

Annie Besant and the Changing World by: Bhagavan Das

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

DR. ANNIE BESANT, President of the Theosophical Society, from 1907 to 1933, passed away at Adyar, Madras, on the afternoon of the 20th September, 1933. In obedience to her will, a portion of the ashes of her physical body, after its cremation on the grounds of the Head-Quarters of the T.S. at Adyar, were taken to Benares by Shri D. K. Telang, and there, on the 1st October, 1933, they were carried by Dr. Bhagavan Das, with a large procession of members of the T.S. and the citizens, from the Head-Quarters of the Indian Section of the T.S., to the Ganga, and entrusted, mid-stream, to the waters held sacred for thousands of years by the Indian People. After the performance of this last solemn rite, the public gathered in the Town Hall, and Dr. Bhagavan Das and many others spoke of her life and works. This is an English version, much expanded, of what Dr. Bhagavan Das said in Hindustānî as president of the public meeting on that occasion.

T. P. H.

Dear Friends,

We have gathered here today to recount, for our own spiritual profit, the great qualities and the great works of Annie Besant, and to offer tribute of *shraddhā*, of deep love and reverence, to the memory of the illustrious departed, in order that our own hearts may be purified and strengthened by bathing in those sacred emotions for a while, through contemplation of her magnificent life of unremitting toil for the uplifting of the lowly, the instructing of the ignorant, the fraternising of the unbrotherly, the resisting of all that is evil, the spiritualising of those immersed in the objects of the fleshly senses with no outlook beyond this brief earthly life of a moment out of the whole of eternity. [Page 2]

Unanimity of All in Offering Shraddhā to Annie Besant

Simple proof of her greatness and her goodness is that, now that she has passed on to other spheres, eminent persons of very different temperaments, ways of thought, lines of action, even her opponents, are all eulogising her many-sided work, her marvellous abilities, her unrivalled eloquence, her magnanimity towards adversaries, her constancy in personal friendships despite differences of opinion, her generous charity to those who needed it. Māhatmā Gandhi has spoken of her devoted love for India and of India's grateful love for her, and, representative of all opposite views, Viceroy Willingdon, too, has expressed appreciation of her. The great poet of world-wide renown, Shri Rabindra Nath Tagore, has declared his gratitude for her life and work, and the orator-poet-politician, Shri Sarojini Naidu, whose

eloquence has been heard by many continents; and who has been President of the Indian National Congress also, has said — and she is entitled by her great qualities, her work, and her experience to say — that if Annie Besant had not been, Gandhi-ji could not be. The oldest and most honored leader of the Hindûs, Shri Madan Mohan Malaviya, and great leaders of the Muslims, Dr. M.A. Ansâri, Maulânâ Abul Kalâm Azâd and Dr. Muhammad Âlam, also Maulânâ Shaukat Ali, have all offered whole-hearted and generous praise [Page 3] to her. Such a thoughtful politician and careful weigher and chooser of words as Shri Srinivasa Sâstri has said that “if they named any three or four of the other great people in India, the sum of their achievements, the aggregate of the benefit that they had rendered to this country, would not exceed what stood unquestionably to her credit”. There could scarcely be richer offering of *shraddhâ* than this.

It is not possible to say all that has to be said about her, in brief time. It is to be hoped that a full biography will be compiled, and her very many friends, admirers, venerators, followers all the world over, will contribute small personal incidents to give to it the fullness of the intensely human personal touch that always belonged to her, side by side with her work for the mass.

PUBLIC WORK

The Key-Note of Her Life

Simultaneous with this human touch in her was a vision constantly fixed upon the superhuman. In her Benares home, Shânti Kunja, she used to work at a desk, specially constructed, sitting cross-legged on a large carpet-covered wooden *chaukî*, in Indian fashion. In front of the desk, placed so that her eyes would fall upon it automatically when she raised them from her writing, was a frame containing some beautiful lines in English, that may be regarded as an expanded version of the quarter-verse of the Gîtâ which embodies the very quintessence of the whole of that great scripture:

Mâm anusmara, yudhya cha.

[Bear Me in mind always, and fight the Battle of the Right.]

The English lines are:

Waiting the word of the Master,
 Watching the Hidden Light;
 Listening to catch His orders
 In the very midst of the fight;
 Seeing His slightest signal
 Across the heads of the throng;
 Hearing His faintest whisper
 Above earth's loudest song.

Another refining, purifying, soul-elevating sentence, which may be regarded as commentary on the above lines, and which also she loved to keep before her eyes, was this:

“Behold the Truth before you: A clean life, an open mind, a pure heart, an eager intellect, an unveiled spiritual perception, a brotherliness for one's co-disciple, a readiness to give and receive advice and instruction, a loyal sense of duty to the Teacher, a willing obedience to the behests of Truth, once we have placed our confidence in and believe that Teacher to be in possession of it; a courageous endurance of personal injustice, a brave declaration of principles, a valiant defence [Page 5] of those who are unjustly attacked, and a constant eye to the ideal of human progression and perfection which the Secret Science (Gupta Vidyā) depicts — these are the golden stairs up the steps of which the learner may climb to the Temple of Divine Wisdom”.

Such was the bīja-mantra, the key-note, of her life, consciously after 1888, unconsciously, subconsciously, before.

It has been said of the great Sufi Persian poet and spiritual teacher, Maulanā Rûm:

Man chi goyam wasf-i-ān ā'li-janāb,
N-îst paigham-bar walé dārad kitāb.

[We cannot well describe, adequately,
The greatness of his wondrous quality;
He may not be a prophet, but he gave,
A precious book, the souls of men to save.]

