SRI AUROBINDO ON "SAVITRI"

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(Continued)

I have said that Overhead poetry is not necessarily greater or more perfect than any other kind of poetry. But perhaps a subtle qualification may be made to this statement. It is true that each kind of poetical writing can reach a highest or perfect perfection in its own line and in its own quality and what can be more perfect or what can be a perfect perfection or what is the kind that one kind of absolute perfection is greater than another kind? What can be more absolute than the absolute? But then what do we mean by the perfection of poetry? There is the perfection of the language and there is the perfection of the word music and the rhythm, beauty of speech or the beauty of sound, and there is also the quality of the thing said which counts for something. If we consider only word and sound and what in themselves they evoke, we arrive at the application of the theory of art for art’s sake to poetry, or that ground we might say that a great deal of contemporary is as good poetry and as perfect poetry as anything in Aeschylus or Sophocles or Homer. The question of the elevation or depth or intrinsic beauty of the thing said cannot then enter into our consideration of poetry; and yet it does enter, with most of us at any rate, and is part of the aesthetic reaction even in the most “aesthetic” of critics and readers. From this point of view the elevation from which the inspiration comes may after all matter, provided the one who receives it fit and powerful instruments; for a great deal of art will move with a lower level of the origins of inspiration than a smaller poet can ever do even from the highest sources. In a certain sense all genius comes from Overhead; for genius is the entry or mark of a greater consciousness into the mind or a possession of the mind by a greater power. Every operation of genius has at its back or infused within it an intuition, a revelation, an inspiration, an illumination or at least a hint or touch or infusion from some greater power or level of conscious being than those which men ordinarily possess in this world. But this power has two ways of acting: in one it touches the ordinary modes of mind and deepens, heightens, intensifies or exquisitely refines their action but without: changing its modes or transforming its normal character; in the other it brings down these normal modes something of itself, something supernormal, something which one at once feels to be extraordinary and suggestive of a superhuman level. These two ways of action when working in poetry may produce things equally exquisitely and beautiful, but the word “greater” may perhaps be applied, with the necessary qualifications, to the second way and its too rare poetic creation.

The greater bulk of the highest poetry belongs to the first of these two orders. In the second order there are again two or perhaps three levels: sometimes a felicitous turn or an unusual force of language or a deeper note of feeling brings in the Overhead touch. More often it is the power of the rhythm that lifts up language that is simple and common or a feeling or the thought that has often been expressed and awakens something which is not ordinarily there. If one listens with the mind only or from the vital centre only one may have a wondrous admiration for the skill and beauty of woven word and sound or be struck by the happy way or the power with which the feeling or idea is expressed. But there is something more in it than that; it is this that a deeper, more inward strand of the consciousness has seen and is speaking, and if we listen more profoundly we can get something more than the admiration and the delight of the observer. We can feel perhaps the Spirit of the universe lending its own depth to our mortal speech or listening from behind to some expression itself, listening perhaps to its memories of Old unhappy fervor things and battles long ago or feeling and hearing, it may be said, the vast oceanic stillness and the cry of the cuckoo.

Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides
or it may enter again into Vyasa’s
A void and dreadful forest raining with the crickets’ cry
Venem pretihisayam smaham jhikjikagamanditam
or remember its call to the soul of man,
Asutym anabham lokam imem prapya bhajanam mnam
Thou who hast come to this transient and unhappy world,
love and worship Me.

There is a second level on which the poetry comes into itself a fuller language of intuitive inspiration or the higher thinking and feeling. A very rich or great poetry may then emerge and many of the most powerful passages in Shakespeare, Virgil or Lucretius or the Mahabharata and Ramayana, not to speak of the Gita, the Upanishads or the Rig Veda have this inspiration. It is in a poetry “dark inlaid with patines of bright gold” or welling up in a stream of passion, beauty and force. But sometimes there comes down a supreme voice, the Overmind voice and the Overmind music and it is to be observed that the lines and passages where that happens rank among the greatest and most admired in all poetic literature. It would be therefore too much to say that the Overhead inspiration cannot bring in a greatness into poetry which could surpass the other levels of inspiration, greater even from the purely aesthetic point of view and certainly greater in the power of its substance.

A conscious attempt to write overhead poetry with a mind aware of the planes from which this inspiration comes and seeking always to ascend to those levels or bring down something from them, would probably result in a partial success; at its lowest it might attain to what I have called the first order, ordinarily it would achieve the two lower levels of the second order and every supreme moments it might be as comes in and sustained passages achieve the supreme level, something of the highest summit of its potency. But its greatest work will be to express adequately and constantly what is now only occasionally and inadequately some kind of utterance of the things above, the things beyond, the things behind the apparent world and its external or superficial happenings and phenomena. It would not only bring in the occult in its larger and deeper ranges but the truths of the spiritual heights, the spiritual depths, the spiritual intimacies and vastnesses as also the truths of the inner mind, the inner life, an inner or subtle physical beauty and reality. It would bring in the concreteness, the authentic image, the inner seal of identity and the heart of meaning of these things, so that it could never lack in beauty. If this could be achieved by one possessed, if not of a supreme, still of a sufficiently high and wide poetic genius, something new could be added to the domain of poetry and there would be no danger of the power of poetry beginning to fade, to fall into decadence, to fail us. It might even enter into the domain of the infinite and inexhaustible, catch some word of the Ineffable, show us revealing images which bring us near to the Reality that is secret in us and in all of which the Upanishad speaks, Anand alam manaso jivavi rauhtam devsrupa parvam sarvat...

Tel cjsiti tan uskiat tad darke tad u antile.
The One unseeing is swifter than thought, the gods cannot overtake it, for it travels ever in front; it moves and it moves not, it is far away from us and it is very close.

The gods of the Overhead planes can do much to bridge that distance and to bring out that closeness, even if they cannot altogether overtake the Reality that exceeds and transcends them.

Concluded

(1946)
Ancient Indian writers spoke of their country as a land abounding in all things that could be on earth, created by nature and man. And this they said simply to express their feeling inspired by the stupendous size of their motherland, her immense natural wealth, her diverse physical features, and the achievements of her creative genius. And what above all, by the concept of the Mother in which India is hailed by her children as their beloved object of adoration, as an embodiment of a benevolent power of God sustaining her own millions and the world’s by her insatiable resources, her material and spiritual progress and achievements in herself everything that can beautify and enrich the body and soul of the earth. Travellers and pilgrims from other lands have marvelled at the vastness and variety of her form, the uniqueness and profundity of her wisdom.

Moreover, there is the other reason why through the ages India has been held to be the sacred land in the future of all humanity. In the very dawn of her history came to her seers the vision that India was a Truth-idea of exceptional significance. It is this vision which has been ever at work as the basic motivating force behind everything the race has done to express its soul through the manifold activities of its creative life.

‘One of the oldest races and greatest civilisations on this earth,’ in the words of St. Aurobindo, ‘the most indomitable in vitality, the most fecund in greatness, the deepest in life, the most wonderful in potentiality,’ India is equally supreme in her epic quest for those eternal values whose discovery and devoted pursuit by her millions have given her the right to their own mind and constitute India’s outstanding contribution to the spiritual advancement of the human race. From this inward tendency of their mind Indians have derived much of their strength and genius as a race. Here is a country which founds its art only when its history began. Here is a people wise even in those days strung by the light of its country’s soul to illumine every form of its creation, every phase of its individual and collective life. It is this inwardness of India’s evolution which is the true meaning of her history, the meaning also of her aims and ideals, it is the true meaning of the story of the man-as-side of her racial life as also the true meaning of her varied physical configuration, since these are visioned by her seers as the many facets of the One, diverse manifestations of the basic integrity of her soul, which expressing itself in her life, culture, and even in her physical form, has shaped and sustained the historical development of India. Integrity thrives best on diversity which is Nature’s way of progress.

