require some elucidation. I think and think, but can't get anywhere. Perhaps you will say, "Make the mind silent"! But Descartes says, "Je pense, donc je suis."

SRI AUROBINDO: Descartes was talking nonsense. There are plenty of things that don't think but still are—from the stone to the Yogi in samadhi. If he had simply meant that the fact of his thinking showed that he wasn't dead, that of course would have been quite right and scientific.

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I once asked Sri Aurobindo for a right definition of a Rishi; also, why he had called Bankimchandra a Rishi. He wrote against my query:

"A Rishi is one who sees or discovers an inner truth and puts it into self-effective language—the mantra. Either new truth or old truth made new by expression and realisation. X experienced certain eternal truths by process of Yoga—I don't think it is by Rishi-like intuition or illumination, nor has he the mantra.—Poetic intuition and illumination is not the same thing as a Rishi's intuition or illumination.

"Well, the Bande Mataram acted as a mantra and so I suppose I gave him the credit of Rishihood."

(6) RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

18-10-1935

MYSELF: How is it that sometimes secular literature moves one more, and gives a greater light than religious literature?

SRI AUROBINDO: Religious literature inspires only the religious-minded,—and most religious literature apart form the comparatively few great books, is poor stuff. Secular literature either appeals to the idealistic mind or to the emotions or to the aesthetic element in us, and all that has a much easier and more common appeal. As for spiritual light, it is another thing altogether. Spirituality is other than mental idealism and other than religion.

MYSELF: In literary expression, I think it is the inner man that counts; but doesn't that imply that unless one is utterly and absolutely sincere the work will not express something genuine and true which the reader can grasp?

SRI AUROBINDO: Plenty of insincere men have written inspiring things. That is because something in them felt it, though they could not carry it out in life, and that something was used by a greater power behind. Very often in his art, in his writings, the higher part of a man comes out, while the lower dominates his life.

MYSELF: You say, "As for spiritual light, it is another thing altogether." What do you exactly mean by it? Do you mean that it can very well be had from anything—either high or low?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, I did not mean that. I meant simply that an idealistic notion or religious belief or emotion were something quite different from getting spiritual light. An idealistic notion might turn you towards getting spiritual light, but it is not the light itself. It is true however that "the spirit bloweth where it listeth" and that we can get an emotional impulse or touch of mental realisation of spiritual things from almost any circumstance, as Bilwamangal got it from the words of his

courtesan mistress. Obviously it happens, because something is ready somewhere,—if you like, the psychic being waiting for its chance and taking some opportunity in mind, vital or heart to knock open a window somewhere.

(7) THE PINEAL GLAND

Yogi X and his machines, instruments etc.—On Seed Sounds—The Pineal Gland, the seat of the spirit entity!!—Squaring physical science with Yoga always makes Sri Aurobindo suspicious—Pseudo-science—Why he is not able to accept the version put forward—His subsequent elucidation—On Science.

MYSELF: Yogi X says, "I am attempting to show the world that a man can be perfectly spiritual without running away to the caves etc. etc.," and has founded an elaborate system of factories, textiles, machines, scientific instruments, electric fans, run by his disciples. His Yoga-practice is called by him Sound-Yoga. What is this again—something really new?

SRI AUROBINDO: How does he show it? The world can see his textiles and machines and electric fans, but how is it to know that his men are perfectly spiritual? "Showing the world" is a dangerous aim to start with—it ends generally in the world as it is and always was + a show.

Not new at all—as old as the Himalayas. You seem to be remarkably ignorant of the past history of Yoga in India. It is only a specialised statement of the general Tantric theory of the Seed Sounds.

MYSELF: Anyway I am not very much interested in all this. There is something else now about which I want your opinion. I have read in a book that the innermost parts of our brain centres are associated with subtle worlds.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nothing new in that—except that it ignores the part played by the subtle body and packs all into the gross physical. But that too has been done before.

MYSELF: The most important part is supposed to be the pineal gland; it is designated as the seat of the spirit entity in man.

SRI AUROBINDO: Ancient, ancient, very ancient! The Theosophists, I believe, made a big noise about the pineal gland.

MYSELF: It is said that if you shoot a man through this gland, he instantaneously dies. When the spirit entity leaves the gland and passes upwards through the grey matter, it comes into contact with the universal mind; then passing through the white matter it enters into contact with lofty spiritual realities.

SRI AUROBINDO: So he does if you shoot him in other places, the heart for instance. So the spirit entity is there too?

Sounds rather stuffy, but it may be true for all I know. These theosophic and other modern attempts to square physical Science with Yoga (Yogis formerly did not bother to differentiate the spiritual functions of grey matter and white matter) make me always suspicious. It looks like fabrications of the mind, pseudo-science. It is true however that a passage in the Upanishads is supposed to give the soul hired lodging in the pineal gland.

MYSELF: You know that medical men are still hazy about the definite functions of this gland. Is it because this small, apparently innocent, unnecessary gland is so important spiritually that we are not able to know anything about it by our physiological analysis? Then again it is said that the soul dwells somewhere in the brain; is the soul the same as this entity residing in the pineal?

SRI AUROBINDO: May be. But the soul is also supposed to be somewhere in or behind the heart, i.e., cardiac centre. But perhaps that is only the soul-entity and not the spirit entity?

God knows and perhaps X also. I don't. I have no idea. Never bothered about the pineal gland. In fact my spirit entity "receded from" it, even "finally left" it long ago without my dying—at least I seem to myself to be alive still.

Allow me to state my difficulty. How can a spirit entity be enclosed in a material gland? So far as I know the self or spirit is not enclosed in the body, rather the body is in the self. When we have the full experience of the self, we feel it as a wide consciousness in which the body is a very small thing, an adjunct or a thing contained, not a container. What then is this spirit-entity? There can be a small formation which stands for the self or spirit, like the Upanishad's Purusha no bigger than man's

thumb. Is this the spirit entity? But even then in which sense, in what relativity of space can it be said to be in the very material pineal gland? A spirit confined in a gland and dislodged from it by a pistol shot is a kind of language which I buck at. A spirit touching grey brain matter and so entering into contact with universal mind and touching white matter and so entering into contact with loftier spiritual realities is also too weird a conception for my intelligence. What happens to it when it has no matter to touch? Dissolution? Laya?

When we speak of Purusha in the head, heart, etc., we are using a figure. The Muladhara from which the Kundalini rises is not in the physical body, but in the subtle body (the subtle body is that in which the being goes out in deep trance or more radically, at the time of death); so also are all the centres. But as the subtle body penetrates and is interfused with the gross body, there is a certain correspondence between these chakras and certain centres in the physical proper. So figuratively we speak of the Purusha in this or that centre of the body. Owing to this correspondence, again, when the Ananda or anything else comes down into the being, it is the subtle body that it pervades, but it communicates itself through it to the gross body and its consciousness, so that it is felt as if pervading the body. But all that is very different from saying that the spirit is lodged in a gland. The gross body is an engine, a means of communication and action of the spirit upon the world and it is only a small part of the instrumentation. It is absurd to make so much of it as all that. It is a sort of false materialism intended to placate minds that have a scanty knowledge of Science. But what is the use of that? Everybody now knows that Science is not a statement of the truth of things, but only a language expressing a certain experience of objects, their structure, their mathematics, a coordinated and utilisable impression of their processes—it is nothing more. Matter itself is something (a formation of energy perhaps?) of which we know superficially the structure as it appears to our mind and senses and to certain examining instruments (about which it is now suspected that they largely determine their own results, Nature adapting its replies to the

instrument used) but more than that no Scientist knows or can know. If the X affirmations are meant to be another kind of language expressing certain psycho-physical experiences I have no objection. But why all this pineal glandism and talk about entities and bullets?

N.B. If I say the Purusha in the heart, do I mean it is there in the physical heart, tumbling about in the flow of the blood or stuck in the valves or the muscular portions and when a bullet is lodged in the heart it jumps up, and tumbles down dead or goes off skating and swimming into some grey or white matter worlds beyond? Certainly not. I am using a significant language which expresses certain relations between the psychic consciousness and the physical of which we become aware by Yoga.

(8) PREDESTINATION, CHANCE, FREE WILL

The scorpion-bite incident—The Compiler's question regarding it—Sri Aurobindo's reply—The play of forces—Socrates and his daemon—The Compiler's difficulty with regard to "the play of forces".—Sri Aurobindo explains—Extreme rigidity of definition obscures the truth—The Cosmic Consciousness with an opening to Overmind needed for knowledge of the whole working.

In September 1935, a strange incident occurred. At that time Dr. Becharlal and I used to work in the dispensary. After the day's work we shut the doors and went out—Dr. Becharlal to the pier for his usual walk, and I to a friend's place. J, another friend of mine, who often used to come to the dispensary to help me, also went to the pier at this time. But that particular evening he somehow did not enjoy his stroll and instead had what he called "a very repulsive feeling" when he arrived at the pier, and distinctly felt that he should go back to the dispensary. When he went there, he found a number of people collected near the entrance, knocking at the door; they were waiting for me. J inquired what had happened, and was told that a sadhak, B.P. had been bitten by a scorpion, and required immediate medical help. He at once hastened to fetch me. I asked him to find Dr. Becharlal, and bring him also to the dispensary. He went to the pier looking for the doctor. After going a little distance he met Dr. Becharlal, who was returning without finishing his walk; he said that somehow he did not feel like going to the pier that day. I was a little baffled by the whole incident, so I asked Sri Aurobindo whether there was some Force working behind which drew all of us to the required spot at the right time to save an ashramite, or whether the whole thing was just an accident like other such incidents.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, of course not. But they seem so to all who live in their outward vision only. "Coincidence the scientists do them call." But anyone with some intelligence and

power of observation who lives more in an inward consciousness can see the play of invisible forces at every step which act on men and bring about events without their knowing about the instrumentation. The difference created by Yoga or by an inner consciousness—for there are people like Socrates who develop or have some inner consciousness without Yoga—is that one becomes conscious of these invisible forces and can also consciously profit by them or use and direct them. That is all.

These things manifest differently, in a different form or transcription in different people. If it had been Socrates and not Becharlal who was there,—which would have been useless as he was no doctor and highly inconvenient to you as he would have certainly turned the tables on you and avenged me by cross-examining you every day and passing you through a mill of philosophical conundrums and unanswerable questions—but still if he had been there, he would have felt it as an intimation from his daemon, "Turn back, Socrates; it is at the Ashram that you ought to be now." Another might have felt an intuition that something was up at the Ashram. Yet another would have heard a voice or suggestion saying "If you went back at once it would be useful"—or simply "Go back, back; quick, quick!" without any reason. A fourth would have seen a scorpion wriggling about with its sting ready. A fifth would have seen the agonised face of B.P. and wondered whether he had a tooth-ache or a stomach-ache. In Becharlal's case it was simply an unfelt force that changed his mind in a way that seemed casual but was purposeful, and this obscure way is the one in which it acts most often with most people.

8-9-1935

MYSELF: Did you not have a presentiment of what was going to happen? If so, you must have acted through the three of us!

SRI AUROBINDO: I was not speaking of any personal action but of the play of forces which happens everywhere, but is of course more mastered here because of our presence and the work done.

MYSELF: Then it means that there is no such thing as accident, chance, or coincidence; all is predetermined—all is a play of forces.

SRI AUROBINDO: I have not said that everything is rigidly predetermined. Play of forces does not mean that. What I said was that behind visible events in the world there is always a mass of invisible forces at work unknown to the outward minds of men and by Yoga, (by going inward and establishing a conscious connection with the Cosmic Self and Force and forces) one can become conscious of these forces, intervene consciously in the play, to some extent at least determine the result of the play. All that has nothing to do with predetermination. On the contrary one watches how things develop and gives a push here and a push there when possible or when needed. There is nothing in all that to contradict the great Sir C.V.Raman.[1] Only when he says these things are games of chance, he is merely saying that human beings don't know how it works out. It is not rigid predetermination, but it is not a blind inconscient Chance either. It is a play in which there is a working out of possibilities in Time.

MYSELF: From the falling down of the bottle—Simpson's discovery of chloroform—to the Irish Sweep-stake everything seems to be this blessed play of forces, but not Chance! The bottle had to fall for the great discovery!

SRI AUROBINDO: Why shouldn't it fall? Something had to happen so that human stupidity might be enlightened, so why not the agency of a bottle?

12-9-1935

MYSELF: Your old colleague B says that if there were such a thing as "accident", then one can no longer say that there is a perfectly uninterrupted order in this world. Order means a reg-

[1] I had written to Sri Aurobindo that once Sir C. V. Raman had declared that scientific discoveries were only games of chance.

ular sequence. An accident can only happen by disturbing this sequence.

SRI AUROBINDO: That's nineteenth century mechanised determinism. It is not like that. Things can be changed without destroying the universe.

MYSELF: I am afraid I am once again knocking my head against a cosmic problem.

SRI AUROBINDO: Very much so, Sir.

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1-7-1935

SRI AUROBINDO: Predestination and chance are words—words that obscure the truth by their extreme rigidity of definition. All is done through a play of forces which seems to be play of different possibles, but there is Something that looks and selects and uses without being either blindly arbitrary (predestination) or capriciously decisive (chance).

MYSELF: The ultimate responsibility then lies with this 'Something' on which the play of forces is dependent, and then —no free will, no chance?

SRI AUROBINDO: There is no question of responsibility. The "Something" does not act arbitrarily, paying no heed to the play of forces or the man's nature. "Selects" does not mean "selects at random". If a man puts himself on the side of or into the hands of the hostile influences and says "This way I will go and no other. I want my ego, my greatness, my field of power and action"—has not the Something the right to say "I agree. Go and find it—if you can"? On the other, if the balance of forces is otherwise, less on one side, the selection may be the other way, the saving element being present, to determine another orientation. But to understand the working of the Cosmic Something one must see not only the few outward factors seen by the human eye, but the whole working with all its multitudinous details—that one cannot do unless one is oneself in the Cosmic Consciousness and with some opening at least in the Overmind.

There is no such thing as free will, but there is the power of the Puruṣha to say "yes" or "no" to any particular pressure of Prakṛiti, and there is the power of the mind, vital etc. to echo feebly or strongly the Purusha's "yes" or "no" or to resist it. A constant (not a momentary) Yes or No has its effect in the play of the forces and the selection by the Something.

(9) THE RIDDLE OF THIS WORLD

20-7-1935

MYSELF: X writes in an article that through sorrow and suffering God leads us to immortality; that there is a glory, even a bliss, in their conquest. (Here I quoted a few lines from the article which was written in Bengali). I am afraid my mystic vision and chicken heart do not see much in this theory. Conquest of sorrow and suffering is all right for brave hearts like Vivekananda's and X's, or even for poor hearts like mine when they have a Guru like Sri Aurobindo and a mother like our Mother here to do the sadhana for them; but what about the people outside who are wallowing under the weight of their crosses!

SRI AUROBINDO: I suppose you have not read my "Riddle of this World", but it is a similar solution I put there. X's way of putting it is a trifle too "Vedantic-Theistic"—in my view it is a transaction between the One and the Many. In the beginning it was you (not the human you who is now complaining but the central being) which accepted or even invited the adventure of the Ignorance; sorrow and struggle are a necessary consequence of the plunge into the Inconscience and the evolutionary emergence out of it. The explanation is that it had an object, the eventual play of the Divine Consciousness and Ananda not in its original transcendence but under conditions for which the plunge into the Inconscience was necessary. It is fundamentally a cosmic problem and can be understood only from the cosmic consciousness. If you want a solution which will be agreeable to the human mind and feelings, I am afraid there is none. No doubt if human beings had made the universe, they would have done much better; but they were not there to be consulted when they were made. Only your central being was there and that was much nearer in its temerarious foolhardiness to Vivekananda's or X's than to the

repining prudence of your murmuring and trembling human mentality, of the present moment—otherwise it would never have come down into the adventure. Or perhaps it did not realise what it was in for? It is the same with the wallowers under their cross. Even now they wallow because something in them likes the wallowing and bears the cross because something in them chooses to suffer. So?—

(10) ON WOMEN

The Compiler speaks about a doctor's opinion on women—Sri Aurobindo disagrees—Men's demands on women throughout the ages—Their subservient position—On sex—Women perhaps less physically sexual than men—They are vitally sexual—Ramakrishna's advice regarding 'kamini-kanchan'—Women discover psychic easily—But more is required for sadhana—Women's intuition from the heart and vital mind, not the Intuition with a capital I—Man's "Hitler-Mussolini attitude"—The opinions of Buddha and Ramakrishna regarding relations with women.

15-1-1935

MYSELF: Is it not true that women are more receptive and psychic than men?

SRI AUROBINDO: Rubbish! Neither more receptive nor even more hysteric. Men, I find, can equal them even at that. It is true that they declare hunger-strikes more easily, if you think with Gandhi that that is a sign of psychicness (soul-force). But after all Non-cooperation has taken away even that inferiority from men.

19-1-1935

MYSELF: A medical man writes that in Greece and Rome during the Middle Ages women had great freedom and a superior form of instruction, yet they did nothing outstanding. In his own profession, though there have been women professors since the 17th century in famous Italian Universities—in Bologna, Naples, etc.—they have done nothing to advance their special science. Then again, there have been no women of first rank in painting, music, literature etc., except Rosa

Bonheur, who however had to shave her chin and dress as a man.

SRI AUROBINDO: In Greece woman was a domestic slave except the Hetairae and they were educated only to please. In Rome, "She remained at home and spun wool," was the highest eulogy for woman. It was only for a brief period of the Empire that woman began to be more free, but she was never put on an equality with man. Your medical man was either an ignoramus or was talking through his hat at you.

What an argument—from exceptional conditions as against the habits of millenniums! What about administration, rule, business, in which women have shown themselves as capable and more consistently capable than men? These things need no brains? Any imbecile can do them?

MYSELF: Of course no one can dispute that at the time of suffering and illness it is their tender hand that soothes.

SRI AUROBINDO: It means that is what men have mainly demanded of them—to be their servants, nurses, cooks, children-bearers and rearers, ministers to their sex-desires etc. That has been their occupation and aim in life and their natures have got adapted to their work. All that they have achieved else than that is by the way—in spite of the yoke laid on them. And then man smiles a superior smile and says it was all due to woman's inferior nature, not to the burden laid on her.

MYSELF: Whatever may be the reason of the difference between a man and a woman, it can't be gainsaid that they can efface themselves more completely or more easily for the sake of love.

SRI AUROBINDO: They have been trained to it through the ages—that is why. Subjection, self-effacement, to be at the mercy of man has been their lot—it has given them that training. But it has left them also another kind of ego which is their spiritual obstacle—the ego which is behind the abhiman and hunger-strike.

MYSELF: Can it be said that because they live more in their heart than in their head, their path is easier?

SRI AUROBINDO: All these clear-cut assertions are mental

statements—mental statements are too clear-cut to be true, as philosophy and science have begun to discover. Life and being are too complex for that.

MYSELF: Here I have noticed that out of sheer love some women have followed their husbands into the travails of the Unknown, but when the husbands have been assailed with doubts and depression, they have been sitting happily and confidently in the lap of the Divine.

SRI AUROBINDO: Great Scott! What a happy dream!

MYSELF: It seems that in Yoga women have one advantage, the sex-instinct in them is not as strong as in men.

SRI AUROBINDO: There is no universal rule. Women can be as sexual as men or more. But there are numbers of women who dislike sex and there are very few men. One Sukhdev in a million, but many Dianas and Pallas Athenes. The virgin is really a feminine conception; men are repelled by the idea of eternal virginity. Many women would remain without any waking of the sexual instinct if men did not thrust it on them and that cannot be said of many, perhaps of any man. But there is another side to the picture. Women are perhaps less physically sexual than men on the whole,—but what about vital sexuality, the instinct of possessing and being possessed etc. etc.?

MYSELF: How is it that Ramakrishna always used to ask his disciples to avoid *kāminī-kāñcan*;[1] Buddha was no less strict.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the old monastic idea. It arises from the extreme sexuality of men. They see in women *Narakasya dvāram*[2] because that door is so wide open in themselves. But they prefer to throw the blame on women.

That was not due to sex but to woman's desire for new experience and knowledge. (In reply to my statement that man's fall from heaven was due to woman).

MYSELF: This letter of mine is pretty long. I am waiting to have from you a royal verdict covering and satisfying all points.

[1] "Woman and gold".
[2] "The gate of Hell".

SRI AUROBINDO: I can't cover and satisfy all points—it would need a volume. I had kept your book in order to write something less flippant and insufficient than the marginal notes about this grave matter. But I have had enough work today for any two Sundays, so I had to leave aside all that was not urgent.

26-1-1935

MYSELF: Apropos of our discussion, let me put before you Mother's opinion on the matter. She says that women are not more bound to the vital and material consciousness than men. On the contrary, as they do not have the arrogant mental pretensions of men, it is easier for them to discover their psychic being and be guided by it.

SRI AUROBINDO: No doubt, they can discover their psychic being more easily,—but that is not enough. It is the first step. The next is to live in the psychic. The third is to make the psychic the ruler of the being. The fourth is to rise beyond the mind. The fifth is to bring what is beyond into the lower nature. I don't say that it is always done in that order, but all that has to be done.

MYSELF: Mother also says that women are conscious in their sentiments, and that the best of them are conscious in their acts. If that is so, there is no more question about it, I think.

Sri Aurobindo underlined the words "no more question" and wrote in the margin: "That is too much to say. There may not be so much mental questioning but there may be a lot of vital questioning and resistance."

MYSELF: You will agree that women are more intuitive than men?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that of course—but it is the spontaneous intuition of the heart or of the vital mind, not the Intuition with a capital I.

MYSELF: As they live in the vital, their difficulties in the sadhana will be less, I suppose.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not at all. How can living in the vital make things easier? The vital is the main source of difficulties

in the Yoga. The difficulty with men is not purely mental. There too it is vital—only men call in their intellect to defend their vital against the coming or the touch or the pressure of the Divine, women call in their vital mind to do the same thing.

MYSELF: N writes in his book, "Woman's whole being is concentrated on the thing she clings to, but man's vision is not so inclusive. *Niṣṭhā* is the very nature and ideal of women."

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on the spirit in which she is concentrated. There is the psychic and spiritual and there is the unregenerate vital. The unregenerate vital way creates enormous difficulties, and the desire to possess means a vehement vital egoism. How can vehement egoism be helpful for the spiritual life?

MYSELF: If the *niṣṭhā*[1] can be transformed for higher and diviner things then her path becomes easier, I suppose.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is this *niṣṭhā*? If the woman recoils from the vital to the spiritual and psychic (the vital converting itself into an instrument of realisation), then what you say may be true. But there lies the whole question.

MYSELF: Since ancient times women have been trained to accept a position of subjection by Manu and others. Is it because men are more sexual? It would be rather hard on us to be accused of this?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is because of man's desire to be the master and keep her in subjection,—the Hitler and Mussolini attitude. The sex is an additional stimulus. —No more hard than you deserve.

MYSELF: Then again, it is said that woman's centre of life and consciousness is in the vital, whose nature is to pull the jiva down to earth.

SRI AUROBINDO: Woman's living in the material and vital is not the cause. It is man's living in the vital and material that is the cause of his finding her an obstacle. She also finds him an obstacle and could say of him that he is *narakasya dvā-*

[1] Nistha means one-pointed concentration upon a thing—single-mindedness.

ram. The assumption that man lives less in the vital and material than woman is not true. He makes more use of his intellect for vital and material purposes—that is all.

MYSELF: Can we not then justify Buddha, Ramakrishna and others who advocated isolation from women? After all, is it not essentially the same principle here, because if vital relations are debarred, nothing remains except a simple exchange of words?

SRI AUROBINDO: What about the true (not the pretended) psychic and spiritual—forgetting sex? The relation has to be limited because sex immediately trots into the front. You are invited to live above the vital and deeper than the vital—then only you can use the vital aright. Buddha was for Nirvana, and what is the use of having relations with anybody if you are bound for Nirvana? Ramakrishna insisted on isolation during the period when a man is spiritually raw—he did not object to meeting when he becomes ripe and no longer a slave of sex.

MYSELF: Now, I have learnt a lot on the subject, but it has not been wholly satisfying, since the answers are in the nature of marginal comments. I would like to have a coherent, harmonious whole. My note book can wait on your table till Monday.

SRI AUROBINDO: Sorry, but you can't get today either the volume or the harmonious whole. Woman will have to wait as she has done through the centuries and may have to do again if Hitler and Mussolini have their way. The men have crowded her out. Next time better not discuss her yourself—that will save me from the temptation of marginals.

(11) THE NECESSITY OF VICTORY OVER SEX

6-4-1936

He is to be congratulated on the victory in the matter of sex —it is very important to have that when the intense definitive experiences are beginning. For if once the actual penetrative descent is felt, the less the higher consciousness is met by the sex force the better, for then a dangerous mixture may take place or else a struggle which is better avoided.

(12) THE DESCENT OF POWER

6-4-1936

The description of the Power he feels—which is obviously the true thing—is very accurate—it is so, like rain or a fall of snow, that it often comes at first. I take it from his use of the word "around", that it is an enveloping Power that he feels. It does not begin for all in the same way—some only feel it above their heads occasionally descending on them and entering.

(13) DIVINE LOVE

9-6-1935

MYSELF: I would like to ask something about Divine love. It is said that the Divine loves all equally; yet it is a fact that some are dearer to Him than others. I believe, you too say the same thing!

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't say; it is the Gita that says it—or rather there are two separate slokas; one says that the Divine makes no differences—the other says that Arjuna is especially dear to him.

MYSELF: There are many instances to show that some persons are dearer to the Divine than others. Besides Krishna and Arjuna, we have the instance of Buddha and Ananda.

SRI AUROBINDO: There is also St. John, the beloved disciple.

MYSELF: Then again, Vivekananda was dearer to Ramakrishna than other disciples. Chaitanya showered his grace on Madhai and Jagai, but were they closer to him than Nitai?

SRI AUROBINDO: But he had love for them (shouldn't I love them for that reason?)[1]

MYSELF: What is it that determines this—I really don't know?

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course you don't—nor does anybody. Is love a creation of the reason? Or dealt out by this or that scale? Or does the Divine calculate "This fellow has so much of this or that quality? I will give him just so much more love than to that other."

MYSELF: This question is not only of theoretical interest to us, but also of practical importance, since in our stumblings and gropings the Divine here may have a soft corner for some, and not perhaps for others to the same extent.

[1] The well-known words of Chaitanya put in brackets here were written by Sri Aurobindo in Bengali.

SRI AUROBINDO: All that is rather beside the point. There is a universal divine love that is given equally to all—but also there is a special relation with each man—it is not a question of more or less, though it may appear so. But even that less or more cannot be judged by human standards. The man who gets a blow may, if he has a certain relation, feel it is a divine caress; he may even say, erecting his own standard, "She loves me more than others, because to others she would not give that blow, to me she felt she could give it," and it would be quite as good a standard as the kind treatment one—as standards go. But no standards apply. For in each case it is according to the relation. The cause of the relation? It differs in each case. Cast your plummet into the deep and perhaps you shall find it —or perhaps you will hit something that has nothing at all to do with it.

11-6-1935

MYSELF: The "deep" is too deep for my plummet, I think.

SRI AUROBINDO: For any mental plummet. It is not the mind that can discover these things.

11-6-1935

MYSELF: In your letter to X you speak of a special relation with the Mother. Is this determined by the need and temperament of the sadhak?

SRI AUROBINDO: The need and temperament are one element only. It is the relation as a whole from which everything flows. These things are not arranged by some mental reason or calculated intuition. The source is deeper and it is a reality behind that acts.

MYSELF: Some say that the Divine love is like a rose; those who come nearer to it, that is, open themselves more, necessarily get more of it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course—but those who don't open themselves get it too—without knowing it often. Unfortunately many don't recognise or appreciate their good luck and may even go grumbling and bumbling off into the darkness.

MYSELF: Some people are of the opinion that those in whom the psychic has evolved through many births will come nearer to the Divine, and will, therefore, be dearer to Him than others whose psychic is still a child.

SRI AUROBINDO: The psychic is always a child—*bâlavat*—only it can be a very wise child.

THE MOTHER

Second Series

SECTION I

Spirituality

17-4-1937

MYSELF: You won't say anything about the Supramental till it descends. It is this great mystery about it that makes us pin all our faith on it and the word Supermind goes from mouth to mouth. Ah, if we could have faint glimpses of it!

SRI AUROBINDO: Not much utility in this mouth to mouth business. If people set themselves seriously to the task of psychic or spiritual opening or development, it would be much more useful—even for the coming of the Supramental. If I tried to explain about the Supramental, it would be all UP with the Supramental. The rest of the lives of the sadhaks would be spent in discussing the supramental and how near Nirod or Nishikanta or Anilbaran was to the Supramental or whether this was supramental or that was supramental or whether it was supramental to drink tea or not etc. etc. etc. and there would be no more chance of any sadhana.

26-6-1938

MYSELF: Your Supermind business baffles our understanding and some of us are sceptic about it and some think it not worthwhile at present to bother about it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, it may not be necessary to understand it but it is advisable not to misunderstand it. The scepticism is stupid, because how can one pronounce for or against about something one does not know or understand at all?

Certainly it is better not to bother about it and to do what is immediately necessary. The attempt to understand has led many to take for the Supermind something that was not even spiritual and to suppose themselves supermen when all they were doing was to go headlong into the ultra-vital.

MYSELF: Does one need to understand your Yoga in order to practise it?

SRI AUROBINDO: If one has faith and openness that is enough. Besides there are two kinds of understanding—understanding by the intellect and understanding in the consciousness. It is good to have the former if it is accurate, but it is not indispensable. Understanding by the consciousness comes if there is faith and openness, though it may come only gradually and through steps of experience. But I have seen people without education or intellectuality understand in this way perfectly well the course of the Yoga in themselves, while intellectual men make big mistakes e.g. take a neutral mental quietude for the spiritual peace and refuse to come out of it in order to go farther.

SUPRAMENTALISATION AND THE CONQUEST OF DEATH

9-10-1936

MYSELF: I find that there is a change of views on your part about the Supermind's descent and the work of conquering death for humanity. Formerly I thought everything depended on your own success; now it seems a lot depends on us in this vital matter. But the outlook for us does not seem very bright; even physically it does not appear encouraging: one or two people have actually died.

SRI AUROBINDO: In what does this change of views consist? Did I say that nobody could die in the Ashram? If so I must have been intoxicated or passing through a temporary aberration.

As for the conquest of death, it is only one of the sequelæ of supramentalisation—and I am not aware that I have forsworn my views about the supramental descent. But I never said or thought that the supramental descent would automatically make everybody immortal. The supramental can only make the best conditions for anybody who can open up to it then or thereafter attaining to the supramental consciousness and its consequences. But it could not dispense with the necessity of sadhana. If it did, the logical consequence would be that the whole earth, men, dogs and worms would suddenly wake up to find themselves supramental. There would be no need of an Ashram or of Yoga.

Why vital? What is vital is the supramental change of consciousness—conquest of death is something minor and, as I have always said, the last physical result of it, not the first result of all or the most important—a thing to be added to complete the whole, not the one thing needed and essential. To put it first is to reverse all spiritual values—it would mean that the seeker was actuated, not by any high spiritual aim but by a vital cling-

ing to life or a selfish and timid seeking for the security of the body—such a spirit could not bring the supramental change.

Certainly, everything depends on my success....But did you imagine that would mean the cessation of death on the planet and that sadhana would cease to be necessary for anybody?

14-10-1936

MYSELF: If the Supermind descends into you or into the earth consciousness, the question of faith or sadhana becomes irrelevant as regards death, for death is a Force and, when you have a control or conquest over it, it means that its supremacy is lost in this part of the world, whether I have faith or not, do sadhana or not.

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord, man. What is this reasoning? Everything is a Force—why should the supramental descent into me or earth assure complete and universal immediate conquest of this Force only or specially among so many?

MYSELF: Even if one does sadhana, illness may come and snatch one away: then one's chance of supramentalisation is lost. Will not one now be protected and allowed a chance?

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, but that is simply warding off death. Perhaps the supramental will do that—(it can, if it wants)—but not for ever. I mean if a man wants 200 years to supramentalise himself, it can't be promised that he will be kept alive till then.

MYSELF: Has faith any say in the prolongation of life?

SRI AUROBINDO: Faith does help and has helped. It is a fact.

MYSELF: You have also said that to prevent death sadhana is necessary.

SRI AUROBINDO: To make the control of death absolute, not provisional and relative.

MYSELF: I want a final word from you. Wouldn't your supramentalisation make death impossible in the Ashram?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not in the sense that anybody can seek refuge in the supramentalised Ashram against death and sit comfortably there without any intention of doing sadhana.

SADHANA

I

SRI AUROBINDO: It is quite right and part of the right consciousness in sadhana that you should feel drawn in your heart towards the Mother and aspire for the vision and realisation of her presence. But there should not be any kind of restlessness joined to this feeling. The feeling should be quietly intense. It will then be easier for the sense of the presence to come and to grow in you.

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Aspire to realisation, but do not be over-eager. Keep yourself quietly open and allow the Mother's force to work in you, that will bring you the necessary realisation.

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It is the soul, the psychic being in you, behind the heart, that is awake and wants to concentrate the mind on the Divine. It is the nature of the mind to go out to other things, but now when it does that, there is the unease in the heart, the psychic sorrow because the heart feels at once that this is wrong and the head also aches because of the resistance to the Divine Force at work. This is a thing that often happens at an early stage, after the opening of the consciousness to the sadhana.