The same and much more may be said of Annie Besant. She not only spread precious spiritual knowledge for the inner betterment of men, but also gave strenuous action for their outer betterment.

Servant of the Spiritual Government

To herself, she was a humble servant and missionary of the Spiritual Hierarchy which, she believed, guides the evolution of humanity. That she was such a servant and messenger is the profound conviction of all those of us also, who believe [Page 6] with her that there is an Inner Spiritual Government of the world, of which, alas! the outer physical governments are mostly the inverted and perverted caricatures; that things do not just happen of themselves, by chance and accident, without cause; that Ideas move the world while the world only provides occasion for the Ideas; that the Mind evolves the Body, and not the Body the Mind; that functions create organs and not the other way; that Spirit governs Matter, and not Matter Spirit, though Spirit is vehicle-less without Matter; that there is a Providence behind all the happenings and “curious coincidences” of history; that the advance of humanity through race after race, age after age, civilisation after civilisation, is not wholly aimless, is not without direction by a Power behind it all; that there is a great order running through the seeming disorder of the eonic Story of Man; that the Great Man makes the New Time, while the Old Time only brings the Great Man; that the

consciousness and the conscience of humanity are being slowly and painfully taken onwards from small to large and ever larger Concepts of Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Unity, Brotherhood, Social Organisation, beginning with tribalism, passing through familist individualism and nationalism and incidental good and bad accompaniments and consequences in many other phases, to end with the Federation of the World and Humanism [Page 7] and Universalism; and that it is being so taken onwards by this invisible Spiritual Hierarchy of Light, working against the powers of darkness, and working through visible leaders, rarely conscious, mostly unconscious, of their being such instruments.

Such believers are convinced that great souls like Annie Besant, with extraordinary lives and careers, covering, embracing, strenuously endeavouring to harmonise and unite, both hemispheres, do not appear and work upon the earth without special wish and purpose of Providence.

The Psychic History of the Human World during the last 400 years, and the Luxuriant Growth of the Poison-plant of Dis-cord

A widespread growth of literacy and of Intelligence (in theosophical technical terms, “the fifth principle” in the psycho-physical constitution of man, and the special characteristic of the fifth sub-race, *viz.*, the European, of the fifth main race, the Aryan), followed the invention of the printing-press and movable types, some 400 years ago, in Europe. This was accompanied and followed by the birth of great explorers by land and sea, of scientists, discoverers, and inventors, to subserve whose work the Printing Press had been sent on in advance, as it were. Then came the [Page 8] wonderful influx of scientific discovery and mechanical invention, which has been progressing with cumulative momentum, since about 150 years ago. Thence resulted extensive and intensive changes, in the economic, industrial, political, social, and domestic conditions of the nations. These changes proceeded with ever greater rapidity also, and in very wrong directions, because the moral sense of the men commanding the wealth and the power and even the science of the advanced nations was decreasing, and their sensuousness and love of luxury and blind and cruel greed and lust for arrogant power were increasing, in direct ratio with the increase of intellect. Because of this weakening of the moral sense, the scientific discoveries and inventions were not applied for thoughtfully humanist objects, but were misapplied and misappropriated for thoughtlessly and ruthlessly selfish individualist and nationalist purposes. As the scriptures say, what the dévas, the gods, the angels, build up for virtue, that the daityas, the titans, the fallen angels, taint with sin, and pervert and divert into the service of their own vices. All this psycho-physical misdirection of the course of history, by materialistic cunning enthroned in the place of spiritual wisdom, selfishness of philanthropy, was making gigantic economic conflicts, social antagonisms, class-hatreds, revolutions in the ideas and ideals of morals, and colossal political wars and butcheries inevitable — tremendous *kali* and [Page 9] *kalaha*, Dis-cord, the “separation of heart from heart”, in place of Con-cord, “the harmony of heart with heart”, as worldwide as the growth of physical sense-seeking and of conscience-suppressing intellect. The three primal and fundamental appetites, springing from the sense of separate individuality, *viz.*, the instinct (of hunger and curiosity) for (physical and mental) food, (of acquisitiveness) for private property, (of mating and progeneritiveness) for spouse and children, when pampered by cunning and not regulated by wisdom, turn into the excessive gluttony and pride, the ruthless avarice, the wanton lust, from which invariably are born the forces of Hate and their dread consequence, internecine War.

The Sowing of the Seed of Con-cord, Through Annie Besant

To counteract these mighty forces of growing Mutual Hate, the seed of the Theosophical Society was planted some forty years before the World War, in the U. S. A., in 1875, by the Invisible Spiritual Government of the World, through Helena Petrovna Blavatsky of Russia, and Henry Steel Olcott of America — the tiny seed (1) of Spirituality, of the Principle of Universal Brotherhood and Love, of Humanism, of Inter-nationalism, (2) of Inter-religionism, and (3) of Superphysical sense-seeking, for the good of mankind, without distinction [Page 10] of race, creed, caste, colour or sex. Then the seed was transplanted to India, the Mother of the Aryan Race. H. P. B. and H. S. O. fostered it here. But H. P. B. was not to work on earth much longer. She passed away to other spheres in 1891.

A worthy successor for her had already been decided on and brought to birth many decades earlier, on the 1st of October, 1847, in Britain — Britain the mother of modern Imperialism and Capitalism, and also of their great rivals, Self-Government and Socialism. Thus are the maleficent and the beneficent angels always intermixing in the world-drama, and good and evil always being brought out of each other by the Great Dramatist. This successor of H. P. B.'s was, as needed, congenitally endowed with exceptional vitality of body, brilliance of intellect, power of oratory, moral courage, and, above all else, sensitive, vibrant, indignant sympathy for the weak, the poor, the suffering, the exploited and oppressed. For over a decade and a half before she met H. P. B., she had been undergoing, in Britain, the strenuous training in public life (reinforced by the ruin of the private life), and in valiant fighting for the weak, which was necessary for her future world-wide work.