Mystic Himalaya

The face of India reflects the lavishness and abandon with which Nature has showered her bounties upon her,—a fact not without its bearing on the evolution of India’s history and culture. Her geographical divisions have each its own story to tell. And what a romance there is about one of them! She has on her north the heaven-kissing Himalayas with ranges extending over a length of 1600 miles and an average width of 100 miles, a system of mountains so tremendous that one may be made of two million cubes! The main rugged region on the earth’s surface, it has a large number of heights at least forty of which exceed 24000 feet, the topmost in the world—Mount Everest, 29362 feet high. An outstanding characteristic of India’s geography, this mountain continent stands in all its majesty splendour as her eternal sentinel, a silent and solemn witness to the chequered march of her history, a formidable natural barrier to any large-scale aggression from outside, though there are passes in it, not easy enough but nonetheless connecting the joint to its neighbours on the north-east and west. It is through these narrow defiles that foreign incursions from the Greeks to the Mongols disturbed the tranquillity of India quite a number of times. May these defiles intended by Nature to keep the country ever on the alert or to rouse it to activity when it lapsed into lethargy or, what was but too natural, got absorbed in spiritual contemplation, and neglected the secular obligations of life. A standing temptation to plunder and conquer, these passes made possible India’s commercial and cultural intercourse with countries beyond her borders: and side by side with her outer modalties, travelled her ideas from early times to various parts of Europe and Asia. These defiles therefore are sacred to the memory of those cultural ambassadors of India who hazard the perilous journey across the rugged mountains in order to carry the torch of the sacred mission to far-off distant lands; sacred alike to the memory of the devout pilgrims who, with a love that cheerfully underwent similar hardships to be able to visit the holy places in India, fly to her wise mind’s support in the invaluable knowledge, of which they were then the sole custodians.

From time immemorial the Himalayas has been the abode of those seekers who, when the call comes, toke off all worldly attractions and go into its secluded retreats in order to contemplate as the One, the Infinite and the Eternal. The mystic calm that pervades its atmosphere and dominates its peaks, valleys, woods and caverns has always its subtle touch on the soul of man in quest of the Supreme. Indians feel that the insides of the whole body, the mind’s body, the world’s body, of which the Himalaya is held by our people shows how deeply it has stamped itself on their consciousness. For its snowy expanses, vast lakes, lofty peaks, and numerous beauty spots that capture the imagination, the Himalayas is pictured in Sanskrit literature, as the holy abode, the home of gods and goddesses. According to the Vaisnava Puranas, Brahma, the creator, has in this region his throne which is shaped like the seed-vessel of a lotus. There is another legend to which the Himalaya is regarded as a god whose daughter Parvati practiced severe penances in order to be accepted by Shiva as his spouse. The story describes how her wish was fulfilled. A solemn spectacle of Nature in deep meditation—this is the Himalaya, even to the outer eye. In occult knowledge, it stands for the ascending hill of existence on the peak of which one can meet the Divine. The Rig Veda assigns to the peaks of the Himalaya—the birthplace of the sage, the King of the gods of mind, who symbolises the spiritual mind in its upward quest that starts growing towards the Divine from this peak where it has had its first contact with Him. It is significant that the Rig Veda regards the same peak as the source of Soma, the symbol of divine bliss, attainable by man when he has risen to a higher level of consciousness.

The Himalaya is indeed a great force in the growth of India’s spirituality and culture, and from this lofty home of countless seers, saints and seekers have flowed thought-currents of Truth, vision and experience, carrying with them into the atmosphere below something of the fire and serenity of their inner yearning, enriching and enlivening the vast field of spiritual culture that India has been from end to end.

Even in the farthest corners of south India, the Hindus regard the Himalaya as a devotee views the temple of his deity. The Himalaya is the meeting-ground of all the monastic orders of India. To its far-sailed but not easily accessible holy places flock, from all parts of India, devotees in thousands, not to present their wants and ask for the help of that holy land. The Himalaya and its peaks are for man an irresistible lure of the unknown; its heights with their majestic calm and mystic solitudes are as much a call to the religious spirit in man as its peaks, the yet unconquered Gauri Shingves (Everest), in particular, are a challenge to his spirit of daring and adventure. This abode of snows—that is the literal sense of Himalaya’s name—is no less a romance to the anthropologists many of whom have, on the basis of positive proofs, declared it as the cradle of man where he evolved into his ‘modern’ form,—a fact whose bearing on India’s history is equally important.

The Himalaya has always been a perennial source of inspiration to the artists of India. The styles of India’s architecture, particularly of the sacred type, the symbolic modes of her sculptural figurative, have, many of them, derived from the ideas in which this king of mountains is visualised. Mon-KEYIES, in particular, have contributed towards the visualisation of the Himalaya in India. In one of his Himalayan studies, Nandalal Bose presents a snow-covered peak of the Himalaya as a profile of a face which is of Shiva absorbed in meditation. Here the greatest artist of modern India pours out his heart’s devotion in a worshipful vision of Girija, the Lord of mountains, which is the title of the picture. A critic characterised this picture as the soul of the Himalaya.

Into some of his typical sketches of the Himalaya Pramodkumar Chattopadhyaya throws a suggestion of the mystic calm that lends a solemnity to its secluded regions. Something of the peace felt in the Himalaya is caught in his fine pictures by Nicholas Roerich, the famous Russian artist and explorer, who lived in the Himalaya and had wonderful experiences. In the description of describing them, he has also spoken of the strange phenomena of light which he sometimes witnessed and for which otherwise he called the Himalaya an ‘abode of light’, a fitting culmination, without doubt, of his consci- nousness which read in the Himalaya ‘the symbol of ascet’. No less impressive is India’s Mount Kailas, the holy mountain. There are few poets of classical India who were not moved by its unique grandeur, or by its various influences. Kalidas, the greatest of them, struck by its stupendous size, called it ‘earth’s measuring rod’. To another poet it is Eternal Himalaya which rises, the uprooted being, as it were, into the mysteries of heaven. The wonder, beauty and mystery of that mountain, with which he has endowed their exquisite expression in the poetry of modern India’s greatest poet in Benaras, Tagore. Thus down this wonderful mountain figure in the historic cultural development of India.

The climate of the country also is very considerably determined by the position and shape of the Himalayas. It is far from the cold northern winds, rendering it warmer and more tropical than might otherwise have been. The valuable forest and water-power resources of the Himalaya have much to do with India’s material prosperity. The towering pines that cover wide stretches of its regions supply a valuable
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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIA

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variety of wood whose by-products are equally important. And the waters that take their rise in its carry its rich elements to fertilize the plains turning them into a source of the proverbial wealth of the country. It is one of the main sources of the Sindhu (Indus), that has given India her modern name—India, Hindustan or Hind.

In the western portion of the Himalayan range, there rise close to each other two principal rivers, the Sindhu and the Brahmaputra, the former with its tributaries turning southward through the Punjab, and the latter bounding the southern limits of the range at the north-eastern angle, and entering the provinces of Assam and Bengal. The system of the Sindhu along with the region watered by it is important for what it has contributed to the growth of India both historically and materially. Its frequent mention in the Rig Veda, the oldest scripture of the spiritual literature of India and the Vedas, and its association with the religious and cultural movements of the early Aryas are proof enough of its bearing on the progress and expansion of ancient India. Recent excavations have brought to light relics of several well-built cities more than five thousand years old, provided with the modern amenities. They show what a high degree of culture the Indians attained in those early days whose complete history has yet to be written. The valley of the Sindhu and its adjoining regions have, it is believed, considerably changed in their climate from time to time when these cities flourished. They were not even now rich enough in their productivity of wheat which is their principal crop and one of the best varieties in the whole world. The Brahmaputra, though quite as rich, has not developed to the same appreciable extent. The river is rather abrupt in its course and there is an often waste marshy belt on its either side, but the near-by flat-land is very fertile, and farther away are the gentle slopes of the hills where rice and jute grow in plenty. The rainfall on the other hand, is not as much as 500 inches per year. Ancient Sanskrit literature mentions Pragjyotish—

the old name of Assam as a Powerful river, a powerful goddess, a region, the centre of arts, movements and events that led to racial and cultural intermingling of no small importance to Indian history. Famous all the world over, its silt is its most important cottage industry.

Creative Plains Of Plenty

But Assam and the Punjab are two extremities of the Sindhu-Ganga plain. Its flatness about 2000 miles long and 300 miles broad, gradually narrowing down to 90 miles in its eastern extremity. The whole plain is watered by the river-systems of the Sindhu, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. The Sindhu and the Brahmaputra run such a course of about 1700 miles, of the Ganga a little over 1500. The principal geological factor responsible for the wonderful flatness of this plain is that it had once been a sea-bed and when large-scale upheavals had pushed back the sea, there remained the basins of the great rivers which were silted up by the alluvium brought down during thousands of years.

These basins gradually forced into their present shape and became one of the most fertile regions of the east. A large belief of its in abundance man needs for his food and clothing. And the surplus constitutes India's foreign trade—another source of her fabulous wealth in the past. This precious trade was more enviable in the lower regions of the east, where besides the rivers which watered the plain, the third rainfall is the source of the rice and jute grow in plenty. But the rainfall begins to decrease as we go westward till it becomes as scanty as not even three years a inch in the upper Sind, affecting, as a consequence, the climate which from a tolerably mild one in the east changes to the extreme heat and cold in the northwest, and to desert dryness in the west. The desert of Rajputana, through part of the sea-bed which formed the Sindhu-Ganga plain, remained arid and barren, no freshwater stream flowing through it. Yet, in later days it became the habitation of a sturdy warlike people who had a large share in the development of India's history.