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All things are the Divine because the Divine is there, but hidden not manifest; when the mind goes out to things, it is not with the sense of the Divine in them, but for the appearances only which conceal the Divine. It is necessary therefore for

you as a sadhak to turn entirely to the Mother in whom the Divine is manifest and not run after the appearances, the desire of which or the interest in which prevents you from meeting the Divine. Once the being is consecrated, then it can see the Divine everywhere—and then it can include all things in the one consciousness without a separate interest or desire.

II

MYSELF: It is exactly a year and a half since I came here, but I can't detect any sign of progress.

SRI AUROBINDO: You have had experiences which are signs of a future possibility. To have more within the first one and a half years it would be necessary to have the complete attitude of the sadhak and give up that of the man of the world. It is only then that progress can be rapid from the beginning.

MYSELF: I must admit that of late I have been rather lax, especially regarding food—I mean eating with friends on Sundays. Does this Sunday indulgence have any connection with the resistance that came up in me? What was the real reason for it?

SRI AUROBINDO: Laxity and a self-externalising consciousness more occupied with outer than with inner things.

About food, tea, etc., the aim of Yoga is to have no hankerings, no slavery either to the stomach or the palate. How to get to that point is another matter—it depends often on the individual. With a thing like tea the straight and easiest way is to stop it. As to food, the best way usually is to take the food given you, practise non-attachment and follow no fancies. That would mean giving up the Sunday indulgence. The rest must be done by an inner change of consciousness and not by external means.

MYSELF: I suppose that this is what you mean by having the complete attitude of the sadhak and giving up that of the man of the world.

SRI AUROBINDO: All these are external things that have their

use, but what I mean is something more inward. I mean not to be interested in outward things for their own sake, following after them with desire, but at all times to be intent on one's soul, living centrally in the inner being and its progress, taking outward things and action only as a means for the inner progress.

MYSELF: The question of food is to some extent within one's control, but it is not so easy to control the habitual movement of thoughts in the mind.

SRI AUROBINDO: Detach yourself from it—make your mind external to it, something that you can observe as you observe things occurring in the street. So long as you do not do that it is difficult to be the mind's master.

III

28-9-1936

SRI AUROBINDO: The two feelings are both of them right they indicate the two necessities of the sadhana. One is to go inward and open fully the connection between the psychic being and the outer nature. The other is to open upward to the Divine Peace, Force, Light, Ananda above, to rise up into it and bring it down into the nature and the body. Neither of these two movements, the psychic and the spiritual, are complete without the other. If the spiritual ascent and descent are not made, the spiritual transformation of the nature cannot happen; if the full psychic opening and connection is not made, the transformation cannot be complete.

There is no incompatibility between the two movements; some begin the psychic first, others the spiritual first, some carry on both together. The best way is to aspire for both and let the Mother's Force work it out according to the need and turn of the nature.

INNER SIGHT AND HEARING

I

SRI AUROBINDO: Things inside can be seen as distinctly as outward things whether in an image by the subtle vision or in their essence by a still more subtle and powerful way of seeing; but all these things have to develop in order to get their full power and intensity.

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The world you see is in some subtle physical plane where men see the gods according to their own idea and images of them.

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The sounds or voices you hear are like the sights (persons, objects) you see. As there is an inner sight other than the physical, so there is an inner hearing other than that of the external ear, and it can listen to voices and sounds and words of other worlds, other times and places, or those which come from supra-physical beings. But here you must be careful. If conflicting voices try to tell you what to do or not to do, you should not listen to them or reply. It is only myself and the Mother who can tell you what you should or should not do or guide or advise you.

II

14-1-1936

MYSELF: Nishikanto has written a poem from a vision. He says that he is going to paint his vision of the violet stream and

the golden cup; so he would like you to illumine him regarding its significance.

SRI AUROBINDO: "Violet" is the colour of benevolence or compassion, but also more vividly of the Divine Grace—represented in the vision as flowing from the heights of the spiritual consciousness down on the earth. The golden cup is I suppose the Truth Consciousness.

III

20-12-1935

MYSELF: Whilst I was having a nap in the afternoon, I had a vision of a very beautiful woman sitting under the sun. The rays of the sun were either surrounding her or were emanating from her body—I can't precisely say which. The appearance and dress seemed to be more European than oriental.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not a woman. A woman does not radiate and is not surrounded by rays either. Probably a Sun Goddess or a Shakti of the inner Light, one of the Mother's Powers.

IV

SRI AUROBINDO: About the snake you saw in your meditation—serpents indicate always energies of Nature and very often bad energies of the vital plane; but they can also indicate luminous or divine energies like the Snake of Vishnu. The one you saw was evidently of this latter type—a luminous divine energy and therefore there was no cause for alarm, it was a good sign.

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

Outside the Body Consciousness

MYSELF: Last night I was having a walk in the yard when I began to feel that it was not I who was doing the walking, but some form which I did not know at all. It seemed to be devoid of much vitality or consciousness. As I came into the area where it was a little darker, the things that were lying about looked as if they existed in a dreamland,—and in the midst of them was this form walking about like one in sleep. All this is rather strange!

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a very usual experience. It means that for a moment you were no longer in your body, but somehow either above or somehow outside the body-consciousness. This sometimes happens by the vital being rising up above the head or, more rarely, by its projecting itself into its own sheath (part of the subtle body) out of the physical attachment. But it also comes by a sudden even if momentary liberation from the identification with the body consciousness, and this liberation may become frequent and prolonged or permanent. The body is felt as something separate or some small circumstance in the consciousness or as something one carries about with one etc. etc., the exact experience varies. Many sadhaks here have had it. When one is accustomed, the strangeness of it (dreamland etc.) disappears.

Wideness

MYSELF: During the evening meditation with the Mother I felt a very strong pressure on the head; as it was difficult to bear I opened my eyes to relieve the tension.

SRI AUROBINDO: Probably the accumulated Force became more than the physical being could receive. When that happens the right thing to do is to widen oneself (one can do it by a

little practice). If the consciousness is in a state of wideness then it can receive any amount of force without inconvenience.

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At the beginning the experience of wideness like other experiences comes only from time to time. It is only afterwards that it becomes frequent and remains long, till finally it settles and the consciousness remains always wide.

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This means that as before there was a widening of the mind and the vital, so now there has begun a widening of the physical consciousness.

Ananda

MYSELF: In the afternoon I was looking at the deep blue sky when all of a sudden I felt a descent of Ananda.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is Ananda in the mind and vital.

MYSELF: If my Ananda was vital and mental, is there a psychic Ananda too?

SRI AUROBINDO: I did not say it was vital and mental, but it was Ananda manifesting itself in the mental and vital—a quite different thing; for the one Ananda (the true thing) can manifest in any part of the being.

MYSELF: Is Ananda a major experience?

SRI AUROBINDO: Light, Peace, Force, Ananda constitute the spiritual consciousness; if they are not among the major experiences, what are?

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There are two conditions, one of Ananda, another of great calm and equality in which there is no joy or grief. If one attains

the latter, afterwards a greater more permanent Ananda becomes possible.

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To be full of peace, the heart quiet, not troubled by grief, not excited by joy is a very good condition. As for Ananda, it can come not only with its fullest intensity but with a more enduring persistence when the mind is at peace and the heart delivered from ordinary joy and sorrow. If the mind and heart are restless, changeful, unquiet, Ananda of a kind may come, but it is mixed with vital excitement and cannot abide. One must get peace and calm fixed in the consciousness first, then there is a solid basis on which the Ananda can spread itself and in its turn become an enduring part of the consciousness and nature.

Knowledge and Love

MYSELF: I have been concentrating on both the head and the heart centres. In meditation the being falls silent, but the head gets heavy and I feel some working going on there. I hope I am not going to get knowledge only, because this is the centre for knowledge; I want bhakti and love too.

SRI AUROBINDO: When things come in this order the head opens up first and the heart afterwards—finally all the centres. If you are satisfied only with peace, knowledge and mukti, then perhaps the heart centre may open to that only. But if you want the love, then the descending Power and Light will work for that also.

The Descent of the Force

Yes, it was the same experience. You went inside under the pressure of the Force—which is often though not always the first result—went into a few seconds' samadhi according to the ordinary language. The Force when it descends

tries to open the body and pass through the centres. It has to come in (ordinarily) through the crown of the head (Brahmarandhram) and pass through the inner mind centre which is in the middle of the forehead between the eyebrows. That is why it presses first on the head. The opening of the eyes brings one back to the ordinary consciousness of the outer world, that is why the intensity is relieved by opening the eyes.

August Darshan

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

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

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If you get something by the darshan it is better to go home and absorb it; if not, it doesn't matter. Only you have to take care not to absorb deleterious influence at the gathering—I mean, moods of doubts, depression, indifference to things spiritual, etc., etc.

November Darshan

MYSELF: 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.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

28-10-1936

SRI AUROBINDO: What the deuce did you get afraid for? Supposing any were there, you could have waited at least to see whether they were good presences or bad. If good, no harm; if bad, you have only to tell them to skidaddle. But I expect it was only a feeling of yours. Generally the স্তব্ধতা[1] is either empty of presences and formations or only one Presence is there, that of one's Self or that of the Divine.

26-3-1937

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, sir, the Presence not finding an entrance into your waking mind easy, tried to take advantage of half sleep to do it. (Half sleep is always a favourable condition for these things.) But your body consciousness not being familiar with such spiritual penetrations, got into a stew—and as a stew is accompanied by heat and steam, so your body got hot and perspired.

Sir, is the Presence of a physical nature or a spiritual fact? And is the physical sense accustomed or able to see or feel spiritual things—a spiritual Presence, a non-material Form? To see the Brahman everywhere is not possible unless you develop the inner vision—to do that you have to concentrate. To see non-material forms is indeed possible for a few, because they have the gift by nature, but most can't do it without developing the subtle sight. It is absurd to expect the Divine to manifest his Presence without your taking any trouble to see it, you have to concentrate.

It simply means you have a subjective sense of Presence.

[1] stillness

But must a subjective sense of things be necessarily a vain imagination? If so, no yoga is possible. One has to take it as an axiom that subjective things can be as real as objective things. No doubt there may be and are such things as mental formations—but, to begin with, mental formations are or can be very powerful things, producing concrete results; secondly whether what one sees or hears is a mental formation or a real subjective object can only be determined when one has sufficient experience in these inward things.

MYSELF: Is this what you call going inward?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, not quite—but it is evidently the result of some opening from within—for without that opening one cannot become aware of Presences or Forms that are supraphysical in their nature.

There is nothing to do but to go on concentrating and calling the Presence within and without you, the opening, the power to receive and let it come. The more the mind falls quiet during or as the result of concentration, the better (no other thought in or out) but no need to struggle for that, must come of itself by the concentration.

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES AND HUMAN DEFECTS

14-11-1936

MYSELF: One sees many defects and difficulties in the outer being. How can there be inner development as long as they are not removed? Sadhana must be much obstructed by them.

SRI AUROBINDO: ...Y has...a day or two ago had the experience of the ascent above and of the wideness of peace and joy of the Infinite (free from the bodily sense and limitation) also the descent down to the Muladhara. She does not know the names or technicalities of these things but her description which was minute and full of details was unmistakable. There are three or four others who have had this experience recently so that we may suppose the working of the Force is not altogether in vain as this experience is a very big affair and is supposed to be, if stabilised, the summit of the old Yogas, for us it is only a beginning of spiritual transformation. I have said this though it is personal so that you may understand that outside defects and obstacles in the nature or the appearance of unyogicness does not necessarily mean that a person can do or is doing no sadhana.

MYSELF: But what is the secret of it? How did she do it? Faith, devotion and love for the Mother?

SRI AUROBINDO: Partly. She got hold of the sadhana by the right end in her mind and applied it.

...She did not take a pride in doubting and using the intellect for the purpose, was sensible enough to see that was not what she came here for. She did not want to question everything and be satisfied in her limited intellect before she took the way of spiritual self-giving and inner experience.

19-11-1936

MYSELF: The Mother said I was receptive. All I know was

that I tried to be calm, forgetting by mind-effort that an outer world exists. That is receptivity?

SRI AUROBINDO: Nonsense! It is only the proper condition for receptivity. Naturally it is the proper thing to do if you want to be receptive or become conscious of inner things. So long as the mind is jumping about or rushing out to outside things, it is not possible to be inward, collected, conscious within.

MYSELF: The Mother said my inner mind asked for vital stability and faith, which can be established by bringing the psychic to the front now, how to do that? It is a shame I ask you that elementary question after three and a half years' stay. I consulted your books and found that by self-offering, aspiration and silence it has to be done.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that is the proper way.

MYSELF: But aspiration for what?

SRI AUROBINDO: Aspiration for the Divine or aspiration for faith and consciousness and the perfection of self-giving—aspiration for divine love, bhakti, anything that connects the soul with the Divine.

MYSELF: Does the psychic come to the front even though the vital is impure?

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, it may, anything is possible; but if it does, it will certainly say, "Fie, fie, what! All this dirt in the temple, sweep me the temple clean."

MYSELF: Z does not claim to know any sadhana but still to have an inner peace and joy. It must be true, for I find Z very happy and cheerful.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, yes, many people are like that. Calm or peace or happiness or cheerfulness, so long as there is no cause for disturbance, but immediately there is, then boil, seethe, simmer, growl, howl, yowl! The calm which causes of disturbance cannot disturb is the thing.

MYSELF: You say the working of the Force is not altogether in vain in spite of serious defects in people's nature. But surely they also must have satisfied some conditions?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, of course. But it varies with different people. It may be faith, it may be earnestness and persistence.

It may be love for the Divine. There are many other things; it may be like the Mohammed and with his tuft, you must give a handle somewhere for the Angel of the Lord to catch hold of you and lift you up.

21-11-1936

MYSELF: Guru,

My head, my head
And the damned fever—
I am half dead!

SRI AUROBINDO: Cheer up! Things might have been so much worse. Just think if you had been a Spaniard in Madrid or a German Communist in a concentration camp! Imagine that and then you will be quite cheerful with only a cold and headache. So

Throw off the cold,
Damn the fever,
Be sprightly and bold
And live for ever.

28-11-1936

MYSELF: I had a funny feeling, that my body was lying on the bed and some separate part seemed to be up and attending a kirtan in A's room. Any significance?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why the deuce do you all people ask always what significance? If you walked out of your house in boots, leaving your slippers or sandals behind that would be a fact, but with no significance except that you had boots. You went out in your subtle body and listened to the Kirtan of the vital plane in A's room, leaving your body to snore (or not) in yours. Quite a common affair, only shows that you have become aware of the boots, i.e. of your subtle body and its exits.

LOVE FOR THE DIVINE AND EXPERIENCE OF THE DIVINE

14-3-1936

MYSELF: Isn't it true that you can't really love the Divine until you experience him in some way? Before that it won't be an intense or deep love.

SRI AUROBINDO: Your supposition conflicts with the experience of many sadhaks. I think Ramakrishna indicated somewhere that the love and joy and ardour of seeking was much more intense than that of fulfilment. I don't agree, but that shows at least that intense love is possible before realisation.

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

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

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

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

MYSELF: It is only the lion hearts that can go on without any experience.

SRI AUROBINDO: The ordinary Bhakta is not a lion heart. The lion hearts get experiences comparatively soon but the ordinary Bhakta has often to feed on his own love or yearning for years and years—and he does it.

BRAHMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

18-7-1937

MYSELF: Some people have looked down upon the sadhaks here, saying that they would count for nothing in the world outside.

SRI AUROBINDO: The quality of the sadhaks is so low? I should say there is a considerable amount of ability and capacity in the Ashram. Only the standard demanded is higher than outside even in spiritual matters. There are half a dozen people here perhaps who live in the Brahman consciousness—outside they would make a big noise and be considered as great Yogis—here their condition is not known and in the Yoga it is regarded as siddhi but only as a beginning.

MYSELF: Is the Brahman consciousness an ideal condition for receiving the supramental descent?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a necessary condition.

MYSELF: I don't suppose it is the same as the realisation of the Self everywhere in everything. Is that realisation the height achieved here?

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course not, the realisation of the Self as all and the Divine as all is only the first step.

The next step is to get into contact with the higher planes above spiritual mind—for as soon as one gets into the spiritual Mind or Higher Mind, this realisation is possible.

MYSELF: Is the realisation of the Self a state of perpetual peace, joy, bliss, etc?

SRI AUROBINDO: If it is thoroughly established it is one of *internal* peace, freedom, wideness in the inner being.

MYSELF: Is it a state surpassing all struggles, dualities, depressions, etc.?

SRI AUROBINDO: All these things you mention become incidents in the external being, on the surface, but the inner being remains untouched by them.

MYSELF: Are all troubles of the lower nature conquered—especially sex?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, sir, but the inner being is not touched.

MYSELF: Is there any danger of a fall from this state?

SRI AUROBINDO: It may be covered up in a way—so long as it is not established in all parts of the being. The old Yogas did not consider that necessary, because they wanted to walk off, not to change the being.

MYSELF: Why do you call it a beginning only? What more do you want to do except physical transformation?

SRI AUROBINDO: I want to effect the transformation of the whole nature (not only of the physical), that is why.

MYSELF: Could you whisper to me the names of a few of those lucky fellows who are enjoying the Brahman consciousness here, so that I may have a practical knowledge of what the blessed thing is like?

SRI AUROBINDO: NO, SIR.

How can you have a practical knowledge of it by knowing who has it? You might just as well expect to have a practical knowledge of high mathematics by knowing that Einstein is a great mathematician. Queer ideas you have!

MYSELF: Will you make it clear to me what exactly the Brahman Consciousness is?

SRI AUROBINDO: Eternal Jehovah! You don't even know what Brahman is! You will next be asking me what Yoga is or what life is or what body is or what mind is or what sadhana is! No, sir, I am not prepared to teach an infant class the A.B.C. of the elementary conceptions which are the basis of Yoga. There is Amal who doesn't know what consciousness is, even!

Brahman, sir, is the name given by Indian philosophy since the beginning of Time to the one Reality, eternal and infinite which is the Self, the Divine, the All, the more than All, which would remain even if you and everybody and everything else in existence or imagining itself to be in existence vanished into blazes—even if the whole universe disappeared, Brahman would be safely there and nothing whatever lost. In fact, sir, you are Brahman and you are pretending to be Nirod; when Nishikanta

is translating Amal's poetry into Bengali, it is really Brahman translating Brahman's Brahman into Brahman. When Amal asks me what consciousness is, it is really Brahman asking Brahman what Brahman is. There, sir, I hope you are satisfied now.

To be less drastic and refrain from making your head reel till it goes off your shoulders I may say that realisation of the Self is the beginning of Brahman realisation—the Brahman consciousness—the Self in all and all in the Self etc. It is the basis of the spiritual realisation and therefore of the spiritual transformation; but one has to see it in all sorts of aspects and applications first and that I refuse to grant.[1] If you want to know you have to read the *Arya*.

[1] Last three words tentative reading. (Ed.)

THE VITAL PLANE

4-3-1935

SRI AUROBINDO: The place where you were is as much a world of fact and reality as is the material world and its happenings have sometimes a great effect on this world. What an ignorant lot of disciples you all are! Too much modernisation and Europeanisation by half!

These things are meetings on the vital plane, but very often in the transcription of what happened some details get in that are contributed by the subconscient. The rest seems all right. The writing on the forehead means of course something that is fixed in you in the vital plane and has to come out hereafter in the physical consciousness.

26-8-1936

SRI AUROBINDO: You are too physically matter of fact. Besides you are quite ignorant of occult things. The vital is part of what European psychologists sometimes call the subliminal, and the subliminal, as everybody ought to know, can do things the physical cannot do—e.g. solve a problem in a few moments over which the physical has spent days in vain etc., etc.

What is the use of the same things happening on both planes? It would be superfluous and otiose. The vital plane is a field where things can be done which for some reason or other can't be done now on the physical.

There are of course hundreds of varieties of things in the vital as it is a much richer and more plastic field of consciousness than the physical, and all are not of equal validity and value. I am speaking above of the things that are valid. By the way, without this vital plane there would be no art, poetry or literature—these things come through the vital before they can manifest here.

MEDITATION

I

Right Meditation

MYSELF: Raman Maharshi says that if one meditates for an hour or two every day, then the current of mind induced will continue to flow even in work. Of course he speaks of meditation "in the right manner."

SRI AUROBINDO: A very important qualification.

If the meditation brings poise, peace, a concentrated condition or even a pressure or influence, that *can* go on in the work, provided one does not throw it away by a relaxed or dispersed state of consciousness. That was why the Mother wanted people not only to be concentrated at pranam or meditation, but to remain silent and absorb or assimilate afterwards and also insisted on avoiding things that relax or disperse or dissipate too much—precisely for this reason that the effects of what she put on them might continue and the change of attitude the Maharshi speaks of would take place. But I am afraid most of the sadhaks have never understood or practised anything of the kind—they could not appreciate or understand her directions.

MYSELF: Is the current induced by the right manner of meditation something like charging a battery which goes on inducing an automatic current.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not exactly automatic. It can be easily spoilt or left to run into the subconscient or otherwise wasted. But with simple and steady practice and persistence it has the effect the Maharshi speaks of—he assumes, I suppose, such a practice. I am afraid your meditation is hardly simple or steady —too much *Kasrat* and fighting with yourself.

II

Meditation and Work

MYSELF: You have written: "Those who do work for the

Mother in all sincerity are prepard by the work itself for the right consciousness even if they do not sit down for meditation." Yet in another letter you say: "It may be necessary for an individual here and there to plunge into meditation for a time."

SRI AUROBINDO: This applies to a certain number of people —it does not lay down non-meditation as a principle. Note the "even if' which gives the proper shade.

To "plunge into" means to do meditation alone—for a time only.

MYSELF: When I wrote to you that I didn't feel like meditating, you replied, "I don't see how you can change your lower consciousness without it"; and when I got back the urge to meditate you again said, "That is the only thing to do." Isn't there some kind of inconsistency in all this?

SRI AUROBINDO: Perhaps there was a stress on the "you". 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 of 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.

MYSELF: I have hardly any time for meditation.

SRI AUROBINDO: Half an hour's meditation in the day ought to be possible—if only to bring a concentrated habit into the consciousness which will help it, first to be less outward in work and, secondly, to develop a receptive tendency which can bear its fruits even in the work.

MYSELF: In one of her *Prayers* the Mother says: "The joy contained in activity is superseded by a greater joy in withdrawal from activity." This implies that withdrawal from activity is preferable to activity.

SRI AUROBINDO: Do you think the Mother has a rigid mind like you people and was laying down a hard and fast rule, for all time and all people and all conditions? It refers to a certain stage when the consciousness is sometimes in activity and when not in activity is withdrawn in itself. Afterwards comes a stage

when the Sachchidananda condition is there in work also. There is a still further stage when both are as it were one, but that is the supramental. The two states are the silent Brahman and the active Brahman and they can alternate (1st stage), coexist (2nd stage), fuse (3rd stage). If you reach even the first stage then you can think of applying Mother's dictum, but why misapply it now?

MYSELF: Is it possible to have the highest Sachchidananda realisation in work?

SRI AUROBINDO: Certainly it is realisable in work. Good Lord! How could the integral Yoga exist if it were not?

MYSELF: Please excuse my asking these questions; as your Yoga is so new, at least the Karma Yoga part of it, I have to.

SRI AUROBINDO: Karma Yoga is as old as the hills.

Let one thing be clear—I do not mean by work action done in the ego and the ignorance, for the satisfaction of the ego and in the drive of rajasic desire. There can be no Karmayoga without the will to get rid of ego, rajas and desire which are the seals of ignorance.

Another thing, I do not mean philanthropy or the service of humanity or all the rest of the things—moral or idealistic—which men substitute for the deeper truth of works.

I mean by work action done for the Divine and more and more in union with the Divine—for the Divine alone and nothing else. Naturally that is not easy at the beginning, any more than deep meditation and luminous knowledge are easy or even true love and bhakti are easy. But like the others it has to be begun in the right spirit and attitude, with the right will in you, then all the rest will come.

Works done in this spirit are quite as effective as bhakti or contemplation. One gets by the rejection of desire, rajas and ego a peace and purity into which the peace ineffable can descend—one gets by the dedication of one's will to the Divine, by the merging of one's will in the Divine will the death of ego and the enlarging into the cosmic consciousness or else the uplifting into what is above the cosmic—one experiences the separation of Purusha from Prakriti and is liberated from the

shackles of the outer nature; one becomes aware of one's inner being and sees the outer as an instrument; one feels the universal Force doing one's works and the self or Purusha watching or witness but free; one feels all one's works taken from one and done by the universal or the supreme Mother or by the Divine Power controlling and acting from behind the heart. By constant reference of all one's will and works to the Divine, love and adoration grow, the psychic being comes forward. By the reference to the Power above, one can come to feel it above and its descent and the opening to an increasing consciousness and knowledge. Finally works, bhakti and knowledge join together and self-perfection becomes possible—what we call the transformation of the nature.

These results certainly do not come all at once; they come more or less slowly, more or less completely according to the condition and growth of the being. There is no royal road to the divine realisation.

This is the Karmayoga as it is laid down in the *Gita* and developed by myself in the *Arya*. It is founded not on speculation and reasoning but on experience. It does not exclude meditation and certainly does not exclude bhakti, for the self-offering to the Divine, the consecration of all oneself to the Divine which is the very essence of this Karmayoga are essentially a movement of bhakti. Only it does exclude a life-fleeing exclusive meditation or an involved[1] Bhakti shut up in its own inner dream, taken as the whole movement of the Yoga. One may have hours of pure absorbed meditation or of the inner motionless adoration and ecstasy, but they are not the whole of the integral Yoga.

III

Meditation and Sleep

MYSELF: Is there any difference between doing meditation in a sitting position and doing it whilst walking? I feel that

[1] Uncertain reading (Ed.).

whilst walking, it is not possible to get the same amount of concentration as in the other—for beginners, at least.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is as each finds convenient. Some meditate better walking, some sitting.

MYSELF: I suppose, meditation whilst walking is more likely to be a prayer than meditation proper.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not at all. One can meditate very well when walking.

MYSELF: As soon as I start meditating I lapse into sleep.

SRI AUROBINDO: The sleep does come like that when one tries to meditate. It has to be dealt with, where that is possible, by turning it into a conscious inner and indrawn state and, where not, by remaining in a quietly concentrated wakefulness open (without effort) to receive.

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MYSELF: I have read in the Mother's *Conversations* that if one prays to her before going to bed to be conscious in sleep, it helps.

SRI AUROBINDO: You have to start by concentrating before you sleep always with a specific will or aspiration. The will or aspiration may take time to reach the subconscient, but if it is sincere, strong and steady, it does reach after a time—so that an automatic consciousness and will are established in the sleep itself which will do what is necessary.

MYSELF: When I get up in the morning I find that the previous day's sadhana is forgotten. What should be done to keep up the continuity?

SRI AUROBINDO: The gap made by the night and waking with the ordinary consciousness is the case with everybody almost (of course, the "ordinary" consciousness differs according to the progress); but it is no use wanting to be conscious in sleep; you have to get the habit of getting back the thread of the progress as soon as may be and for that there must be some concentration after rising.

'You need not meditate at once—but for a few moments take

a concentrated attitude calling the Mother's presence for the day.

At night, you have to pass into sleep in the concentration—you must be able to concentrate with the eyes closed, lying down and the concentration must deepen into sleep—that is to say, sleep must become a concentrated going inside away from the outer waking state. If you find it necessary to sit for a time you may do so, but afterwards lie down keeping the concentration till this happens.

MYSELF: But I find that the concentration before going to bed merges unconsciously into sleep.

SRI AUROBINDO: These things cannot have their effect in a moment. You must persevere till the physical consciousness is penetrated.

IV

The Inner Being and the Surface Consciousness

MYSELF: During the evening meditation I was wondering why I was not able to find the rasa of this life. Many have found it in poetry, some in painting, others in physical work. When I was thinking of praying to you to give me some joy and interest in the world I had an experience: I felt that my mind was divided into two parts—the inner being was silent, not disturbed by anything, while the surface mind was thinking at random. As soon as the outer thoughts cropped up it tried to see if all this was a forced condition of mind,—but no, the silence was really there and intact. This continued as long as the meditation lasted. I would like to have your corroboration on the matter. I wonder how these experiences suddenly drop in.

SRI AUROBINDO: The consciousness from which these experiences come is always there pressing to bring them in. The reason why they don't come in freely or stay is the activity of the mind and vital always rushing about thinking this, wanting that, trying to perform mountaineering feats on all the hillocks of the lower nature instead of nourishing a strong and simple

aspiration and opening to the higher consciousness that it may come in and do its own work. Rasa of poetry, painting or physical work is not the thing to go after. What gives the interest in Yoga is the rasa of the Divine and of the divine consciousness which means the rasa of Peace, of Silence, of inner Light and Bliss, of growing inner Knowledge, of increasing inner Power, of the Divine Love, of all the infinite fields of experience that open to one with the opening of the inner consciousness. The true rasa of poetry, painting or any other activity is only found when these things are part of the working of the Divine Force in you, and you feel it is that and it exists in the joy of that working.

This condition you had of the inner being and its silence separated from the surface consciousness and its little restless workings is the first liberation, the liberation of Purusha from Prakriti, and it is a fundamental experience. The day when you can keep it, you can know that the Yogic consciousness has been founded in you. This time it has increased in intensity, but it must also increase in duration.

These things do not "drop"—what you have felt was there in you all the time, but you did not feel it because you were living on the surface altogether, and the surface is all crowd and clamour. But in all men there is this silent Purusha, base of the true mental being, the true vital being, the true physical being. It was by your prayer and aspiration that the thing came, to show you in what direction you must travel in order to have the true rasa of things, for it is only when one is liberated that one can get the real rasa. For after this liberation come others and among them the liberation and Ananda in action as well as in the static inner silence.

MYSELF: I would like to know if experiences of this kind effect a lasting result in the consciousness.—Do they ever settle down and become a constant realisation, or do they just occur off and on?

SRI AUROBINDO: They come first in this isolated way, afterwards more frequently and for longer periods, then they settle. In some they settle at once, but that is rare. In some they

persist recurring till they are settled, that is less rare. In others the occurrence is at first at long intervals and waits for the consciousness to be ready.

MYSELF: It seems I had the same experience again. In the meditation I felt that something descended, and the body became silent; it seemed to me that it was something apart from me. Along with this the inner silence began. I tried to test and verify it by thinking of external things, which however could not disturb the silence.

SRI AUROBINDO: The real self (Atman or Purusha) is not the body—the body is something separate, a part of the being, but a part of Prakriti, not the true self or Purusha.

It is best to remain silent. To test the experience may lead to a mental activity which will break it. That it did not [do] so in this case shows that the power of silence that came down must have been very strong and imperative.

MYSELF: You said before that this condition was of the inner being and its silence, the separation of Purusha from Prakriti.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but it seems also to be the beginning of liberation from identification with the body consciousness. That easily comes with the Purusha consciousness in the inner being.

MYSELF: Is this inner being the same as the psychic being?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, not necessarily—the inner being is composed of the inner mental, the inner vital, the inner physical. The psychic is the inmost supporting all the others. Usually it is in the inner mental that this separation first happens and it is the inner mental Purusha who remains silent, observing the Prakriti as separate from himself. But it may also be the inner vital Purusha or inner physical or else without location simply the whole Purusha consciousness separate from the whole Prakriti. Sometimes it is felt above the head, but then it is usually spoken of as the Atman and the realisation is that of the silent Self.

Durga

MYSELF: X told us today that the Mother was trying to bring down the personality of Durga on the Puja day.

SRI AUROBINDO: There was no trying—it came down.

MYSELF: When I came for pranam, the Mother's appearance made me feel that she was Durga herself. I don't know whether such a feeling arose out of the association with the puja on that day, or quite independently of it.

SRI AUROBINDO: All that is the silliness of the physical mind which thinks itself very clever in explaining away the inner feeling or perception.

MYSELF: These feelings are so vague and momentary, and not accompanied by a concrete vision.

SRI AUROBINDO: What else do you expect the first touches to be!

MYSELF: To give you one instance: I heard as if the Goddess Bhagawati were telling me, "I am coming" and many other things which I don't remember now.

SRI AUROBINDO: These things are at least a proof that the inner mind and vital are trying to open to supraphysical things. But if you belitttle it at once the moment it starts how can it ever develop!

MYSELF: I have started concentrating in the heart now. Last Sunday while I was meditating I had the vision of your face floating before me for about an hour or so, accompanied by a deep joy. I was fully conscious, but the body became utterly numb. Has anything in me opened up? Is all this the fulfilment of the promise given by Bhagawati?

SRI AUROBINDO: It looks like it. At any rate there is evidently an opening in the heart-centre or you would not have had the change or the vision with the stilling of the physical consciousness in the body.

THE ASHRAM AND ITS YOGA

I

Yogic Ups and Downs

SRI AUROBINDO: What you say may apply to everybody because everybody has things in him which conflict with the Yoga. Logical conclusion: Nobody should try anything in which anybody has failed or in which there is a possibility of failure! I am afraid most human activities would stop on that principle except আহার, নিদ্রা ও মিথুন (food, sleep and sex) and perhaps only the first two. But after all not even these—for people die in their sleep and others die of their food by poison, indigestion or otherwise. So to be safe one must neither eat, sleep nor do anything else—much less do Yoga. Q.E.D.