Psychic Recapitulation in Her Own Life

Those who have not the leisure or the inclination to take more than the surface-view of [Page 11] things have often spoken, with decial, of her many changes, and she herself spoke of her blunders. "What great soul has not committed blunders — even mountainous blunders ? To those who try to look beneath the surface, such changes are, in the *psyche*, during the manifest life of a great worker, like the changes of type, in the *physique*, which every human embryo recapitulates in its unmanifest hidden life during gestation. They are preparatory for the soul's maturation and conversion. In those who are persons "of great action", *rajas*, as well as "of great thought", *sattva*, such recapitulation takes strong *outer* expression also — which appears as the so-called "changes" — because of the exceptional "energy", "vitality", stored in the individual. In those who are persons only "of thought", such palingenetic psychic struggles and transitions, through the critical points, from one thought-"kingdom" to the next higher thought-"kingdom", are experienced mostly only inwardly, or, if there is surplus energy available, then the successive inner experiences may find expression in successive outer preachings and writings.

Yet even through all these "changes" of Annie Besant, the very essence of Theosophy may be clearly discerned running as a continuous thread. Her very atheism of the early years was a passionate revolt against the glaring miseries and iniquities of life, which seemed to [Page 12] cry out against the possibility of an Omnipotent and Omniscient as well as Benevolent Creator, but was, at heart, the desperate struggle to understand and reconcile the existence of such an Ultimate Power with such sufferings of the seemingly innocent. They who wrestle angrily with God, as children sometimes with their mothers, really clasp Him far more closely, and come to know Him in every limb and aspect far more intimately, than those who are content to worship Him from a distance; veiling their eyes in awe, not daring and not

caring to behold the glories of His face full-eyed. Her socialism, not merely theoretical, but practically manifested in struggles to improve the lot of the down-trodden, was the natural fretting and fighting of a finely sensitive soul to remedy these wrongs.

The message of the Spiritual Hierarchy reached her in 1888, through *The Secret Doctrine* of H.P.B., by one of those 'curious coincidences' which always coincide with the wishes of the Elder Brothers of Humanity who are known in India, among the Yogis and Vedantins as Kumāras, Manus, Buddhas, Dikpālas, Tīrthankaras, Rshis, Arhats; among Gnostics and Mystics as “the Sons of God”, “the Lords of the Sabbath” and “the Wise men of the East” ; and among the Sûfis as Qutb, Ghaus, Naqîbs, Autād, Abdāl, Abrār, Auliyā. On reading that message, the half-awake soul opened its eyes fully. The reasons for the inequalities [Page 13] and seeming injustices of the world, sub-human, human, superhuman, were understood. The way to right them, to adjust them, was seen also. Patient, many-sided, steady striving to spread Theosophy and apply its principles to various departments of human life, for the uplift of the human race, took the place of the former impatient fretting and struggling.

Theosophy, Her Guiding-Star in Life

For forty-eight years, from 1888 till her passing, Theosophy, God-Wisdom, Brahma-vidyā, Tasaw-wuf, Gnosis, the Science of the Infinite and Infinitesimal Spirit, Greater than the Greatest, Smaller than the Smallest, was her guiding-star, her beacon-light, her one inspiring motive in all her multifarious work.

The educational effort, which ultimately resulted in the Central Hindu College, Boys' School, and Girls' School, was first intended to take shape as a Theosophical College. Only because a sufficient number of theosophists wearing the garments of other creeds were not available then, was it decided to begin with an institution which should rationalise, liberalise, and Spiritualise at least Hinduism, and harmonise and solidarise the thousand-and-one divisions and sub-divisions of at least the Hindû community. Later on, more definitely Theosophical schools and colleges for girls and boys were [Page 14] developed by her, in Benares and in the South including schools for those who have now received the name of Harijans.

To establish peace between the creeds, to show the identity of the essentials of all religions, may be regarded as the practical purpose of the second of the three main objects of the Theosophical Society, as a very important means to the accomplishment of the first object, viz., the establishment of a nucleus of Universal Brotherhood without distinction of caste, creed, color, race or sex. The two theosophical colonies, at Benares, the headquarters of the Indian Section of the Society, and at Adyar in Madras, the Presidential headquarters of the whole T.S., which she fostered and developed, the latter splendidly — where persons of many races and many creeds are to be always seen, and particularly in Convention days, living and cooperating in brotherly and sisterly spirit — these two colonies are standing object-lessons in what Theosophy can do to obliterate artificial barriers between heart and heart.

The Scattering of the Seed of Theosophy by Annie Besant

Through her, the Hierarchy planted the seeds of such Theosophy in very many of the countries of this earth, to save Spirituality and Humanism from being drowned altogether in the Flood [Page 15] of

sensuous selfishness and arrogant ruthless Materiality, which has been rushing upon mankind from all sides with the misuse of machinery. Science and its inventions, given to man for ministering to the greatest happiness of the greatest number, are being misappropriated for promoting the greatest pride and wealth and luxury of the smallest number. The Ideal of Universal Brotherhood and the scientific psychological principles of Theosophy, duly applied, promise the only refuge from the terror of this mighty danger. Therefore, even as the Ark was built through Noah to preserve the seeds of many-formed life safe above the Deluge, even so have the Seeds of Theosophy and Spirituality been spread through all the countries through Annie Besant, to sprout and put forth healthy flower and fruit after the Flood of sensuous Materiality has subsided in convulsions of world-wars and world-bankruptcies.