Thus is set by Nature the stage on which has been enacted a great part of the drama of India's history. It is a tract which has a romance of its own, a romance that exists, for a purpose which is as elusive as some scene of human activity is unrolled in the unbridled prairies of Texas. These activities, the great endeavours of the people inhabiting this plain, the results, the blending, colour and variety to their existence and help them to grow towards the fulfillment of their destiny soonation in a future even greater than their glorious past. For, this is the India which-elements under living Nature in whatever man has done in history. In India she made the first step towards a life of peace and contentment that there might grow here a nature and culture with sufficient vitality to apply itself with vigour and intensity to the attainment of the goals of the development of their many-sided potentialities. And we know how this interconnection is fulfilled by that a large part of the Indian civilisation is the creation of people not only for its own sake but also for the benefit of this region, the rivers which are also the mothers of much of India's material activity. Men of this region have always lived a life of opulence and plenty. And from their continued creative efforts through the ages have resulted a rich output of cultural achievements that have enriched human progress generally.

Here arose empires, kingdoms and republics administered by wise and benevolent rulers who built their states into ideal organisations of service of the people for their all-round advancement. Here were those centuries of learning where pure knowledge which culminated in a devoted quest for the supreme values of life in the Spirit. This is the land hallowed by the lives and teachings of those Incarnations of God, of God-men and God-lovers, of saints and sages, who gave away without stint the priceless treasures of heaven they brought down for the spiritual uplift of mankind. Here lived seers who have revealed their vision of the Truth in the greatest and oldest mystical poetry of the world; here were the creative artists who have captured the eternal lustre on India's literature, thinkers and philosophers who founded fundamental precepts which have ever remained master-creations of the Indian mind; makers of law who formulated religious and social systems which for millenniums have been governing the life of the Indian people; political philosophers who have blended the best of traditions and modernity and built a perfect state of corporate life. And what these masters produced are those monumental works in Sanskrit and its many derivates—indispensably the largest imaginative literature for a single country in the world. They are an everlasting tribute to the amazing creative genius of those masters, the stream of whose activities flowed freely over a long stretch of more than four thousand years. And does not every work of theirs testify to their robust spirituality and virile mind?

Here, in plain stand even to this day the capital cities of ancient India, in the Province of Assam. Along with towns and cities on the banks of the Sindhu and the Ganga and their tributaries, trace their origin far back to a hoary past, cities which may not now retain their pristine grandeur, but which still bear unmistakable signs and suggestions of their magnificent past. Here, the Ganges moves east, west or south, here, come across uncounted ruins and antiquities—only a very small part of what would have been there, had proper excavations been done in all the sites—temples and monasteries, statues and pillars, sculptures and paintings—all reminiscent of the unbelief, artistry and stupendous artistic efforts of the people inspired by the religious fervour of their soul. Here have met and mingled races, clans and tribes and an ocean—some of humaninity to make up the homogeneous web of a common nation which India is today. Here has taken place the grand synthesis of ideas and cultures by the rivers of the Ganges and the Sindhu. India is a country of foreigners who ruled over her political destiny for more than six hundred years; yet, this decline in her collective life did not appreciably affect her creative genius which has ever gone on expressing itself in new forms and we find it today perhaps no less active than in her grandeur of old.

The Sindhu-Ganga plain is the most populous region of India. In ancient inscriptions and literature parts of it are called by various names of which Brahmaputra, Aryavarta and Uttarapatha are more prominent. Each of these significant names has a history behind it. The first is derived from the name of one of the sacred rivers, the second refers to the base of the Aryas who made it the base of their operations in their campaigns to bring the whole of northern India under the unifying discipline of Aryan thought and culture which, spread over the northern path of the Aryas. In fact, all the three and a few others indicate the regions which, in the past, had the political dominance over the northern plains of India. 

The Ganges plain is the natural nursery of Indian history. Where in the whole world is there such a vast area of 200,000 sq. miles, so rich and so culturally creative almost in every part of it, and maintaining that creativity for so many thousands of years?

The most important river in this plain is the Ganga which figures so prominently in the religious consciousness of Hindu India. The Imperial Gazetteer of India has some very weighty words to say about this holy river. No river on the surface of the globe can compare with the Ganga in sanctity. And there is not a river in the world which has influenced humanity or contributed to the growth of material civilisation or of social ethics to such an extent as its Ganga. The wealth of India has accumulated in its valley; and profound ideas of spiritual philosophy, conceived on its shady banks, have winged their way far and wide for the guidance of the world. It may be mentioned that for its aspic peers the water of the Ganges has been used for a long time for drinking purposes as well as for religious ceremonies in places far away from the Ganges river itself. Other medicinal qualities are also attributed to this water. These are among the reasons why the Hindus look upon the Ganga with so much veneration. Legend has it that the Ganges, according to the scientific theories of knowledge, flows away from heaven to earth, according to a symbolic interpretation, it was brought down for purification by the flowing stream. Knowledge for the liberation of man from his impure life in ignorance. And also many other rivers of India are associated with the myths and legends of the regions in which they are regarded as gods and goddesses, maybe because of the immense benefit they confer on man. If Egypt is the gift of the Nile, North India is the gift of the Ganga.

To be continued
I am an American author and journalist. I was born in a suburb of New York. My father was a German who had made a business success in England and came to this country in middle life to start a home and carry on his business in the eastern part of the United States. My mother was born in New York City. I had a private school education. After I graduated from college in the state of Massachusetts, I graduated, the First World War came on, and I enlisted and was sent over to France and the front.

After the Armistice in 1918, I went on with the Army of Occupation into Germany and spent almost a year in the vicinity of Coblenz. I suppose it was this experience of war and its aftermath that made me, like so many others, start to think about the world in which we live and the people in it. For I remember that the Treaty of Versailles, when it was published and read to the people, was not good news. It was announced that it was a huge short cut of diplomacy. It was, I thought, a cynical document. It had too much to do with the old ways and instruments of revenge diplomacy and too little to do with the Fourteen Points of President Wilson. If there was a time to do the world some good, it was then. It made me think of what I wanted to become; what I wanted to do with my life that had been given every comfort and advantage hitherto. It seemed to me that the only thing that was really seen, the slaughter, the bloodshed, the ruin, was simply a colossal example of that kind of human misunderstanding that went on everywhere in the world, from small things to great. War was simply a huge outburst of all the added sums of everyday frustration, misunderstanding and intolerance. Men simply did not understand that they all shared a common fate—a fate composed from birth to death of happiness, unhappiness, joy and misery, success and failure. They did not understand—although all their great religions had taught them—that a man in any part of the world was the common denominator of mankind everywhere. They did not realize that their surface difference, in race, colour, nationality and creed, was not a cause for quarrelling, but simply an added factor in the pleasures of deep understanding.

Once you were practical business-like people in the world to build the railroads, lay down the laws of economics, run the ships and planes, chart the routes of commerce. But again, I thought, coming back to my own case, that it would be quite bad if there were nothing else, if there were no teachers, painters, thinkers, musicians, writers, to balance the hands busy at other tasks. For if it was practical to build and get and earn, still one of the most deeply practical and abiding truths that had ever been uttered was that men do not live by bread alone. All this sort of thinking did not seem to me an enormous challenge, for if a person sets himself to discover truth and write about his discoveries, he certainly needs to be very humble about his ability and his strength. But one could certainly take courage from the fact that others had done it and I could take courage that they were published, and that some found a quiet place for themselves.

And there were enough failures to teach me that if the old saying is true, the cleverest and most trusted peak of dirt in a lifetime—shrewdly saying, almost certainly, doubly true of anyone, a writer, an architect, a painter, a writer, how ever wise, to do something of permanent value. He must learn, sooner or later, to swallow an extra peck of dirt and grow on it. Now this is just as true for me all his simple reminiscences—but because it is true of all writers, painters, musicians, here in America, as elsewhere in the world. Our paths here in America are not paved with gold and glory. We are the only country in the world that has a popular university for writers. We are the only country in the world that has a popular university for writers who want to understand an art. Our readers are as many as the average for the world. Our writers are as many as the average for the world.