2-4-1937

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

SRI AUROBINDO: Everybody drops. I have dropped myself thousands of times during the sadhana. What rose-leaf-princess sadhaks you all are!

MYSELF: Is it not that we have to work very hard at Yoga in this Ashram and it takes very long to get to our goal?

SRI AUROBINDO: Allow me to point out that here there are any number of people who have had experiences which could be highly prized outside. There are even one or two who have had the Brahman realisation in a single year. But it is the fashion here to shout and despair and say we have got nothing and nobody can get anything in this Yoga. I believe the pretensions of the Pondicherry sadhaks to have an easy and jolly canter to the goal or else think themselves baffled martyrs would be stared at with surprise in any other Ashram.

11-4-1937

SRI AUROBINDO: The difficulty is a myth. The difficulty is in the change of Nature or transformation which comes afterwards. Otherwise the difficulty in the beginning is the same for this or any other Yoga. Some go fast, some go slow here, also elsewhere.

I don't suppose the later stages of the transformation including the physical would be possible elsewhere. In fact in those outside none of the three transformations seems to have begun. They are all preparing. Here there are at least a few who have started one or two of them. Only that does not show outside. The physical or external alone shows outside.

25-6-1937

SRI AUROBINDO: Everything once gained is there and can be regained. Yoga is not a thing that goes by one decisive rush one way or the other—it is a building up of a new consciousness and is full of ups and downs. But if one keeps to it the ups have a habit of resulting by accumulation in a decisive change —therefore the one thing to do is to keep at it. After a fall don't wail and say, "I'm done for," but get up, dust yourself and proceed farther on the right path.

II

The True Way of Yoga

19-5-1936

MYSELF: X says he has been eight years here; yet no peace, at times only joy and that also joy of literary creation.

SRI AUROBINDO: Eight years? Amateur yogis! Those who know something about yoga would count 5,6,7,8,10 years as nothing for the work of preparation and self-purification. That

was X's bane. He expected to conquer heaven in a gallop, but there was only one way of doing it, complete abdication of self, and that he refused and probably could not do. Then when the gallop could not succeed, he has been wrestling and groaning ever since—meditation, japa, prayer with only one idea "when is it coming? when is it coming? why is it not coming? of course it won't come. It will never come, never, never." And of course it doesn't. That is not the way.

Yet he had promised me he would drop all that and go on quietly getting rid of ego etc., till he was fit. The subconscient has been too strong with its unvarying orbits of repetition of the same obstinately irrational movement.

MYSELF: But poetry, he says, is অযুক্ত কর্ম্ম (work not in yoga). If that could give the Divine any number of literary people would have it.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is like him and most of the sadhaks. All hold grip to their own ideas, follow their own conceptions about Yoga. Reason! logic! As for the ways pointed out by the Guru, all supramental nonsense. The surprising thing is that anyone succeeds here.

11-3-1937

MYSELF: How is it that in spite of tremendous pouring of Force by the Mother and you, X could not change many of his ideas about the Yoga in our Ashram?

SRI AUROBINDO: His mind changed somewhat, but his vital clung to the feeling of frustration by the Yoga and therefore abused the Yoga. It wanted either satisfaction of its play or brilliant experiences to replace them or both together. Not getting its way, it damned the Yoga as grim, horrible, etc. All the time it refused to go on steadily with the thing that would be effective.

III

Views about Yoga

MYSELF: Everything seems to be queer in this world, this

yogic world included. When a fellow works hard at French, medicine, trying to improve his department and himself, and thereby serve the Divine, it is bad. Too much concentration and meditation is worse. When one follows the rule "eat, drink and be merry" it is worst. I am coming to X's view that your Yoga will always be yours.

SRI AUROBINDO: There is where you miss the truth and he missed it also—he did not try to "improve himself", at any rate in any yogic way—he might try to aggrandise himself, but that is another matter. Self-aggrandisement does not save from collapse.

Well, I never heard that to eat, drink and be merry was one of the paths of Yoga—unless Charvak's way is one of Yoga.

It is not my Yoga that is difficult to get the head or tail of—it is your and X's and others' views about Yoga that are weird and wonderful. If a fellow is brilliant in French and Sanskrit, you think he is a wonderful Yogi, but then it is the people who are first in the Calcutta B.A. who must be the great Yogis. If one objects to spending all the energy in tea and talk, you say, "What queer Gurus these are and what queer ideas", as if sociability were the base of the Brahman, or on the contrary you think that everybody must shut himself up in a dark room, see nobody and go mad with want of food and sleep—and when we object, you say, "Who can understand this Yoga?" Have you never heard of Buddha's maxim "No excess in any direction" —or of Krishna's injunction "Don't eat too much or abstain from eating, don't drop sleep or sleep too much; don't torture the soul with violent tapasya—practise Yoga steadily without despondency. Don't abstain from work and be inactive, but don't think either that work will save you. Dedicate your work to the Divine, do it as a sacrifice, reach the point at which you feel that the works are not yours but done for you etc., etc. Through meditation, through dedicated works, through bhakti —all these together arrive at the divine consciousness and live in it." Buddha and Krishna are not considered to be unintelligible big Absurdities, yet when we lay [stress] on the same thing, you all stand and say "What's this new and unheard-of stuff?"

It is the result I suppose of having modern-minded disciples who know all about everything and can judge better than any Guru, but to whom the very claims of Yoga are something queer and cold and strange. Kismet!

MYSELF: Now about tea and butter. All these were, it seems, generously granted by you to X.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not butter—it is tea and talk....They were granted by me as a concession to his nature, because by self-deprivation he would land himself in the seas of despair—not as a method of reaching the Brahman. He was trying to do what his nature would not allow. It was only if he got intense spiritual experience that he could give up tea and talk without wallowing in misery. Is it so difficult to understand a simple thing like that? I should have thought it would be self-evident even to the dullest intelligence.

Because I allowed him to talk...does it follow that talk and tea were given as part of his Yoga? If the Mother allowed butter or eggs to Y for his physical growth does it follow that butter and eggs are the bases of the Brahman? If somebody has a stomach-ache and I send him to the Dispensary, does it follow that stomach-ache, the Dispensary, Nirod and allopathic drugs are the perfect way to spiritualisation?...

IV

The Ashram "Prestige"—Praise and Blame

30-6-1938

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

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Lord, man, it is not for changing or moulding character that

this Ashram exists. It is for moulding spirituality and transforming the consciousness.

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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.

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What you are looking at is the praise and blame of people, not at any "it". One has to look at "it" not from the point of view of whether it is praised or blamed by the public, but from its inherent relation to the spiritual life.

V

Departures from the Ashram

2-9-1935

MYSELF: The departure of a person with extraordinary powers is serious.

SRI AUROBINDO: Pooh! a sincere heart is worth all the extraordinary powers in the world.

MYSELF: And what a pathetic and tragic end for him? All the world will laugh at him and won't you share in the laughter? What is your attitude from the Supramental? Won't you care?

SRI AUROBINDO: And why a tragic or pathetic end! He is as merry as a grig and as sure of himself as a god. He says he has only one step to make and he is going to make it no matter whatever happens or who does what.

Do you think I care? What a very human mind you have! But why want me to share in it? What is in the minds of the sadhaks matters because that is part of my work, but what you call all the world (meaning the small part of it interested in Y outside) can laugh or not—what difference does it make? My bringing down of the Supramental does not depend on the নিন্দা স্তুতি[1] or মান অপমান[2] dealt out from there. And is care for these things part of the ordinary spiritual consciousness even and if I am to be inferior in these matters to a spiritual man, for instance X, how am I to be not only Supramental and superman but supramentalise others? Have you never thought of these things and will you and the others live always in the ordinary mundane social consciousness and feelings and ideas and judge me and my work from that sorry standpoint?

21-4-1937

MYSELF: When somebody leaves the Ashram, I feel a kick, a shock, a heartquake.

SRI AUROBINDO: May I ask why? People have been leaving the Ashram since it began, not only now. Say 30 or 50 people have gone, 130 or 140 others have come. The big Maharathis, X,Y,Z, departed from this too damnable Ashram where great men are not allowed to do as they like. The damnable Ashram survives and grows. A and B and C fail in their yoga—but the yoga proceeds on its way, advances, develops. Why then kick, shock and heartquake?

As for X, he has been going some dozen or dozen and a half times, only pulled back with great difficulty. Wants immediate siddhi in perfect surrender, absolute faith, unshakable peace. If all that is going to take time, can't do the Yoga. Feels himself unfit. Not being allowed to reach the Paratpara Brahman at once, had better rush out into the world and dissipate himself

[1] praise and blame
[2] honour and dishonour

into the Nihil. Besides got upset by every trifle and, as soon as upset, lost faith in the Mother—and without faith no Yoga possible. Reasoning, sir, reasoning—the mighty intellect in its full stupidity. Understand now?

MYSELF: I hold the view that the Supramental is descending concentratedly and that those who resist, who are between two fires, have either to quit or to submit.

SRI AUROBINDO: Even if it were so, that is their own business. The Divine is driving nobody out except in rare cases where their staying would be a calamity to the Ashram; if they cannot bear the pressure and rush away, listening to the "go away, go away" push and suggestions of the Hostile can it be said then that it was the Divine who drove them away and the push and suggestion of the Hostile is that of the Divine? A singular logic! The "go, go," push and suggestion have been successfully there ever since the Ashram started and even before when there was no Ashram. How does that square with your theory that it is due to the concentrated descent of the Force?

Why should I stop the business—that is to say postpone the possibility for another millennium because A or B gets shaky or many others look homeward? Will that postponement change the lower nature or get rid of the Asuras?

What occult secret? It is a fact always known to all Yogas and occultists since the beginning of time, in Europe and Africa as in India, that wherever Yoga or Yajna is done, there the hostile Forces gather together to stop it by any means. It is known that there is a lower nature and a higher spiritual nature —it is known that they pull different ways and the lower is strongest at first and the higher afterwards. It is known that the hostile Forces take advantage of the movements of the lower nature and try to spoil through them, smash or retard the siddhi. It has been said as long ago as the Upanishads (hard is the path to tread, sharp like a razor's edge); it was said later by Christ 'hard is the way and narrow the gate by which one enters into the kingdom of heaven' and also 'many are called, few chosen' —because of these difficulties. But it has also always been known that those who are sincere and faithful in heart and

remain so and those who rely on the Divine will arrive in spite of all difficulties, stumbles or falls. That is the occult knowledge pertinent here.

I have expatiated—but in the line of common sense, not occultism.

VI

"Big Men" and the Ashram's Spiritual Work

SRI AUROBINDO: 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 any one 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.

...You seem to have an exaggerated idea of X's bigness (an example of Einsteinian relativity, I suppose, or the result of his own big view of himself). Whatever bigness he has is my creation, apart from the fact that he was a popular singer when he came. He would have been nothing else (even in music) if he had not come here. The only big thing he had by nature was a big and lusty vital....

What big operation? There was no operation; I am not trying to bale in X as a big fish. I am not trying to catch him or

bring him in. If he comes into the true spiritual life, it will be a big thing for him, no doubt, but to the work it means only a ripple more or less in the atmosphere. Kindly consider how many people big in their own eyes have come and gone (P,Q,R, not to speack of others) and has the work stopped by their departure or the Ashram ceased to grow? Do you really think that the success or failure of the work we have undertaken depends on the presence or absence of X or on my hauling him in or letting him go? It is of importance only for the soul of X—nothing else.

YOGIC GUIDANCE

I

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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I want you to be open and in contact with the Peace and Presence and Force. All else will come if that is there and then one need not be troubled by the time it takes in the peripeties of the sadhana.

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5-8-1936

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.

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Cheerfulness is the salt of the sadhana.—It is a thousand times better than gloominess.

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21-8-1936

MYSELF: Tell me, if I pray for peace, strength etc., will it be enough or not? After that, rejection, detachment must be done by your Force.

SRI AUROBINDO: At any rate there must be the acceptance of the rejection or detachment for the Force to use—a kind of will in it. If you simply pray and then say "All right now, damn it, I have done all that is necessary. I can now lament or indulge"—that makes things a trifle difficult.

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MYSELF: I am trying to be silent within, but the mood of jocularity persists. Is this not, however, a sign of cheerfulness?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not always—moreover the cheerfulness is vital. I do not say that it should not be there, but there is a deeper cheerfulness, an inner *sukhahāsya* which is the spiritual condition of cheerfulness.

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You are quite right in taking an optimistic and not a pessimistic attitude in the sadhana—progressive sadhana is enormously helped by an assured faith and confidence. Such a confidence helps to realise, for it is dynamic and tends to fulfil itself.

II

The stream which you feel coming down on the head and pouring into you is indeed a current of the Mother's force; it is so that it is often felt; it flows into the body in currents and works there to liberate and change the consciousness. As the consciousness changes and develops, you will begin yourself to understand the meaning and working of these things.

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As for the other matter, there are two different things. Some people have a faculty of receiving impressions about others which is not by any means infallible, but often turns out to be right. That is one thing and the Yogic intuition by which one directly knows or feels what is in a man, his capacities, character, temperament is another. The first may be a help for developing the other, but it is not the same thing. The Yogic faculty has to be and it can be complete only with a great development of the inner consciousness.

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The absence of thought is quite the right thing—for the true inner consciousness is a silent consciousness which has not to think out things, but gets the right perception, understanding and knowledge in a spontaneous way from within and speaks or acts according to that. It is the outer consciousness which has to depend on outside things and to think about them because it has not this spontaneous guidance. When one is fixed in this inner consciousness, then one can indeed go back to the old action by an effort of will, but it is no longer a natural movement and, if long maintained, becomes fatiguing. As for the dreams, that is different. Dreams about old bygone things come up from the subconscient which retains the old impressions and the seeds of the old movements and habits long after the waking consciousness has dropped them. Abandoned by the waking consciousness, they still come up in dreams; for in sleep the outer physical consciousness goes down into the subconscient or towards it and many dreams come up from there.

The silence in which all is quiet and one remains as a witness while something in the consciousness spontaneously calls down the higher things is the complete silence which comes when the full force of the higher consciousness is upon mind and vital and body.

RISHI AND YOGI

9-2-1936

MYSELF: Would you call X a Rishi?

SRI AUROBINDO: He is more of a Yogi than a Rishi, it seems to me. The happiness theory does not impress me,—it is as old as the mountains but not so solid. But he knows a lot about Yoga.

11-2-1936

SRI AUROBINDO: A Rishi is one who *sees* or discovers an inner truth and puts it into self-effective language—the mantra. Either new truth or old truth made new by expression and realisation.

He has expressed certain eternal truths by process of Yoga —I don't think it is by Rishi-like intuition or illumination nor has he the mantra.

A Rishi may be a Yogi, but also he may not; a Yogi too may be a Rishi, but also he may not. Just as a philosopher may or may not be a poet, and a poet may or may not be a philosopher.

MYSELF: Don't poets and artists get intuition and illumination?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but poetic intuition and illumination is not the same thing as Rishi's intuition and illumination.

MYSELF: You have called Bankim a Rishi. Do you think his *Bande Mataram* a real mantra or that he actually saw the country as the Mother?

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, the *Bande Mataram* acted as a mantra and so I suppose I gave him the credit of Rishihood. Can't say whether he saw. Must ask him.

22-4-1933

MYSELF: The Mother appears to be reducing her physical contact with us.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Mother was giving freely of her physical contact in former years. If the sadhaks had had the right reactions, do you think she would have drawn back and reduced it to a minimum? Of course if people know in what spirit to receive from her the physical touch is a great thing, but for that the constant physical nearness is not necessary. That rather creates a pressure of the highest forces which how many can meet?

11-3-1937

MYSELF: X seems to think that the Mother is harder than you.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

21-4-1937

MYSELF: We are told the Mother can act best if a sadhak is sincere. But what is meant by this?

SRI AUROBINDO: What is meant by sincere sadhana? In the Mother's definition of sincere, it means "opening only to the Divine Forces" i.e. rejecting all the others even if they come.

10-7-1936

MYSELF: Is it true that physical work opens one more than, say, literary occupations to the Mother's action?

SRI AUROBINDO: Many find it easy to think of the Mother when working; but when they read or write, their mind goes off to the thing read or written and they forget everything else. I think that is the case with most. Physical work on the other hand can be done with the most external part of the mind leaving the rest free to remember or to experience.

SPIRITUAL FORCE AND OTHER FORCES

I

SRI AUROBINDO: 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 things to right 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 particular 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.

II

If it [the latent medico] were there, I would develop that and run the Dispensary myself. What would be the need of a Nirod or Becherlal or Ramchandra?... What logic? Because Mother and myself are not engineers, therefore Chandulal can't develop the right intuition in engineering? or because neither I nor Mother are experts in Gujerati prosody, therefore Pujalal 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.

III

One can feel it [Force] in the same way if it descends in the body. But sometimes it simply works from above or behind or within and in that case one may be conscious of the result, the

energy given without feeling the Force itself.... No. It depends on the person. Many people feel the Force more easily than the Peace or the Ananda.... That needs a knowledge and keen observation, I suppose—to see whether the fact of the work is as good as the show. But you are there for supervision mainly, not for expert knowledge....Well, get the Energy from above (the Force) and put it forcefully on the carpenters. If one day you can do that you will amply justify your timber-throne....One must also aspire for the Force and for the consciousness of the Force. There is a lid in between. Remove that and the Force will come tumbling down into you....Much more easy if you have the force to make a carpenter to carpent properly than to propel a sadhak in the way he should go. Receptivity is all-important for the sadhana—it counts but not so much in getting an ordinary thing done by an ordinary man. ...Direct it [Force] upon them [workers] in a steady stream. If Force can come into you, why can't it go out from you too?

2-9-1935

If I have knowledge of the play of the forces, why do you want me to ignore the play and work by violence or a miracle beyond the play of the forces? It is precisely the play of forces which brought him where he is.

2-10-1935

MYSELF: Do you think the Yogic Force will enable a doctor, even if he is not trained, to do things like cutting off an appendix or a cataract?

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Heavens, no!... The Force has to prepare its instrument first—it is not a miracle-monger. The Force can develop in you intuition and skill if you are sufficiently open, even if you did not have it before—but not like that. That kind of thing happens once in a way but it is not the fixed method of the Divine to act like that.

IV

21-6-1936

MYSELF: I tried hard 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?

SRI AUROBINDO: I usually read your soul-stirring communications (medical or other) at 7.30 or 8 or thereabouts. This one I must have got only after 10 p.m. But that makes no difference. 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.

MYSELF: Sometimes "the Force that is always operating" is not enough for me. You have to leave all relaxed repose and sit up and regain curvilinear proportions and send a dose! This is what must have happened today.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is enough if you hitch on to the operating Force which is always rotating or hanging about over your head or over my head or over the general head of the Ashram or the (terrestrial) universe. It does not much matter where you hitch on, so long as you somehow do it; but in this case there may have been some connection with my curvilinear recovery which took place somewhere about 9.30. But if so, it can only have been because the Force rotated more forcibly by the impulsion of my recovery, for the conscious sending of Force to you took place only when I was reading the letter.

MYSELF: 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?

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

V

17-4-1937

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

SRI AUROBINDO: 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. ন তত্র শোচতে বুধঃ[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.

[1] The wise man grieves not over that.

HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

I

Human Affection

SRI AUROBINDO: Human affection is obviously unreliable because it is so much based upon selfishness and desire; it is a flame of the ego sometimes turbid and misty, sometimes more clear and brightly coloured—sometimes tamasic based on instinct and habit, sometimes rajasic and fed by passion or the cry for vital interchange, sometimes more sattwic and trying to be or look to itself disinterested. But fundamentally it depends on a personal need or a return of some kind inward or outward and when the need is not satisfied or the return ceases or is not given, it most often diminishes or dies or exists only as a tepid or troubled remnant of habit from the past or else turns for satisfaction elsewhere. The more intense it is, the more it is apt to be troubled by tumults, clashes, quarrels, egoistic disturbances of all kinds, selfishness, exactions, lapses even to rage and hatred, ruptures. It is not that these affections cannot last—tamasic instinctive affections last because of habit in spite of everything dividing the persons, e.g. certain family affections; rajasic affections can last sometimes in spite of all disturbances and incompatibilities and furious ruptures because one has a vital need of the other and clings because of that or because both have that need and are constantly separating to return and returning to separate or proceeding from quarrel to reconciliation and from reconciliation to quarrel; sattwic affections last very often from duty to the ideal or with some other support though they may lose their keenness or intensity or brightness. But the true reliability is there only when the psychic element in human affections becomes strong enough to colour or dominate the rest. For that reason friendship is or rather can oftenest be most durable of the human affections

because there is less interference of the vital and even though a flame of the ego it can be a quiet and pure fire giving always its warmth and light. Nevertheless reliable friendship is almost always with a very few; to have a horde of loving, unselfishly faithful friends is a phenomenon so rare that it can be safely taken as an illusion.... In any case human affection whatever its value has its place, because through it the psychic being gets the emotional experiences it needs until it is ready to prefer the true to the apparent, the perfect to the imperfect, the divine to the human. As the consciousness has to rise to the higher level so the activities of the heart also have to rise to that higher level and change their basis and character. Yoga is the founding of all life and consciousness in the Divine, so also love and affection must be rooted in the Divine and a spiritual and psychic oneness in the Divine must be their foundation—to reach the Divine first leaving other things aside or to seek the Divine alone is the straight road towards that change. That means no attachment—it need not mean turning affection into disaffection or chill indifference. But X seems to want to take his vital emotions just as they are—tels quels—into the Divine—let him try and don't bother him with criticisms and lectures; if it can't be done he will have to find it out for himself.

II

Personal Relations in the Spiritual Life

23-6-1936

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't think it is much use writing about personal relations in the true spiritual life (which does not yet exist here). None would understand it except as a form of words. Only three points—

(1) Its very base would have to be spiritual and psychic and *not* vital. The vital would be there but as an instrument only.

(2) It would be a relation following from the higher Truth, not continued from the lower Ignorance.

(3) It would not be impersonal in the sense of being colourless, but whatever colours were there would [not] be the egoistic and muddy colours of the present relations.

26-10-1936

MYSELF: If one has a double attachment, would it be an insincerity?

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on the ideal. If it were a matter of the union of two lives, it would be an insincerity, a faithlessness; but for the vital? Its character is to change, sometimes to multiply, to run here and there. Unless of course it is caught, glued to a single attraction or passion for a long period or for a lifetime. But in such gluings it is generally one of the two that is entangled, the other skirmishes around dragging his living appendage or else leading it half glued, half dropped.

3-5-1938

MYSELF: What exactly is vital interchange?

SRI AUROBINDO: Difficult to specify. There is always a drawing of vital from one to another in all human social mixture that takes place automatically. Love-making is one of the most powerful ways of each drawing upon the other's vital force, or of one drawing the other's, which also often happens in a one-sided way to the great detriment of the "other". In the passage come many things good and bad, elation, feeling of strength and support, infiltration of good or bad qualities, interchange of psychological moods, states and movements, depressions, exhaustion—the whole gamut. People don't know it—which is a mercy of God upon them—but when one gets into a certain Yogic consciousness, one becomes very much aware and sensitive to all this interchange and action and reaction, but also one can build a wall against, reject etc., etc.

"It is a wall of consciousness that one has to build." Consciousness is not something abstract, it is like existence itself or ananda or mind or prana, something very concrete. If one becomes aware of the inner consciousness, one can do all sorts of things with it, send it out as a stream of force, erect a circle or wall of consciousness around oneself, direct an idea so that it shall enter somebody's head in America etc., etc.

MYSELF: I don't understand why you call it God's mercy?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because ignorance is bliss and they would feel very uncomfortable if they felt these things or were at all aware of them. As for the elation, they get it without needing to know the cause.

SPIRITUAL GURUS AND MARRIAGE

27-4-1936

MYSELF: Somebody writing a life of Confucius in Bengali says: "Why do the Dharmagurus marry, we can't understand. Buddha did and his wife's tale is heart-rending..."

SRI AUROBINDO: Why? what is there হৃদয় বিদারক [heart-rending] in it?

MYSELF: He goes on: "Sri Aurobindo, though not a dharmaguru but dharma-mad, has done it too..." Well, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, it is better to be ধর্ম্ম পাগল [dharma-mad] than to be a sententious ass and pronounce on what one does not understand.

MYSELF: "We feel so sad about his wife, so too about the wife of Confucius."

SRI AUROBINDO: Poor sorrowful fellows!

MYSELF: "So we don't understand why they marry and why this change comes soon after the marriage."

SRI AUROBINDO: Perfectly natural—they marry before the change, then the change comes and the marraige belongs to the past self, not to the new one.

MYSELF: "The wives of Buddha and Ramakrishna felt proud when they were left."

SRI AUROBINDO: Then what's the harm?

MYSELF: "If married life were an obstacle to spirituality, then they might as well have not married."

SRI AUROBINDO: No doubt. But then when they marry, there is not an omniscient ass like this biographer to tell them that they were going to be ধর্ম্ম গুরু or ধর্ম্ম পাগল [dharmaguru or dharma-mad] or in any way concerned with any other ধর্ম্ম [dharma] than the biographer's.

Well, if the biographer of Confucius can be such an unmitigated ass, Confucius may be allowed to be unwise once or twice, I suppose.

MYSELF: I touch upon a delicate subject, but it is a puzzle.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why delicate? and why a puzzle? 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.

PROBLEMS OF HARMONISATION

SRI AUROBINDO: Every man has a double nature except those who are born (not unborn) Asuras, Rakshasas, Pisachas and even they have a psychic being concealed somewhere by virtue of their latent humanity. But a double being (or a double nature in the special sense) refers to those who have two sharply contrasted parts of their being without as yet such a linking control over them. Sometimes they are all for the heights and then they are quite all right—sometimes all for the abysses and then they care nothing for the heights, and even sneer or rail at them and give full rein to the lower man. Or they substitute for the heights a smoky volcano summit in the abyss. These are extreme examples, but others while they do not go so far, yet are now one thing, now just the opposite. If they can convert the lower fellow or discover the central being in themselves, then a true harmonious whole can be created.

4-6-1936

MYSELF: One good news: I find now three mules—mules, mind you, not horses—are trying to draw me on. (1) Meditation, (2) silence (not of mind but of the buccal cavity), (3) poetry.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, mules are very useful animals. When Badoglio's motor lorries broke down, he bought 20,000 mules (I won't swear to the exact number) and they did the trick. You have only three mules and not 20,000—but perhaps 3 will serve.

MYSELF: The buccal silence I can keep off from clashing with the other two. But the collision between meditation and poetry is inevitable unless I favour one of them.

SRI AUROBINDO: There are three ways of meeting that situation (1) Say "Yes, yes" to both partners, but that may create trouble afterwards, (2) be cryptic cystic in your answers, so

that neither will be sure what you mean, (3) silence with an occasional profound "...Ah, hum. Yes, eh!" "Ah hum" always sounds unfathomable depths—and if "Yes" is too positive "eh" tones it down and corrects it. You have not enough worldly wisdom.

No need to harmonise by any set arrangement—only keep up the concentration. One hour of packed concentration or even a few minutes can do as much as three hours less packed. Do you say yours is not packed? Well, striped, streaked, spotted, dotted or whatever it may be.

5-12-1935

MYSELF: I am attempting short stories—just to open up my grey matter if possible, though I doubt very much. Again doubt! Yes, sir, doubt at every blessed nook and corner.

SRI AUROBINDO: You must have been St. Thomas in a past life, also Hamlet, an Academic philosopher, and several other things.

MYSELF: Three sisters are dancing in me—the urge to write short stories, the urge to write poetry and the urge to meditate. Is there any possibility of realising their rhythms in the near future?

SRI AUROBINDO: Every possibility if you will cease to Hamletise and go straight or go baldheaded for the thing to be done when there is a chance.

6-12-1935

SRI AUROBINDO: Lucky man! Ample time, sir, ample time, both to realise the Brahman and to write another Iliad—or Nirodiad.

Good Lord! What can one write in 1 or 1½ hours? If I could only get that time for immortal productions every day! Why in another three years Savitri and Illion and I don't know how

much more would be all rewritten, finished, resplendently complete.

Well, but what I mean is to stop this profitless debate in your stomach and do what you have to do. When you are moved to concentrate, concentrate—when you are moved to cosmicise chaos, cosmicise away. And don't waste time in remorses for having done either. Remorse is a damned useless affair, very very depressing, defertilising etc. Even if you murder somebody or, what is worse, write lines which amount to a murder of the Muse, remorse is out of place. In the first case, the useful thing to do is to bury the corpse and in the second to seek the capacious arms of the W.P.B. for your misdeed or try to cover it up by doing better.

ANIMAL-SACRIFICE, SELF-SACRIFICE, SPIRITUAL SACRIFICE

4-10-1935

MYSELF: Is there any truth behind animal sacrifices to Kali?

SRI AUROBINDO: If animal sacrifices are to be made they may just as well be made to Kali as to one's stomach—the Europeans who object to it have no *locus standi*.

MYSELF: Is the killing of mosquitoes, bugs, snakes and scorpions permissible for self-protection?

SRI AUROBINDO: Certainly. One might just as well object to the killing of germs by fumigation or otherwise.

MYSELF: What about the sacrifice of harmless animals to Kali?

SRI AUROBINDO: Useless and therefore inadvisable. External sacrifices of this kind have no longer any meaning—as so many saints have said, sacrifice ego, anger, lust etc. to Kali, not goats or cocks.

How does the Divine benefit by it? Very hungry, I suppose —would like a nice goat-chop?

MYSELF: I wonder if you know that some Sharma has gone on hunger-strike to stop the sacrifices at Calcutta. Tagore supports him.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course, I know. But he objects to animal sacrifice; why does he make a goat offering of himself to Kali? Is human sacrifice better than animal sacrifice?

MYSELF: The argument is: what does the loss of one life matter if by it other lives can be saved?

SRI AUROBINDO: I know the South African saying "How glorious if the whole world were to destroy itself to save the life of a single mosquito." I used always to wonder what would become of the poor mosquito if the world were destroyed? It seemed to my poor common sense that it would perish also in the glorious holocaust.

17-10-1935

Self-sacrifice for the country's sake has certainly a moral value. The "terrorism" brings in another element and assimilates it to the act of a fighter, less sattwic and more rajasic in its nature. I am not sure that I would be willing to call that a sacrifice in the moral or sattwic sense. In Bhishma's case the element of sacrifice came not in fighting and killing for the sake of Dhritarashtra but in his knowing that he must die and accepting it for his ideal of loyalty. Of course, you may say that every man who risks his life does an act of sacrifice, but then we come back to very primitive ideas. I take the word in S's letter in a less outward sense, otherwise my answer might have been different.

MYSELF: Recently an ignorant fanatic killed somebody whom he took to be irreverent to his Teacher. He was in turn killed by the Court. Did he make a sacrifice of his life for a noble cause?

SRI AUROBINDO: It seems to me that he made the sacrifice of another's life and not his own. In that way a murderer can also be said to make a sacrifice of his life to his desires or his passions, for he risks the gallows. Note that the fanatic tried to escape the gallows. Even taking it that he gave his life, it was for a reward, Paradise. His act is therefore at best equivalent to that of a soldier killing and getting killed. It cannot be called sacrifice, except in the old sense of the word, when you killed a cow or a goat on an altar to get religious merit. For, the essence of this kind of act of fanaticism is, admittedly, the killing of the unbeliever and not the giving of your own life. Would you call it self-sacrifice if you offered a goat at Kalighat? It would be for the goat if it assented to the affair, but for yourself? Of course there is the price of the goat—you might pride yourself on that sacrifice. There is nothing noble besides in fanaticism —there is no nobility of motive, though there may be a fierce enthusiasm of motive. Religious fanaticism is something psychologically low-born and ignorant—and usually in its action fierce, cruel and base. Religious ardour like that of the martyr who sacrifices himself only is a different thing.

MYSELF: It seems difficult to understand when the Mother says that spiritual sacrifice is joyful.

SRI AUROBINDO: She was speaking of the true spiritual sacrifice, not the bringing of an unwilling heart to the altar.

MYSELF: It seems to me that pain and struggle are bound to be there at the beginning of spiritual sacrifice by one who has tasted the joys of life.

SRI AUROBINDO: It simply means that your sacrifice is still mental and has not yet become spiritual in its character. When your vital being consents to give up its desires and enjoyments, when it offers itself to the Divine, then the Yajna will have begun. What I meant was that the European sense of the word is not the sense of the word "Yajna" or the sense of "sacrifice" in such phrases as "the sacrifice of works". It doesn't mean that you give up all works for the sake of the Divine—for there would be no sacrifice of works at all. Similarly the sacrifice of knowledge doesn't mean that you painfully and resolutely make yourself a fool for the sake of the Lord. Sacrifice means an inner offering to the Divine and the real spiritual sacrifice is a very joyful thing. Otherwise one is only trying to make oneself fit and has not yet begun the real Yajna. It is because your mind is struggling with your vital, the unwilling animal and asking it to allow itself to be immolated that there is the pain and struggle. If the spiritual will (or psychic) were more in the front then you would not be lamenting over the loss of the ghee and butter and curds thrown into the Fire or trying to have a last lick at it before casting it. The only difficulty would be about bringing down the gods fully enough (a progressive labour), not about lamentations over the ghee. 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.

MYSELF: You always paralyse me by bringing in Mother and yourself, non-humans as examples to humans!