This day, (1 Oct., 1933) when she would have completed eighty-six years if she had stayed eleven more days on earth, more than fifty countries are calling to mind with gratitude, in small or large groups of members of the T.S., the help she brought to them in the deeper things of life.

Thousands of lectures she gave in scores of countries and hundreds of towns, hundreds of books and pamphlets she published, and myriads of editorial and other articles she wrote — in these last forty years. The burden of them all, at heart, was the [Page 16] promotion of Peace and Universal Brotherhood and the spread of Theosophy everywhere.

As one small instance of her tirelessness in this “Service of the Masters”, may be mentioned the fact that, in the summer of 1929, in her eighty-second year, she visited, by aeroplane, twenty-two towns of the newly re-shaped countries of Middle and Eastern Europe, in twenty-three days, and gave two, sometimes three, talks and lectures on Theosophy at each place — making a total of over fifty. To mention another instance, much earlier, in 1903, travelling by train, in Bombay, Kathiāwād, Gujerāt, Rājputānā, Mālwā, and the Panjāb, she visited twenty-three towns in fifty-two days, giving at each place one lecture on Theosophy and one on the Central Hindū College, besides holding conversations and question-and-answer meetings. I had the privilege of acting as her personal assistant on that tour, and, though twenty-one years younger, became almost ill towards the end of the tour, especially because of the frequent breaks in sleep involved by changes from broad-guage to metre-guage and main line to branch line, and *vice versa*, at very odd hours of the night. But she was indefatigable and ready always. Maintenance of health, by strictly regular hours and habits, one can understand; but her ability, at sudden call, to resist the demands of sleep was always a marvel to me. In December, 1928, after attending a whole day's sessions of the All-Parties' Convention at [Page 17] Calcutta, she sat up the succeeding night at the I. N. Congress session from 8 p.m. to 3 a.m., cross-legged, in Indian fashion, on the hard floor of the cloth covered wooden *dais*, almost without changing posture, while the other leaders, all junior, some very junior, to her — she was eighty-one then — were all dosing off and taking little naps, or going out of the *pandāl*, from time to time, to refresh themselves.

Parivrājaka, sannyāsi, faqīr, bhikshu, ascetic wanderer, that she was, perpetual tours like those above-mentioned, in India in the cold weather, in the cooler continents in the hot weather, were her predestined task in all these forty years, except the last two, for carrying the great message to all, in language which went home to the hearts of the listeners. In those earlier years, from 1894 to 1907 (when she was elected P. T. S. and began to reside mostly at Adyar), my elder brother, Govinda Das (who passed away in 1926) used generally to accompany her on her tours in the south of India, Upendranath Basu in the east, and I in the west and north.

It is devoutly to be prayed for that a worthy successor may be found, and no schisms arise within the T. S. because of short-sighted personal reasons, (as has been the unhappy experience of almost all the great attempts at Religious Reform), now that the great captain has gone on leave, and that the ship of Theosophy may continue to voyage [Page 18] to and fro, above the surface of the Deluge of Materiality, amidst all the storms of warring egoisms, and convey to all countries its cargoes of genuine spiritual food, heart-consoling message of sure and certain ultimate safety, and wise counsel as to how best to weather through the many very serious troubles that are profoundly perturbing all mankind today. [Dr G.S. Arundale, one of her brightest and most loyal protégés, who did splendid work for her in the Central Hindu College, Benares, as Professor of History and English, as Head Master of the School Department, as Principal of the College, from 1903 to 1913, and since then has travelled far and wide, has now been elected P.T.S. The other candidate was Prof. Ernest Wood, also a trusted protégé of A.B's and a very good worker too. May all the needed wisdom and power come to G.S. Arundale to steer the ship of the T.S. aright, to advance the cause of Theosophy, to win the trust and the active co-operation of those who were his opponents in the recent election.]

The Theosophy of Her Politics

Because of this Theosophy; because of her knowledge that nothing in this world is wholly independent of anything else, that no country today can stand wholly aloof from any other country — as is being proven resistlessly to even the most purblind by the World-War and the consequent World-Bankruptcy, and the menace of a worse Armageddon overhanging the whole of the human world like a thick pall of black gloom; because she knew that the cry for “complete Independence” in India was only the natural reaction against the [Page 19] violent imposition of complete Dependency upon it; therefore, in her political work for India, she pleaded with both the sides concerned in the great contest, for the early establishment of an *honorable mutual Inter-dependence*, of Brotherhood, on equal terms — the only right and just relationship.

Always, latterly, was she proclaiming with all her might that the Indian problem was the world-problem, that peace in and with India would bring peace to all the world. But the men in power did not heed her. Selfishness places impenetrable veils upon the eyes and ears. India has been the apple of discord in the past between Portuguese, Dutch, French and English. Revelations subsequent to the World-War have made it fairly well-known that the German railway from Berlin to Baghdad was intended to be continued, as we may say, through Beluchistan to Benares and through Burma to Bangkok. This was prevented, mostly for the profit of Britain, at the cost of the slaughter (by varying computations) of eight to thirteen million men of some thirty countries and the explosion into air of forty to fifty thousand million pounds worth of the murderous products of sweated and misemployed human labor, with an unending trail of woeful consequences. But the mischief has been scarcely even scotched; it seems, indeed, to have been made worse, instead of being abated. National hatreds and armings and wastes on Misemployed and [Page 20] Unemployed, are worse than ever before — all because of insane greed for money and for power of some, and consequent hate and jealousy of all the others.