As a matter of fact not all American writers of solid talent who go to Hollywood are swallowed alive. I would name Dudley Nichols, whose famous adaptation "The Informer," is still a high water mark in the motion picture field. I might mention William Faulkner, the recent winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, who gave Hollywood up after a few months and returned to his quiet backwater in Oxford, Mississippi. I am saying this simply because I feel that one of the idlers charges ever levied at the United States today is that we are a nation of materialists, worshiping nothing but the almighty dollar.

You might just as well say that because a leopard has spots all animals that have spots are leopards, that because a king has a crown all people who wear a crown are kings. There are people who do insist on reasoning this way, even outside the walls of the Kremlin. But for one thing, American literature today—the best of it—has joined the stream of world literature. In Europe and England where people still regard literature as one of the necessary experiences and enjoyments of life, I think it is quite fair to say that the names of American writers like Hemingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck and Thomas Wolfe are as well known as Sartre, Giraudoux, Valéry, St. Exupery, Graham Greene, Rebecca West, William Sannion, and the Sitwells.

Most of the writers of my generation who prospected to see a Heaven in Europe in the 20's and a kind of materialist purgatory here in America later turned their own sacred thing to see what the scene from a wider perspective. American had and has much to teach Americans. But having lived for a good third of my native life in France, Italy, Germany and England, I also see that America has some things to teach Europe.

I was about England during the Munich crisis, I saw that the truth about our two democracies lay somewhere in between. The blessed idea, if there ever are any, must lie somewhere between the New World and the Old.

When I was in Africa during the Second World War, I saw that Americans had as much to learn from, as to teach, the peoples of the hikas and deserts. The same thing would certainly apply to the Far East, to China, India, Burma, Thailand, Pakistan. Once. This brings us to another thought about materialism and American writers. Since the time of Theodore Dreiser, at the turn of the century, on through Sinclair Lewis in the 20's and 30's to Thomas Wolfe, who died in 1938, there is a very real left and right struggle to the contemporary American writer. The issue has been a very real struggle and it has been largely a literature of protest and criticism, hard-hitting or simply melancholy. If Europeans are greatly critical of us and our so-called materialism, it would seem that we have somewhat, beaten them to the gun through our own self-criticism.

A great deal of our materialism—and there is plenty of it in America or elsewhere—is simply a hangover from our pioneer days. You don't have to travel a forest, swamp or prairie with a poem, symphony, or ideas. You do it can, can go, a plough, or a shovel. It was not until the frontiers of America were filled, the railroads built, that America could pause to cultivate those arts that spring from contemplation and some necessary leisure and that the writers of America could stand in the front ranks to attack our materialism.

We can't, even today, afford in our system too many ivory towers for our artists, and that has its good side as well as its bad. The most of our best writers participate more or less actively in the scene around them—sheer part and parcel of literature. They do not resist any the illusions of superiority—any person whether he is a bridge builder, a musician, an artist, a cabinet maker, must know how little he knows, how much he has to learn, at any age of life, if he is any age at all. No one can ever rest on his laurels—they are too likely to become the creepers around his headstone. Conversely, no sensible person can do anything but learn from his failures.

This is a credo, I think, that unites all artists and writers wherever in the world they live. In America, if we can't earn enough by our chosen form of writing—though many can and do—we can support our aspirations in other ways. We can teach, as Thornton Wilder is now doing in Harvard University, or, like James Truslow Adams, one of our great historians, we can retire early from a successful business career. The point is not that such ways are not beset with difficulties; the point is rather that there are ways and means and that any man who has chosen a high aim fails not through his outward showing but more simply through his character, his failure to grow.

So it is with writers in America today; so it has always been, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse, in the world. I think that the measure of our growth shows in our achievement. We don't think of ourselves as perfect. When we think deeply, as the best of our writers do, we think of ourselves and round about us, how much it has given us, how much we still have to learn.

And perhaps the clearest thing of all to sum it up all—that affects us most as writers here in America—is a phrase in a quotation from Epictetus, the Stoic philosopher. I am not a Stoic, but I came across this quotation a long time ago, and it has come back from time to time to me since. This is the quotation: "Act the role that is given..."
SRI AUROBINDO, THE LEADER OF THE EVOLUTION
PART III OF "THE WORLD CRISIS AND INDIA"
by "Synergist"

SECTION III - THE NEW WORLD-VIEW

POWERS OF MIND AND SUPERMIND

In the analytical rational apprehension of the external world, the whole is lost sight of owing to a pre-occupation with the part; and even when the synthesizing faculty steps in to correct the deficiency of the analytical, the mind is unable to conceive of his nature-personality as a single, unified, luminous movement of the One Existence.

In a general survey of cognition, ranging from the mental to the supermental, as carried out in the previous essays, the subject of the powers and faculties of the intellectual as well as of intuitive mentality receiving a corresponding gnostic action on the Supermental level was briefly discussed. For a complete formulation of the epistemology of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, it is necessary to take up this subject again here and treat it in greater detail. It can be said at the outset that regarding the apprehension of Reality in all its modes and manifestations through the development of higher mental faculties, an omission is not fatal. It is the gnostic physiological basis that makes it necessary to make clear, that all possible knowledge is knowledge within the power of man—for all ontological and cosmic realities there exist corresponding epistemical and gnostic powers which can know them. God and the universe, therefore, need not always remain for man outside of Universality; and, through the evolutionary growth of man, man becomes conscious of the whole.

But this, as a man becomes conscious of his evolutionary growth, when he becomes capable of evolving consciously by practising a psychological and spiritual discipline, he is in a position to develop powers for acquiring knowledge of higher realities—a growth into a spiritual and then a Supernal consciousness enables him to have direct and immediate knowledge of truths beyond the grasp of the mere rational mind.

Apropos of a skola in the Kena Upanishad, Sri Aurobindo writes in _The Life Divine_:

"The Unknowable is not the Unknowable; it need not remain the Unknowable for ever. Man can choose ignorance if he will, though this may not necessarily be due to his being a natural organism. But the Unknowable is not the Unknowable. The Unknowable is Absolute Reality and has always existed and at a certain stage capable of development. We may choose not to develop them; where they are partially developed, we may discourage and impose on them a kind of atrophy. But, fundamentally, all possible knowledge is knowledge within the power of man. And since in man there is the inherent power of nature towards self-realization, no struggle of the intellect to limit the action of our capacities within a determined area can forever prevail."

Therefore, it seems that Bacon's famous dictum needs a little modification; it should read: "Man, as the mediator and interpreter of nature, does not so much study as he knows; he knows as much as his observations on the order of nature, either with regard to things or the mind, permit him, and neither knows nor is capable of more," provided he does not evolve psychologically as he has evolved anatomically and physiologically, provided he does not grow in consciousness and there is, consequently, no change in the psycho-epistemological basis of his knowledge-apprehension; but if there is such a change and he is able to have instead of separate knowledge direct and immediate knowledge and ultimately knowledge by identity, in essence as well as in dynamism and function, he can possess knowledge beyond the ken of the mere rational and scientific mind, which at present observes and passes judgment "on the order of nature with regard to things and the mind."

The levels of Being and ranges of Nature other than those which come under his normal observation become accessible to him.

The knowledge of the Universal and of the Universe becomes possible for man because of his secret identity with them. Man is not a separate self-existing entity detached from his natural environment, one who must always look upon it as "other" and as distinct from himself; he has his usual analytical rational view of things and men; also, as the voice of his consciousness is cosmic and not universal, he is unable to see his inherent relation with the world around him, and looks upon himself as "self" and upon the world as "other." Everything is the disputable phorium: "The universe is not the same as the earth. From the earth's point of view, it cannot be well seen from within the field" is literally true; as we saw in the essay, _Consciousness, the True Determinant in The World Crisis and India_.

But it is because his consciousness is one-pointedly focussed in his outer personality and his awareness is consequently restricted, he cannot have a wider cosmic vision and look upon the universal manifestation as a single totality. Owing to this limitation in his consciousness, whether of himself or of the universe, the scope of his knowledge is limited. This is the reason why we find the universe is still outside of the field he is observing, being connected with it by a net-work of forces, and there is an absolute constant interaction between the two, which is the object of knowledge and the observer. This becomes quite apparent in a larger cosmic vision where the relation of the observer to the field, of the part to the whole, is constantly understood.

In the analytical rational apprehension of the external world, the whole is lost sight of owing to a pre-occupation with the part; and even when the synthesizing faculty steps in to correct the deficiency of the analytical, the mind is unable to conceive of his nature-personality as a single, unified, luminous movement of the One Existence.