SRI AUROBINDO: All this about human and non-human is sheer rubbish, your usual red herring across the path; you use it in order to argue that our knowledge and experience are of no practical value because they apply to us alone and cannot apply to or help human beings. As if no human beings ever had a clear mind and strong will able to make a resolution and carry it out without vital struggles and repinings. There are thousands who have done so. Even most ordinary men can do it when the passion for a cause seizes them. I have seen that in hundreds during the Swadeshi times. And do you think none who were human ever had conquered passion for the Divine?

12-7-1937

Sacrifice depends on the inner attitude. If one has nothing outward to sacrifice one has always oneself to give.

SEEKING FOR HAPPINESS

9-2-1936

MYSELF: I wrote some time back that behind any difficult endeavour of an individual there is the seeking for Ananda which acts as a motive-force. I got a rebuff from you: "Not that I know of." My little brain still can't argue with your mighty one about this matter.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is an easily made psychological proposition which can exist only by ignoring facts. If you say that it is the Ananda behind the veil which makes one act, as a moving power, not as a "motive",—that may be so, but this is a metaphysical, not a psychological generalisation. When a communist faces torture in a Nazi Concentration camp, he is not doing it for the sake of Ananda or happiness, but for something else which make him indifferent to Ananda or happiness or else compels him to face the loss of things and their very reverse, however painful it may be.

MYSELF: I have always seriously thought that all men are after happiness which is a deformation of Ananda.

SRI AUROBINDO: A mistake; many men are not after happiness and do not believe it is the true aim of life. It is the physical vital that seeks after happiness, the bigger vital is ready to sacrifice it in order to satisfy its passions, search for power, ambition, fame or any other motive. If you say it is because of the happiness power, fame etc. gives, that again is not universally true. Power may give anything else, but it does not usually give happiness, it is something in its very nature arduous and full of difficulty to get, to keep or to use—I speak of course of power in the ordinary sense. A man may know he can never have fame in this life but works in the hope of posthumous fame or in the chase of it. He may know that the satisfaction of his passion will bring him everything rather than happiness—suffering, torture, destruction—yet he will follow his

impulse. So also the mind as well as the bigger vital is not bound by the pursuit of happiness. It can seek Truth rather or the victory of a cause. To reduce all to a single hedonistic strain seems to me to be very poor psychology. Neither Nature nor the vast Spirit in things are so limited and one-tracked as that.

MYSELF: I read a wise man's statement that all human beings are ever wanting happiness untainted with sorrows.

SRI AUROBINDO: All? It is far too sweeping a genralisation. If he had said that it is one very strong strain in human nature it could be accepted. But mark that it is in human physical consciousness only. The human vital tends rather to reject a happiness untainted by sorrow and to find it a monotonous boring condition. Even if it accepts it, after a time it kicks over the traces and goes to some new painful or risky adventure.

MYSELF: Is not man's real nature happiness? Is not happiness inborn in the true self?

SRI AUROBINDO: The true Self is quite a different proposition. But what it has is not happiness but something more.

MYSELF: It is said that even the wicked and the criminal sin because they are trying to find the self's happiness in every sin they commit: this striving is instinctive in man but they don't know it...

SRI AUROBINDO: Who is this they? I fear it is a very summary and misleading criminal psychology. To say that a Paris crook or *apaché* steels, swindles, murders for the happiness of stealing, swindling, murdering is a little startling. He does it for quite other reasons. He does it as his métier just as you do your doctor's work. Do you really do your doctor's work because of the happiness you find in it?

MYSELF: People will not seek a sorrowless untainted everlasting happiness, even if shown the way—because they will consider it beyond their powers to attain.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is also with many because they prefer the joy mixed with sorrow, মানুষের হাসিকান্না[1] and consider your everlasting happiness an everlasting bore.

[1] man's laughter and tears.

11-2-1936

MYSELF: You have hit me well by asking me whether I do my doctoring for the sake of happiness. You know very well that it was forced on me!

SRI AUROBINDO: Most people do things because they have to, not out of the happiness they find in the things. It is only its hobbies and penchants that the nature finds some happiness in, not usually in work—unless of course the work itself is one's hobby or penchant and can be indulged in or dropped as one likes.

THE MAN OF SORROWS

I

Human Life and Suffering

SRI AUROBINDO: It is fundamentally true for most people that the pleasure of life, of existence in itself, predominates over the troubles of life; otherwise most people would want to die whereas the fact is that everybody wants to live—and if you proposed to them an easy means of eternal extinction they would decline without thanks. That is what X is saying and it is undeniable. It is also true that this comes from the Ananda of existence which is behind everything and is reflected in the instinctive pleasure of existence. Naturally, this instinctive essential pleasure is not the Ananda,—it is only a pale and dim reflection of it in an inferior life-consciousness—but it is enough for its purpose. I have said that myself somewhere and I do not see anything absurd or excessive in the statement.

MYSELF: This is how one sees things from the cosmic consciousness, I suppose.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not at all. There are plenty of people, not endowed with the cosmic consciousness who have said and written the same thing. It is no new theory or statement.

MYSELF: In the face of what we see in the world today, it is not easy to accept X's viewpoint. Just look at India, with its famines and starvation and unemployment! In spite of this, how can it be said that the Ananda of this bare existence surpasses all suffering?

SRI AUROBINDO: All that is only a feature of the present time when everything is out of order. One can't argue from that and speak as if it were the normal existence of the human race. Even with all this trouble and disorder[1] are all these hu-

[1] Conjectural reading (Nirodbaran).

man beings feeling so miserable as you say? They have so much to vex and trouble them yet they go on chatting, laughing, enjoying what they can. Why?

Against the second part of the question Sri Aurobindo wrote in the margin:

For most people it does. All are not men of sorrows like yourself or fallen into the Byronic vein. Some of course have so miserable an existence that it stifles the innate pleasure of life —but these are after all a small minority.

MYSELF: But you have yourself written in *The Riddle of This World* that this is an unideal and unsatisfactory world strongly marked with the stamp of inadequacy, suffering and evil.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is when you look at what the world ought to be and lay stress on what it should be. The idealists' question is why should there be pain at all even if it is outweighed by the fundamental pleasure of existence? The real crux is why should inadequacy, limit and suffering come across this natural pleasure of life? It does not mean that life is essentially miserable in its very nature.

If anyone is conscious of the Mother's presence, he does not make a big case of his troubles.[1] Even if one is not, yet those who have faith or are not touched by your Man of Sorrows are not making the row you speak of. Nobody *has* to make a big case. People do it because they are ignorant and unconscious.

II

Difficulties and Despair

11-5-1933

MYSELF: I hear that many are the people here who have been

[1] In the daily report of our sadhana we used to send to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo (Nirodbaran).

at one time or another on the point of going away due to the pressure of Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is not due to the pressure of Yoga but to the pressure of something in them that negates the Yoga. If one follows one's psychic being and higher mental call, no amount of pressure of Yoga can produce such results. People talk as if the Yoga had some maleficent force in it which produces these results. It is on the contrary the resistance to Yoga that does it.

12-5-1933

MYSELF: The Mother, in her *Conversations*, says that the first effect of Yoga is to take away the mental control so that the ideas and desires which were so long checked become surprisingly prominent and create difficulties.

SRI AUROBINDO: They were not prominent because they were getting some satisfaction or at least the vital generally was getting indulged in one way or another. When they are no longer indulged then they become obstreperous. But they are not new forces created by the Yoga—they were there all the time.

What is meant by the mental control being removed is that the mental simply kept them in check but could not remove them. So in Yoga the mental has to be replaced by the psychic or spiritual self-control which could do what the vital cannot, only many sadhaks do not make this exchange in time and withdraw the mental control merely.

MYSELF: I find already that at certain moments this life seems distasteful, dull and dreary.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is meant by dull and dreary is that the ordinary preoccupations and amusements of the vital are not there. The whole of one's life and action is to be turned into sadhana and then it is not dull.

28-5-1933

MYSELF: Sometimes I think that you are giving me a taste of the cup of bliss in very small drops, and at long intervals, but I do not at all despair.

SRI AUROBINDO: There is no room certainly for despair. The bliss always comes in drops at first, or a broken trickle. You have to go on cheerfully and in full confidence, till there is the cascade.

30-12-1933

MYSELF: For some time past I have been feeling as if I were receding from the Divine, or is it that the Divine is receding from me?

SRI AUROBINDO: The Divine does not recede. For yourself, you are probably not so much receding as getting into the part where there is the difficulty. I mean you have projected yourself from the mind into the vital. It would have been better if you had drawn back into the psychic—but since you are there, you have only to force your way through it to the psychic gates.

MYSELF: Is there any hint that the projection has been rather invited and encouraged by myself?

SRI AUROBINDO: It came by being preoccupied too much with the difficulties of the nature. It is always better to dwell on the good side of things within yourself. I do not mean in an egoistic way, but with faith and cheerful confidence, calling down the positive experience of which the nature is already capable so that a constant positive growth can help in the rejection of all that has to be rejected. But in fact one gets often projected into the vital difficulties at an early stage and then instead of going from the mind into the psychic (through the heart) one has to go through the disturbed vital.

MYSELF: Is it possible to retrace one's steps to the psychic? If so, how?

SRI AUROBINDO: It can be done, if you refuse to be preoccupied with the idea of your difficulties and concentrate on really helpful and positive things. 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!

10-5-1934

MYSELF: The Mother says in her *Prayers* that experience is willed by the Divine. Am I then to suppose that dearth or abundance of experiences is in any given case willed by the Divine?

SRI AUROBINDO: To say so has no value unless you realise all things as coming from the Divine. One who has realised as the Mother had realised in the midst of terrible sufferings and difficulties that even these came from the Divine and were preparing her for her work can make a spiritual use of such an attitude. For others it may lead to wrong conclusions.

9-6-1934

MYSELF: My friend is extremely troubled by his own defects and is in utter despair and thinks of putting an end to his own life. What should I say to him from you?

SRI AUROBINDO: Despair is absurd and talk of suicide quite out of place. However a man may stumble, the Divine Grace will be there so long as he aspires for it and in the end lead him through.

15-10-1934

MYSELF: I feel quite helpless and without force and energy, without aspiration or faith. I would like to know if and how one

is responsible for such a condition. Shall I persist in meditation or try to replace it by some reading?

SRI AUROBINDO: These things must be the result either of desire or of inertia or of vital restlessness. If you stop meditation, I do not see how you are going to get rid of these things. It is only by bringing in a higher consciousness that you can get rid of the habitual conditions of the old consciousness.

24-10-1934

MYSELF: It seems that it is futile to make any effort for anything. One tries hard to reject habitual thoughts but to no avail. How little is the result after some days of effort! What then is the use?

SRI AUROBINDO: All that is the physical mind refusing to take the trouble of the labour and struggle necessary for the spiritual achievement. It wants to get the highest, but desires a smooth course all the way, "who the devil is going to face so much trouble for getting the Divine?"—that is the underlying feeling. The difficulty with the thoughts is a difficulty every yogi has gone through—so the phenomenon of a little result after some days of effort. It is only when one has cleared the field and ploughed and sown and watched over it that big harvests can be hoped for.

One must either use effort and then one must be patient and persevering, or one can rely on the Divine with a constant call and aspiration. But then the reliance has to be a true one not insisting on immediate fruit.

III

Despair and Commonsense

23-2-1935

MYSELF: I am unhappy and I don't know why. To put it medically, there is some hidden focus of infection disseminating

slow and mild but constant toxins of unhappiness in the system.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well but hang it all! If there is no "why", "why", then be unhappy?

Is it in the system or in the air? Endemic? epidemic? You seem to be only one of many cases.

MYSELF: I felt immense joy at the *darshan* on February 21, but it ebbed away as soon as I came down.

SRI AUROBINDO: It sounds like *facilis descensus Averno.*[1] But after all downstairs and Erebus are not the same thing.

MYSELF: There are some Yogis, I hear, who are in bliss during meditation, but when they come down they are swallowed up in the lower nature, and to escape from this they at once leap up to their static sublimity. Unfortunately I can't rush up again till August 15—the next *darshan.* Will you kindly come down and help the poor amateur Yogi?

SRI AUROBINDO: Come down? into Erebus? No, thank you—I might become like the said Yogis.

But why hug despair without a cause—Dilipian or other? Come to your senses and develop a Nirodian jollity instead (not necessarily Mark Tapleyan, though that is better than none). Laugh and be fat—then dance to keep the fat down—that is a sounder programme.

MYSELF: The Overmind seems so distant from us, and your Himalayan austerity and grandeur takes my breath away, making my heart palpitate!

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

[1] Easy the descent to Hell.

IV

Depression and Yoga

MYSELF: Freed once more from the Devil's claws! Just a few words about the process: I took up X's poem, felt like writing one after reading it, failed; then went to Pranam, there found J's letter waiting, read it and as soon as I sat in the Hall, lo, everything fell off! what then did the job—poem, letter?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, of course, it was the Old Man of the Sea, I mean of Sorrow, who dropped off, because he can't stand anything cheerful and hopeful. The main credit goes to the letter, because it has a push in it of the psychic force which took your vital and the O.M. also by surprise and knocked him off and you up by surprise before the vital had time to turn round and cry, "Hélas! Hélas! Alas! Ototototoi!"

All together—Poetry first attempt, letter brought a good atmosphere (that was the sense of something pleasant) and both were the effect of a long pressure from me which you had resisted sitting firm in a Gandhian passive resistance.

MYSELF: This shows, Sir, you make us suffer unnecessarily; you can at any moment draw me out if it pleases you.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not at all, you can't be drawn out if something in you refuses and sticks like a badger in its hole. When that says, "Oh, damn it, after all let me get out and breathe some fresh air," then it can be done.

MYSELF: I don't understand what my friend J means by the disturbance in connection with the affairs of the world.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is clear enough. His new consciousness makes him feel more strongly the opposite forces that one contacts when one moves in the world and has to do affairs and meet with others and he is afraid of a response in the vital which will upset his sadhana or create difficulties. Evidently he is a man who is psychically sensitive or has become so to that thing which you blindly refuse to recognise even when you are in the midst of it—the play of forces. You can feel your friend's atmosphere through the letter "so beautiful, so

strengthening, so refreshing" and it has an immediate effect on you. But your mind stares like an owl and wonders "What the hell can this be?", I suppose, because your medical books never told you about it and how can things be true which are not known either to the ordinary mind or science? It is by an incursion of an opposite kind of forces that you fall into the Old Man's clutches, but you can only groan and cry, "What's this?" and when they are swept aside in a moment by other forces blink and mutter, "Well, that's funny!" Your friend can feel and know at once when he is being threatened by the opposite forces and so he can be on his guard and resist old Nick, because he can detect at once one of his principal means of attack.

19-6-1935

MYSELF: You have often spoken of the Man of Sorrows in connection with me. But I was a cheerful fellow at school and college. So I am afraid he is a contribution, partly at least, of your Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not of my Yoga, but of the blasted atmosphere that has been created here by the theory that revolt, doubt and resultant shout and struggle and all that rot are the best way to progress. The Ashram has never been able to get out of it, but only some people have escaped. The others have opened themselves to the confounded man of sorrows and got the natural consequence. But why the devil did you do it? The man of sorrows is a fellow who is always making a row in himself and covering himself with a sevenfold overcoat of tragedy and gloom and he would not feel his existence justified if he couldn't be colossally miserable—when he gets on people's backs he puts the same thing on them. Yoga on the other hand tells you even if you have all sorts of unpleasantnesses to live in the inner sunlight—your own or God's. At least most Yogas do except the Vaishnava—but the Yoga here is not a Vaishnava Yoga.

20-6-1935

MYSELF: I have a headache at times—it is worse after pranam. Is it yogic in origin? Do you break resistances by giving pains and aches?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, to make people ill in order to improve or perfect them is not Mother's method. But sometimes things like headache come because the brain either tried too much or does not want to receive or makes difficulties. But the Yogic headaches are of a special kind and after the brain has found out the way to receive or respond they don't come at all.

13-9-1935

SRI AUROBINDO: Now look here, as to the Yoga etc. if I can be patient with you and your despairs, why can't you be patient with the forces? Let me give you a "concrete" instance. X is a...of whom it might be said that if anyone could be said to be incapable of any least progress in yoga, X was the very person, blockhead absolute and unique in that respect. Mulish, revolted, abusive. No capacity of any kind, no experience, not a shadow, tittle or blessed pinpoint of it anyhow, anywhere or at any time for years and more years and still more years. Finally some while ago X begins to fancy or feel that X wants Mother and nothing and nobody else (that was the result of my ceaseless and futile hammering for years, X makes sanguinary row after row because X can't get Mother, not a trace, speck or hint anywhere of Mother. Threats of departure and suicide very frequent. I sit mercilessly and severely upon X, not jocularly as I do on you. X still weeps copiously, because Mother does not love X. I sit on X still more furiously but go on pumping force and things into X. X stops that but weeps copiously because X has no faith, does not love Mother (all this goes on for months and months). Finally one day after deciding to stop weeping for good and all X suddenly finds X was living in barriers, barriers broken down, vast oceanic wideness

inside X, love, peace rushing in, or pressing to rush; can't understand, what on earth all this is—or what to do—writes for guidance. Now, sir, if my yugalike persistence could work a miracle like that with such a one, why can't you expect an earlier result with you, O Nirod of little faith and less patience? Stand and answer.

14-9-1935

SRI AUROBINDO: I suppose X was able to stick because X had no brains. It is the confounded reasoning brain that is the ruin of you. For instead of taking the lesson of things it begins reasoning about them in this futile—shall I say asinine—way. My idea however is that X stuck because X had nowhere else to go. Of course that is the outer reason, the real one being that something unknown pinned X down here.

1-10-1935

MYSELF: Absolutely in the physical consciousness! Don't find any trace of the psychic anywhere, Sir! Are you handling the blessed subconscient physical or what?

SRI AUROBINDO: I am handling the handle. Sticky! If you are absolutely in the physical consciousness so much the better. It shows you are on the way. If you were in your uproarious mental or tragic vital then there would be little chance for the psychic to emerge. But now that you are in the physical, there is some prospect of your finishing the circle M.V.Ph. Afterwards possibly there will be a chance for the line Ps. HC.S. Rejoice.

MYSELF: What are the abbreviations—Ps. HC.S.?

SRI AUROBINDO: Psychic—Higher Consciousness—Supramental.

MYSELF: You are trying to adopt shorthand now.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course! what to do? shorthand lessens

the labour of the writer, even if it increases that of the reader. Besides the attempt to find out what the abbs mean should stimulate your intuition and sharpen your intelligence.

MYSELF: I don't know how the psychic is going to emerge from the physical consciousness.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, it is the bottom of the first curve, so logically the next thing is to make an upward tangent and get into the second curve.

MYSELF: Suppose one finishes the circle M.V.Ph. it can go round again before one is shifted to the starting of the other line.

SRI AUROBINDO: That would be very clever but it is not usually done except by people with big egos. Yours is no doubt a well-developed chubby chap but it is not a giant.

25-12-1935

MYSELF: I don't understand why I came to this world with doubts and Co. whereas others did so with self-confidence. why some people go on patiently, honestly etc. and still end their days in misery, why frauds etc. flourish so well! I would say Kismet. You may say blessed Karma—it is only another name.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, the frauds are capable and clever in their fraudulency, I suppose. And why should not capacity have its results? The others are only moral and reward of morality is not worldly success but the satisfaction of a conscience at rest. Virtue is its own reward—it can't ask for success in life also! What would the poor frauds do if having the torments of a bad conscience (?) they had no success to soothe their tortures.

Karma is not luck, it is the transmission of past energies into the present with their results.

21-7-1937

MYSELF: There is no uprush of sex or desire and all that. But still a negative blank state!

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, it may be one of two things. (1) The vital has dropped down and says "if I can't have what I want in this damned world of yours, alright I non-cooperate and ask for nothing." Hence the flatness—Result of course tamasic vairagya. This kind of thing often happens at a certain stage of sadhana.

(2) Drop to the physical—first complete acquaintance with the principle of Inertia proper to the physical when it is moved neither by vital, mind, nor spirit. Lies flat waiting for the breath of God or any breath to stir it, but making no move of its own.

Hold on and call upon the Spirit to breathe.

V

Jeremiads and the Divine Force

20-1-1936

As there are several lamentations today besieging me, I have very little time to deal with each separate Jeremiad. Do I understand rightly that your contention is this, "I can't believe in the Divine doing everything for me because it is by my own mighty and often fruitless efforts that I write or do not write poetry and have made myself into a poet." Well, that itself is *épatant*, magnificent, unheard of. It has always been supposed since the infancy of the human race that while a verse-maker can be made or self-made, a poet cannot. "*Poeta nascitur non fit*", a poet is born not made is the dictum that has come down through the centuries and millenniums and was thundered into my ears by the first pages of my Latin Grammar. The facts of literary history seem to justify this stern saying. But here in Pondicherry we have tried not to manufacture poets but to give them birth, a spiritual, not a physical birth into the body. In a number of instances we are supposed to have succeeded—one of these is your noble self—or if I am to believe the man of sorrows

in you, your abject, miserable, hopeless and ineffectual self. But how was it done? There are two theories, it seems—one that it was by the Force, the other that it was done by your own splashing, kicking, groaning Herculean efforts. Now, sir, if it is the latter, if you have done that unprecedented thing, made yourself by your own laborious strength into a poet (for your earlier efforts were only very decent literary exercises), then, sir, why the deuce are you so abject, self-depreciatory, miserable? Don't say that is only a poet who can produce no more than a few poems in many months. Even to have done that, to have become a poet at all, a self-made poet is a miracle over which we can only say Sabash! Sabash! without ever stopping. If your effort could do that, what is there that it can't do? All miracles can be effected by it and a giant self-confident faith ought to be in you. On the other hand, if, as I aver, it is the Force that has done it, what then can it not do? Here too faith, a giant faith is the only logical conclusion. So either way there is room only for Hallelujahs, none for Jeremiads. Q.E.D.

I am obliged to stop—if I go on, there will be no Pranam till 12 o'clock. So send your Jeremiad back tonight and I will see what else to write. Have written this in a headlong hurry—I hope it is not full of *lapsus calami*.

2

21-1-1936

The fact that you don't feel a force does not prove that it is not there. The steam engine does not feel a force moving it, but the force is there. A man is not a steam engine? He is very little better, for he is conscious only of some bubbling on the surface which he calls himself and is absolutely unconscious of all the subconscient, subliminal, superconscient forces moving him. (This is a fact which is being more and more established by modern psychology though it has got hold only of the lower forces and not the higher, so you need not turn up your rational nose at it.) He twitters intellectually (=foolishly,) about the

surface results and attributes them all to his 'noble self', ignoring the fact that his noble self is hidden far away from his own vision behind the veil of his dimly sparkling intellect and the reeking fog of his vital feelings, emotions, impulses, sensations and impressions. So your argument is utterly absurd and futile. Our aim is to bring the secret forces out and unwalled into the open so that instead of getting some shadows or lightnings of themselves out through the veil or being wholly obstructed, they may "pour down" and "flow in a river". But to expect that all at once is a presumptuous demand which shows an impatient ignorance and inexperience. If they begin to trickle at first, that is sufficient to justify the faith in a future downpour. You admit that you once or twice felt a force coming down and delivering a poem out of you (your opinion about its worth or worthlessness is not worth a cent, that is for others to pronounce). That is sufficient to blow the rest of your Jeremiad to smithereens; it proves that the force was and is there and at work and it is only your sweating Herculean labour that prevents you feeling it. Also it is the trickle that gives assurance of the possibility of the downpour. One has only to go on and by one's patience deserve the downpour or else, without deserving, stick on until one gets it. In Yoga itself the experience that is a promise and foretaste but gets shut off till the nature is ready for the fulfilment is a phenomenon familiar to every Yogin when he looks back on his past experience. Such were the brief visitations of Ananda you had some time before. It does not matter if you have not a leechlike tenacity—leeches are not the only type of Yogins. If you can stick anyhow or get stuck that is sufficient. The fact that you are not Sri Aurobindo (who said you were?) is an inapt irrelevance. One needs only to be oneself in a reasonable way and shake off the hump when it is there or allow it to be shaken off without clinging to it with a leech-like tenacity worthy of a better cause.

All the rest is dreary stuff of the tamasic ego. As there is a rajasic ego which shouts "What a magnificent powerful sublime divine individual I am, unique and peerless" (of course there are gradations in the pitch,) so there is a tamasic ego which squeaks

"What an abject hopeless, worthless, incapable, unluckily unendowed and uniquely impossible creature I am,—all are great Aurobindos, Dilips, Anilbarans (great for their capacity of novel-reading and self-content, according to you) but I, oh I, oh I!" That's your style. It is this tamasic ego (of course it expresses itself in various ways at various times, I am only rendering your present pitch) which is responsible for the Man of Sorrows getting in. It's all bosh—stuff made up to excuse the luxury of laziness, melancholy and despair. You are in that bog just now because you have descended faithfully and completely into the inert stupidity and die-in-the-mudness of your physical consciousness which, I admit, is a specimen! But so after all is everybody's, only they are different kinds of specimens. What to do? Dig yourself out if you can; if you can't, call for ropes and wait till they come. If God knows what will happen when the Grace descends, that is enough, isn't it? That you don't know is a fact which may be baffling to your—well, your intelligence, but is not of great importance—any more than your supposed unfitness. Who ever was fit, for that matter—fitness and unfitness are only a way of speaking; man is in nature unfit and a misfit (so far as things spiritual are concerned) in his outward nature. But within there is a soul and above there is Grace. "This is all you know or need to know" and, if you don't, well, even then you have at least somehow stumbled into the path and have got to remain there till you get hauled along it far enough to wake up to the knowledge. Amen.

21-4-1936

MYSELF: A most stimulating formula I find in your letter —"Within there is a soul, and above there is Grace"—about which you say "This is all you know or need to know." Is that all really?

SRI AUROBINDO: For any one who wants the spiritual life, yes, it is enough.

24-4-1936

MYSELF: Can one arrive at what is called "a state of grace" simply by sticking or simply because there is a soul within?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, one can, plenty of people have done it.

MYSELF: But then the soul is there in everybody and Grace is above everybody. How is it that people have turned their backs on the Divine?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because of rajasic ego, ambition, vanity—because they believed in their own efforts and not in the Grace.

MYSELF: I have never heard that Grace did everything. And, where it seems to do so, how do we know that somebody has not done sadhana in his past life? You can't deny this, can you?

SRI AUROBINDO: You can't affirm it, can you?

I can point you at many instances in spiritual history—beginning with the famous Jagai Madhai. Bt it is no use against a brain that does not want to admit that 2+2=4.

MYSELF: Simple sticking won't do. In that case our Ashram cat Bushy would have a chance.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course she has—of rising to a new grade of birth with all in her favour in the next life.

MYSELF: I hesitate to believe much in Grace. Is not Grace something that comes down unconditionally?

SRI AUROBINDO: It does not depend on conditions—which is rather a different thing from an unconditional surrender to any and every sadhak.

MYSELF: Even Ramakrishna's baby-cat type of sadhak has to make a decisive movement of surrender and compel the rest of the being to obedience, which is the most difficult thing on earth.

SRI AUROBINDO: I never heard that the baby cat was like that—if it were it would not be a baby cat. (It is the baby monkey trying to become a baby cat who does that.) But you have evidently so great a knowledge of spiritual things (surpassing mine and Ramakrishna's) that I can only bow my head and pass humbly on to people with less knowledge.

MYSELF: *If anybody can do the baby cat surrender at a stroke, is it not because his "unfinished curve" in the past life has finished it in this?*

SRI AUROBINDO: Hail, Rishi, all-knower! Tell us all about our past lives.

MYSELF: Surely the soul instead of sleeping has to aspire etc. to call down its Lord the Grace. Where do you see that aspiration in me? If you build my spiritual castle on those one or two minutes' brief visitations of Ananda and that too once or twice only, excluding the moments of *darshan* of your great self, which also have been sometimes marred in these three years—and if you build my poetic mansion on little trickles, then I can only say—well, what shall I say?

SRI AUROBINDO: Better say nothing. It will sound less foolish.

24-1-1936

MYSELF: You have often inveighed against my asking you not to use yourself as an argument against the Divine. But what is the history of your sadhana in your own words—a Herculean practice of Pranayama, concentration and what not and then, after years and years of waiting the Grace of Brahman. Still you are *pañcamukha* in the praise of Grace.

SRI AUROBINDO: What a wooden head! what is the use of saying things if you deliberately misinterpret what I write? I said clearly that the pranayam 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. I can only look mournfully at your ununderstanding pate.

SRI AUROBINDO: It can mean also waiting on the Grace of of the Divine! The will of the individual in this respect does not mean anything like that. If the will of the individual is towards perdition, if his ego becomes hostile to the Divine, then the Divine is not bound to show him a Grace he does not want at all and kicks at.

MYSELF: Take the case of X. My God, to think that after all those Napoleonic efforts in poetry, and having succeeded, one is still driven to desperation because, after all, one has obtained nothing spiritually in spite of aspiration, meditation etc.—this is blood-curdling and at once smashes your theory of Karmayoga through poetry.

SRI AUROBINDO: Napoleonic rubbish! He was the worst poet in the world before he came here and here immediately as soon as I put my force he began writing beautiful poems. Yet it was by his Napoleonic efforts that he did it? Imbecility, thy name is ego.

I was not putting any Karmayoga theory—I was simply mocking at your absurd idea that it was by your own mighty efforts that you had succeeded in writing poetry which any good judge (you are not one) would call genuine poetry.

Non, monsieur,—j'ai d'autres chats à fouetter. I have other cats to whip—I can't go on whipping one cat all the time. A few lashes on the margin are all I can spare for you just now.

There are three main possibilities for the sadhak:

1. To wait on the Grace and rely on the Divine.

2. To do everything himself like the full Adwaitin and the Buddhist.

3. To take the middle path,—go forward by aspiration and rejection etc. helped by the Force. The first, it appears, is too easy for you to do it, the second is too difficult for you to do, the third being easy in parts and difficult in parts is as impossible for you to do it. Right? Amen!!!

2-6-1936

MYSELF: I am feeling dry, dry, dry. But a mood of medita-

tion creeps over the dryness—sometimes a feeling of stillness. Poetry nowhere near. A lot of thinking. Que faire? I suppose this dryness is due to your unexpected progress. That is the only consolation. Addis Ababa—far?

SRI AUROBINDO: Dryness, no! that is part of your own pilgrimage. The rest may be due to Ad. Ab. Quite a number of people are trying to become स्तब्ध[1]—wide etc. without ever having intended it. I like to think my march may have something to do with it.

3-6-1936

MYSELF: 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?

SRI AUROBINDO: 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 vairagya. Don't much care for vairagya myself, always avoided the beastly thing, but had to go through it partly, till I hit on *samatā* as a better trick. But samata is difficult, vairagya is easy, only damnably gloomy and uncomfortable.

4-6-1936

SRI AUROBINDO: Vairagya means a positive detachment from things of this life, but it does not *immediately* carry with it a luminous aspiration except for a few fortunate people. For the positive detachment is often a pulling away by the soul while the vital clings and is gloomy and malcontent.

[1] still

14-6-1936

SRI AUROBINDO: Your analysis and reasonings are those of Grand'mère Depression which sees only what she allows to come to the surface for her purposes. There are other things that Madame suppresses because they don't suit her. It does not greatly matter what brought you here—the important thing is to go on till the psychic truth behind all that becomes manifest. The inertia of your physical nature is only a thick crust on the surface which gives way slowly, but under the pressure it will give way. If you had some big object in the ordinary life and nothing to hope for here it might be different, but as things are it would be foolish to walk off under the instigation of this old Mother Gloom-Gloom. Stick on and you will get the soul's reward hereafter.

8-1-1937

MYSELF: One misgiving is pressing heavily on my soul. I sense and feel that the tone of your letters has suddenly become very grave, rough, stiff and gruff—the owl-like severity with which you had once threatened me. Have I done anything to deserve such punishment? Or is it because you are getting supramentalised day by day that you are withdrawing yourself so? There must be a reason if my sense feel is correct. Well, if you want to press me between two planks and pulverise me.... Not that I want it, you know.

SRI AUROBINDO: I think your sense feel has been indulging in vain imaginations, perhaps with the idea of increasing your concrete imaginative faculty and fitting you for understanding the unintelligible. As you have now much to do with mystic poetry, it may be necessary. But why object to being pulverised? Once reduced to powder, think how useful you may be as a medicine, Pulv. Nirod. gr. II. Anyhow disburden your soul of the weight. I am not owled yet and my supramentalisation is going on too slowly to justify such apprehensions. Neither

am I withdrawing, rather fitting myself for a new rush in the near or far future. So cheer up and send the Man of Sorrows with his 'planks' to the devil.

"BLUE MOON"

25-12-1935

MYSELF: Do you hope that a "blue moon" will ever rise in my heavens?

SRI AUROBINDO: I trust that a blue moon will rise in everybody's heaven who has on one side the patience to go through and on the other no fundamental and self-expulsive wickedness in his nature. Even for these others a blue moon will rise one day, though later; if they have once sought for it.

SECTION II

Art and Literature

WHICH ART IS THE GREATEST?