The ruthless exploitation of India and the resultant lurid glow and glitter of imperial power and show in Britain have aroused similar ambitions and stimulated rivalries and competitions all around. The Dutch and French Republics have been imperialist all along, and are becoming more and more such now. Republics — and imperialist! Even the U. S. A. seems to be heading in the same direction. Italy too has come into the same field now with a rush. And Japan in the far East, forced, by the sheer necessity of

self-preservation, to imitate the ways of Britain. And Russia, with intentions indubitably philanthropic (as compared with the more and more blatantly cynical and selfish junkerism and chauvinism and jingoism of the imperialists) but with some very fallacious 'ideology' (the new and more fashionable word for 'psychology' and 'philosophy of life') and methods of violence and autocratic and bureaucratic dictatorship as bad as those of the others, is working in her own way for "World-Dominion" or "World-Revolution". Economic, and, for its sake, political, "influence", or "mandate", or "protectorate", or downright "possession", over and of India — seems to be the main objective of almost all. Where else two million [Page 21] square miles of food-producing land, full of all kinds of other raw materials also, and three hundred millions of 'serfs' to work it ? Napoleon coveted India; the Czars longed for it; Wilhelm II of Germany made a bid for "World-Dominion or Downfall" on her account; Japan wants the Hegemony of Asia, has seized Korea and now Manchuria, is capturing the trade if not yet the lands of India, and cries to the other predaceans, "Paws off China"; and Britain, with her own paws elbow-deep in India, has not the force to say "No" publicly and openly to her too apt pupil, but seems to have begun, judging by the news in the papers, to take quiet; mysterious action on different parts of the frontiers of China, to the north and east of India, Thibet, and Burma ; while France seems also to be trying to creep up, northwards from Indo-China, into Yunnan. What chance that Disarmament Conferences will succeed ? It has been written down in books, by western lifelong students of the subject, that India and the Nile are the key to modern world-politics. Restoration of India to Self-government, and Planned Economy and Social Organisation within each country — this is the only way to successful Disarmament and World-Peace. He who has set the bad example — it is for him to make amends, apply the remedy, set the good example. As the Indian scriptures say,

Jyēshtah kulam pālayati, vināshayati wā punah.

(The elder makes or mars the family.) [Page 22]

He who has the power is the elder. Because the power is his, therefore the responsibility, the duty, is his, primarily. If he shares power and wealth willingly with the other members, the family holds together and prospers. Otherwise, partition is certain some day, sooner or later, with perhaps complete ruin of all power and wealth, after internecine conflict.

Therefore Annie Besant began advising Britain, even during the days of the Great War, to give Home Rule to India of its own accord, and thereby win perpetual gratitude and the strong solidarity of the Indo-British Commonwealth, which would, then, before very long, become the Commonwealth of all the Nations, the Federation of the World. But she was not listened to. Evil counsels, evil passions and ambitions, have continued to prevail. History continues to illustrate the psychology of the worse half of human nature and not yet of the better half. And, therefore, the Disarmament Conferences are repeatedly ending in fiascoes. If India were set up in Home Rule and real Dominion Status today, with a constitution which embodied her own ancient traditional meaning of *Swarāj*, (*i.e.*, *rāj*, legislation and government, by those representing the higher, better, wiser *Swa* or Self of the people), as well as the most suitable technical devices of modern political science and art consistent with this radical principle — then these Disarmament Conferences would succeed today, because of [Page 23] the removal of the Apple of Discord, and Britain would not lose economically, but, probably, gain more; and though the imperialist-capitalist-militarist cliques in Britain would have to shed political and financial arrogance, the nation as a whole would gain the Moral Hegemony of the human world, and all the advantages that that must mean, through the gratitude and the admiration of the other countries. Annie Besant often mentioned publicly

what Britain had gained by helping to free the Negro slaves in the U.S.A.

God usually helps those most readily who help themselves. But he also sometimes takes pity on and indirectly helps those who cannot help themselves. One of His laws, implanted in human nature, is that thieves must fall out some day, so that honest men may have a chance. Therefore over-greedy capitalists must overleap themselves into internecine war. But the honest men have to make sure that they are really honest and not also thieves at heart, kept down so far only by stronger thieves. It may be that He simply wishes this particular Indo-British scene in the Perpetual Drama to be prolonged a little by the interplay of opposing counsels and forces, till the education and conversion of both is complete. Or it may be that He wishes to give the surface of His harassed earth a long respite from the ceaseless rushings, tramlings, scratchings, deeper and deeper diggings [Page 24] and divings, and higher and higher flyings, of this very quarrelsome and very restless race of beasts called men, by destroying them in a vast Armageddon this time, a new kind of *pralaya*, instead of the usual cataclysmic submersion of a continent under the ocean; it may be that He wishes to give to the earth a long and peaceful sleep in bright sunshine and soft moonlight, under the umbrella of the primeval forest, lulled by the rhythmic roar of the ocean-waves unbroken by the constant churning of the myriad steamers, and fanned by the gentle breezes undisturbed by the tremendous drone of the thousand aeroplanes.