[As we have seen, the universe itself is an emanatory manifestation of the "universal consciousness", and the individual in his individual existence in consciousness is a part of this universe; this establishes a dual identity of the individual with the Transcendental Supreme, one direct through the soul-being and the other through the universal manifestation.]
Mr. P. Lal has issued "A Testament for Our Poets." He has some pointed and pertinent things to say, but he spoils their effect by falling foul rather violently of one about whom Francis Watson, in a broadcast lecture on English Poetry from India to America, said was the one Indian poet whom Yeats had singled out as writing creatively in English. Yeats is well-known for his somewhat supercilious manner towards Indo-English poets: hence a comment like this from him has a rare value—particularly as he was himself one of the greatest contemporaries of Yeats in the English language. Mr. Lal seems to have been exceptionally unfortunate in his choice of Sri Aurobindo as a whipping post.

His own personal preference is for "realistic poetry reflecting... the din and hubbub, the confusion and indecision, the flashes of goodness and beauty of our age." There is nothing intrinsically objectionable in this penchant, provided it does not deprive one of sensitiveness to other kinds of poetry. But there must be no particular philosophical shade attached to the word "realistic" as if poetry that is not a product of so-called "realism" were a dressing up of unreality. Art is out of touch with reality only when its expression is abstract or imprecise instead of in concrete and vivid terms. Reality, for art, is simply that which is real to the artist and which he can best seize in perfect form with concreteness and vividness.

Wrong Approach

Such a position is not altogether repudiated by Mr. Lal—in broad theory. But he has grave limitations of perception and sympathy, rendering his theory itself a little hazy, and he cannot help bringing into it his own personal preferences. He reacts against romanticism on the one hand and "criticism of life" on the other. In condemning Sri Aurobindo's epic Savitri and warning Indian poets to keep away from the Aurobindonian brand of verse if they wish to do anything worth while, he portrays a most indefensible lack of recognition of poetic reality.

He, of course, protests that he cannot be considered totally unsympathetic to poetry of a spiritual order. "I can read," he says, "the Divine Comedy with pleasure. St. John of the Cross is a marvellous poet, poems of Kabir and Chandidas are exquisite. T. S. Eliot's Ash-Wednesday is an excellent poem of spiritual tension, confusion and resolution which I can read with great enjoyment and recall with surprising accuracy and detail." Well, the protest is far from convincing. Dante was a first-rate religious poet, not a spiritual or mystic one: he was well-versed in theology, perfectly conversant with the symbols of the Catholic church: his imagination was finely and powerfully touched by religious fervour, but there never was any invasion of his consciousness by the superconscious and he had not the temperament or the experience of the Saints who figure in his Paradiso. By the way, apart from certain later portions, the Divine Comedy is not even directly religious poetry: only its setting is in terms of religion. T. S. Eliot also is in part an effective poet of religious feeling and ideas: the tension, confusion and resolution in Ash-Wednesday are not spiritual in the true sense and they are more misty than mystical. Not that a state of mind is not infused into us by them, but they give us neither the concreteness nor the intensity of spiritual vision and mystic experience. Mr. Lal's ignorance of this fact proves that he has no clear idea of spiritual poetry.

St. John of the Cross is a real mystic and in his poems there is the immediacy of inner contact with the Eternal. But they are spiritual and mystic in a certain way—a highly personal devotion-coloured lyricism, deeply intense yet not charged with the powerful amplitude of vision and vibration such as we find in verses of the Upanishads, verses which seem to be the Infinite's own large and luminous language. Kabir and Chandidas are somewhat in the same category, though with a difference of tone and temper. They are indeed, as Mr. Lal says, exquisite and they are authentically spiritual, but again more intense than immense and the masterful metric expression is not theirs. If Mr. Lal responds to St. John of the Cross and to those two Indian singers he is not without all spiritual sympathy: still, he cannot be said to show any sensitiveness to the kind of inspiration that is Savitri. We are not surprised that he fails to appreciate it.

Poetic Communication

Here we are likely to have a couple of paragraphs from his own article thrown at our heads by him. He has written: "The job of all poetry is to convey an experience which the reader has not himself experienced but to which he is made sympathetic by the rhythm, linguistic precision and invention of the poem he is reading... The great poem must be able to communicate an emotion to me even when I have only the faintest intellectual, and no emotional, idea of what that emotion is." But surely there must be something in the reader to serve as a point of entry for the poet's effort at communication. Else we shall be obliged to reject Lyricism as no poetry because Dr. Johnson found it crude and unmelodious, Wordsworth's Lyric Ballads as sheer prose because Jeffreys remarked, "This will never do," Shelley's work as valueless because Matthew Arnold shook his head about it, Swinburne's early lyrics as meretricious stuff because Morley castigated them ruthlessly. And, mind you, these were no small and narrow critics on the whole. If they could have a blind spot on their critical retina and prove unrеacular on occasion, Mr. Lal's criticism of their general sympathies and semi-perceptive of the spiritual light in poetry can hardly hope to impress us by his statement: "When I read any passage from Sri Aurobindo's 'epics', a sick-as-state-lemonade shiver gallops up and down my spine at a rate impossible to compute—or by his description of Savitri-like verse as being "greasy, weak-spined and purple-adjutected poetry," "a loose expression of a loose emotion"—or by his warning that unless poets like him band together and produce a Manifesto "there is every likelihood that the blurred, rubbery and airy sentiments of a Sri Aurobindo will slowly clog our own poetry." Spiritual Vision And Philosophy

One point we may grant the preposterous Mr. Lal. If poets like him tried to write in Sri Aurobindo's vein without any of the Aurobindonian discipline of consciousness and mystical drive of the inner being, they might very well turn out in verse a painted anaemia of pseudo-spirituality. Spiritual poetry cannot be written on the cheap, but that does not mean that what Sri Aurobindo writes answers to Mr. Lal's designation of Savitri. Prima facie, a master of spiritual experience, with a consummate knowledge of the English language (Sri Aurobindo was educated from his seventh to his twenty-first year in England), is not likely to pen favorably feeble incantations and pass them off as mysticism. If he is in addition an intellectual and a philosopher of giant proportions, all the less probable is it that his mystical expression should be greasy and weak-spined and purple-adjectively. At his worst he might be in danger of seeming clumsy and easternized and over-refined and recondite. Mr. Lal's terms are absolutely irrelevant and incorrect.

One cannot tax with either gaudiness or prettification Sri Aurobindo's revelatory glimpse of Super-nature through a magical phase of early dawn A visioning hand of pale enchanted light That glanced along a fading morning's brink Fixed with gold girdel and opalescent ring A gate of dreamy ajar on mystery's verge. Nor can one accuse of empty effusiveness his profound symbolic depiction of spiritual personality:

As in a mystic and dynamic dance A priestess of immaculate certainties Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault Moves in some prophet cavern of the gods, A heart of silence in the hands of joy Inhabited with rich creative being A body like a parable of dawn That seemed a niche for veiled divinity Or golden temple door to things beyond. Nor is there anyopaus unknown in his suggestive conjuration of some occult sacrifice on a cosmic scale: The dubious godhead with his torch of pain Lit up the charm of the unfished world And called her to fill with her cost self the abyss.

All this is pure spiritual vision which seems to have made little impression on Mr. Lal during his reading of Savitri. But Savitri is spiritual philosophy as well as spiritual vision, and Mr. Lal is equally at sea with a poetry that fuses the philosophical mind with mystic symbolism and revelation. Else how could he miss the concreteness and vividness of a large-idea'd utterance like:

Thought lay down in a mighty voicelessness; The toiling thinker widened and grew still, Wisdom transcendent touched his quivering heart: His soul could not be beyond thought's luminous bar; Mind screened no more the shoreless Infinite. Across a void retreating sky he glimpsed Through a last glimmer and drift of vanishing stars The superconcealent realms of notionless peace Where judgment ceases and the word is mute And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone.
ON OF SRI AUROBINDO
RECENT CRITICISM

ETHNA

an attack was made by an Indo-English poet for that weekly do for that weekly do for that weekly do

Or take the following philosophical spiritual lines:

Inward realities took on a shape:
There looked out from the shadow of the Unknown
The bodiless Namelessness that saw God born
And tried to gain from the mortal’s mind and soul
A deadless body and a divine name.
The immobile lips, the great crescent wings,
The visage marked by Superconcealed Sleep,
The eyes with their closed lids that see all things,
Approved of the Architect who builds in treacle.

Or consider a passage like this—an example of something that occurs very frequently in Savitri—about earth’s aspiration and her future fulfilment:

An inarticulate whisper drives her steps
Of which she feels the force but not the sense.
A few rare intimations come as guide.
Immense divining flashes cleanse her brain.