MYSELF: There has been often a discussion and hence a difference of opinion on the relative greatness of different branches of Art. Some of us are disposed to think of music as the highest; poetry, painting, architecture, sculpture, embroidery following thus in order of merit. Though one may not agree to such a classification, still because of the universality and most direct appeal of music cannot one give it preference? Poetry is rather limited in its scope and painting even more so. They have to be understood in order to be appreciated in their fullest measure whereas music, apart from the technical aspect which is not absolutely obligatory for an appeal, need not. You know of the stories of beasts and snakes being charmed, not to speak of the hardhearted Yamaraja, by music! Take your *Love and Death* as an example of poetic excellence. I am afraid people would throng round a piece of music sung by one of the renowned singers, more than round your recital of the poem. Yes, you may have the satisfaction of having an audience of intellectuals and then it will prove my contention that poetry has a limited appeal. Now about painting. I hear quite a number of people have lost their heads over Mona Lisa, even over a copy of it, but I have come away quite sound and strong without even being touched in the heart and I am sure many others have done so. This substantiates again my theory that painting is restricted in its scope. But will you turn the tables by this very fact of the restricted scope and difficult technique of painting and poetry and place Painting, Poetry, Music and so on. Is there really a hierarchy of planes in the Occult?

SRI AUROBINDO: I fear I must disappoint you. I am *not* going to pass the Gods through a competitive examination and assign a highest place to one and lower places to others. What an idea! Each has his or her own province on the summits and what is the necessity of putting them in rivalry with the others? It is a sort of Judgment of Paris you want to impose on me?

Well, but what became of Paris and Troy? You want me to give the crown or apple to Music and enrage the Goddesses of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Embroidery, all the Nine Muses, so that they will kick at our publications and exhibitions and troop off to other places? We shall have to build in the future—what then shall we so if the Goddess of Architecture turns severely and says, "I am an inferior Power, am I? Go and ask your Nirod to build your house with his beloved music!"

Your test of Precedence—universal appeal—is all wrong. I don't know that it is true, in the first place. Some kind of sound called music appeals to everybody, but has really great music a universal appeal? And, speaking of arts, more people go to the theatre or read fiction than go to the opera or a concert. What becomes then of the superior universality of music, even in the cheapest sense of universality? Rudyard Kipling's *Barrack Room Ballads* exercise a more universal appeal than was ever reached by Milton or Keats—we will say nothing of writers like Blake or Francis Thompson; a band on the pier at a seaside resort will please more people than a great piece of music with the orchestration conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham. In a world of gods it might be true that the highest makes the most universal appeal, but here in a world of beasts and men (you bring in the beasts—why not play to Bushy and try how she responds?) it is usually the inferior things that have the more general if not quite universal appeal. On the other hand the opposite system you suggest (the tables turned upside down—the least universal and most difficult appeal makes the greatest art) would also have its dangers. At that rate we should have to concede that the cubist and abstract painters had reached the highest art possible, only rivalled by the up-to-date modernist poets of whom it has been said that their works are not at all either read or understood by the public, are read and understood only by the poet himself and are read without being understood by his personal friends and admirers.

When you speak of direct appeal, you are perhaps touching something true. Technique does not come in—for although to have a complete and expert judgment or appreciation you

must know the technique not only in music and painting where it is more difficult, but in poetry and architecture also, it is something else and not that kind of judgment of which you are speaking. It is perhaps true that music goes direct to the intuition and feeling with the least necessity for the using of the thinking mind with its strongly limiting conceptions as a self-imposed middleman, while painting and sculpture do need it and poetry still more. At that rate music would come first, architecture next, then sculpture and painting, poetry last. I am aware that Housman posits nonsense as the essence of pure poetry and considers its appeal to be quite direct—not to the soul, but to somewhere about the stomach. But then there is hardly any pure poetry in this world and the little there is still *mélangé* with at least a homeopathic dose of intellectual meaning. But again if I admit this thesis of excellence by directness, I shall be getting myself into dangerous waters. For modern painting has become either cubist or abstract and it claims to have got rid of mental representation and established in art the very method of music; it paints not the object, but the truth behind the object—by the use of pure line and colour and geometrical form which is the basis of all forms or else by figures which are not representations but significances. For instance a modern painter wishing to make a portrait of you will paint at the top a clock surrounded by three traingles, below them a chaos of rhomboids and at the bottom two table castors to represent your feet and he will put in underneath this powerful design, "Portrait of Nirod". Perhaps your soul will leap up in answer to its direct appeal and recognise at once the truth behind the object, behind your vanished physical self,—you will greet your psychic being or your Atman or at least your inner physical or vital being. Perhaps also you won't. Poetry also seems to be striving towards the same end by the same means—the getting away from mind into the depths of life or, as the profane might put it, arriving at truth and beauty through ugliness and unintelligibility. From that you will perhaps deduce that the attempt of painting and poetry to do what music alone can do easily and directly without these acrobatics is futile because it

is contrary to their nature—which proves your thesis that music is the highest art because most direct in its appeal to the soul and the feeling. Maybe—or maybe not; as the Jains put it, *syād vā na syād vā.*

I have written so much, you will see, in order to say nothing—or at least to avoid your attempt at putting me in an embarrassing dilemma.

Q.E.F.

6-1-1936

MYSELF: I don't understand at all, Sir, what to make of your reply!

SRI AUROBINDO: If you did know it would mean I had committed myself which was just what I did not want to do. Or shall we put it in this way "Each of the great arts has its own appeal and its own way of appeal and each in its own way is supreme above all others"? That ought to do.

LITERARY ACTIVITY AND YOGA

14-5-1934

MYSELF: I have been thinking whether I would not profit more by spending the time I use for writing in doing meditation instead. Has the writing work any spiritual value?

SRI AUROBINDO: No present value spiritually—it may have a mental value. It is the same with the work—it has a value of moral training, discipline, obedience, acceptance of work for the Mother. The spiritual value and result come afterwards when the consciousness in the vital opens upward. So with the mental work. It is a preparation. If you cannot yet do it with the true spiritual consciousness, it, the work as well as the mental occupation, must be done with the right mental or vital will in it.

MYSELF: I should like to be a literary man. Do you approve?

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends upon what kind of 'literary man' you want to be, ordinary or yogic.

A literary man is one who loves literature and literary activity for its own sake. A Yogic 'literary' man is not a literary man at all but one who writes only what the inner will and Word wants to express. He is a channel and an instrument of something greater than his own literary personality.

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To be a literary man is not a spiritual aim, but to use literature as a means of spiritual expression is another matter. Even to make expression a vehicle of a superior power helps to open the consciousness. The harmonising rests on that principle.

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There should be no "desire" to be a "great" writer. If there

is a genuine inspiration or coming of power to write then it can be done, but to use it as a means of service for the Divine is the proper spirit.

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17-8-1934

MYSELF: I saw what you wrote to X about reading; I wonder if it applies to me also!

SRI AUROBINDO: What is written for X is not meant for you. He has got into a movement of consciousness in which reading is no longer necessary and would rather interfere with his consciousness. There is no objection to your reading provided it does not interfere with your meditation.

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22-5-1934

MYSELF: In some cases you don't seem to like people to be engrossed in literary work. Can it be taken as a general rule?

SRI AUROBINDO: There is no general rule; the mind is always trying to build general rules. The thing done may be the same, but it is done in different ways according to the circumstances and the nature of the people.

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MYSELF: I have such a push to write poetry, stories, all kinds of things, in Bengali!

SRI AUROBINDO: 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. X has had dynamisms and followed them so long as they were there or as often as they were there. You mentalise, mentalise, discuss, discuss, hesitate and hesitate.... There is no incompatibility between spirituality and creative activity—they can be united. Fluctuating of course comes in the way of action and therefore of success. One can do one or other or one can do both, but not fluctuate eternally.

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24-7-1936

MYSELF: X says: "If you want to publish your literary work, you must see that people would understand it—not the public at large, but, as Virginia Woolf says, a select public. Otherwise don't publish at all."

SRI AUROBINDO: What is not understood or appreciated by one select circle may be understood or appreciated by another select circle or in the future like Blake's poetry. Nobody appreciated Blake in his own time. Now he ranks as a great poet, more poetic than Shakespeare, says Housman. Tagore wrote he could not appreciate X's poetry because it is too "yogic" for him. Is Tagore unselect, one of the public at large?

I don't agree at all with not publishing because you won't be understood. At that rate many great poets would have remained unpublished. What about the unintelligible Mallarmé who had such a great influence on later French poetry?

5-8-1936

MYSELF: When you bring in the examples of Milton and Virgil in poetry and the number of years in Yoga, you forget that they had no Supramental Avatar as Guru to push them.

SRI AUROBINDO: Considering that the Supramental Avatar himself is quite incapable of doing what X or Y do, i.e. produc-

ing 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.

The rule of 12 years is one announced not by me, but many Sannyasis and people who know about Yoga. Of course they are "professionals", so to speak, while this is an Ashram of amateur yogis who expect quick results....

19-9-1936

If you want to understand my supramental "brevities", you must read carefully. You have absolutely ignored my pregnant "Possibly". I never said that it must be a *waste* of time—but "possibly" yes or "possibly" not. Reading Dickens merely cannot give you the spiritual consciousness—that is obvious. It would be a miracle if it did. Reading the Oxford Dictionary might be more helpful in that direction. Unless of course a miracle took place; then even Dickens. But otherwise it may evidently be a waste of time. X got helped by Lawrence's letters—even J gave him a dream-meeting with J and his daughter. But most people would get little that is either occult or spiritual from either. But things done with *nirbhar* can help—not because of themselves, but because of the *nirbhar*.

MYSELF: To try to be a literary man and yet not to know what big literary people have contributed would be inexcusable.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

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SRI AUROBINDO: Some people have the trick of always opening to a Force (e.g. D, N, for creative literary activity),

Some have it sometimes, don't have it sometimes (you, A, myself). Why make it a case of kicks and despair?

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MYSELF: One should be acquainted with the best literature of the world.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not indispensable—even by being steeped in one literature, one can arrive. But useful of course.

MYSELF: What about planning to read Meredith, Hardy, Shelley, Keats and the Continental and Russian writers?

SRI AUROBINDO: Lord, sir, I wish I had time to follow out a programme as massive as yours. I have none even to dilate upon yours.

MYSELF: Reading these authors helps to gain experience of life.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is it so? There would be a danger of its being only derivative and bookish work. The great novelists like the great dramatists have been usually men who lived widely or intensely and brought a world out of the combination of their inner and their outer observation, vision, experience. Of course if you have a world in yourself, that is another matter.

POETIC INSPIRATION AND YOGA

I

10-5-1934

MYSELF: Need one aspire even for writing poetry?

SRI AUROBINDO: Aspiration is an essential part of the sadhana.

MYSELF: If one waits calmly, does not the Grace descend by itself without our asking?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not unless one is in a state of Grace—in a psychic condition.

MYSELF: If a person asks and doesn't get it, he is likely to get disappointed.

SRI AUROBINDO: If he asks with the vital, yes. Your mind is too active in these matters. Get your mind silent, learn to feel within, to aspire from within—then things will come more easily.

MYSELF: Please give me one direct and decisive rule to follow.

SRI AUROBINDO: Aspire for the opening to the right place of inspiration.

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8-6-1934

MYSELF: For some time past the inspiration has stopped.

SRI AUROBINDO: You must remember that you are not a "born" poet—you are trying to bring out something from the Unmanifest inside you. You can't demand that should be an easy job. It may come out suddenly and without apparent reason like the Ananda—but you can't demand it.

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12-6-1935

MYSELF: 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.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

MYSELF: I don't think a latent faculty brought out by Yogic Force would achieve the same result as a faculty which manifests in the natural way.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course not so long as it is latent or not fully emerged. But once it is manifested and settled there is no reason why it should not achieve equal perfection. All depends on the quality of the inspiration that comes and the response of the instrument.

MYSELF: This means that the quick emerging of a faculty depends on a favourable *ādhār*. But on what does this favourableness depend?

SRI AUROBINDO: How can one say on what it depends? It depends on all the past and all the future and on what is behind the present also!! The mental instrument is what has been formed for the present life—naturally if it has by present nature a marked beginning of capacity in a certain direction, it will be more easy for something that is pressing to manifest, to develop through it than it will be for an instrument not so naturally responsive. But "more easy" is all one can say. It does not follow that the facile instrument will do more than the difficult one. There are poets who produce with no difficulty; there are poets who produce with difficulty; there are poets who produce with

occasional facility and customary difficulty. All kinds go into the cosmic hotch-potch.

3-3-1936

MYSELF: A.K.'s poetry has caused a flutter. Another miracle, they say. How has this feat been done? A fellow who has never written any bit of poetry produces, just after one or two pieces, a remarkable poem and a long one at that, which will have an abiding place in Bengali literature! How could he have produced it?

SRI AUROBINDO: What a 'hower' you are! You are puzzled because you are always demanding a rational process familiar to the ordinary physical mind from a suprarational thing like Yoga. Yoga has its processes, but they can only be understood and detected by those who have Yogic experience. But you refuse to accept that experience as valid. You want everything to be explained according to your own field of reason which is that of the ignorant physical mind. If you persist in that you will remain puzzled to the end of the chapter.

MYSELF: I have been labouring for years, yet produced nothing so big and, when I write a poem, I know by my own active experience the way it comes.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is because you are a 'hower' and an efforter—so the Divine or the Overself or whatever the people like to call it has to pretend with you that it is done in you by your stupendous effort and the how has to be shown—the how being that you work 40 hours and produce 4 lines.

4-3-1936

MYSELF: You ask me why I don't keep my inner condition right. As if I knew how to do it! It keeps itself right or goes wrong without the least caring for my effort.

SRI AUROBINDO: What about the wonderful efforts (unpre-

cedented in human history) by which X and you have made yourselves poets? Why can't you put some of that superhuman effort into this? If you do and succeed, I will rigorously leave all the credit to you and not ask any for a superior Power.

MYSELF: The Force had seized me and has now left me—that's all.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is this talk about Force? Nothing is done in this world except by one's own effort. Ask your own reason and X.

MYSELF: You say I am an efforter. Well, without effort, how to write? If I had waited for a spontaneous downpour of Inspiration, my outpours by now would have been only 4 or 5!

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't understand. You say it is only by effort that one can write poetry—that is, what is written is something constructed by mere effort. It follows that anybody who makes a necessary effort can become a great poet. Up till now it was thought that there was some mysterious thing called inspiration. There are plenty of people who have made Herculean and untiring efforts night and day but have not succeeded in writing anything that others would call poetry—they may have just produced good or bad verse. That however in the light of your luminous rationality is evidently an agelong error. As X might say "I labour and write poems day and night and people give the credit to some damned thing (not my own great self) they call Inspiration." Evidently. But what is this about a few cases? Are you going to tell me that Inspiration after all exists? Can't be.

6-3-1936

MYSELF: 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!

SRI AUROBINDO: Exactly. When any real effort 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 Amal 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.

MYSELF: One has to work hours and hours on end. What do you call this labour?

SRI AUROBINDO: Hammering, making a beastly noise so that Inspiration may get excited and exasperated and fling something through the window, muttering "I hope that will keep this insufferable tinsmith quiet."

MYSELF: My brain is now less hampered by the body's indisposition.

My boil has burst and as you see
From the depression I am free.
Thanks Guru, thanks to thee!

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, I got irritated last night by your persistent boiling and put a gigantic Force which, I am glad to see, burst the little boil.

Thank God for that!
Free from boil,
At poems toil
Laugh and grow fat.

9-3-1936

MYSELF: You actually propose "Laugh and grow fat" though laughing never makes fat!

SRI AUROBINDO: You oppose one of the most ancient traditions of humanity by this severe statement. But your statement is mistaken even according to Science. We are now told that it is the activity of certain glands that makes you thin or fat. If glands, then why not gladness?

MYSELF: Really I am now wondering at my own revelry and hilarity. No particular concern about yoga, yet I am happy. What kind of psychic attitude is this?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not a psychic attitude, but is better than depression.

MYSELF: What has happened to my typescript? Hibernating?

SRI AUROBINDO: 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 Raman Maharshi with the plague of prasads and admirers, but at least don't add anguish to annihilation by talking about typescripts.

MYSELF: What is the use of your complaining? You have committed the grave blunder of coming into this sorrowful world with a mighty magical pen. Sri Krishna, I conjecture, may have complained about his lungs because of his incessant blowing and fluting to melt our hearts.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is an idea! strange that none of the poets has mentioned it—a modernist poet would catch it at once. "The Flute and the Lungs." or "Krishna's Bronchitis."

9-3-1936

MYSELF: Is effort without demand of result possible unless the psychic fellow comes to the front?

SRI AUROBINDO: Perfectly possible, if you can once distinguish between the will of the Purusha and the demand of the vital. Of course it is easiest and indeed plain sailing if the psychic comes in front but even before that it is possible.

25-3-1936

MYSELF: I am obliged to sleep out for a few days because of repairs in our house. The whole building is smelling of lime, lime and lime.

SRI AUROBINDO: If you want to be a real Yogi, go on suffering and suffering at the lime till the smell creates an ecstasy in the nose and you realise that all smells and stinks are sweet and beautiful with the sweetness and beauty of the Brahman.

29-3-1936

MYSELF: My hard labour and effort deprive me of the joy of creation and discourage with a dread of the work. You say that this is because I am an "efforter" and "hower". Well, show me then the Grand Trunk Road of non-effort.

SRI AUROBINDO: There are two ways of arriving at the Grand Trunk Road. One is to climb and struggle and effortise (like the pilgrim who traverses India prostrating and measuring the way with his body: that is the way of effort). One day you suddenly find yourself on the G.T.R. when you least expect it. The other is to quiet the mind to such a point that a greater Mind of mind can speak through it. (I am not here talking of the Supramental). You will do neither. Your mind refuses to be quiet—your vital kicks at the necessity of effort. One too active, the other too lazy. How can I show you the G.T.R. when you refuse either way of reaching it?

MYSELF: I have resorted to prayer. Well, if a prayer means a call to the Above, why doen't the Above have the kindness to respond, especially when it is just on the other side of my street?

The Above being so close and concrete, I can't understand the lack of response.

SRI AUROBINDO: But just answer! If it responded to everybody in all circumstances, there would by this time be 100 million poets writing away for all they were worth, let us say 1000 pages of poetry a day each and publishing them. Wouldn't it be a disaster? Wouldn't such kindness be a cruelty to all the rest of the creation?

31-3-1936

MYSELF: In regard to writing poetry, not only is my vital lazy but also my mind does not know precisely how to silence itself. This second point applies to X too. How then does he manage to receive from the Above?

SRI AUROBINDO: The difference is that as his mind has opened to the Above the Above can turn its activity into an activity of the inspiration; its quickness, energy, activity enable it to transcribe quickly, actively, energetically what comes into it from the Above. Of course if one day it becomes silent also, it may possibly become the channel of a still higher Inspiration.

MYSELF: Did X's vital become active because somehow he could more easily draw in the Inspiration?

SRI AUROBINDO: X's vital strength is inborn, though it may not have at first been open to the poetic inspiration. When it did, it could leap at once with full energy and gave itself entirely to the flow.

MYSELF: Is silencing the mind to be done only at the time of writing?

SRI AUROBINDO: Silencing the mind at the time of writing should be sufficient, even not silencing it but its falling quiet to receive.

MYSELF: One of my methods in composing is to try to find out the rhymes.

SRI AUROBINDO: Just the thing you should not do. Let the rhyme come, don't begin dragging all sorts of rhymes in to see if they fit.

MYSELF: Do you want to say that if I have discovered some lines I must not think of the next lines, but try instead to keep absolutely silent?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the ideal way; but usually there is always an activity of the mind jumping up and trying to catch the inspiration. Sometimes the inspiration, the right one, comes in the midst of this futile jumping, sometimes it sweeps it aside and brings in the right thing, sometimes it asserts itself between two blunders, sometimes it waits till the noise quiets down. But even this jumping need not be a mental effort—it is often only a series of suggestions, the mind of itself seizing on one or eliminating another, not by laborious thinking and choice, but by a quiet series of perceptions. This is method No. 2. No. 3. is your Herculean way, quite the slowest and worst.

MYSELF: While one person breaks his head over a few lines, another composes three or four poems.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is fluency, not necessarily inspiration; Southey used to write like that, I believe. But you don't call Southey an inspired poet, do you?

MYSELF: You once brought "the organisation of the Supermind in the physical consciousness" into the talk about your poetic inspiration. What is the connection between the two?

SRI AUROBINDO: Excuse me, it was you who brought in Overmind etc. in connection with my poetry and asked why having these things I had to write *Savitri* many times instead of pouring out 24,000 lines a day.

MYSELF: I have worked today from 1-30 to 6-15 p.m.—5 hours!—and composed only 16 lines! Is this a sign of laziness?

SRI AUROBINDO: But that is quite magnificent—16 lines in one day, $3\frac{1}{5}$ lines an hour about! Remember that Virgil used only to write 9 lines a day. At this rate you will end by being twice as inspired and fluent as Virgil.

4-4-1936

MYSELF: I am sending you a poem. Do you find it good?

Even if it is so, where does my credit lie after so much correction? The credit is all yours.

SRI AUROBINDO: Your credit lies in the substance which could not realise its possibilities because of your damnable errors in rhythm. It was good poetry in substance but spoiled by errors of form. What the hell do you mean by trying trochees like

⏑ ' / / ⏑ / ⏑
In whose | gilded | shackles | we laugh | and weep,

⏑⏑ ⏑ ⏑ / / ⏑
Into | a profound | stillness, | of lone | sky-heights,

or worst of all

/ / / /
The fi | nite for | one brief | moment | climbs.

Do you think you are adult enough yet for such Hitlerian violences to English metre?

MYSELF: Do you find in my piece some influence of your poem *Rishi* which I read a few days ago?

SRI AUROBINDO: It may be there, but I did not find it. The only result was a greater elevation and strength in the poetic speech. No objection can be made to an influence like that. It is imitation and reproduction that are objectionable.

25-4-1935

MYSELF: In one letter you spoke of fictitious stresses. What is meant by them? Can you not illustrate them in a poem? I am enclosing a *carte blanche* for the purpose.

SRI AUROBINDO: I meant simply stresses which are conventionally supposed to be there for the sake of the metre....What are you dreaming of, Sir? A poem as an illustration of my bit of prosodic grammar? Inspiration would run away to Pelion and never return if I did such a shocking thing. I am keeping your *carte blanche*, but the odds are that it may be fitted to quite another purpose.

28-7-1936

MYSELF: Have I any strand of yogic seeking in me? I am writing poetry, but not getting love and peace. Even the thrill of joy that others get is missing, and I suspect it won't satisfy even if it comes. I say to myself, "It is not this, not this that I want. Something deep, great and wide is what I am after."

SRI AUROBINDO: And yet you say there is no strand of yogic seeking in you anywhere?

Neti, neti with this longing for something deep and great in the nature of Ananda filling the being and the *vairāgya* for anything less (*nālpe sukham asti, bhūmaiva sukhamasti*) is the very nature of the yogic push and impulse, at least according to the Vedantic line.

Poetry does not give love and peace, it gives Ananda, intense but not wide or lasting.

Your mind has obstructed the free flow of the poetry, but what it has obstructed more is the real peace and Ananda that is "deep, great and wide". A quiet mind turned towards the *bhūmā* is what you need.

MYSELF: Along with *neti, neti*, there is also longing of the vital! How to trust this *vairāgya* then?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is another part of your vital....

Your argument is that because the yogic strand is not the whole of the nature, it cannot be real. This is rather illogical. The yogic strand is always in the beginning a strand, a movement or impulsion from one part of the nature, however veiled or small. It grows afterwards, slowly or quickly, according to people and circumstances or the rest.

8-8-1936

MYSELF: Writing poetry as a result of yoga ought to spiritualise one.

SRI AUROBINDO: If poetic progress meant a progress in the whole range of Yoga, X would be a great yogi by this time.

The opening in poetry or any other part helps to prepare the general opening when it is done under the pressure of Yoga, but it is at first something special, like the opening of the subtle vision or subtle senses. It is the opening of a special capacity in the inner being.

MYSELF: I hope you understand my psychology and, if you do, give some answers, not mystic but mental.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is quite easy to understand if one realises that the natural being is not of one piece but made up of parts or quantums or whatever one likes to call it. One part of your mind and vital has the need though not yet the push for the Divine and that need is being very prominent—another does not believe or hope for anything. One part of the mind resorts to poetry but cannot wake the vital enthusiasm, because the vital is besieged by the Man of Sorrows. Then there is the Man of Sorrows himself—in everything. Different parts of the mind take different sides and suggest opposite things according as they are pushed by one force or another. As yet no resolution of the central being to put all that into harmony, expel what is to be expelled, change what is to be changed. I do not know whether you call that mystic or mental answers, but I can't give you any other that would be true.

9-8-1936

MYSELF: I am satisfied with the answers exposing the symptoms and providing the diagnosis. Now the prognosis and treatment?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is more difficult. Panacea there is, but only one, which you have indicated in your today's poem. You described very admirably the attitude of perfect *nirbhar* which is the great secret of the most perfect kind of sadhana.

Nirbhar means reliance on the Divine whatever the condition or the difficulties. *Nirbhar* when all is going well, does not mean much. It is a pose one has to take and you can grow into it.

For the rest there are several formulas which are not panaceas.

The first is to get into touch with your central being and get it into action. That central may be the psychic, it may be the Self above with the mental Purusha as its delegate. Either of these once in action does the harmonising etc.

The second way is to act with your mental will on these things, not letting yourself to drift and not getting upset by difficulties and checks, calling on the Mother's force to assist and finally use your will. There are others, but I stop here.

18-8-1936

MYSELF: I can try to call down the Mother's force but faith and surrender would require a wonderful yogic poise and power.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not at all. A wonderful Yogic poise and power would usually bring self-reliance rather than faith and surrender. It is the simple people who do the latter most easily.

18-9-1936

MYSELF: While X and others receive your Force for poetry, why am I such a granite block? Y also receives very well.

SRI AUROBINDO: Ah, you think so! My dear Sir, I have to do boring operations like digging an artesian well before I can get a few poems out of him. And afterwards it is one long wail. "All gone, all gone! I am damned, doomed, dead, deteriorated, degenerated" for a whole day period. Sir, Y is twice the Man of Sorrows you are.

10-11-1936

MYSELF: Lawrence says one can only write creative stuff when it comes, otherwise it is not much good....But does even writing such stuff change one's being in the spiritual sense?...

Yoga seems a difficult affair—especially if great experiences don't come for long.

SRI AUROBINDO: All statements are subject to qualification. What Lawrence states is true in principle but in practice most poets have to sustain the inspiration by industry. Milton in his later days used to write everyday fifty lines; Virgil nine which he corrected and recorrected till it was within halfway of what he wanted. In other words he used to write under any other conditions and pull at his inspiration till it came.

Good heavens! where did you get this idea that literature can transform people! Literary people are often the most impossible on the face of the earth.

According to the affirmation of people acquainted with the subject, the preliminary preparation before getting any yogic experiences worth the name may extend to 12 years. After that one may legitimately expect something. You are far from the limit yet, so no reason to despair.

11-11-1936

MYSELF: We may have progressed in literature, but the outer nature remains almost the same.

SRI AUROBINDO: Outer human nature can only change either by an intense psychic development or a strong and all-pervading influence from above. It is the inner being that has to change first, a change which is not always visible outside. That has nothing to do with the development of the faculties which is another side of the personality.

MYSELF: So I am thinking of using my effort and labour in the direction of sadhana.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is another question altogether. But such sadhana means a slow and laborious work of self-change in most cases (twelve years, you know), so why not sing on the way!

MYSELF: It seems one must have sensitiveness or sensibility in order to be an artist. Otherwise, one cannot create. Artists can't also stand criticism.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not quite that. Sensibility, yes. One must be able to feel things. Exaggerated sensitiveness is not necessary. Men of genius have generally a big ego, can't be helped, that.

T weeps oceans if criticised. L goes red etc. It's the mark of the tribe.

MYSELF: I hear that James Cousins said about your poem "Rishi" that it was only spiritual philosophy, not poetry.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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"[1] is mostly work of the poetic intelligence. Cousins' criticism helped me to go a stage farther.

13-11-1936

MYSELF: Amal says Cousins ignored your poem "Rishi" while speaking of the others. Isn't that far worse?

SRI AUROBINDO: Neither worse nor better. What does Cousins' bad opinion about "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 "Rishi" is anywhere near "Paradise Lost", but it is poetry as well as spiritual philosophy.

[1] The reference is to the early version, not the one revised and considerably rewritten later (Nirodbaran).

IV

7-8-1936

SRI AUROBINDO: You have suddenly reached a remarkable maturity of poetic power which seems to suggest that the periods of sterility were not so sterile after all or were rather an incubation period, a work of opening going on in the inner being behind the veil before it manifested in the outer. Let us hope the same is going on in the direct Sadhana.

24-7-1938

The sameness does not matter much. The use of your writing is to keep you in touch with the inner source of inspiration and intuition so as to wear thin the crude *external* crust in the consciousness and encourage the growth of the inner being. The dream you speak of in your medical report shows that the inner being is beginning to awake somewhat, as a result, even in things not having to do with the literary inspiration. For this purpose "sameness" does not much matter.

7-9-1938

What the deuce are you complaining about? You are writing very beautiful poetry with apparent ease and one a day of this kind is a feat. If the apparent ease covers a lot of labour, that is the lot of the poet and artist except when he is a damned phenomenon of fluency. "It is the highest art to conceal art." "The long and conscientious labour of the artist giving in the result an appearance of divine and perfect ease"—console yourself with these titbits. As for repetitions, they are almost inevitable when you are writing a poem a day. You are gaining command of your medium and that is the main thing. An inexhaustible original fecundity is a thing you have to wait for—when you are more spiritually experienced and mature.

INDIANS AND THE WRITING OF ENGLISH POETRY

27-2-1936

MYSELF: Let me tell you how an Englishman named T visiting our Ashram looked at our versification in English. His tongue has poured cold water over our enthusiasm. He had a heated discussion with D and said he could not understand at all why we Easterners should write poetry in English, deserting our own languages.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is his understanding of such immense importance? I might just as reasonably ask him why Westerners like him should go to practise an Eastern thing like spirituality or Yoga, leaving their own parliaments, factories and what not. But not being T in intelligence I don't ask such absurd questions.

MYSELF: He seems to know definitely that we shan't be able to handle English as an Englishman would.

SRI AUROBINDO: A T, like his father Tom, also his uncles Dick and Harry, must of course be omniscient.

MYSELF: He says: "Suppose an Englishman were to write in Bengali!"

SRI AUROBINDO: It would depend on the Englishman and how he did it.

MYSELF: D argued: "The *Gitanjali* of Tagore was appreciated by many English poets. Conrad's prose ranks as high as any great English writer's. Sarojini Naidu and some others were praised by Gosse, Binyon and de la Mare."

SRI AUROBINDO: Add Santayana whose prose is better than most Englishmen's.

MYSELF: T rejoined: "The interests of those praisers were extra-literary. Show the works of the Indians to people like Eliot and see." God knows what he means.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't think God knows. What the blazes

does all this nonsense mean?...People like Binyon and de la Mare have no literary merit or literary perception and Eliot has? Eliot is a theorist, a man who builds his poetry according to rule. God save us from such people and their opinions.[1]

MYSELF: As for Tagore, his work is said to have been appreciated because it was derivative, a rendering from another language.

SRI AUROBINDO: What difference does that make? The English Bible is a translation, but it ranks among the finest pieces of literature in the world.

MYSELF: As for Conrad, T says he is a Westerner, and surely there is a bigger difference in tradition, expression, feeling between an Easterner and an Englishman than between a Westerner and a Westerner.

SRI AUROBINDO: In other words, any Western tradition, expression, feeling—even Polish or Russian—can be legitimately expressed in English, however un-English it may be, but an Eastern spirit, tradition or temper cannot? He differs from Gosse who told Sarojini Naidu that she must write Indian poems in English—poems with an Indian tradition, feeling, way of expression, not reproduce the English mind and turn, if she wanted to do something great and original as a poet in the English tongue.

MYSELF: T objects to our making even an experiment.

SRI AUROBINDO: How terrible! Then of course everybody must stop at once. I too must not presume to write in English —for I have an Indian mind and spirit and am that dreadful Indian thing, a Yogi.

MYSELF: Can we say that he is absolutely wrong?

SRI AUROBINDO: Nobody ever is absolutely wrong. There

[1] Note:—Sri Aurobindo's whole estimate of Eliot is naturally not summed up in a remark made in 1936. Although this remark touches on a point which he evidently thought important in relation to Eliot, he could say about some passages read out to him at a later date: "This is poetry." About some others he said, "The substance is good but there's no poetry." He also appreciated certain pieces of criticism by Eliot, apropos of which he remarked that Eliot was better as a critic than as a poet.

is an infinitesimal atom of truth even in the most lunatic proposition ever made.

MYSELF: We Indians can't enter into the subtleties of a foreign tongue; so we run the risk of writing un-English English.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who is this "we"? Many Indians write better English than many educated Englishmen.

MYSELF: I believe he would waive his objection in your case.

SRI AUROBINDO: How graciously kind of him! After all perhaps I can continue to write in English. Only poor Amal will have to stop. He can't write a line after the cold water of T's tongue.

MYSELF: I don't know that any Englishman could write *pucca* Bengali. It would sound and "sense" un-Bengali Bengali.

SRI AUROBINDO: It would if he had not thoroughly mastered the Bengali tongue. It is true that few Englishmen have the Indian's linguistic turn, plasticity and ability.

MYSELF: Of course if you say that our aim is not success or Shelleyan heights, then it is a different matter.