Theosophy and the Indian Political Striving

Indians would do well to remember that A. O. Hume, the father of the Indian National Congress, was first led into work for the uplift of India, fifty years ago, by the inspiration of Theosophy. That he disagreed with his theosophical colleagues on various points, broke away from them and decided to attend more directly to the political aspect of the awakening rather than to the inner and deeper spiritual aspect of it — we may now, looking back in the light of subsequent experience, see this to have also been due to the wise dispensations of Providence. Despite abstention from all political work, H. P. B. and H. S. O. [Page 25] were shadowed and subjected to much espionage. To put the political work in the separate charge of a Briton, and a retired official, too, of the highest standing, was indispensable in order that the two movements might live and grow. The anxiety of the Elder Brothers to uplift the “deeply sunken Indian People”, socially and politically as well as spiritually, and to create an “Indo-British Nation” for the helping of mankind, will be clear to all theosophists who study the volume published in 1923, under the title of *The Mahatma Letters*. It [The following extracts will help to illustrate. All the Letters, it should be noted, are dated between 1880 and 1884, and are addressed to Mr. A. P. Sinnett.

“The projected organisation had ... in view ... to promote the security and welfare of a whole conquered nation” (p. 212).

“Will you, or rather they, never see the true meaning and explanation of that great wreck of desolation which has come to our land and threatens all lands — yours first of all ? It is *selfishness and exclusiveness* that killed ours, and it is *selfishness and exclusiveness* that will kill yours — which has in addition some other defects which I will not name . . .” (p. 252).

“You must be complete and sole master of a paper devoted to the interests of my benighted country ... He alone who has the love of the Humanity at heart, who is capable of grasping thoroughly the idea of a

regenerating practical Brotherhood, is entitled to the possession of our secrets . . ." (p. 252).

"The 'Indo-British Nation' is the pulse I go by" (p. 381).

"I scarcely knew until I had begun to watch the development of this effort to erect a bulwark for Indian interests, how deeply my poor people had sunk. As one who watches the signs of fluttering life beside a dying bed, and counts the feeble breaths to learn if there may still be room for hope so we Aryan exiles in our snowy retreat have been attentive to this issue. Debarred from using any abnormal powers that might interfere with the nation's Karma, yet by all lawful and normal means trying to stimulate the zeal of those who care for our regard, we have watched the weeks [Page 26] grow into months, without the object having been achieved . . . The word 'patriotism' has now scarcely any electrical power over the Indian heart. The 'Cradle land of Arts and Creeds' swarms with unhappy beings, precariously provided for, and vexed by demagogues who have everything to gain by chicanery and impudence. We knew all this in the mass, but not one of us Aryans had sounded the depths of the Indian question as we have of late ... To the psychic sight India seems covered with a stifling grey fog, . . . the odic emanation from her vicious social state. Here and there twinkles a point of light which marks a nature still somewhat spiritual, a person who aspires and struggles after the higher knowledge ... I have . . . been . . . shocked by this nearer view of the selfish baseness of human nature (the concomitant, always, of the passage of humanity through our stage of the evolutionary circuit) ... I shall . . . confine myself to our prime duty of gaining knowledge and disseminating through all available channels such fragments as mankind in the mass may be ready to assimilate . . ." (pp. 383-5).

"The only object to be striven for is the amelioration of the condition of man by the spread of truth suited to the various stages of his development and that of the country he inhabits or belongs to" (p. 399).

"K . . . and S . . . are both needed . . . one correcting and equilibrising the other . . . Discord is the harmony of the universe . . . Each part . . . ceaselessly chases the other in harmonious discord on the paths of Eternal Progress, to meet and finally blend at the threshold of the pursued goal in one harmonious whole . . ." (pp. 400-1).

"[You will be helping in] ... saving our respective countries from a great evil that overhangs both . . . Opposition notwithstanding, and just because of it, you will bring the great national boil to a head sooner than it could be otherwise expected, . . . you will be helping the events that have to be brought about to save the unfortunate population that has been sat upon ever since 1793 . . . The Chohan was then in India and he was an eye-witness to the beginning of horrors . . . Things too horrible to mention were done under the eyes [Page 27] and often with the sanction of the Company's servants when the Mutiny put a certain impediment by bringing as its result another form of Government . . . The whole future of 'the brightest jewel'—O, what a dark satire in that name—in the crown of England is at stake, and I am bound to devote the whole of my powers as far as the Chohan will permit me, to help my country at this eleventh hour of her misery" (pp 387-392)] seems to happen, not infrequently, that servants of the same Masters, not fully conscious of the fact, and given different commissions for work in the outer world, do not recognise each other as such servants, and find themselves even at cross-purposes, now and then; but that too seems to be pre-arranged, all for the best in the end.

Forty years after the founding of the T.S., thirty after that of the Congress, the two lines of work converged in the person of Annie Besant.

Her work for the C. H. College and subsidiary activities had made her realise that the tentacles of that giant octopus, British-made Indian Law, were gripping every limb of the Indian People's Life so closely and completely that free movement and development were no longer possible even in educational work. To make such progress possible, the help and support of the political power that belongs to substantial self-government only was absolutely indispensable. Some other causes were also tending to diminish, at this time, the interest of the general public in Theosophy and the Theosophical Society, on the one hand, and her own in the work of the C. H. College on the other. She was impelled from within to take up political work directly, of course not as President of the T. S., but as the individual A. B. In 1914 she started the weekly *Commonweal*, and, on the 14th of July, in that same year, the anniversary of “the taking of the Bastille”, she [Page 28] started the daily *New India*. In the same year also she started the Indian Boy Scouts' Association — a very important movement. She founded the Home Rule League in 1915.