A vision meets her of her supernal Possessors.

That dreamerer as if mighty genii lost
Approaching with estranged great luminous gaze...

Outstretched arms to the unconscious Void,
Passionate she prays to invisible forms of God,
Sollicitation from dumb Fate and taming Time
What must she needs, what most exceeds her scope.

A Mind sweated by illusion’s gleams,
A Will expressive of soul’s deity,
A Strength not forced to stumble by its speed,
A Joy that drags not sorrow for its shade.

For these she yearns and feels them distant here:
Heaven’s privilege she claims as her own right.
Just is her claim the all-universing Gods approve.

Clear in a greater light than reason owns:
Our intuitions are its title-deeds;
Our souls accept what our blind thoughts refuse.
Earth’s winged chimeras are Truth’s steeds in Heaven,
The impossible God’s sign of things to be.

It would really be a critical apocalypse if one could learn from Mr. Lal where in any one of these satisfies the criterion of a game of gold or a quiet contemplation.

Even D’Arcy who is more uniformly inspired in his Divine Comedy than most of the other great epic poets has his slightly relaxed periods. And as for Homer in the Iliad and Milton in Paradise Lost, they either nod or plod on occasion and still remain mighty names in the roll of poetry.

Even when the verse is not a sober bridge between the stories of dramatic moments, there is bound to be in a poem of considerable length and ample range of subject an inequality in the expression. What we have to appreciate in Savitri is the ravens of the inequality and the presence of some authentic minimum of inspiration in the passages where the afflatus tends to sink. According to Mr. Lal, there is no authentic inspiration in the text.

But we will not go beyond the following:

All there was soul or made of sheer soul-stuff:
A sky of soul covered a deep soul-ground.

All here was known by a spiritual sense:
Thought was not there but a knowledge near and one
Seized on all things by a moved identity...

Life was not there but an impassioned force,
Finer than fineness, deeper than the deeps,
Felt as a subtle and spiritual power,
A quivering out from soul to anawakening soul,
A mystic movement, a close influence,

A free and happy and intense approach
Of being to being with no screen or check,
Without which life and love could never have been.

Body to body and soul to soul, and yet not,
The soul itself was its own deathless form
And met at once the touch of other souls,
Close, blissful, concrete, wonderfully true...

Well, can we say to this at least at once?
I am sorry that even this concession is out of the question. Read without prejudice, the passage for all its comparative inferiority has nothing to sickness in us. There is a balanced systematic development of the theme of soul-stuff by all, and the lines:

Thought was not there but a knowledge near and one

Seized on all things by a moved identity,

which is not absurdly patently rounded—nor is it even absurdly so. The word "seized" is concrete and vivid as is also the word "moved"—a suggestive picture comes before the inner sense. The lines that provoke Mr. Lal to the utmost sarcasm are:

Life was not there but an impassioned force,
Finer than fineness, deeper than the deeps.

The second line is an echo of a turn we find at times in some Upanishads, it is a sort of paradoxical pointing of extremes and is not devoid of attractiveness or effectiveness: here it is particularly apt because the soul, in Yogic realisation, is the inmost entity of the inner world and the subtlest of all subtle forces. The first line is deemed by Mr. Lal an attempt at Miltonese which succeeds in being more without than sense.

In one respect Mr. Lal’s judgment is quite right. He is mistaken in both respects. Miltonese is more grandioso in language and less direct in suggestion. This is a straightforward style and statement expressing the truth that on the occult “plane” where Soul is the determining principle there is a pure essence of vitality in both its ardent and its dynamic aspects, rather than what we know as Life Force. Of course, these lines and all the rest of the passage would hardly make an impact on a reader who has allowed the glib use of the word “soul” by wishy-washy and vacuous sentimentalists or by pseudo-mystics to spoil his stomach for it. Still less would an impact occur if a reader has from the very beginning no feel of what the soul could be like and looks upon every mention of it as a gaseous falsehood. Mr. Lal labours under a serious deficiency of soul-sense. Most non-mystics readers are somewhat in the same case, but not all lack so completely a sympathetic instinct for something which to the mystic is more “close, blissful, concrete, wonderfully true” (a phrase, by the way, very felicitously worded and rhythmized) than even his bodily existence. Mr. Lal himself says eda-oda the passage: “I see nothing; there is nothing I can hang on to.” This could just as well be because of his own superficiality as because of the supposed lack of poetry in the lines.

Not that Sri Aurobindo is here at his best. But if we admit that Sri Aurobindo is perhaps here at his worst, it is still a tremendous compliment. For the lines, by their harmonious significance and word and rhythm, remain poetry for all their falling below such bursts of inspiration as we quoted earlier—and even those examples cannot provide a really authentic notion of the sustained splendour of soul that can impart the huge variety of poetic merit in it, passages of a spiritu- lised “natural magic” and mystificed “human interest” as well as Yogised philosophy and direct occult insight into the individual and the universal. Yes, the lines remain poetry and the tension produced in them in their proper context as part of a fuller record in which is set alive before us an actual experience of the plane of the World-Soul. Terms like “soul-stuff” and “sky of soul” and “deep soul-ground” acquire a degree of concrete meaning that cannot arise when the passage is torn from what goes before and comes after and when no indication is supplied of the totality of which it is an integral and almost inseparable portion.

Mr. Lal does injustice to the passage by the way he has presented it and the attitude he adopts towards it. But the worst crime he commits against the critic’s office is to choose from Sri Aurobindo a passage that is not plenarily Aurobindonian, and declare it to be all that Sri Aurobindo is capable of throughout the nearly thirteen thousand lines published in Volume I of Savitri. This is an act of inexcusable falsity, proving Mr. Lal to be suffering from not only a literary but also a moral "kink". No doubt, Savitri is not always easy to appreciate, it is mostly a new kind of poetry with a vision and language caught as if directly from hidden heights and depths and breadth of a more than human consciousness. Sri Aurobindo himself felt that it would take time to obtain recognition. But for an unpurged reader of quick, supple and pene- trating imagination there is nothing in it that is incapable of winning for its author the richest laurels—especially among his countrymen who may be expected to respond more readily to a sovereign spiritual utterance.

If, however, every Indian reader turns out to be like Mr. Lal, I can only sigh and quote two lines—“a state of tension produced in a refined sensi- bility” and “language used precisely, nobly and with a sense of purpose”, I suppose—from one of Mr. Lal’s own recent and definitely non- Aurobindonian poems;

Here in declension
I don’t know what to do.
POWERS OF MIND AND SUPERMIND

Continued from page 5

take the spiritual turn and rise above the mind to its sources, the Supermind; of course, he does not rise directly from the one to the other—there are intermediate stages through which he has to pass; these have already been described in detail. Sri Aurobindo here explains this inherent identity of mind and Supermind, he points out the relation that all the action of the mind is a derivation from the secret supermind, although we do not know this until we come to know our higher self, and draw from that source all that has of truth and value. All our thoughts, willings, feelings, sense representations have in them, at their roots an element of truth, which originates and sustains their existence, however, in the actuality they may be perverted or false, and behind them a greater truth, which would grasp it, would make it unified, harmonious and at least relatively complete. Actually, such truth as they have is diminished in scope, degraded in a lower movement, divided and falsified by fragmentation, after the teleological direction that men are marred by suffering. Mental knowledge is not an integral but always a partial knowledge..."
SRI AURIBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT—Continued from previous page.

The Eternal Hour

An emerald-soul of peaks within
Travels from height to height unseen.
The shadow of the Infinite falls on earth's palm,A golden desire, a heavenly ruin.
Transcendent of Time's moments' power Comes encircling the eternal hour.

The sun above, the moon below,
Unheard foot-foots come soft and slow.
A bell rings from Eternity:Whirling the Almighty's power, She
Creates a land of blue and white
Within the smoke and dust of night;
She comes in her golden robe of fire
To release God-music from earth's lyre.

SAHANA
BOOKS in the BALANCE

THE LONELY TOWER: STUDIES IN THE POETRY OF YEATS

By T. R. HENN

(Methuen, London. Price: 12s.)