SRI AUROBINDO: Shelleyan heights are regarded, I believe, by Eliot as very low things or at least a very bad eminence.

MYSELF: But even for expressing spirituality, must we not try to make the vehicle as perfect as possible?

SRI AUROBINDO: Who said not except the unparalleled T?

MYSELF: Now, is there any chance for it? T, an Englishman, says "None." And you?

SRI AUROBINDO: How can my opinion have any value against that of an Englishman—especially when that Englishman calls himself T?

As I said at the beginning I have no interest in T's opinions and set no value by them. Even the awful fact of his being an Englishman does not terrify me. Strange, isn't it? I have seen some lucubrations of his meant to be spiritual or Yogic and they are the most horrible pretentious inflated circumlocutionary bombastic would-be-abysmally-profound language that I have seen. For a man who talks of English style, tradition, expression, feeling, idiom it was the worst production and most un-English possible. Few Indians could have beaten it. And the

meaning nil. Also he is the gentleman who finds that there is "very little spirituality" in India. So hats off to T (even though we have no hats), and for the rest silence.

As for the question itself, I put forward four reasons why the experiment could be made. 1) The expression of spirituality in the English tongue is needed and no one can give the real stuff like Easterners and especially Indians. 2) We are entering an age when the stiff barriers of insular and national mentality are breaking down (Hitler notwithstanding), the nations are being drawn into a common universality with whatever differences, and in the new age there is no reason why the English should not admit the expression of other minds than the English in their tongue. 3) For ordinary minds it may be difficult to get over the barrier of a foreign tongue but extraordinary minds, Conrad etc., can do it. 4) In this case the experiment is to see whether what extraordinary minds can do cannot be done by Yoga. *Sufficit*—or, as R eloquently puts it, "'Nuff said."

JOY AND THE WRITING OF POETRY

14-12-1936

MYSELF: Why should joy be a necessary precondition for writing poetry?

SRI AUROBINDO: Art is a thing of beauty and beauty and Ananda are closely connected, they go together. If the Ananda is there, then the beauty comes out more clearly—if not, it has to struggle out painfully and slowly. That is quite natural.

MYSELF: I will put in any amount of labour and that should be enough.

SRI AUROBINDO: Labour is not enough for the things to pour down. What is done with labour only is done with difficulty, not with a downpour. The joy in the labour must be there for a free outflow. You have very queer psychological ideas, I must say.

MYSELF: How can I have any joy when what I write seems such poor stuff and delivered with much perspiration?

SRI AUROBINDO: That is your confounded nature. How can the man of sorrows feel joy in anything or any self-confidence? His strain is "Oh how miserable am I! Oh how dark am I! Oh how worthless is all that I do," etc., etc.

But apart from the M of S, 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. Arjava 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.

MYSELF: Please give some force to complete the incomplete poem I have been at. I fear to touch it least the coming lines should fail in their quality.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, it's that kind of thing that stands in the way.

MYSELF: The first portion I wrote quickly and almost dosing. Why dosing?

SRI AUROBINDO: This is a medical spelling.

Probably in order that your waking mind might not interfere. Dozing is often a form of semi-samadhi in which the waking mind retires and the subliminal self comes bobbing up.

Meaning and Intellectual Understanding

MYSELF: Is poetry to be felt only, not understood?

SRI AUROBINDO: What's the use of saying poetry, with a universal sweep like that? It is a question of mystic poetry, not of all poetry.

MYSELF: Perhaps one must not use intellect and understand what exactly or apparently is meant?

SRI AUROBINDO: Mystic poetry does not mean anything exactly or apparently; it means things suggestively and reconditely,—things that are not known and classified by the intellect.

What you are asking is to reduce what is behind to intellectual terms, which is to make it something quite different from itself.

MYSELF: Must not one see if the body is as beautiful and precious as the soul?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not a question of the (intellectual) body, but of the mystic soul of the thing.

You want it intellectually beautiful and precious or mystically beautiful and precious?

MYSELF: Your *Bird of Fire*, for instance, is full of colour and images, but if one can follow the *bhāva* behind or through them, I believe the appreciation becomes complete.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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?"

MYSELF: Suppose one said: "Why the devil do you want to know the meaning and not rest satisfied with the beauty of the expression?"

SRI AUROBINDO: Why the deuce are you dwelling on the poetry of the expression as if that were all one feels in a mystic poem and unless one dissects and analyses it one can't feel anything but words?

MYSELF: The little explanations you gave here and there of X's mystic poems enhanced the *rasa.*

SRI AUROBINDO: It didn't to me, it simply intellectualised all the *rasa* out of it.

MYSELF: Blake's poems also lose half the charm. Now that they understand their significance they consider him very great. Isn't that so?

SRI AUROBINDO: They understand the significance? In what way? By allegorising them?

Read the remarks of Housman on the magnificent poem of Blake he quotes in full and the attempts of people to explain it. I quite agree with him there though not in his too sweeping theory of poetry. To explain that poem is to murder it and dissect the corpse. One can't explain it. One can only feel and live the truth behind it.

MYSELF: In symbolic or mystic poems one wants to know also the truth behind the symbol.

SRI AUROBINDO: Intellectual truths? Do you think that the intellectual truth of the Divine is its real truth? In that case there is no need of Yoga. Philosophy is enough.

MYSELF: For instance X has written "Crimson Rose" and by crimson has suggested the painful feeling. Now if one could catch that instead of simply visualising a red rose, the *rasa* becomes more thick.

SRI AUROBINDO: It would become much more thick if you felt the mystic red rose and all that it is in the subtle planes instead of merely visualising a red rose and thinking about pain.

I may further say about X's poem that I don't care a damn who the woman is that is sitting there and I would rather not have a label put on her. It leaves me free to feel all the inner possible meaning of her waiting and what she is waiting for.

It is the same with the symbols in Yoga. One puts an intellectual label on the "white light" and the mind is satisfied and

says, "Now I know all about it, it is the pure divine consciousness light," and really it knows nothing. But if one allows the Divine white light to manifest and pour through the being, then one comes to know it and get all its results. Even if there is no labelled knowledge, there is the luminous experience of all its significance.

4-12-1936

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know about that. The *vaktavya* is there it seems to me and expressed, but it does not come to so much as one would expect from the richness of the expression. I suppose he means that you have caught only little of something that might be expressed—only a hair of the tail instead of the complete animal.

MYSELF: I was feeling happy, but the very next day a nebulous cloak of depression fell and I am still under it. Well!

SRI AUROBINDO: Tut, tut, tut! You really must get rid of this kind of thing, hang it all. Out of this kind of nebula no constellation can be made.

8-12-1936

It is a psychological condition, attitude or whatever you like to call it that you must get into, still, compact, receptive, vibrant to the touch when it comes.

Mystic poetry has a perfectly concrete meaning much more than intellectual poetry which is much more abstract. The nature of the intellect is abstraction; spirituality and mysticism deal with the concrete by their very nature.

MYSELF: Mystic poetry is to some misty and mysterious!

SRI AUROBINDO: That is another matter. It is a question of personal idiosyncrasy. There are people who thrill to Pope and find Keats and Shelley empty and misty. The clear precise intellectual meanings of Pope are to them the height of poetry, the

emotional and romantic suggestions of the *Skylark* or the *Ode to the Nightingale* unsatisfactory. How the devil, they ask, can a skylark be a spirit, not a bird? What the hell has "a glow-worm golden in a dell of dew" to do with the song of the skylark? They are unable to feel these things and say Pope would never have written in that incoherent inconsequential way. Of course he wouldn't. But that simply means they like things that are intellectually clear and can't appreciate the imaginative connections which reveal what is deeper than the surface. You can, I suppose, catch something of these, but when you are asked to go still deeper into the concrete of concretes, you lose your breath and say: "Lord! What an unintelligible mess. Give me an allegorical clue for God's sake, something superficial which I can mentally formulate." Same attitude as the Popists'—in essence.

II

Imagination and Experience in Poetry

27-5-1936

MYSELF: J. wrote in a poem

ছন্দি অযুত তারা
ঝলি হীরক ঢালে
নত আপন হারা[1]

X says: "How can stars be bent? So he changed it to ধ্রুব দীপন ধারা[2], Whereas J. declared that she wrote it because she experienced one night as if the stars were bending down.

SRI AUROBINDO: ধ্রুব দীপন ধারা is no doubt good poetry and very good poetry but it is a purely external image and gives no

[1] Millions of stars are swaying in rhythm
And, sparkling, pour their diamonds:
They are bent downward in self-oblivious ecstasy.

[2] In a steadfast stream of illumination

subjective vibration, while J's line does. The objection that stars do not get নত[1] stands only if the poem describes objective phenomena or aims at using purely objective images. But if the vision behind the poem is subjective, the objection holds no longer. The mystic subjective vision admits a consciousness in physical things and gives them a subtle physical life which is not that of the material existence. If a consciousness is felt in the stars and if that consciousness expresses itself in subtle physical images to the vision of the poet, there can be no improbability of a star being নত—such expresssions attribute a mystical life to the stars and can appropriately express this in mystic images. I agree with you about the fineness of the line.

MYSELF: X says: "This may not be an experience at all, and who knows if it is not an imagination, and how are we to know which is which?"

SRI AUROBINDO: But is it necessary to say which is which? It is not possible to deny that it was an experience, even if one cannot affirm it—not being in the consciousness of the writer. But even if it is an imagination, it is a powerful poetic imagination which expresses what would be the exact feeling in the real experience. It seems to me that that is quite enough. There are so many things in Wordsworth and Shelley which people say were only mental feelings and imaginations and yet they express the deeper seeings or feelings of the seer. For poetry it seems to me the point is irrelevant.

27-5-1936

How can "anything" be used in a poem? A slight change makes all the difference between something forceful and a mere literary expression that misses its mark.

MYSELF: X argues, "E said many things that she used to imagine. She herself considered them experiences."

SRI AUROBINDO: How do you know that E's sayings are only

[1] bent

imaginations? If so, they are very remarkable imaginations for a child of that age. They might be the communications of her inner being to her mind. A few children have that in a degree, in some it takes the form of imagination—E had it in a very unusual degree. I hope the elders will not knock this rare gift out of her by their misunderstanding and want of sympathy.

17-1-1937

Behold! From where comes this unknown Creeper
Along the woodland path anointed by the rising Moon?
All pain she has tinged with the blue of Heart-stream,
She has made Heaven unveil and break out into murmuring
billows.

The magic of her compassion flowers in her hand,
And the thunder-roar that booms the world's end is hushed
suddenly;
In the morn that is the death of the naked skeleton
She stalks over the world, a gathered Fire, voicing her
approach.
The Dark One has put on a golden garland,
And on her delicate forehead burns the flame of red sandal—
She, the Eternal Memory, from within the forgetfulness of
earth's depths
Kindles the first spark of the Word born of the churning.

The eye of the waxing Moon at night-end
Pours out of its blue the golden gleam of a dark collyrium.

NIRODBARAN

(*Translated by Nolini Kanta Gupta from the Bengali*)

MYSELF: I don't know what this is driving at.

SRI AUROBINDO: I am afraid I don't know either. You have suddenly shot beyond Mallarmé and everybody else and landed yourself into the Surrealism of the most advanced kind. Such a line as বিবসনা কঙ্কালের মরণ-প্রভাত[1] would make any surrealist poet's heart wild with joy. I think, however, you should put up a petition to your Inspiration to rein in this gallop towards and

[1] In the translation: "In the morn that is the death of the naked skeleton."

beyond the latest Modernism and give us something less progressive and startling.

The only lines I can make something out of are the first two (the creeper of the unknown new life in the woodland path of the moonrise, spiritual opening—অভিষিক্ত[1] with the moonbeams, I suppose) and the third quatrain which is rather remarkable. The Energy (secret in the physical centres) accepted(?) the golden Garland (the Garland of the Truth) and She (this Kundalini Shakti) who carries in her the eternal Memory of all things secreted in the apparent Inconscience kindles from the oblivious depths of Earth (the material Nature) the first lightning of the Word of the churning of the Depths i.e. the first bringing up of all that is concealed and undelivered in the consciousness of Matter. It is a very cryptic and also very significant poetic description of the working of the closed-up Energy in the physical centre when it wakes. The couplet *might* mean that the white-blue moonlight (spiritual light) pours the golden Script of the Truth from its eyes (power of vision). The rest *may* mean a preliminary consequence of the opening in which the wave of Manifestation of Paradise comes and brightens up the anguish of the Man of Sorrows in you with a stream of soul-blue, with the result that the tempest is stopped, there is the day of death for the confounded Naked Skeleton (of the dead old Adam in you) and a concentrated Fire pervades everything. After which, as I have said, the Yoga Shakti uncoils in your physical centres and starts serious business.

Great Scott! I think I have unexpectedly solved the riddle.

Well, if my prophetic soul has rightly interpreted it, it is not 'mixed up' but it is recklessly audacious in its whirlingness of cryptic images. Spiritual surrealism with a vengeance.

17-I-1937

MYSELF: I am a little disappointed. Every time there is any difficulty in expression, transition etc., etc., you escape al-

[1] "Anointed."

ways by using the word 'surrealist'. What's this blooming surrealism now? At times I have to make a foolish face to people when I can't understand my own expressions.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why foolish? Make a mystic face and say "It means too much for owls." The difficulty is that you all want exact intellectual meanings for these things. A meaning there is, but it can't always be fitted with a right and neat intellectual cap....My 'surrealist' is a joke but not a depreciatory one.

Surrealism is a new phrase invented only the other day and I am not really sure what it conveys. According to some it is a dream-poetry making[1] a deeper truth, a deeper reality than the surface reality. I don't know if this is the whole theory or only one side or phase of the practice. Baudelaire as a surrealist is a novel idea, nobody ever called him that before. Mallarmé, Verlaine, and others used to be classed as impressionist poets, sometimes as symbolists. But now the surrealists seem to claim descent from these poets.

MYSELF: People think I am just rioting in fancy and meaninglessness—with no real transitions from one part to another. Would you say I am expressing dreams from what we call the vital plane—dreams without link or reason?

SRI AUROBINDO: This is the gibe of the orthodox school of critics or readers—certainly the surrealists would not agree with it—they would claim they have got at a deeper line of truth and meaning than the intellectual.

Transitions are not there of a mental logic. Not palpable on the surface but palpable to a deeper vision.

How do you say the vital dreams have no link or reason? They have their own coherence, only the physical mind cannot always get at the clue by following which the coherence would unroll itself. For that matter the sequences of physical existence are coherent to us only because we are accustomed to it and our reason has made up a meaning out of it. But subject it to the view of a different consciousness and it becomes an incoherent

[1] Doubtful reading (Nirodbaran).

phantasmagoria. That is how the Mayavadins or Schopenhauer would speak of it, the former say deliberately that dream-sequences and life-sequences stand on the same footing, only they have another structure. Each is real and consequent to itself, though neither, they would say, is real or consequent in very truth.

12-2-1937

[1]Q: Could you say something about Nirodbaran's poetry? Obscurity and unintelligibility seem to be its very essence!

SRI AUROBINDO: Nirod's poetry (what he writes now) is from the dream-consciousness, no doubt about that. My labelling him as surrealist is partly—though not altogether—a joke. How far it applies depends on what the real aim and theory of the surrealist school may be. Obscurity and unintelligibility are not the essence of any poetry and—except for unconscious or semi-conscious humourists like the Dadaists —cannot be its aim or principle. True dream-poetry (let us call it so for the nonce) has and must always have a meaning and a coherence. But it may very well be obscure or seem meaningless to those who take their stand on the surface or "waking" mind and accept only its links and logic. Dream-poetry is usually full of images, visions, symbols that seek to strike at things too deep for the ordinary means of expression. Nirod does not deliberately make his poems obscure; he writes what comes through from the source he has tapped and does not interfere with its flow by his own mental volition. In many modernist poets there may be labour and a deliberate posturing, but it is not so in his case. I interpret his poems because he wants me to do it, but I have always told him that an intellectual rendering narrows the meaning—it has to be seen and felt, not thought out. Thinking it out may give a

[1] The answer to this question put by a friend has been published in *Letters of Sri Aurobindo*, Third Series.

satisfaction and an appearance of mental logicality, but the deeper sense and sequence can only be apprehended by inner sense. I myself do not try to find out the meaning of his poems, I try to feel what they mean in vision and experience and then render into mental terms. This is a special kind of poetry and has to be dealt with according to its kind and nature. There is a sequence, a logic, a design in them, but not one that can satisfy the more rigid law of the logical intelligence.

MALLARMÉ

Some questions were put by me on Mallarmé and his work. Sri Aurobindo made marginal comments. These are given below within quotation marks. The questions are within brackets.

"Blake is Europe's greatest mystic poet and Mallarmé turned the whole current of French poetry (one might almost say, of all modernist poetry) into a channel of which his poems were an opening."

(We hear that he used to write with a set determination to make his works unintelligible: is it true? And are his works unintelligible?)

Comment on the first question:

"Certainly not. The French language was too clear and limited to express mystic truth, so he had to wrestle with it and turn it this way and that to arrive at a mystic speech. Also he refused to be satisfied with anything that was a merely intellectual or even at all intellectual rendering of his vision. That is why the surface understanding finds it difficult to follow him. But he is so great that it has laboured to follow him all the same."

Comment on the second question:

"Then why did they have so much influence on the finest French writers and why is modernist poerty trying to burrow into the subliminal in order to catch something even one quarter as fine as his language, images and mystic suggestions?"

(Please read, Guru, *A Book of French Poetry* by Professor K. In the Introduction he seems to say about Mallarmé just what I have said, though he speaks of him as being an acknowledged master and of his great influence on contemporary poetry. Do

you agree with the other things he says about Mallarmé? He says: "an intellectual artist, never evoking emotion but only thought about thought....Obscurity was part of his doctrine. Another cause of his obscurity is that he chose his words and phrases for their evocative value alone, and here again the verbal sonorities suggested by the tortuous trend of his mind make no appeal except to the initiated. His life-long endeavour to achieve an impossible ideal accounts for his sterility—he has left some 60 poems only—and the darkness of his later work, though he did write, before he had fallen a victim to his own theories, a few poems of great beauty and perfectly intelligible").

Comment on the opening sentence of the letter:

"He can't deny such an obvious fact, I suppose—but he would like to....

Comment on the rest of the letter:

"Certainly not—this man is a mere pedant; his remarks are unintelligent, commonplace, often perfectly imbecile....Rubbish! His [Mallarmé's] doctrines are perfectly tenable and intelligible. It is true that the finest things in art and poetry are appreciated only by the few and he chose therefore not to sacrifice the truth of his mystic (impressionist, symbolist) expression in order to be easily understood by the multitude, including this professor. Not only that—his will to arrive at a true and deep, instead of a superficial and intellectual language. I gave two reasons for Mallarmé's unusual style and not this one of the limitedness of the French language only....60 poems, if they have beauty, are as good as 600. It is not the mass of the poet's work that determines his greatness. Gray and Catullus wrote little; we have only seven plays of Sophocles and seven of Aeschylus (though they wrote more), but these seven put them still in the front rank of poets."

(He says also that Mallarmé's verse is acquired while Verlaine's is inspired. X says M adopted the path of arduous

tapasyā with language because the French language is too simple, clear and transparent etc., etc. And then he remarks that just as in spirituality simple (*sahaj*) sadhana leads to truth, so also in poetry simplicity leads to beauty. Does it mean that M's acrobatics with words in poems won't or don't lead to beauty?)

"Only X can say what he meant, but to refuse beauty to M's poetry would be itself an acrobacy of intellect. For what then is beauty? Simplicity and beauty are not convertible terms. There can be a difficult beauty. What about Aeschylus then? or Blake?"

(Mallarmé says that the poet's mission is either to evoke gradually an object in order to suggest a mood, or inversely, to choose an object as a symbol and disengage from it a mood by a series of decipherments. I don't quite follow what he means but it seems something different from Housman's idea that the mission or function of poetry is to transfuse emotion, which Mallarmé had none of!)

"It is a very good description of the impressionist method in literature. Verlaine and others do the same even if they do not hold the theory....Housman is not an impressionist or symbolist in theory."

Comment on the phrase about Mallarmé's lack of emotion:

"Indeed? Because the professor says so? How easily you are impressed by anybody's opinion and take it as final!"

(Please read M's sonnet No. 199. Pardi! Guru, it is indeed a hard nut; a tortuous trend of mind, no doubt! Look at that image "Le transparent glacier des vols qui n'ont pas fui..."etc. The transparent glacier of flights haunting the hard lake under the frost! Frost or snow has become the glacier, and the glaciers compose the lake or what? What do you think of this sonnet?)

"How does hoar-frost or rime become the glacier? 'Givre' is not the same as 'glace'—it is not ice, but a covering of hoar-frost such as you find on the trees etc., the congealed moisture of the air—that is the 'blanche agonie' which has come down from the insulted Space on the swan and on the lake. He can shake off that but the glacier holds him; he can no more rise to the skies, caught in the frozen cold mass of the failures of the soul that refused to fly upward and escape. It is one of the finest sonnets I have ever read. Magnificent line, by the way, 'le transparent glacier des vols qui n'ont pas fui!' This idea of the denied flights (imprisoned powers) of the soul that have frozen into a glacier seems to me as powerful as it is violent. Of course in French such expressions were quite new—in some other languages they were already possible. You will find lots of kindred things in the most modern poetry which specialises in violent revelatory (or at least would-be revelatory) images. You disapprove? Well one may do so,—classical taste does; but I find myself obliged here to admire.

"I do not know what you mean by emotion. If you mean the surface vital joy and grief of outer life, these poems of Mallarmé do not contain it. But if emotion can include also the deeper spiritual or inner feeling which does not weep or shout, then they are here in these two sonnets. The swan is to my understanding not merely the poet who has not sung in the higher spaces of the consciousness, which is already a fine idea, but the soul that has not risen there and found its higher expression, the poet, if Mallarmé thought of that specially, being only a signal instance of this spiritual frustration. There can be no more powerful, moving and formidable expression of this spiritual frustration, this chilled and sterile greatness than the image of the frozen lake and the imprisoned swan as developed by Mallarmé.

"I do not say that the spiritual or occult cannot be given an easier expression or that if one can arrive at that without minimising the inner significance, it is not perhaps the greatest achievement. But there is room for more than one kind of spiritual or mystic poetry. One has to avoid mere mistiness or vague-

ness, one has to be true, vivid, profound in one's images; but, that given, I am free to write either as in *Nirvana* or *Transformation*, giving a clear mental indication or I can suppress the mental indication and give the image only with the content suggested in the language—but not expressed so that even those can superficially understand who are unable to read behind the mental idea—that is what I have done in the *Bird of Fire*. It seems to me that both methods are legitimate."

Comment on Professor K's comparison between Mallarmé's verse and Verlaine's:

"If these two magnificent sonnets (the last two) are not inspired then there is no such thing as inspiration. It is rubbish to say of a man who refused to limit himself by intellectual expression, that he was an intellectual artist. Symbolism, impressionism go beyond intellect to the pure sight and Mallarmé was the creator of symbolism."

(I sent Prosfessor K's book because of the interesting reference.)

"I don't find it interesting,—it is abysmally stupid."

SAMENESS IN SPIRITUAL POETRY

25-5-1938

MYSELF: People object to our poetry on the ground that there are too many repetitions. Amal has "stars" coming in almost everyone of his poems.

SRI AUROBINDO: That was Amal's own preference, not the spiritual poems' necessity. I read the other day a comment on Keats' poetry that he always writes about stars and that there is a spiritual reason for it.

Ordinary poems (and novels) always write about love and similar things. Is it one point against ordinary (non-spiritual) poetry? If there is sameness of expression in spiritual poems, it is due either to the poet's binding himself by the tradition of a fixed set of symbols (e.g. Vaishnava poets, Vedic poets) or to his having only a limited field of expression or imagination or to his deliberately limiting himself to certain experiences or customs that are dear to him. To readers who feel these things it does not appear monotonous. Those who listen to Mirabai's songs, don't get tired of them, nor do I get tired of reading the Upanishads. The Greeks did not tire of reading Anacreon's poems though he always wrote of wine and beautiful boys (an example of sameness in unspiritual poetry). The Vedic and Vaishnava poets remain immortal in spite of their sameness which is in another way like that of the poetry of the troubadours in mediaeval Europe, deliberately chosen. Variety, বৈচিত্র্য is all very well, but it is the power of the poetry that really matters. After all every poet writes always in the same style, repeats the same vision of things in "different garbs".

MYSELF: Tagore writes that the world creation is full of a variety of rasa. The poet's mind should not be confined to one single inspiration, however vast it may be.

SRI AUROBINDO: But Tagore's poetry is all from one প্রেরণা.[1]

[1] Inspiration

He may write of different things but it is always Tagore and his *preraṇā* (inspiration) repeating themselves interminably. Every poet does that.

MYSELF: He hints that only spiritual inspiration dealing with things spiritual should not bind a poet's creation. Well?

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, and if a poet is a spiritual seeker what does Tagore want him to write about? Dancing girls? Amal has done that. Wine and women? Hafez has done that. But he can only use them as symbols as a rule. Must he write about politics? Why should he describe the outer aspects of world nature, বিশ্ব প্রকৃতি, for their own sake, when his vision is of something else within or even apart from her? Merely for the sake of variety? He then becomes a mere litterateur. Of course if a man simply writes to get poetic fame and a lot of readers, if he is only a poet, Tagore's advice may be good for him.

OVERHEAD POETRY

SRI AUROBINDO: What super-excellence? as poetry? When I say that a line comes from a higher or overhead plane or has the Overmind touch I do not mean that it is superior in pure poetic excellence to others from lower planes—that Amal's lines outshine Shakespeare or Homer for instance. I simply mean that it has some vision, light, etc. from up there and the character of its expression and rhythm are from there. You do not appreciate probably because you catch only the surface mental meaning. The line ["Flickering no longer with the cry of clay"] is very fine from the technical point of view, the distribution of consonantal and vowel sounds being perfect. That, however, is possible on any level of inspiration. These are technical elements, the Overmind touch does not consist in that but in the undertones or overtones of the rhythmic cry and a language which carries in it a great depth or height or width of spiritual vision, feeling or experience. But all that has to be felt, it is not analysable. If I say that the second line ["The distance-haunted fire of mystic mind"] is a magnificent expression of an inner reality most intimate and powerful and the first line, with its conception of the fire once "flickering" with the "cry" of clay but now no longer, is admirably revelatory—you would probably reply that it does not convey anything of the kind to you. That is why I do not usually speak of these things in themselves or in their relation to poetry—only with Amal who is trying to get his inspiration into touch with these planes. Either one must have the experience—e.g., here one must have lived in or glimpsed the mystic mind, felt its fire, been aware of the distances that haunt it, heard the cry of clay mixing with it and the consequent unsteady flickering of its flames and the release into the straight upward burning and so known that this is not mere romantic rhetoric, not mere images or metaphors expressing something imaginative but unreal (that is how many would take it perhaps) but facts and realities of the self, actual and

concrete, or else there must be a conspiracy between the solar plexus and the thousand-petalled lotus which makes one feel, if not know, the suggestion of these things through the words and rhythm. As for technique, there is a technique of this higher poetry but it is not analysable and teachable. If, for instance, Amal had written "No longer flickering with the cry of clay," it would no longer have been the same thing though the exact mental meaning would be just as before—for the overtone, the rhythm would have been lost in the ordinary staccato clipped movement and with the overtone the rhythmic significance. It would not have given the suggestion of space and wideness full with the cry and the flicker, the intense impact of that cry and the agitation of the fire which is heard through the line as it is. But to realise that, one must have the inner sight and inner ear for these things; one must be able to hear the sound-meaning, feel the sound-spaces with their vibrations. Again, if he had written "Quivering no longer with the cry of clay," it would have been a good line, but meant much less and something quite different to the inner experience, though to the mind it would have been only the same thing expressed in a different image—not so to the solar plexus and the thousand-petalled lotus. In this technique it must be the right word and no other, in the right place and in no other, the right sounds and no others, in a design of sound that cannot be changed even a little. You may say that it must be so in all poetry; but in ordinary poetry the mind can play about, chop and change, use one image or another, put this word here or that word there—if the sense is much the same and has a poetical value, the mind does not feel that all is lost unless it is very sensitive and much influenced by the solar plexus. In the overhead poetry these things are quite imperative, it is all or nothing—or at least all or a fall.

29-3-1936

MYSELF: 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.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

MYSELF: If X could receive his inspiration without any necessity for rewriting, why not you?

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

MYSELF: Do you have to rewrite because of some obstruction in the way of the inspiration?

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

MYSELF: With your silent consciousness it should be possible to draw from the highest planes with the least concentration.

SRI AUROBINDO: The highest planes are not so accomodat-

ing 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*!

RHYTHMICAL OVERTONES AND UNDERTONES

11-5-1937

SRI AUROBINDO: I was speaking of rhythmical overtones and undertones. That is to say, there is a metrical rhythm which belongs to the skilful use of metre—any good poet can manage that; but besides that there is a music which rises up into that of the rhythm or a music that underlies it, carries it as it were as the movement of the water carries the movement of a boat. They can both exist together in the same line, but it is more a matter of the inner than the outer ear and I am afraid I can't define further. To go into the subject would mean a long essay. But to give examples—

> Journeys end in lovers' meeting
> Every wise man's son doth know,

is excellent metrical rhythm, but there are no overtones and undertones. In

> Golden lads and girls all must
> As chimney-sweepers come to dust

there is a beginning of undertone, but no overtone, while the "Take, O take those lips away" (the whole lyric) is all overtones. Again

> Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
> I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him

has admirable rhythm, but there are no overtones or undertones. But

> In maiden meditation fancy-free

has beautiful running undertones, while

In the dark backward and abysm of Time

is all overtones, and

Absent thee from felicity awhile
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain

is all overtones and undertones together. I don't suppose this will make you much wiser, but it is all I can do for you at present.

POETIC QUALITIES

I

My life is veiled in a sleep of light,
A hush that nothing breaks;
The world before my inward sight
Into pure beauty wakes.

Life that is deep and wonder-vast,
Lost in a breath of sound;
The bubbling shadows have been cast
From its heart's timeless round.

In its lulled silver stream now shines
A lustrous smile of God
Whose brilliantly curved outlines,
Flashing on the memory-trod

Caverns of slumbering earth, there bring
A glow of the Infinite,
While my soul's diamond voices wing
Into a heaven of light.

30-3-1938

MYSELF: Guru, I fear this is only a sprat!

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not a sprat, sir; it is a goldfish. You seem to be weak in poetical zoology. It is perfect, except for the one fault you have detected. The only alterations (except the "pure") I find needful are meant to obviate that defect, by going back to "my", so connecting the first and last lines (also aided by the repetition of Light) and making the rest appear as closely connected with it. Like that it makes a very well-built and finely inspired poem. If you can produce more sprats

like that, there will be much wealth in your fisheries. It is much better than the other recent ones, except the stress poem—nothing decorative,—all there!

31-3-1938

MYSELF: About yesterday's poem, I am still "weak" in finding the "gold" you found in my fish. I don't see what beauty is there to make you mark certain lines thrice—e.g. "Into a heaven of light", which is a very simple, ordinary sort of line, I should say. I admit it is well-built and devoid of decoration, but to see it as you see it—well, could you explain a bit? But I can increase this sort of "wealth" if you are at my back!

SRI AUROBINDO: There is probably a defect in your solar plexus which makes it refuse to thrill unless it receives a strong punch from poetry—an ornamental, romantic or pathetic punch. But there is also a poetry which expresses things with an absolute truth but without effort, simply and easily, without a word in excess or any laying on of colour, only just the necessary. That kind of achievement is considered as among the greatest things poetry can do. The three lines are put in yesterday's poem wherever that happened.

A phrase, word or line may be quite simple and ordinary and yet taken with another phrase, line or word become the perfect thing. If you look you will see that my 3 lines are put against the *two* last lines taken together and not this one only by itself. So taken they express with perfect felicity something that can be seen or felt in spiritual experience. The same reason for the other three line encomiums. E.g. A line like "Life that is deep and wonder-vast" has what I have called the inevitable quality, with a perfect simplicity and straightforwardness it expresses something in a definitive and perfect way that cannot be bettered; so does "Lost in a breath of sound", with less simplicity but with the same inevitability. The two lines that follow are very fine but they have to labour more to express what they want and express it less absolutely—still it does so much that

it gets 2 lines, but not three. The same distinction applies to the next two lines "In the lulled silver stream" etc. and the four that follow. I don't mean that highly coloured poetry cannot be absolutely inevitable, it can e.g. Shakespeare's "In cradle of the rude imperious surge" and many others. But most of the highly coloured poetry attracts too much attention to the colour and its brilliances so that the thing in itself is less felt than the magnificence of its dress. All kinds are legitimate in poetry. I only wanted to point out that poetry can be great or perfect even if it uses simple or ordinary expressions—e.g. Dante simply says "In His will is our peace" and in writing that in Italian produces one of the greatest lines in all poetic literature.

II

2-9-1938

MYSELF: You call this line, "A fathomless beauty in a sphere of pain," a magnificent one, but I did not feel its magnificence when I wrote it and am unable to see where you find it. I think you find behind these things some inner truth which magnifies them before your eyes! Otherwise the rhythm and the word music can't possibly seem so extraordinary!