By this time, world conditions had changed greatly, Theosophy had made small or large homes for itself in all the advanced countries, was fairly well established in India, and was influencing thought all around, though direct membership of the T. S. was comparatively small. The leading scientists had discarded philosophic materialism and some had even taken up psychical research. Spirituality had now to contend against not so much the intellect as the selfishness inherent in the heart of the nations — no doubt a foe far stronger than the disbelief or doubt of the intellect. The World-War which began in 1914 and the World-Bankruptcy which has come upon its heels, began and continue to help the cause of Theosophy indirectly, by compelling men to see that, not in separative selfishness, but in all-inclusive unselfishness, co-operation, brotherhood, is to be found, not only their spiritual, but, emphatically, their material salvation also.

Theosophy now needed to be *carried into practice*, and not to remain confined to easy-going study or even strenuous preaching of theory and doctrine. It had to be infused into all departments of the people's life; not only into Education, but also into Politics, in order to transform it from its present avaricious [Page 29] and murderous sordidness into spiritual Rājā-Dharma, the “King of Duties, the Duty of Kings, *i.e.*, Rulers, the Compendium of all Righteous Duties, the Code of the Justly balanced Life, Individual and Social.

Sarvé dharmāh Rājā-Dharmé pravishtāh.(*Mbh.*)

(The Duty of the Ruler comprehends
The duties of all others, since he has
To see that every one performs his share
Of proper work in the Community.)

So Annie Besant took up the work of helping the Indian People to Self-knowledge, Self-respect, and Self-Government. Diplomatic persons of crooked ways, ever intent on making catspaws of others to draw their own chestnuts out of the fire, asked her why she was making things more difficult for Britain, in

India, during the days of the World War. She frankly and straightforwardly replied: "I emphatically want the connection between Britain and India to continue; I *do not* want it broken; but I also want India to have her just rights restored to her, which Britain has unjustly deprived her of; therefore, and only to this extent, I say, Britain's difficulty is India's opportunity; I want an Indo-British Commonwealth, not India enslaved and Britain slave-owner". The shortsighted British-Indian Government interned her in Ootacamund, for her Indian Home Rule activities, in the summer of 1917. G. S. Arundale and [Page 30] B. P. Wadia had the privilege of sharing the internment with her at Ootacamund. A storm of indignant protest swept over the whole country. I had the privilege of presiding over perhaps the first meeting of public condemnation of the Government's action, which was appropriately held in Benares on 26-6-1917 (if I remember rightly). She was released after three months, and was able to explain her views personally to the sympathetic and large-hearted Mr. E. S. Montagu, then Secretary of State for India, when he visited this country in the following winter. A profoundly grateful country, with one voice, bestowed upon her the highest honor it was possible for it to offer, *viz.*, the Presidentship of the Indian National Congress, at Calcutta, in December, 1917. I may mention, incidentally, that it; was Annie Besant's internment that first opened my eyes, and those of many others, to the importance of the political struggle that India had begun and the need for every Indian to help in it to his and her utmost. Till then I was immersed in educational work and theosophical (including Samskrit) studies, and had felt no keen interest in current politics. I now realised that without substantial and true Self-Government, no progress was possible in any department of our life. Along every line we are hindered by some page or other of the British-made Statute-Book, which gives the power of control to a Bureaucracy which exercises it in the interests not of India but of others. [Page 31]

Universal Inter-Dependence

The last three decades have been bringing home to the nations, and even perhaps to their mad politicians and economists, 'blinded' to the patent Truth by conceit and pride, and 'driven' into disastrous Error by sensuous greed (under the action of the *āvarana* and *vikshépa shaktis* of *Māyā*), the essential truth of Theosophy, embodied, centuries ago, by the Persian Sūfi, in some verses:

Banî Ādam a'zāi yak dīgar and,
Ke dar āfrīnish ze yak jauhar and
Cho uzvé ba dard āwarad rozgār,
Digār uzwahā rā na mānad qarār.

(The progeny of Adam are all limbs
Of but one body, since in origin
And essence they are all identical;
If one is hurt by stroke of evil fate,
Can th' others ever rest in painless ease ?)

The same great truth was proclaimed in fuller and more precise detail, by the Védic seers, in the Purusha-Sūkta of the Rg-Véda:

Brāhmano asya Mukham āsīt,
Bāhû Rājanyah krtah,

Ūrū tad Asya yad Vaishyah,
Padbhyām Shūdro ajāyata.

(The Men of Science constitute the Head
That sees, foresees, and guides the whole aright;
The Men of Valour form the powerful Arms
That guard against, prevent, and cure, all ills; [Page 32]

The Men of Trade, the Trunk that distributes,
After due storing, alimnt to all parts;
The Men of Labor lastly constitute
The sturdy Legs that well support the whole
And carry it about from place to place —
Such is the Body of the Human Race.)

Neither France, nor Italy, nor U. S. A., nor Britain, nor Russia, nor Japan, nor Germany, nor any other the most self-governing monarchy or republic, is “independent” of any others today. They are all bound together, bound to one another, by innumerable ties of “Trade and Commerce, which”, (if honestly conducted, with mutual goodwill, without the wish to cheat), “fulfils the direst wants of all the human world” [Commentary on these old verses, and on the teachings of Theosophy as regards the *practical* value of Universal Brotherhood, is being written today by the scores of books and the hundreds of dailies which are pointing out the disastrous consequences to all, of each nation raising tariff walls around itself, the result being that if imports are barred exports are stopped also, and the trade of all suffers alike.

The same commentary is continued by such proposals, by public men in the west, as that “Education should (a) inculcate the principle of the Essential Unity of Mankind, (6) teach the inter-dependence of interests of all people, (c) give a less national bias to history, (d) teach the realities of war”; (Leonard Woolf, *Way to Prevent War*, p. 489, pub. 1933.)]