Yeats’s reputation has increased since the beginning of the century when in 1923 he was awarded the Nobel Prize. His death left the world the poorer today, for he combined to the best of mediaevalism with the best of modernism. Judged by the range of subjects and the treatment that he brought to them there is nothing to class him as a modern poet unless we call him modern and think of other poets who are also called modern. He brought to poetry a vision only possible with the mystic and his interest in mesmerism and astrology makes him a poet different from the rational poets of today who only occasionally bring to their verse-compositions the semblance of a world which was far removed from the bustle of the crowd, he composed much that will not easily be forgotten. He reminds one of the Romantic poets like whom he took an intense delight in Nature and Man. The friendship and love of women brought out the best in his poetry which is described as having "fragile and fluid loveliness". The paragraphic strength of his poetry he owes to the reading of the Gitavali for which he wrote his memorable and beautiful introduction. He was enamoured of the East. India will remember his services to Rabindranath Tagore and the world will chant his poems when a better day dawns.

Born in June 1865, William Butler Yeats came under the influence of his father and brother, both of whom were painters. He took to painting and though he discontinued it after 1920 when he was 78, the influence of painting left its impress on his poetry as marked as the study of sculpture gave to Hardy’s novels architectural symmetry. His dreamy nature and absorption in books in the library made him interested in literature which he finally decided on as his career when he was 22 years of age. His initial poetical ventures found their way into The Dublin University Review and The Irish Monthly. The publication of his first poems "The Island of Ermine" showed him as a new poet and he contributed occasionally in prose and verse to the two journals. His first dramatic poem, Nohoda (1888) made him feel confident as a man of letters and he went to London the following year and worked as a journalist for some years, compiling his poems and facing life. The Wydarnra of Ossian (1889) established him as a lyricist and some poems came under his influence. His early works bore the impress of Heine and Celnistice. As a poet he experienced difficulty in composing poetry and he often produced as little as nine lines a day.

In The Countess of Kilkenny (1892), a drama, Yeats showed a noblewoman selling her soul to save her people from starvation and despite the ent-calling of some Puritans and the obstacles put by others, the drama was a success and established Yeats as a dramatist. The Land of Hean’s Desire (1894) was a one act drama of a dreamy bride who was called away by the fairies on May Eve. Of this play the poet thought later, in spite of its beautiful lyrics, that it was exaggerated in sentiment and sentimentalism. In 1899 he made his first visit to India and when he was 33 he took to the theatre with a view to giving Ireland a characteristically literary of her very own. The interest of the people in the plays of Sean O’Leary and the nature of the drama made him take to poetry once more as the symbol of Ireland’s greatness, seeing in the poetry a future that would “some day be great enough to lead a world sick with theories to those sweet well-watered prisms of poetic life, upon whose edge still linger the brotherhoods of wisdom, the immortal moods.”

A Packet for Ezra Pound (1929) revealed to the world Yeats’s love for sinners and showed his wife as a medium leading him to the theories about the spiritual unfoldment of life, which he put forth in A Vision in 1908; his wife’s automatic writing, hallucinations and trances made him a believer in them and he continued to believe in them till death. He surprised the world by his belief in fairies. In "The White Birds" he sings:

I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danub-shore, Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrows come near us no more;

Soon far from the rose and the lily and fret of the flames would we be.

Are we only white birds, my beloved, buoyed out on the foam of the sea?

Burton Rowne describes Yeats as “a tall, stopped, very poetical (and prophetic) looking man with his black hair streaked white” and wearing beribboned glasses. William Rothenstein thought his manner rather “artificial” when he was surrounded by female admirers. George Moore’s first impression of him was that of a man with “a long black cloak descending from his shoulders, a black soft samovar on his head, a voluminous black silk tie flaying from his collar, loose black trousers dragging untidily over his long, heavy feet.” Moore later changed his opinion and spoke of his “solemn height and hieratic appearance” and even called him "a sort of monk in literature." Yet Yeats’s look was “the most melancholy thing in the world.” His tendency towards absent-mindedness bordered on the ridiculous and was well-known to his friends and more so when he attended a dinner given in his honour in Chicago. There he was heard to chant his own verses so loudly as to forget himself and the company he was in and particularly the fellow poet was forgotten who was paying him eloquent and thoughtful compliments. The one desire of Yeats was to devote the rest of his life to the revision of his collected works in prose and verse and, judged by the revisions made in the latter, he was not always successful in improving on the originals. Yet he has to his credit some of the finest poems in world literature and he is one of the major poets of today combining in him the old and the new.

The Lonely Tower is a scholarly work named after one of Yeats’s poems, entitled The Tower, and it reveals to the world the contribution made by the Irish poet in the realm of literature. Irish writers have influenced world literature, and T. R. Henn the Irish critic and Brigadier shows the lasting appeal of his countryman and friend Yeats. He considers the poet from three aspects: the influence of the years 1916-29 on the man and poet, the significance of that most difficult and obscure work A Vision in both Yeats’s life and his debt made him write the chapter “Choice and Chance” Henn recapitulates all the available sources for the poet’s life and the chapter “Myth and Magic” shows the esoteric background of the poet and the influence of Blake and Calvet and the Rosicrucians on him. Yeats’s poetry does not serve the purpose of the Indian moulded as it is in many stages of consciousness. The analyses of individual poems as a result of the study of the poet’s letters and diaries give new meaning to the poems and show the connection between poetry and life. The Lonely Tower will interest the specialist and the Yeatsian scholar in particular.

IMMERSION—A STORY: by MANJERI S. ISWARAN

(W. Sivaswathan & Co, 11 McNichol Road, Chetpet, Madras. Price: Rs. 2)

When a poet takes to writing a story there is always the poetic strain in him which he can no more help than his being sensitive to life. This is the case with Immersion which is a long-short in the kind. Manjeri Iswaran not only charms his readers by his language and poetic treatment of a subject which in inferior hands would degenerate into the sexy and the sordid, but elevates the mind to nobler flights. Reading Immersion one must, however, be oblivious to language as he knows it and as it is used in prose and glide in the language of the story-writer who goes a-meandering with the joy of colour and harmony as accompaniments to his prose. Immersion is, in short, a labyrinth in thought, thought-flights and a macabre philosophy. There is the unfoldment of the traditional Hindu mind, with its love for the simple, beautiful and mysterious; and as his first experiment in the long-short in English, Immersion is the beginning of the long-short in India acc augurs well for the future.

The long-short, as an intermediary between the short story and the novel, has won popularity by its ingredients of plot, character and atmosphere; and on the Continent its appeal lies in the character-sketch method as used by the Russians. In India its survival will depend a good deal on its adaptation to home conditions, as is done by Indian writers who compose long-shorts in their own language. The long-short has not only interest but also respect and more so in these days of loose plots and common characters. Traditional themes if modernised would, therefore, serve the public well, provided the language and treatment are above average. There is no more than saying the Indian mind needs deep to its stories, particularly if they are to give beautiful twists to sex and other problems.

Immersion as a long-short borders on poetry and it is to be judged as a lyric. For apart from the story which is based on a slight incident there is nothing to call it a long-short at all. It is the story of Aklilewanm and his wife Jaguda who go on a three-day journey to Benares for the immersion ceremony of his father and find the pet of ashes missing. Manjeri Iswaran goes a-meandering in his story with the cartman and by the time he comes back Jaguda is a victim to the consequences. The,pure nature returns with the pot intact and attributes it to God’s intercession. They continue their journey. The incident reaches a climax in the Holy City when he and his wife Jaguda are burying the ashes and he sees her slip
It was lately the privilege of two women—a painter and a writer—on holiday in the crystalline beauty of a warm April in Southern England, to read three books: two on the recommendation of an article in Mother India. These were Graham Greene's The Power and the Glory and Lloyd Douglas's The Robe. The third, a present from its Indian author, Sri Dilip Kumar Roy. These three books will probably always be bound together in at least one reader's mind as a picture of three flames making with varying intensity one pillar of fire. Are they not three burning sincerity responses—Indian, American and British—to the cry of ripening Time: “Let there be light”? Light not only increasingly visible and feelable in “its own place” and, at one remove, halting the saints and the sages, but visibly and feelably active as never before among the trivial and the dark: breaking up triviality, pouring and sparkling itself into the whole body of darkness till it is no longer so dark but already full of spangles urgently agitating towards the moment of coming together to make brilliance.

These two women read The Upward Spiral in turns, and when neither was reading it, they discussed it—or, sometimes, broke it in at once upon each other’s reading of different books with an impulsion to share immediately another admiration: the lovely economy of the Sanskrit word upadhi,* the touching picture of the little dancer’s recognition, from the youngest age, of her vocation; Raka’s question to Gurudev at their first meeting: “When are you going to throw off your mask?” and its tremendous answer: “When you throw away your thinkers.”