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, have you become a disciple of Baron and the surrealists? You seem to suggest that significance does not matter and need not enter into the account in judging or feeling poetry! Rhythm and word music are indispensable, but are not the whole of poetry. For instance lines like these

> In the human heart of Heligoland
> A hunger wakes for the silver sea;
> For waving the might of his magical wand
> God sits on his throne in eternity,

has plenty of rhythm and word music—a surrealist might pass it, but I certainly would not. Your suggestion that my seeing the inner truth behind a line magnifies it to me, i.e. gives a

false value to me which it does not really have as poetry, may or may not be correct. But, certainly, the significance and feeling suggested and borne home by the words and rhythm are in my view a capital part of the value of poetry. Shakespeare's lines

> Absent thee from felicity awhile
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain

have skilful and consummate rhythm and word combination, but this gets its full value as the perfect embodiment of a profound and moving significance, the expression in a few words of a whole range of human world-experience. It is for a similar quality that I have marked this line: coming after the striking and significant image of the stars in the skyline and the single Bliss that is the source of all, it expresses with a great force of poetic vision and emotion the sense of the original Delight contrasted with the world of sorrow born from it and yet the deep presence of that Delight in an unseizable beauty of things. It expresses it not intellectually but through vision and emotion. As for rhythm and word music, it is certainly not striking in the sense of being out of the way or unheard of, but it is perfect —technically in the variation of vowels and the weaving of the consonants and the distribution of longs and shorts, more deeply in the modulated rhythmic movement and the calling in of overtones. I don't know what more you want in that line.

III

3-11-1938

SRI AUROBINDO: I am afraid the language of your appreciations or criticisms here is not apposite. There is nothing "bare and rugged" in the two lines you quote—

> *A rhythmic fire that opens a secret door,*
> *And the treasures of eternity are found;*

on the contrary they are rather violently figured—the *osé* image

of a fire opening a door of a treasure-house would probably be objected to by Cousins or any other purist. The language of poetry is called bare when it is confined rigorously to just the words necessary to express the thought or feeling or to visualise what is described, without superfluous epithets, without images, without any least rhetorical turn in it. E.g. Cowper's

Toll for the brave,
The brave who are no more—

is bare. Byron's

Jehovah's vessels hold
The godless heathen's wine

does not quite succeed because of a rhetorical tinge that he is not able to keep out of the expression. When Baxter (I think it was Baxter) writes

I spoke as one who ne'er would speak again
And as a dying man to dying men,

that might be taken as an example of strong and bare poetic language. I have written of Savitri waking on the day of destiny—

Immobile in herself, she gathered force:
This was the day when Satyavan must die.—

that is designedly bare.

But none of these lines or passages can be called rugged; for ruggedness and austerity are not the same thing; poetry is rugged when it is rough in language and rhythm or rough and unpolished but sincere in feeling. Donne is often rugged.—

Yet dare I almost be glad, I do not see
That spectacle of too much weight for me.
Who sees God's face that is self-life must die,
What a death were it then to see God die?

but it is only the first line that is at all bare.

On the other side you describe the line of your preference

My moments pass with moon-imprinted sail

by the epithets "real, wonderful, flashing". Real or surreal? It is precisely its unreality that makes the quality of the line; it is surreal, not in any depreciatory sense, but because of its supra-physical imaginativeness, its vivid suggestion of occult vision; one does not quite know what it means, but it suggests something that one can vividly see. It is not flashing—gleaming or glinting would be nearer the mark—it penetrates the imagination and awakens sight and stirs or thrills with a sense of beauty but it is not something that carries one away by its sudden splendour.

You say that it is more poetic than the other quotation—perhaps, but not for the reason you give, rather because it is more felicitously complete in its image and more suggestive. But you seem to attach the word poetic to the idea of something remotely beautiful, deeply coloured or strangely imaged with a glitter in it or a magic glimmer. On the whole what you seem to mean is that this line is "real" poetry, because it has this quality and because it has melodious sweetness of rhythm, while the other is of a less attractive character. Your solar plexus refuses to thrill where these qualities are absent—obviously that is a serious limitation in the plasticity of your solar plexus, not that it is wrong in thrilling to these things but that it is sadly wrong in thrilling to them only. It means that your plexus will remain deaf and dead to most of the greater poetry of the world—to Homer, Milton, Valmiki, Vyasa, a great part even of Shakespeare. That is surely a serious limitation of the appreciative faculty. What is strange and beautiful has its appeal, but one ought to be able also to stir to what is great and beautiful, or strong and noble, or simple and beautiful, or pure and exquisite. Not to do so would be like being blind of one eye and seeing with the other only very vividly strange outlines and intensely bright colours.

I may add that if really I appreciate any lines for something which I see behind them but they do not actually suggest or express, then I must be a very bad critic. The lines you quote not only say nothing about the treasures except that they are found, but do not suggest anything more. If then I see from some knowledge that has nothing to do with the actual expression and suggestion of the lines all the treasures of eternity and cry "How rich"—meaning the richness, not of the treasures, but of the poetry, then I am doing something quite illegitimate which is the sign of a great unreality and confusion in my mind, very undesirable in a critic. It is not for any reason of that kind that I made a mark indicating appreciation but because I find in the passage a just and striking image with a rhythm and expression which are a sufficient body for the significance.

SONNET

22-2-1936

SRI AUROBINDO: 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 Sh. 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 did 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.

IAMBICS, ANAPAESTS, TROCHEES

10-12-1935

SRI AUROBINDO: What on earth do you mean? Iambics and anapaests can be combined in English verse at any time, provided one does not set out to write a purely iambic or a purely anapaestic metre. Mixed anapaest and iamb make a most beautifully flexible lyric rhythm. It has no more connection with free verse than the constellation of the Great Bear has to do with a cat's tail. Free verse indicates verse free from the shackles of rhyme and metre, but rhythmic (or trying to be rhythmic) in one way or another. If you put rhymes that will be considered a shackle and the "free" will kick at the chain. The rhythm and metrical arrangement is perfect on the iamb anapaest basis. I only wanted to know whether that was what Amal intended. For the rhyme scheme of the poem is that of a sonnet and in English the sonnet is always written in iambic pentametre—the combination of the lyrical metre with sonnet rhyme scheme is a novel adventure.

22-12-1935

SRI AUROBINDO: Trochees are perfectly admissible in an iambic line as a modulation specially in the first *foot* (not first line), but also occasionally in the middle. In the last foot a trochee is *not* admissible. Also these trochees must not be so arranged as to turn an iambic into a trochaic line.

My dear sir, this is an instance of importing one's own inferences instead of confining oneself to the plain meaning of the statement. First of all the rules concerning a mixed iambic-anapaestic cannot be the same as those that govern a pure iambic. Secondly what I objected to was the trochaic run of the line. Two troochees followed by a long syllable, not a single

iamb or anapaest in the whole! How can there be an iambic or an iambic anapaestic without a single iamb or anapaest in 1.7? The line as written could only scan either as trochaic, therefore not iambic line, 'or thus—u | : uu | , that is a trochee followed by an anapaest. Here of course there is an anapaest, but the combination is impossible rhythmically because it involves three short syllables one after another—an unbearable collocation—one is obliged to put a minor stress on the "at" and that at once makes the trochaic line. In the iambic anapaestic line a trochee followed by an iamb can be allowed in the first foot; elsewhere it is to be admitted with caution so as not to disturb the rhythm.

What numbers do you mean? The rules are perfectly clear and intelligible, only of course you must know what are the accents and what modulations are or are not possible. That means that you must know something about the language, that is all.

I have given you however some rules for the modulations in iambic verse—they are not exhaustive. In modern verse one can pepper an iambic line with anapaests. I have done so myself in the sonnets. But one must be very careful how one does it. This license is not for beginners.

16-2-1936

MYSELF: One more poem. Amal was not available. I have tried to stick to the normal form, unless my scansion is wrong. I have put the scansion. I find that in the fore-going ones my scansion was wrong. For instance, I scanned:

A wide | inexpres|sible Peace | seizes | my soul,
Pervad|ing the spa|ces a |profound | Presence | I feel
Inscru|table, vas|ter than | the sea, | sky-still.

SRI AUROBINDO: That, except in the second line, is the orthodox method of scansion, but even so the two lines are not iambic pentametres. The first is anapaestic-trochaic with an

iamb at the beginning and another at the end. In the second line the orthodox scansion would make it a line of six feet.

MYSELF: I scan:

Illu|mined by | thousand | resplen|dent suns

SRI AUROBINDO: That is a mathematical scansion, not rhythmic. If you scan like that, there is no prose that cannot become verse. I have scanned in that way your prose.

1. One more | poem | Amal | was not || avail | able.—
I have tried | to stick | to the nor|mal form, || unless| my
scan|sion is wrong | ...

The stress in "thousand" is on the first syllable, not the second. The natural stresses are "illú|mined by thoú|sand resplen|dent suns." If you stress the unstressed "by" and the unstressed "and" and destress the strongly stressed "thou" in "thousand", then no law of accent remains, you land yourself in pure license and there is no reason why you should not scan "Illu|mīned by | thousand | resplen|dent suns" | and make a trochaic line of it. You cannot ignore stresses in the English language.

I really cannot see how you find iambic rhythm in "Pervading the spaces a profound Presence I feel". If there is any rhythm, it is the rhythm of free verse, not of any fixed metre.

You have to train your ear to recognise (1) the difference between the various basic rhythms iambic, trochaic, anapaestic and the various lengths pentametre etc. (2) the extent to which other feet can be admitted without upsetting the basic rhythm. These two things are indispensable.

IMPERFECT RHYMES

19-12-1935

MYSELF: How do you rhyme "life" and "cliff", "smile" and "will", "came" and "whim". Are they all whims?

SRI AUROBINDO: They are called in English imperfect rhymes and can be freely but not too freely used. Only you have to understand the approximations and kinships of vowel sounds in English, otherwise, you will produce illegitimate children like "splendour" and "wonder" which is not a rhyme but an assonance.

MODES AND VARIETIES OF POETIC CREATION

5-6-1935

SRI AUROBINDO: I like your poem very much. The poet seems to have come out after all. So the pains of labour and even the forceps were useful. It is the turn of the Yoga to come out next, what? Even with a forceps!...Well, at any rate it proves that he is there—for these poems were true poetry—and can come out even if he has still to be dragged out by the hair of his head. In time he will surely become less shy and difficult. As for the Yoga—well, we will see....It is the medical man with his forceps that comes in the way of the Ananda, I suppose,—too much occupied with the doubt and difficulty of delivery. But the poet is there beyond a doubt now. So buck up, kick off the man of sorrows from your shoulders and go cheerfully ahead.

24-8-1935

MYSELF: It is proposed to include me in an Ashram Anthology of Bengali poets. But won't my work look pale and anaemic beside something like Nishikanta's, all splendour and glow?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. Besides, there must always be varieties in an anthology which is like a museum or a botanical collection. So a *modestum Nirodicum* inside will do no harm even beside *flaminga Nishikantica.*

8-12-1935

MYSELF: I have been plodding at a poem and now it is ready. So slow and laborious I am as a poet!

SRI AUROBINDO: What of that? The result is all right. 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 Manmohan, 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 Nishikanta.

MYSELF: Here is a joint effort—some stanzas by myself, some by Nishikanta. Perhaps they fail as a whole?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is certainly a little difficult to keep them together, especially as Nishikanta's stanzas are strong and fiery and yours are delicate and plaintive. It is like a strong robustuous fellow and a delicate slender one walking in a leash—they don't quite coalesce.

13-2-1936

SRI AUROBINDO: X's poetry is more mental. N's comes straight from the vital vision and knocks you in the pit of the stomach.

He does not repeat his images so much as X and they are exceedingly striking and forceful. They are of one type, but that I suppose is the case with most poets.

Can't say I understand. N himself had done nothing worth doing in poetry when he came here—all the signs were that he would be at the best only a Tagorian poetling like so many others. He got a touch here which brought out in him some powerful force of vital vision and word that certainly had not shown any signs of existing before. It may have been there latent, but so was the poet in X. What then exactly is meant by a combination of born poet and genius? A born poet is usually

a genius, poetry with any power or beauty in it implies genius.

Richness of image is not the whole of poetry. There are many born poets who avoid too much richness of image. There are certain fields of consciousness which express themselves naturally through image most—there are others that do it more through idea and feeling.

21-12-1935

SRI AUROBINDO: One can't make rigid rules like that. Wordsworth is as simple and direct as possible, (not always though), Keats aims at word magic. One can't say W is a greater poet than K. Whatever style is poetically successful, is advisable.

23-8-1936

MYSELF: When J was asked to compose songs the other day, we found a sudden transformation. How was this brought about? And what did she do?

SRI AUROBINDO: Opened the lyrical gift in her probably—began knocking for the spontaneous song in place of the mind-made article.

But, my dear sir, it often happens like that. I believe you were not here when X's poetry blossomed; but it was quite as sudden. Remember Tagore's description of him as the cripple who suddenly threw away his crutches and began to run and his astonishment at the miracle. N came out in much the same way, a sudden Brahmaputra of inspiration. The only peculiarity in J's case is the source she struck—the pure mystic source.

MYSELF: I refuse to believe she did it herself.

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course she didn't, nor X nor N either. It is a way of speaking.

MYSELF: I would like to know how you have done it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, if you think I knew how it's done! I hammer about till I hit the right spot. It hits quick sometimes, that's all. Note however that there was always in J something that wanted or claimed to belong to another world. Perhaps by the pressure she got into contact with it.

7-6-1936

MYSELF: A poem for you. I hope you will make out in it the fall of Adam (soul) from the garden of Eden. But what is it—symbolic, mystic or cystic?

SRI AUROBINDO: Symbolic mystic without being crypticcystic. Anyhow, pure inspiration and very luminous. Something undeniably original this time, what?

23-8-1936

MYSELF: How do you find the poem I am sending you? Does it deserve incarceration?

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, as poetry it is good—but I can't say it is distinguished or beautiful like the poems you have written since. You needn't incarcerate, but bury it in a drawer somewhere for the moment. Read it again after ten years. (Horace's advice.)

MYSELF: What about the refrain?

SRI AUROBINDO: Refrain? man alive, if all were like the refrain, I should say "bury, bury, burn, burn."

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Yes, the mind is used as a medium. It might be an understanding transcribing agent or it may be only a passive channel. If an agent, it transcribes what comes from above, understands but does not pass its opinion—only transmits. If it is only a channel then it sees the words and passes them but knows no more.

'Not to improve; for that would mean the mind interfering, refusing to be a medium and trying to do better on its own active account. But to understand is desirable. If the mind is watchful and awake to the symbols being used or the images it can acquire the habit or knack of understanding.

31-3-1936

MYSELF: I was not at all speaking of the world, neither am I concerned with it. I was asking why my prayers were not answered by the Above when that Above is on the other side of my house and encourages my writing.

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord! you are not a part of the world? Then you must be a Jivanmukta and no need of prayer.

The Above may encourage your writing, but it does not follow that he will deal with you in the same way as with X; *Ye yathā mām prapadyante.*

MYSELF: I admit that my vital is lazy, because it is afraid of too much labouring, 4 lines in 40 hours!

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but if the vital were not lazy you would not have to labour like that. It is lazy in labouring but also it is lazy in responding, it is a slow mover.

SECTION III

Matters Medical

SRI AUROBINDO: I was under the impression that you were not enthusiastic over medicine or at least over the practice of it. If I had known that you were anxious to justify the 20,000, we could have utilised you in that direction. Are you serious about it?...Well, Mother thought of you when we wanted somebody to fill up the hole left by the erratic X and we also don't know what we shall do when B. goes for his domestic inspection of his affairs. We had rejected the idea because we thought you might not only be not enthusiastic but the reverse of enthusiastic about again being a medical gent. When however you spoke lovingly and hungeringly about the 20,000, I rubbed my eyes and thought, "Well, well, here is a chance." That's all.

MYSELF: Now that I am in charge of the dispensary I feel afraid about my prestige. People expect great things from an England-returned doctor (who I may confide in you, hasn't had enough time for experience). If you can't save my prestige, save at least my face.

SRI AUROBINDO: People are exceedingly silly—but I suppose they can't help themselves. The more I see of humanity, the more that forces itself on me. The abysses of silliness of which its mind is capable....The prestige I can't guarantee, but hope to save something of the face....

Last week of January, 1935

MYSELF: I am sending you a diagnosis of the ailment of my first patient. It is bad luck for me to have to tackle such a difficult case at the very outset of my medical work in the Ashram. But why do you have to spend so much Force, when you can do the whole job by a word; I mean, why not cut short our la-

bour and the patient's discomfort by launching your তথাস্তু[1] from the higher Divine consciousness! I hope my patient gets cured soon by Your Force.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is a *test case*, I suppose! I should have thought everybody knows that doctors have to be guessing all the time and that cure is a matter of hit or miss. If you hit often you are a clever doctor—or if you kill people brilliantly, then also. It reduces itself to that.

I did not expect you to take my তথাস্তু with such grim seriousness. 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 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.

MYSELF: X asked me to tell you that he felt your Presence and Force in the evening very concretely. He does not want any medicines at all; he says that he used to have doubts before, but now they have disappeared.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is queer. All the force I am putting into it or almost all turns into this subjective form—some objective result is there but still slight, uncertain and slow. Of course the cause is apparent—he has been accustomed to receive subjectively but not accustomed to receive physically. It is not however convenient for the present purpose except as a step (for him) for the more objective receptivity.

[1] *tathāstu*=be it so

1-2-1935

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

SRI AUROBINDO: 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 Chandulal 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.

MYSELF: If we doctors are important as mediums, you must tell me what our attitude should be in conducting a case.

SRI AUROBINDO: Faith, openness, an alert and flexible intelligence. I mean by faith especially faith as a dynamic means of bringing about what has to be effected or realised.

2-2-1935

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

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

MYSELF: I was under the impression that it is quite possible to know intuitively with the Yogic vision the exact condition of a patient without any medical diagnosis, but from your recent remarks about some patients I find that it is not so. On the contrary you say that the Force can act better and quicker when there is a proper diagnosis.

SRI AUROBINDO: It can if you train it to act in that field and if you can make it the real Intuition which sees the things without ranging among potentialities. 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 aquiescence 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.

MYSELF: 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?

SRI AUROBINDO: Rubbish! This is a world of the play of 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?

II

MYSELF: I hear that plenty of forces come to people while meditating. Even the force of illness can come, I am told, if one gets scared.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, that is quite possible. If it does one has only to kick it away and say, "Get off, you fool." Or if you are not vigorous enough to do that call the Mother's force.

MYSELF: When the forces come during meditation, it seems that if one lets fear possess one, there is even a chance of madness.

SRI AUROBINDO: Not necessarily madness. Plenty of people get afraid without getting mad. Madness is exceptional. What fear does is to stop the experience or else it exposes you to blows from the vital beings. If you don't fear, they can't hit you. Fear must not enter in Yoga. As Vivekananda said, the Yogi must be अभी[1],

MYSELF: I can't understand how any illness can come by subtle forces. How is that to be reconciled with the action of the germs?

SRI AUROBINDO: What is the difficulty? You are like the scientists who say or used to say that there is no such thing as mind or thought independent of the physical brain: mind and thought are only names for brain quiverings. Or that there is no such thing as vital Force because all the movements of life depend upon chemicals, glands and what not. These things and the germs also are a minor physical instrumentation for something supraphysical.

MYSELF: How do the subtle forces work to bring about illness?

SRI AUROBINDO: They first weaken or break through the nervous envelope, the aura. If that is strong and whole, a thousand million germs will not be able to do anything to you. The envelope pierced, they attack the subconscient mind in the body, sometimes also the vital mind or mind proper—prepare the illness by fear or thought of illness. The doctors themselves say that in influenza or cholera in the Far East 90 p.c. get ill through fear. Nothing to take away the resistance like fear. But still the subconscient is the main thing.

If the contrary Force is strong in the body one can move in the midst of plague and cholera and never get contaminated.

MYSELF: What about Ramakrishna dying of cancer? But he was an Avatar!

[1] fearless

SRI AUROBINDO: Why should he not? Why on earth limit the possibilities of an Avatar?

MYSELF: Even if we take his Avatarhood to be compatible with his cancer, should not the cancer be accepted as a physical fact due to physical causes rather than as due to subtle forces, the result (if we are to believe Ramakrishna himself) of a moral-spiritual situation? Do not the Laws of Nature and the existence of the material world that is proved by our instruments of observation make things like soul and God and subtle worlds superfluous?

SRI AUROBINDO: What did he himself say about it—that it was the sins of his disciples which constituted the cancer? There is a physical aspect of things and there is an occult supraphysical aspect—one need not get in the way of the other. All physical things are the expression of the supraphysical. The existence of a body with physical instruments and processes does not, as the 19th century wrongly imagined, disprove the existence of a soul which uses the body even if it is also conditioned by it. Laws of Nature do not disprove the existence of God. The fact of a material world to which our instruments are accorded does not disprove the existence of less material worlds which certain subtler instruments can show to us.

MYSELF: The spiritual Force is said to be enough to cure illnesses. Why then do you encourage Dr. X's treatment? This Force and his medicines—aren't they incompatibles?

SRI AUROBINDO: Where the illness becomes pronounced and chronic in the body, it is necessary often to call in the aid of physical treatment and that is then used as a support of the Force. X in his treatment does not rely on medicines alone, but uses them as an instrumentation for the Mother's force.

MYSELF: Can the anti-illness force of the Yogic consciousness be absolute?

SRI AUROBINDO: The absoluteness can only come with the supramental change. For below the supramental, it is an action of a Force among many forces—in the supramental, it becomes a law of the nature.

MYSELF: Can the supramental really make immortal a totter-

ing old man, with all his anatomy and physiology pathological? It seems too much to expect even from the Yogic Force!

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, don't you know that old men sometimes get a new or third set of teeth in their old age? And if monkey-glands can renew functionings and forces and can make hair grow on a bald head, as Voronoff has proved by living examples,—well? And mark that Science is only at the beginning of these experiments. If these possibilities are opening before Science, why should one declare their absolute impossibility by other means?

There is a difference between Yogic Force and Supramental Nature. What is acquired and held by the Force in the one becomes inherent in the Supramental and exists by nature—it becomes self-existent and absolute.

MYSELF: I was myself going to write to you about Voronoff and rejuvenation. Have you any idea why the monkey-gland is used? I wonder how far the rejuvenating operation is successful.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is successful partially and for a period——one cannot say more than that. But even that—rejuvenation for a period—is a tremendous progress and how can one say where it will end? As for the monkey, it is because it is nearest to man and at the same time of an extremely vital nature, I mean full of vital force. As for the gland, it is because the seat of the physical energy is there which supports and reinforces all the rest. Voronoff's selection is perfectly logical and intuitive at the same time.

ILLNESS: ITS ENTRY AND ITS PREVENTION

MYSELF: We all believe that as soon as you read our letters we receive the necessary help. Yesterday when I went to R to treat his eye, he told me that he felt your Force working inside it, and inferred that you were reading his letter just then.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

MYSELF: You have said that one can know of illnesses before they enter the body; in that case, one can always stop them and have absolute immunity.

SRI AUROBINDO: All illnesses pass through the nervous or vital-physical sheath of the subtle consciousness and subtle body before they enter the physical. If one is conscious of the subtle body or with the subtle consciousness, one can stop an illness on its way and prevent it from entering the physical body. But it may come without one's noticing, or when one is asleep or through the subconscient, or in a sudden rush when one is off one's guard; then there is nothing to do but to fight it out from a hold already gained on the body. Self-defence by these inner means may become so strong that the body becomes practically immune as many Yogis are. Still this "practically" does not mean "absolutely". The absolute immunity can only come with the supramental change. For below the supramental it is the result of an action of a Force among many forces and can be disturbed by a disruption of the equilibrium established —in the supramental it is a law of the nature; in a supramentalised body immunity from illness would be automatic, inherent in its new nature.

There is a difference between Yogic Force on the mental and inferior planes and the Supramental Nature. What is

acquired and held by the Yoga-Force in the mind-and-body consciousness is in the supramental inherent and exists not by achievement but by nature—it is self-existent and absolute.

9-10-1936

MYSELF: It seems that people are now depending more on doctors and medicines than before!

SRI AUROBINDO: Increase of numbers brought in all sorts of influences that were not there in the smaller circle before. Doctors did not matter so long as faith was the main thing and a little treatment the help. But when faith went, illness increased and the doctors became not merely useful but indispensable. There was also the third cause, the descent of the sadhana into the physical consciousness with all its doubt, obscurity and resistance. To eliminate all that is no longer possible.

The Doctor as Patient: Two Personalities

MYSELF: You have said to X that my natural bent is pessimistic. But why then is there such an ambition, such an aspiration to be pure and perfect in life as well as in literature, in my role as doctor no less than in other roles? Psychologically the doctor himself is rather a patient!

SRI AUROBINDO: It is two different portions of your being. One wants to climb mountains, the other which stands at the foot or is climbing or rather being hauled up the first steps of the ascent, pulls back, groans, grunts, growls, wails and cries "That? all that height? Tchah! pooh! I'll never be able to negotiate one ten thousandth part of that! Let me sit down and lament."

MYSELF: I am doctoring on others, but there is nobody to doctor on me. The eternal conflict is going on between something that wants to work and work and something else that likes to be inert. Any prescription from the supreme Doctor? What is his diagnosis?

SRI AUROBINDO: Two different personalities standing in the way of each other. No remedy except "harmonisation" and that is usually done by the working of a higher Force which compels the two beggars not to interfere with each other. The business of the patient is to take plenty of doses of the Force. The usual formula (prescription, whatever you like to call it) is "proceed with as much zeal as if all had to be done in a fraction of a lifetime and as much patience as if you had all eternity before you." Your two parts ought to arrange that between them—one seems to plump for the first course, the other for the all-eternity. A splendid chance for harmonisation.

The Successful Doctor: Rajasic—Sattwic

MYSELF: On what does the success of a doctor depend, so far as he himself is concerned?

SRI AUROBINDO: Immense energy, enthusiasm, vital force, 100 miles an hour determination to succeed and a 2000 horse power confidence, "I will do it", vital absolutely convinced of the force, and constantly finding reasons for belief in it (not as you and others do equally or more, admitting reasons against); rapid intuitions getting there in spite of many errors of speculation, decision of mind and will accompanied by a mobile and plastic observing mind adapting itself to the circumstances and then overcoming them—that's the secret of a powerful instrumentalism at least in a rajasic man. A sattwic fellow would do it also but on other lines. You—ahem!

MYSELF: It seems to me that intuition is not enough, one must know one's business too.

SRI AUROBINDO: Naturally one must know the business. But there is an enormous difference between a man who knows his business and has confidence and intuition and one who knows his business and has not. I have known doctors with an excellent knowledge of medicine who succeeded much less than others who had far less but had dash, decision and drive.

Even if you had knowledge and experience, you would still hesitate: there would be always an "after all, is it this or that?", "I may be off the track", "Is it this, is it that?" etc.

The self-confident doctor decides as best he can and acts—if he finds he is making *fausse route* he retraces his steps and corrects. He develops in himself the *coup d'oeil* which does not depend only on reasoning and finally manages to be right in the majority of cases. You may say that he may kill his patients when he is wrong. But so does the hesitant doctor by his hesitation, e.g. by not taking a step which is urgently required.

All this is of course general. I am not asking you to imitate the quick step people—because without their confidence and *savoir faire* you would only bungle it. স্বধর্ম্মে নিধনম্ শ্রেয়ঃ (of the patient, of course), পরধর্ম্মোভয়াবহঃ[1]

[1] *Swadharme nidhanaṁ shreyaḥ paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ:* "Death in one's own law of being is better, perilous is it to follow an alien law" (*The Gita*).

MYSELF: I hoped that the Force would drop in one day and dynamise the being. That illusion has gone. Now I find that I shall have to work for it, till one day, one year, one decade my labour culminates in what I hope for.

SRI AUROBINDO: One century, one millennium—be complete, please, in your enumeration.

That is just it. It is the "slowly slowly" mind and "let us consider all the facts and reason the whole thing and its possibilities and impossibilities" mind that stands in your way.

MYSELF: You have said, "A sattwic fellow would do it also, but on other lines." Will you tell us how?

SRI AUROBINDO: I would prefer to wait till I have the said sattwic man in my hand. The sattwic man would have less vital rush, more balance, harmony, even working out of the Force. He might do less surprising things or rather give them a less surprising appearance, but possibly he would be more quietly sure.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SEX ENERGY

3-12-1935

MYSELF: The other day we had a discussion about the possibility of the atrophy of sex-glands as a result of sex-abstinence. Yogis say that ojas and tejas can only be produced by such abstinence.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is correct. The whole theory of brahmacharya is based upon that by the Yogis. If it were not so, there would be no need of brahmacharya for producing tejas and ojas.

It is not a question of vigour and energy per se, but of the physical support—in that physical support the ojas produced by brahmacharya counts greatly. The transformation of retas into ojas is a transformation of physical substance into a physical (necessarily producing also a vital physical) energy. The spiritual energy by itself can only drive the body, like the vital and mental, but in driving it it would exhaust it if it had not a physical support—(I speak of course of the ordinary spiritual energy, not of the supramental to be which will have not only to transmute retas into ojas but ojas into something still more sublimated.)

MYSELF: How is it then that scientists attach no value to sex energy except its use for procreation? The current theory is that sex is a physiological necessity.

SRI AUROBINDO: You mean the doctors. But even all doctors do not agree in that; there are many (I have read their opinions) who say that sex-satisfaction is not an absolute necessity and sex-abstinence can be physically very beneficial and is so—of course under proper conditions.

As for scientists, the product of the sex-glands is considered by them (at least so I have read) as a great support and feeder of the general energies. It has even been considered that sex-force has a great part to play in the production of poetry, art

etc. and in the action of genius generally. Finally, it is a doctor who has discovered that sex-fluid consists of two parts, one meant for sex-purposes, the other as a basis of general energy, and if the sex action is not indulged the first element tends to be turned into the second, (retas into ojas, as the Yogis had already discovered). Theories? So are the statements or inferences of the opposite side—one theory is as good as another. Anyhow I don't think that the atrophy of the sex-glands by abstinence can be supported by general experience. X's contention is however logical if we take not individual results but the course of evolution and suppose that this evolution will follow the line of the old one, for these useless organs are supposed to disappear or deteriorate. But will the supramental evolution follow the same course as the old one or develop new adaptations of its own making—that is the uncertain element.

MYSELF: Artists and poets? Isn't it said that they are as a class rather loose and lavish in their sex economy? If they indulge much in sex, how can their sex-force produce great things?

SRI AUROBINDO: You have not understood. I was answering the statement that scientists don't attach any value to sex-gland product and think it is only of use for an external purpose. Many scientists on the contrary consider it a base of productive energy; among other things it plays a part in artistic and poetic production. Not that artists and poets are anchorites and Brahmacharis but that they have a powerful sex-gland activity, part of which goes to creative and part to (effectual or ineffectual) procreative action. On the latest theory and Yoga theory, the procreative part would be retas, the creative part the basis of ojas. Now supposing the poet or artist to conserve his retas and turn it into ojas, the result would be an increased power of creative productivity.

MEDICINE AS A SCIENCE

4-1-1936

MYSELF: When a medicine is a specific, it is scientifically supposed to be active on one particular disease and therefore quite successful.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is not enough for a medicine to be a specific. Certain drugs have other effects or possible effects which can be ignored by the physician who only wants to cure his case, but cannot be in a whole-view of the system and its reactions. The unfavourable reactions of quinine are admitted by medical opinion itself and doctors in Europe have been long searching for a substitute for quinine.

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SRI AUROBINDO: Medicine is not exactly science. It is theory and experimental fumbling and luck.

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MYSELF: But our allopathic medicine is a science developed by painstaking labour—experiment, research, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: To a certain extent. The theory is imposing, but when it comes to application, there is too much fumbling and guess work for it to rank as an exact science. There are many scientists (and others) who grunt when they hear medicine called a science. Anatomy and physiology, of course, are sciences.

MYSELF: Dr. X, who is a homeopath, does not believe in allopathy. What do you think of his treatment?

SRI AUROBINDO: There are plenty of allopathic doctors who consider homeopathy, Nature-cure, Ayurveda and everything else that is not orthodox "medical science" to be quackery. Why should not homeopaths etc. return the compliment?

I don't know anything about X's homeopathic knowledge or capacities....But sometimes he seems to be remarkably effective. It is perhaps however due to a great power of suggestion or, if you like to call it so, induced auto-suggestion. But many doctors say it is more the confidence in the doctor and the medicine that cures then either the doctor himself or the medicine. All this is meant not to support X, but to throw some cold water on the "my" in "my science".

MYSELF: I must say, however, that I have learnt a few things from him—calmness, self-confidence, faith.

SRI AUROBINDO: Right—that is the thing every physician should have.

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SRI AUROBINDO: In fact, much of our knowledge originates in the same way. Thus, a certain medicine is found, because of favourable circumstances, to cure a number of people of a particular disease. Then it is announced that the medicine is an absolute remedy for that disease. But it is not true. If the same medicine is given to a hundred persons, it will affect them in a hundred different ways: sometimes the reactions are quite opposite. In no two cases will the result be similar. Therefore it is not the virtue of the medicine itself that effects the cure. It is a superstition to believe in the absolute efficacy of medicines.

But going farther we can say that there is very little difference between science and superstition! The only difference is in the manner of expressing oneself. If you take care to say like the scientists, "it seems it is like that, one might conclude that things appear like that" etc., etc., then it is no longer superstition. But if you assert pointblank, "It is like that", then you land in superstition.