**“Our philosophy has a beautiful word,” Aitz went on, “Upadhi. It is very rich in import: a web of associations have crystallised round it through centuries of mysticism. … For instance, a crystal, held near a red flower, acquires its neighbour’s upadhi of redness. So it was with Prima; she had constant tetch with lawyers and money-makers; the result she became infected with their upadhi—or worldliness.” (The Upward Spiral, p. 12).**

The pictures of contemporary Indian life were of interest to both minds; so were the fleeting pictures of life in the Asram. Sometimes these puzzled. Must Aitz and Raka be so often and so selfly “hurt” when the beloved Mala appears to favour the one above the other? Well, perhaps they must. How but through such manifestations of ever-reckless ego could the whole depth of patience, understanding and gentleness possessed by the complete Knewer be demonstrated? In a slightly different connection, but still amplifying this aspect of wisdom, the scene between Gurudev and Raka when she is lifted out of her tantrum on page 436 seemed to one reader of the most piercing importance.

On page 536 our troubled age is given this great lantern to swing before it: the melancholy Prebal has been making a common complaint: he finds the Demons and Titans within him quite enough “without their rampaging all over the place.”

“But there you are wrong again,” said Gurudev. “For nothing can happen outside that is not a projection of what is inside us. Tyrants and dictators would have died in their cradles had we not hated and nursed them with all the ardour of a bane devotee.”

“Receive the truth,” said John Kest, “and let it be your balm.” This truth received, here is one at least of the white blazes of light its lantern lends to:

“And since this is at last open to you, the way of Light, why masks for the marsh of phantoms? Why fume and fret when you can love and pray—gladly participating in His miracle Play where not an atom whirls or nebula wheels but that He—the Primal Teacher of the Cosmic Dance, the Akhilesh-fulfiller—informs its movements… Yes, if you can pray for that, you will care no more for anything else—not even salvation.” (p. 575).

BOOKS in the BALANCE—Continued from previous page.

**LOTUS-FLAME—Continued from page 12**

Breathing all the obscure attacks from below, he shall force his path into the cryptic womb Of spaceless extinction and of total Being.

To conquer the hell-queen in her serpent-base
Who rules the globe with her titans seas of gloom
And free the earth from her dumb fatal yoke
To realise the benediction of the Peak.

On its unburdened head and yearning soul.
His unfatigued heart shall not be appeased
Till the irremediate crest of Self is reached;
Till the super-priestliness and the limitless fire
Consume the earth in its diamond wilderness,
Merged in its wide breast unimaginable.

One godhead’s one unmutilated blue
Envelops the soul with its thunder and its light,
Till all ascension be annulled and blotted out
And man be one with his own Infinity.

To be continued.
LOTUS-FLAME
PART IV: THE SELF-KNOWLEDGE
By ROMEN

Continued from the issue of October 13

This was the measureless end to be attained,
This was the goal, unhorizoned and remote.
To be an endless channel of the Supreme
Wisdom fell o’er its ideal and mission and close.
Alone he must strive on, unaided, sole.
Till be discovered his very vastness-core.
His soul was as limitless like the stars;
His labour was to climb the hill of sense.
His brain was to seize the unattainable signs
Of the mysteries that were this global whole.
He must be unfatigued like tireless heaven;
Umbrellas like the awestricken bellies,
Colossal and unspeakable as the sky.
He must build the bright citadel of his being
Into one mesmeric harmony like the sea;
A://%A
A diaphanous motion.
The azure altitudes of the aper-noon
Or an immense mansion of crystal poise.
His spirit of flame must a grand fortress be,
Whose base and top were undivided and whole,
A white burning structure unnameable, unique.
Rooted on earth his head must touch the peak,
Rooted in the heights his base must touch the dust.
A god must be he and the hour’s puny man,
Infinite must be he and a finite soul.
Being a radiant beaconfly in clay,
He must be the fearless void of the Unnamed,
Unnameable to human heart, his form august
Must be the mire’s playmate perpetual.
In the dim spaces of creation, he
Must be an unparalleled gate, five-born
Whose manhood was to be the summit of earth
And whose mind a far pinnacle of sun-gold.
Between his dual self’s extremes unfathemable,
Of kinetic power and of potent sleep.
His measureless being’s universe would hold
The million worlds, the countless energies
And the unnumbered realms that stand behind
And above and below the earth’s atomic point,
The Viewless and the Increscutable and the Inane.
Standing behind all actions and all plans,
He would preside over the destiny
Of earth and man’s heavensward ascending march.
Remaining in the flux of mortality,
He would be above death and time and change.
His would be the sheer ubiquitous mind-space;
His would be the great deathless heart of the spheres;
He would be the wide soul of compassion and bliss,
A radiant font of ceaseless beatitude
And his golden frame of dust would be the creed
Of the eternal in the man’s soulless home.
His life and flesh would be an embodiment be
Of superconscious husk and power and will.
A lustrous body whose gnawing teeth would be
The bright multitudinous sheebles of God.
Not ungreped laxy ideal’s star-gleam
But a flaming diamond omnipotence,
A dawn of the future sure his steps would be
And his vision would create the worlds anew
And his benediction immortality.
One in whose gods would find their vast abode;
One who housed the bounteous demigod;
In whose large breast nestled the topless fire.
His descent would be the outreach glorious
Of light and peace and power unnameable:
Soul of all souls he would be to the earth,
The very essence of all sight and Being.
His name would clasp an iridescent might,
An amazing seed to raise the Infinite,
A nameless wonder on the bosom of the hour.
Sleepless would be his gaze upon the globe
And his help eternal and without an end.
For one yearning to climb the celestial feast,
For mortality craving to reach god-close.
All the wealth of his high godhead’s effulgences
Would be focussed on the dim screen of the clot
To throw the image of the Ever-beautiful
From the ageless projector-machine of his hidden soul
And reveal to earth the mysteries occult
That brood behind its somnolent domains
And the divan of the gods’ descent on dust.
His life shall be a splendid path to the peak,
A living index of the ascent of man
From his sleep of sod to his waking firmament,
From his abyss to his height’s toplessness.
It was he who would impose the law divine
On ignorance and the half-illuminated soul
And enlarge its blind meaningless cyclic whirl
Into the spaceless nadir of the sun
To revolve around a limitless, deathless orb,
Not around its nucleus of somnolence.
Casting the robe of matter and dire gloom,
He would rescue the light-child lost in the night,
The unfathomable darkness drowned below the throb
Of insconscience and ever-puissant despair.
The awakening of a vast bournless sun-sea
From the womb-hold of a subterrestrial world
Shall change the visage of the universe.
From the remote twilight-apellation
His power shall force the unconscious dusty speak
To the perception of spirit-noon,
From its soulless midnight to its zenith-peak
Of perfection’s topless immortality.
Amiss darkness and insiptent nights without eye
His roll shall be to kindle the radiance
Of the deathless and celestial soul-lamp
Making man conscious of his inborn bliss
And infinity and light immolate,
A true icon of the august blaze above,
Leading his steps from the lunate glimmerings
Of his errant mind and making the mighty path
Of the carolean empire’s huge descent
On soil a burning inevitable sleep.
It was he who must labour on the heights
With his sleeplessness calling the Unknowable
Into the mute gulf of humanhood’s caves;
It was he who must prepare the unseen worlds,
Kingdoms and dominions for the thunder-falls
Of the giant lightning-oceans of the Self
And mortality to receive the earnest
Of the unbounded flame of the Absolute.
His work shall be unseen, latent like the stars
That gleam behind the brilliant blaze of noon,
A viewless presence of force and will divine
To reshape the argil mould of finite fate
And change the base of sombre oblivion
Into a white faultless calm-sea to hold
The Infinite. Hewing by his mighty hands
Out of the shapeless matter’s unsouled night-hills
With his levin-chisel of celestial force,
He shall sculpture the face of the Invisible,
He shall hold the reigns of cosmic puissances
Standing above all rush of mutable forms,
Behind all the forces that take birth and die,
Behind—the destiny that leads our earth.
His puissance shall be incomensurable.
Alone, alone holding communion
With his vast super-self inaccessible,
He shall be the multiform 和 wide gaze,
A golden miracle without term or name.
A wonder none has imagined or conceived
Upon this obscure globe of recents age.
Aboding the human frame of the dying hour,
He shall attempt all works and modes and paths;
All routes and countless possibilities
Shall come under the broad horizontless field
Of his work tireless, labour ceaseless and calm;
All the topless, wayless summits he shall climb,
All the unchartered depths of Styx descend;
All the large, unbarred universal space
Shall be the bright easel to hold the frame
Of his vast work’s limitless masterpiece.
His enormous brush-strokes firm and infallible
Shall paint the world with the alfy fiery hues,
The blazing hues of his advent’s dawn-gold.

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