CASES OF POISONING

I

25-2-1935

MYSELF: Our "poisoned" patient has, to our surprise, recovered. Our medical authority says that castor oil seeds are highly toxic and that 10 seeds are the extreme limit. This chap took more than three times 10 ! Is medical science mistaken or has your Force worked or is it the antidote or cow dung given by some villagers that did the miracle?

SRI AUROBINDO: Perhaps it was Force plus the cow dung that did it. You know the proverbial Cromwellian "Trust in God and keep the powder dry."—so "Open to the Force and keep your cow dung handy" would be the recipe for castor-oil-seed-eaters.

26-5-1935

MYSELF: It would be better if he stopped taking these seeds. Who knows if it may not produce cumulative poisoning later. I learn that he has already done some Hatha Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO: He must not stop suddenly, otherwise all the symptoms of poisoning are likely to come up. If he stops, it must be very gradually, decreasing little by little.

MYSELF: He started with 5-7 seeds a day. The number rapidly rose to 26-30 divided among three meals. It is amazing he had no bad symptoms except a slight oily sensation in the throat at first. Immunity? Tolerance by the system? Or another Khagananda in the Ashram?

SRI AUROBINDO: He must have immunised himself—a modern Mithridates! Of course the yogis do this kind of thing and it is perfectly possible. But I did not realise that V was one of the great ones. He has however in these matters the

faith and audacity that moves mountains. Also his intestines must be very leathery and tough.

Who is Khagananda? There was the public poison-nails snakes eater who died because once he forgot to do the antidotic *kriyā* after his poison meal. But that was, I think, another Ananda.

27-2-1935

MYSELF: I am sending you an account of Mithridates from "experts", but it idoes not illuminate for me your reference.

SRI AUROBINDO: The information of the experts is defective. Mithridates in order to guard himself against all possibility of poisoning immunised himself by training his sytem to take all poisons first by small then by increasing doses. He did it so well that when the Romans were after him in their genial manner and he had no choice but death at their hands or his own, he could not take recourse to poison and had to end himself by a vulgar perforation with steel—at least I think it was steel. He was not a Persian king, though he was of Indo-Persian extraction as his name shows. I believe he was king of Armenia or Bithynia or some such obsolete place in Asia Minor.

II

MYSELF: X, in a disturbed condition of mind, drank something injurious under the misapprehension that his ailment would be cured if he did so.

SRI AUROBINDO: If he did do it with such an idea, it is evidently a suggestion of the hostile force, or if you like to put it more psychologically, he was possessed by a mental fixation of an irrational undetermined character. It is of the same class as the ideas which get hold of people's minds and become "fixed ideas", only these are momentary. But even if he did it by mistake, it was a suggestion from a source that wanted to do him injury and took advantage of a momentary "absence of mind."

SRI AUROBINDO AND ILLNESS

I

26-3-1935

SRI AUROBINDO: It is long since I have had anything but slight fragments of illness e.g. sneezes, occasional twitches of rheumatism or neuralgia (but the last mostly now outside the body and does not penetrate—with the exception of the eye and the throat which are still vulnerable points). Ah yes, there is also prickly heat but that has diminished to almost nothing these last years. There is sometimes an attempt at headache, but it remains above the head, tries to get in and then recedes. Giddiness also the same. I don't just now remember anything else. These are the facts about "having no illness". As for the conclusion, well, you can make a medical one or a yogic one according to your state of knowledge.

II

SRI AUROBINDO: It may be "policeman's disease" as the French call it, "maladie de sergent de ville"; I have forgotten the technical name for it, but it is supposed to come from too much standing. I had it myself for something like a year, because of walking or standing all day—that was when I used to meditate while walking. The Fr. Medical Dictionary says there is no remedy but rest. I myself got rid of it by application of force without any rest or any other remedy. But M is not a policeman and she does not walk while she meditates—so how did she get it?

MEDICINES AND THE MOTHER'S BODY

1-2-1937

SRI AUROBINDO: Then why don't you understand? If medicines can't help, what's the use of putting foreign matter in the eye, merely because it is medicine? Medicines have quite a different action on the Mother's body than they would have on yours or X's or anybody else's and the reaction is not usually favourable. Her physical consciousness is not the same as that of ordinary people—though even in ordinary people it is not so identical in all cases as "science" would have us believe.

MEDICINES, PROGNOSTICATIONS, CONSOLING MEDICAL WORDS

1-2-1937

SRI AUROBINDO: Why do people make such prognostications? Suggestions of the kind ought never to be made, mentally even—they might act like suggestions and do more harm than any good medicines can do.

MYSELF: But I am surprised to hear that even prognostications are very harmful.

SRI AUROBINDO: Prognostications of such kind should not be lightly thought of or spoken especially in the case of the Mother —in other cases even if there is a possibility or probability they should be kept confidential from the person affected, unless it is necessary to inform. This is because of the large part played by state of consciousness and suggestion in illness. I shall I suppose one day send you the Presse Medicale with my note (the journal is with me and I shall send it to you, it is no longer with Pavitra) and that will perhaps show the basis.

I say—Dr. Hutchinson, President of the Royal Society of Medicine,—a Lord—says (vide "Sunday Times", page 4) that if all the doctors struck work for a year, it would make no difference in the death rate. The doctor's only use is to give comfort, confidence and consolation. Now what do you say to this opinion of your President? Rather hot, isn't it?

MYSELF: It is not only hot, but a little top-heavy it seems. If the doctor's function is only to give consolation, I fear many patients visiting us will leave, cursing us.

SRI AUROBINDO: It depends on the effectivity of your consoling words and confidence in giving drugs. Your words and cheery care may so boost X's morale that it will affect his piles and if it can't do altogether that, your medicines may give so much confidence to the piles that they will walk in and give up

the ghost. But it is all a confidence trick in reality. If the piles are crass and refuse confidence, well—

MYSELF: I proposed to one patient this consolation treatment; he agreed. Then I asked him, 'How is it then that your old malady has come back which was supposed to have been cured by the doctor?" He answered, "But one doctor may fail and, besides, there is the Force." "Ah, you now bring in the Force!" Well?

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, that's the point. How did X or how does anybody cure? By his medicines or by his "confidence" imparted to the subconscient of the patient?

The Force is another matter. Your President Hutchinson or Henderson (or what the deuce was his name?) wasn't thinking in terms of force.

MYSELF: Anyway, what is your opinion?

SRI AUROBINDO: My opinion is that Allah is great and great is the mystery of the universe and things are not what they seem, etc.

EXPERIMENT, EXPERIENCE, KNOWLEDGE, INTUITION, INSPIRATION

6-4-1937

SRI AUROBINDO: There is a vegetable called "bubble and squeak." That describes the two methods you propose. "Bubble" is to go on tossing symptoms about in the head and trying to discover what they point to—that is your method. "Squeak" is to dart[1] at a conclusion (supported by a quotation) and ram some inappropriate medicine down the patient's throat—that's X's method. But the proper method is neither to bubble nor to squeak.

Your logical brain box, sir, is such a rule-of-thumb Dr. Johnsonian sort of affair that it is quite impossible to satisfy. If ever you succeed in emptying the brain box of its miscellaneous contents and being mentally silent then you will discover how these things are done.

Well, so that's how the Mother's statements are understood! A free permit for anything and everything calling itself an intuition to go crashing into the field of action! Go at it, indeed! Poor it!

What the Mother says in the matter is what she said to Dr. Manilal with his entire agreement—viz. reading from symptoms by the doctors is usually mere balancing between possibilities (of course except in clear and simple cases) and the conclusion is a guess. It may be a right guess and then it will be all right or it may be a wrong guess and then all will be wrong unless Nature is too strong for the doctor and overcomes the consequences of his error—or at the least the treatment will be ineffective. On the contrary if one develops the diagnostic flair one can see at once what is the real thing among the possibilities and see what is to be done. That is what the most successful

[1] Uncertain reading (Nirodbaran).

doctors have, they have this flashlight which shows them the true point. M agreed and said that the cause of the guessing was that there were whole sets of symptoms which could belong to any one of several diseases and to decide is a most delicate and subtle business, no amount of book knowledge or reasoning will ensure a right decision. A special insight is needed [that] looks through the symptoms and not merely at them. This last sentence, by the way, is my own, not M's. About development of intuition afterwards—no time tonight.

10-4-1937

SRI AUROBINDO: I did not flare up. I was cold with horror.

Doctors don't mean it when they do that kind of thing. It is not deliberate murder with them, but involuntary or, shall we say, experimental homicide.

10-4-1937

MYSELF: Mother told me to practise the intuitive method, I thought.

SRI AUROBINDO: She said that you have to stop jumping about from guess to guess and develop the diagnostic insight—seeing what comes from the intuition and then looking at the case to see if it is right. But to take the first thing that comes and *act on it*, is guessing pure and simple. If after a time you find that your perceptions turn out to have been automatically right each time then you can be confident that you have got the thing.

Well, there are some who after killing a few hundreds, learn to kill only a few. But that is not intuition; that is simply learning from experience.

Of course, experience is of great importance but still it is not everything.

Excuse me, you can have intuitions without book knowledge or even experience.

Experience is necessary, book knowledge is useful for the man who wants to be a perfect doctor; observation and discrimination are also excellent provided they are correct observation and discrimination; but all these are only helps for the flair to move about supported by a perfect mental confidence in the flair.

How is the outer guidance to give intuition? It only by itself supplies a ready-made course of action which the person blindly follows.

MYSELF: Don't you develop our intuition by outer guidance in the form of corrections and changes in our English poems?

SRI AUROBINDO: 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 Amal I now-a-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.

MYSELF: If a man has outer knowledge and capacity, will he not receive your right Force?

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

28-4-1937

SRI AUROBINDO: 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?

MYSELF: The Force has military, poetic, healing capacity while the embodiment of the Force must have latent soldier, poet, medico—this sounds strange to me.

SRI AUROBINDO: Because you have the damnably false idea that nothing can be done in the world except by mental means

—that Force must necessarily be a mental Force and can't be anything else.

MYSELF: The strangest thing of all is that if the Divine wills it, He can Himself get the right knowledge and do without the instrument.

SRI AUROBINDO: Why the devil should He will like that in all cases?

3-10-1935

SRI AUROBINDO: Practise and learn, learn and practise. When you have had a few thousand intuitions you can get the knack—for there is a recognizable difference between the true ones and the imitations or half ones.

It depends on how it came, what was the stuff of the perception and the light in it and whether it bobbed up as one among potentials though dominant or seized you as an inevitable dead cert. Also whether it was a pure intuition or a mixed mental. Difficult, isn't it?

VACCINATION

14-4-1937

SRI AUROBINDO: Haven't denied partial effectivity though complete it is not, since it has to be renewed every year, as you say. The whole Pasteurian affair is to me antipathetic—it is a dark and dangerous principle however effective....

No time for showing the glorious science its errors. Too busy trying to get the Supramental Light down to waste time on that. Afterwards, sir, afterwards.

28-4-1937

Amrita was to have offered himself as a victim on the altar of vaccination, but he has been kindly bitten by the dog of the Privy Councillor, so although there is no hydrophobic danger, it is better for him to cure before being bitten by the vaccinator.

29-4-1937

You don't know the story of Pavitra and Khitish and the bother? Pavitra who had just come here with a rather French pronunciation of English said to K "I am a brother to you all" and Khitish cried out "Oh, no, no!" P insisted but K still cried out with pain and politeness in his voice "Oh, no, no!" It turned out K had heard all through "I am a bother to you all!" so brothers are bothers and bothers are constant brothers to us insisting on inhabiting the Ashram—or at least visiting it, like the vaccination.

VARIABLE CURE AND ABSOLUTE CURE

16-4-1938

The morphia stuns locally or otherwise the consciousness and its reaction to the subconscient pressure and so suspends the pain or deadens it. Even that it does not always do—Manilal took five morphia injections in succession without even diminishing his liver inflammation pains. What became of the power of the drug over the subconscient in that case? The resistance was too strong just as the resistance of N.P's subconscient to the Force.

In much the same way as Coué's suggestion system cured most of his patients, only by a physical instead of a mental means. The body consciousness responds to the suggestion of the medicine and one gets cured for the time being or it doesn't respond and there is no cure. How is it that the same medicine for the same illness succeeds with one man and not with another or succeeds at one time with a man and afterwards doesn't succeed at all? Absolute cure of an illness so that it cannot return again depends on clearing the mind, the vital and body consciousness of the psychological response to the Force bringing the illness. Sometimes this is done by a sort of order from above (when the consciousness is ready, but it cannot always be done like that). The complete immunity from all illness for which our Yoga tries can only come by a total and permanent enlightenment of the below from above resulting in the removal of the psychological roots of ill health—it can't be done otherwise.

CANCER CURE BY YOGA

11-10-1935

MYSELF: The Mother once said that there is hardly a disease that cannot be cured by Yoga. Can cancer be cured by it?

SRI AUROBINDO: Of course it can, but on condition of faith or openness or both. Even a mental suggestion can cure cancer —with luck of course, as is shown by the case of the woman operated on unsuccessfully for cancer, but the doctors lied and told her it had succeeded. Result, cancer symptoms all ceased and she died many years afterwards of another illness altogether.

HOMEOPATHY

I

23-12-1935—26-12-1935

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

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

MYSELF: When all doctors have failed, how does R proclaim that he *will* pull a man out? Self-confidence? Isn't it sometimes too risky to commit oneself like that, however strong one's confidence may be?

SRI AUROBINDO: Because he has confidence in himself like all who are able to do in any field big things....Why can't it? How dreadfully downright and sweeping you are in your demands! What ground had Mustapha Kemal for his strong and enormous confidence when he defied all Europe and all the probabilities and possibilities and undertook to save three-quarters dead Turkey?...What does that matter if it succeeds in some places? Napoleon's self-confidence and intuition tripped him up at Waterloo, but before that it had won him Marengo, Jena, Austerlitz.

MYSELF: Was there some extraordinary power behind R before he came here that was responsible for the marvellous results?

SRI AUROBINDO: Certainly. It was because the Mother saw a great force in him that she accepted him in the Ashram.

MYSELF: I hear he is a very good medium and is a tower of vital strength.

SRI AUROBINDO: Which means of course full of massive vital force which can be used by the Yoga-force for its purposes and being massive can produce striking results.

MYSELF: Is the strength then the real cause of his success?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why the flabbergasts not? What's the use of strength if it can't do things?

MYSELF: But I don't understand how a tower of strength can cure a man!

SRI AUROBINDO: You are very much behind the times. Do you not know that even many doctors now admit and write it publicly that medicines are an element but only one and that the psychological element counts as much and even more? I have heard that from doctors often and read it over reputable medical signatures. And among the psychological elements, they say, one of the most important is the doctor's optimism and self-confidence, (his faith, what? it is only another word for the same thing) and the confidence, hope, helpful mental atmosphere he can inspire in or around his patient. I have seen it stated categorically that a doctor who can do that is far more successful than one who knows Medicine better but cannot.... I did not mean that it cannot be done without medicines. But if it is to be done with the aid of medicines, then the right medicine is helpful, the wrong one obviously brings in a danger.... How does his knowledge prevent intuition? Even an allopathic doctor has often to intuit what medicine he should give or what mixture—and it is those who intuit best that succeed best. All is not done by sole rule of book or sole rule of thumb even in orthodox Science.

MYSELF: How can a patient, as good as lost, leap up, although he knew nothing of faith in yogic force?

SRI AUROBINDO: That often happens. It is even sometimes easier to deal with a man of that kind, provided he does not know what is being done—so that there is no room for doubt or mental resistance.

MYSELF: I am thrown out of joint at two miracles, Sir: (1) R's treatment or yours; (2) N's English poetry, though Madam Doubt still peeps from behind. Anyhow, no chance for me! Kismet, Sir! What to do?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why out of joint? It ought to strengthen your joints for the journey of Yoga. Not at all, sir. Mind, sir, mind. Madam Doubt, sir, Madam Doubt! Miss Material Intellectualism, sir! Aunt Despondency, sir! Uncle Self-distrust, sir! Cousin Self-depreciation, sir! The whole confounded family, sir!

MYSELF: In this resuscitation of G who you say was given up by the best doctors in Pondicherry, V, A and others, and who in spite of their dosing and injecting was near to his last gasp when V ran to R as a last chance, what I am puzzled about is the exact contribution of R's medicines.

SRI AUROBINDO: Exact? How can one measure exactly where vital, mental and spiritual factors come in? In dealing with a star and atom you may (though it appears you can't with an electron) but not with a man and his living mind, soul and body.

MYSELF: If R were an allopathic homeopath, with a difference only in treatment and not in pathology, I wouldn't doubt his explanations.

SRI AUROBINDO: What is an allopathic homeopath? Homeopathic principles are just the opposite of the allopathic. So why must the dealings be fundamentally the same with only a difference of drugs? In spite of what you say you have the solid belief that allopathy alone is true. I suppose allopathic homeopathy is something like a biped with four feet.

MYSELF: A symptomatic treatment can't be applied in cases where the same symptom is produced by two or three different diseases!

SRI AUROBINDO: 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....

MYSELF: Don't speak of your own cures, please; I can't fight you there!

SRI AUROBINDO: Why should I not speak of my cures when they are perfectly apposite and a proof that you can cure by symptomatic treatment?...You mean you don't want to give me the lie or say I am under a delusion?

MYSELF: How can a homeopath ask a high-blood-pressure man who has just risen from the grave to attend to his duties in the old way and give him the usual food?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why can't he, if he has some other means of combating the possible bad results? I have not heard that R asked G to resume his duties. He represents it as if he remained neutral and it was G's own choice with which he did not interfere. That may have been imprudent; but R is daring in everything and that *means* a stiff dose of imprudence. Besides he has his theories also which may or may not be right, but I can't say they are prima facie impossible if I can judge by the one he put forward for making S eat the full Ashram meals. If S's accounts of his condition are true, they seem to have been justified by a considerable amount of success.

MYSELF: If you say R is led by intuition I'll stop my argument. But then how did he ignore so important a factor as albumen in G's case?

SRI AUROBINDO: He has intuition but not always the right intuition to fit the case. It is a mental intuition he uses, and mental intuition is a mixed movement....I have answered all that already. I do not say R was right, but he did not act at random; he gave his reasons for rejecting the albumen which I am not medical enough to understand. I would have preferred if he had dealt with and had kept it under observation before letting him loose, but it is not my funeral. I do not expect G to live long and I don't think R expects it either. But in the case of S he has for the time being at least proved his case. He is by the

way dealing with G's kidneys today and admits it is a ticklish job; but the first effects he says were successful and he is waiting for the night to pass to see what will be the sequel. For the drug, he says, is highly potentised (that is American language), but may produce an upheaval. Well, there you are, that is the man. Right or wrong? God he knows. I put a force behind him and also await the results.

He had by the way hesitated to act at once on the kidneys because the body needed to be accustomed to renewed vigour (so far as I understand) before risking the *coup*. Contrary to allopathic pathology? May be. But it has some similarity to what I have seen in my experience of action by Yoga.

Certainly, if you are dejected, diffident, despairing, full of doubt you can't produce a favourable nidus in the atmosphere.

MYSELF: Self-confidence, I suppose, presupposes knowledge and experience. Kemal Pasha and Napoleon surely had the stratagems of war and current politics at their fingers' ends. Even so, had Napoleon been a little more self-confident, things might have had different results at Waterloo.

SRI AUROBINDO: What an absurd statement! Self-confidence is an inborn thing; it does *not* rest on knowledge and experience....Who says that? I never heard that Napoleon failed at Waterloo for want of self-confidence. I have always read that he failed because he was, owing to his recent malady, no longer so quick and self-confident in decision and so supple in mental resource as before. Please don't write history unless you have data for your novel version.

Please remember that R has studied homeopathy and he has knowledge of homeopathic medicines if not of allopathic pathology. He took a degree in America and the Mother tells me that many of his ideas of which we were so impatient and thought them his own inventions are the ideas of the American school of homeopathy which is more meticulous, intolerant, intransigeant, dead against allopathy, particular about the subtle properties of homeopathic drugs and their evanescence by wrong contacts (quite yogic that) than others....He was successful outside. While he was outside the Ashram, not yet accepted, he was

making remarkable cures and already getting a name. I had to stop him as soon as he became an accepted disciple, even before he came into the Ashram because his practice was illegal. But I had to refuse applications from the town for allowing him to treat patients because he had succeeded so remarkably with them that they wanted to continue. I was not concerning myself in the least with his cures and knew nothing at all about them.

And you say all that was luck because his ideas differ from yours? Are you not reasoning like Molière's doctors who declared that a patient's audacity in living contrary to the rules of Science was intolerable or like the British Medical Council which refused any validity to Sir Herbert Barker's cures because he was an osteopath and had no qualified medical knowledge?

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. If it is not so, why then did V come to R for help surprisingly when he and A had failed with all their capacity and experience? V has known and practised homeopathy to some extent. May we not infer that he knew there were cases in which homeopathy (not allopathic homeopathy but pure) might be successful?

It is not a question of drugs alone. The drug is only a support. If you had not intuition and self-confidence and the same thoroughgoing belief in your own action and the Yoga-force behind you you might have done some good but not had the same rapid effect. R believes in his medicines, but he does not believe that they are infallible in their effects or rely on them alone. He believes in the man behind them and the Force behind the man....They may all study pathology; but I don't think they all bind themselves to the same conclusions as the allopaths. If they did, they would not be able to have an entirely opposite system.

MYSELF: I don't deny that personality is a big factor though I don't know exactly whether hope, faith etc. operate physically more or bring some occult forces into the field.

SRI AUROBINDO: You have only to admit that the mind and vital can influence the body—then no difficulty is left. In this action of mind and vital on the body faith and hope have an immense importance. I do not at all mean that they are omnipotent or infallibly effective—that is not so. But they assist the action of any force that can be applied, even of an apparently purely material force, but the action may be purely material when it is a question of material objects. But in things that have life or mind or mind and life one cannot isolate the material operation like that. There is always a play of other forces mixed with it in the reception at least and for the most part in the inception and direction also.

MYSELF: If a homeopath went by symptoms only, he would perhaps cut off the leaf but I am afraid the roots would flourish as strongly as ever.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is what A told G that homeopathy only gives a transient palliation followed quickly by a worse catastrophe. After all, if it can raise up a man at the last gasp condemned by a rally of the whole allopathic faculty almost with the sentence "No more can be done" and send him walking about for a few more days of cheerful life, it is a rather big palliation. Moreover, in some cases I have watched I have seen R's drug produce not only a rapid, even an instantaneous improvement, but in the end what seems up to now a lasting one and this in cases of illnesses of ancient standing. However that does not cover K's case which looks more like a lung affair (Mother always was apprehensive that she might be a consumptive case) than a vicarious menstruation or monstrous vicaration one. R however says that it is his principle to make a diagnosis and never change it or say anything more about it but just go and prove his case by a cure!! What say you to that, sir? Confidence, if you like! However what bothers me about diagnosis is that if you put twenty doctors on a case they give twenty different diagnoses (in S's we had three doctors with three quite different theories of the illness) and such jokes as a doctor shouting "Appendix", opening up a man, finding illness neither of appendix nor volume nor chapter and cheerfully

stitching him are extremely common. So if a layman's respect for allopathic pathology and diagnosis is deficient sometimes and R's sneers at doctors' diagnoses find occasionally an echo, —well, it is not altogether without "rational" cause.

II

28-12-1935

MYSELF: While crushing my rigid mind, do you want to establish the long-neglected and much-maligned merits of homeopathy as beyond all dispute and harangue by allopaths?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not at all. I don't care a penny for homeopathy (or allopathy). I only wanted to poke some jokes at your allopathic mind.

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

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

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The Force needs an instrument and an instrumentation also sometimes. The instrument was R, 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 R 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 R'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 R's medicines act.

MYSELF: Now about diagnosis, about which you have joked, why take a muddle as an instance and ignore other cases? I should say that a mistaken diagnosis of the appendix, for example, is very rare.

SRI AUROBINDO: Good heavens! It happened in scores and scores of cases when there was the appendicitis mania among doctors in France—and they have other manias also.

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

SRI AUROBINDO: 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.

MYSELF: I think an allopath like M would be able to cure many people just as R has done—and also without some of R's mistakes.

SRI AUROBINDO: M has an admirable knowledge and masterful movement in his treatments, but Mother finds that he is an overdrugger. He pours drugs on his patients as some painters overload their canvas with colour. He almost killed himself in this way and we had all the trouble in the world to tone him down. He admitted it frankly, but since professional bias was too strong for him, when he fell ill, he could not help drugging and drugging.

MYSELF: In a case which we diagnosed from blood vomit etc. as T.B., R brought up the verdict: "Vicarious Menstruation"! Well, blood-vomit he may stop, with the Divine Force acting through him and his drugs—but what about the T.B. itself?

SRI AUROBINDO: R swears that ordinary doctors who have not had sufficient gynaecological experience can and do take V.M. for T.B....

Now if we look beyond pathology to what I may call psychopathology (non-allopathic, non-homeopathic), this hysteria is usually accompanied with some disorder of the genital parts; wrong menstruation is itself often due to sexual trouble. T.B. again is always (psychologically) due to a psychic depression—I use psychic in the ordinary, not the yogic sense. The psychic depression may arise from sex frustration of one kind or another or from some reaction of the sexual order. So if R is wrong in suspecting V.M., psychologically he may be right.—There may be, not vicarious menstruation, but its psychological equivalent, All that may no doubt be Greek (not medical Greek) to you, but I know what I mean—and so long as that is there, the cure of the T.B. by D.F.[1] is rather problematical. In X's case I saw at once that nothing could be done. That is why R got his chance. The allopaths could have cured the T.B., but it would have come back worse than before. However he is so disgusted with all the storm of opposition raised against him that he seems inclined to throw up the cases and even (other things ending) to leave the Ashram. If so all will be peace in Jerusalem, S will go back with his liver into orthodox hands, G fulfil his allopathic destiny and an interesting phase will be over.

Actually, apart from anti-allopathic jokes and speculations, I don't say anything. I am not in the habit of jumping at conclusions when there are many possibles without a complete certitude, but wait till knowledge comes. I do not believe that D.F. has done everything in all these cases and they would have been ameliorated equally well if anybody else had been there. I

[1] Divine Force

count R for a remarkable though too resonant instrument.[1] I see there is something in his treatment and medical ideas which is out of the ordinary and cannot be gauged by traditional standards. I am trying to see what it is. Is it that he has an intuition into psycho-physical forces and throws his drugs at them in a successful way, partly intuitional, partly experimental, while his physical renderings of them (attempts at diagnosis) are mere façade or error—except when they happen to be right? It may be, but that sounds too easy and plausible an explanation to be true.

You may say what you like about the homeopathic theories, but I have seen R work them out detail by detail in cases where he had free and unhampered action and the confidence of the patients and their strict obedience and have seen the results correspond to his statements and his predictions based on them fulfilled not only to the very letter but according to the exact times fixed, not according to R's reports but according to the long detailed and precise reports of the allopathic doctor in attendance. After that I refuse to believe, even if all the allopaths shout in unison, that homeopathic theory or R's interpretation and application of it are mere rubbish and nonsense. As to mistakes all doctors make mistakes and very bad ones and kill as well as cure.... One theory is as good as another and as bad according to the application made of it in any particular case. But it is something else behind that decides the issue.

To bring out the latent illness and counteract it is a recognised principle in homeopathy and is a principle in Nature itself....Neither R nor V are infallible. So often I have seen diagnosis made on all the symptoms which turned out to be the wrong one. It is like a condemnation on circumstantial evidence.

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[1] 20-3-37

MYSELF: Have you asked R his opinion of the trouble with the new patient?

SRI AUROBINDO: Haven't asked him. Afraid of a resonant explanation which would leave me gabrified and flabbergasted but no wiser than before.

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.

MEDICAL NOTES

17-10-1936

MYSELF: Well, Sir, you have made people believe that medicines and doctors are no good and at the same time could not infuse into them sufficient faith in you. Result—they have fallen between two stools!

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, T and S used both to get cured without need of medicines once on a time. The later development has evidently come for your advantage so that you may have elementary exercises in *samatā*. I have had a lot of schooling in that way and graduated M.A. Your turn now.

If you had treated them in the pre-ashram period, do you think their comments if not at once cured would have been more filled with a holy awe and submission to the doctors?

Exactly—for these are poor little uneducated people. But are the big brains at bottom less unreasonable and insistent? All alike, sir, in one way or another. Man is a reasoning animal no doubt, but not a reasonable one.

18-10-1936

SRI AUROBINDO: A descent cannot possibly produce nausea and vomiting etc. There can, if one pulls down too much force, be produced a headache or giddiness; both of these go if one keeps quiet a little, ceases pulling and assimilates. A descent cannot produce blood pressure, madness or apoplexy or heart failure or any other illness.

Illness does not rise up by the descent of the Force; nor hereditary taint nor madness. They come up of themselves, as in X's case who never had even the smallest grain of a descent or a Force anywhere. It is only after he went off his centre that we are putting Force (not as a descent, but as an agent) to keep him as straight and as sound as possible.

MYSELF: In the case of an illness, how do you then 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?

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

MYSELF: I thought that it is not possible to have spiritual experiences, especially major ones, without your previously having knowledge about it.

SRI AUROBINDO: 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. All that Mother previsèd was that there was something not right in Y, one part of him at odds with his aspiration. That might lead to trouble. That is why *entre nous* I want him to find out what part of him did not want the descent.

What I gather from Y's letter is that he felt great intensity of descent (much greater than he had before) and got into a panic (because of the indescribable sensation) and thought he might be going mad like Z (Z's madness was not the result of a descent), so nervous that he upset his stomach and possibly his circulation also. That is the only possible explanation if it is not an attack of illness over which it is for the doctors to pronounce, not me.

There are sensations that are due to descent and not troublesome or dangerous at all, there are others that are physical. But the description is necessary in order to distinguish.

The difficulty is that he has got the fear and the association in his mind of the descent with the disturbance.

MYSELF: You wrote to X: "before there can be a resumption of the sadhana." What exactly did you mean in connection with his trouble?

SRI AUROBINDO: I meant by sadhana the positive side (descent etc.). What I indicated was that there was a part of the being which was afraid of the descent, didn't want it and by its fear got this trouble. This must be found out and put right before calling any descent again.

MYSELF: He complained of nausea.

SRI AUROBINDO: Well, that's a physical ailment, not a yogic phenomenon.

MYSELF: Cannot the illness be due to the action of a dark force?

SRI AUROBINDO: Not through the descent, but through the fear a dark Force might strike in. That is what it is trying with many people.

MYSELF: Seeing some of these "upsets" I feel pulled down. I ask myself: "Well, my friend, whither, whither are you going? What awaits you?"

SRI AUROBINDO: Perhaps the Paratpara Purusha beyond even the Purushottama....But why this pulled downness? You are not pulling down Purushottama or any other gentlemen from the upper storey, are you? It is strain and want of rest, I suppose. Sleep, sleep! Read Mark Twain or write humorous stories. Then you will be quite chirpy and even M won't feel heavy to you.

19-7-1937

MYSELF: I dreamt that the Mother is building a very big hospital. Dream of a millennium in advance?

SRI AUROBINDO: It would be more of a millennium if there were no need of a hospital at all and the doctors turned their injective prodding instruments into fountain pens—provided of course they did not make misuse of the pens also....

MYSELF: Why furious about injective instruments, sir? They are supposed to be very effective.

SRI AUROBINDO: That does not make an increase of hospitals, illnesses and injections the ideal of a millennium....

MYSELF: But why the deuce are those instruments to be replaced by fountain pens?

SRI AUROBINDO: I was simply adopting the saying of Isaiah the prophet, "the swords will be turned into ploughshares," but the doctor's instrument is not big enough for a ploughshare, so I substituted fountain pen.

14-3-1937

MYSELF: I find that as a result of your Force A had one vomiting only.

SRI AUROBINDO: Evidently my Force is growing just as my handwriting is improving.

30-3-1937

SRI AUROBINDO: Miracles can be done, but there is no reason why they should be all instantaneous, whether from Gods or doctors.

4-4-1937

SRI AUROBINDO: It is no use discussing these matters. The Mother's views are too far removed from the traditional nostrums to be understood by a medical mind, except those that have got out of the traditional groove or those who after long experience have seen things and can become devastatingly frank about the limitations of their own "science".

Ideas differ. Both the Mother and Pavitra were horrified at the idea of a child of four months being given a purgative. The leading Children's Doctor in France told the Mother no child under 12 months should be given a purgative, as it is likely to do great harm and may be dangerous. But here we understand it is the practice to dose children freely with purgatives from their day of birth almost. Perhaps that and over-administration of medicines is the cause of excessive infant mortality.

9-4-1937

All "science" does not recommend castor oil for children—I think it is a nineteenth century fad which has prolonged itself.

The Mother's "children's doctor" told her it should not be done —also in her own case when a child the doctors peremptorily stopped it on the ground that it spoiled the stomach and liver. I suppose you will say doctors disagree? They do! When K's child reached Madras, the first doctor said "Stop mother's milk for three days", the second said "Mother's milk to be taken at once, at once!" So, sir. Anyhow for D Mother proposes diet first—small bananas Pavitra will give, very good for constipation, papaiya if available in the garden. Also as he is pimply, cocoanut water on an empty stomach. Afterwards we can see if medicine is necessary.