Vārtā cha sarva-jagatām param-ārti-hantri.

But, today, they are all thus bound together, *without* mutual good-will, not by the wish to help but by the wish to cheat and exploit one another, and therefore all are unhappy. [Page 33]

Only in the voluntary, honorable, equitable Interdependence of all the nations, and, as indispensable preliminary condition therefor, of all the vocational, functional, classes or sections within each nation, in a prevailing atmosphere of Universal Brotherhood, is to be found happiness, the greatest happiness of the greatest number; for thereby alone can be achieved the wise and peaceful solution of all problems, along the *via media* between extreme power in the hands of a handful and extreme enslavement of the vast mass, between Bolshevik Dictatorship, or Fascist Dictatorship, or Individualist Capitalism, or Nationalist Imperialism, on the one side, and Proletarian Mobocracy and Democratic Anarchism, on the other side — between all opposite extremes, in short. Because of this great fact; and because the spiritual life and strength and virtue of the several great creeds, sent out by the Spiritual Hierarchy from time to time, to

serve as fountain-heads of such Brotherhood, have become outworn; because instead of breeding fraternity they are breeding enmity; because instead of guiding politics and economics into paths of beneficence, they have become subservient tools of these in acts of maleficence; therefore, to enable these creeds to remoralise, rationalise, and harmonise themselves, and, even more, to persuade and influence physical science to spiritualise itself, and thus enable and induce them all afresh to do their proper duty to mankind, has the [Page 34] good message of Theosophy been sent round so diligently from land to land through Annie Besant, after the fresh proclamation of it through H. P. Blavatsky and H. S. Olcott.

Temperamental Differences

Providence must have had some special purpose in view for permitting Theosophy and the political striving of the Congress to meet in the person of Annie Besant, and yet not permitting a closer *rapprochement* between the outstanding leaders of the two. To us, of feeble vision, who wished and prayed and tried in vain for such colligation, the reason may seem to have been, mostly, only temperamental differences. We thought that if Dr. Annie Besant, President of the T.S., ex-President of the I. N. Congress, and Founder of the Central Hindu College, on the one hand, and Mahatma Gandhi, the Chief Leader and ex-President of the Congress, on the other, and also the late Swāmi Shraddhānanda, the late Maulana Mohamed Ali, and Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya, founders and guides of the great religio-educational movements represented by the Arya Samāj Guru-kula of Kāngri, the Jāmia Milliā Islāmia of Delhi, and the Hindu University (developed out of the C. H. College) of Benares, respectively, the two last being ex-Presidents of the Congress also — we thought that if they could only collaborate, with [Page 35] one heart and one mind, for the purification and spiritualisation of Politics as well as Religion and Education, A. B. contributing the broad, full, comprehensive, far-sighted, splendid, theosophical vision as well as invaluable first hand experience of economic and political struggles in the west, Mahatma-ji his marvellous moral soul-force and matchless power of moving the Indian masses, and the others their powerful influence over their respective followings and their indispensable detailed work, then the fate of India would be changed for a happier one very soon. But it was not to be. Such “If’s” lie scattered thickly all over the numberless pages of History, which is made voluminous with events only because these “If’s” are not realised, since no news is good news and happy times have no history. The “If” was not realised, in this case, because, as we thought, of “temperamental differences”. There must be some deeper cause, behind those temperamental differences. The vast mass of three hundred and more million human beings requires much leavening, not to be completed in a few short years.

Movement and Philosophy of Movement

Throughout history we see that a great movement and a philosophy of the movement, a practice and a theory, a *kriyā* and a *jnāna*, a *prayoga* [Page 36] and a *shāstra*, an *a'mal* and an *asl*, a *fa'l* and a *qual*, a new adjustment of social structure and a new idea of the need and the manner of it — accompany and evolve, develop, and define one another, or rather each other, by action and reaction, as rotating cause and effect, like seed and plant. As yet, the neo-Congress movement, which began after 1919, the year of the horrible Amritsar Massacre, has not evolved an intelligible philosophy; it has only evolved a new — and very valuable because non-violent — method, and remains, mostly, mere activities, mere means, without a well-defined end. Theosophy, on the other hand, has no visible Movement or Practice, in outer social, economic, and political life, and remains, mostly, mere studies, also indefinite, because not attempted to-be applied to daily affairs. Another great person, Dr. Sun-yat-sen, Father of the New China,

which is suffering from childhood's illnesses as much as New India, has said that "action is easy but knowledge is difficult"; and he has tried to give a new Philosophy as well as a new Movement to his country. Yet another Chinese thinker, Dr. Woo, very rightly says: "Of all the enemies of human progress, the greatest is *the confusion of ideas*, because it obstructs views and paralyses action and destroys the collective will of any large organisation". Our ancient tradition is that self-sacrificing heroic action, *kriyā* involving *tapas*, *nafs-qurbānt*, and far-seeing comprehensive [Page 37] knowledge, *jnāna* or *vidyā* of the true Self, *irfān*, whence only true Self-government, are both equally difficult and equally necessary for progress and salvation, for material as well as mental welfare, for political as well as spiritual *moksha*, *najā't*, freedom from bondage. All these are only comments on the action that right knowledge, right desire, and right action are all interdependent and all equally indispensable for healthy individual and social life.

Capitalism, Fascism, Communism

The three "isms" which stand out glaringly in current history, Imperialist Capitalism, Bolshevism, Fascism, have each of them both a theory and a practice. The two latter seem to differ radically from each other in principles; but they are agreed in opposition to the excesses of the first; and yet also, both of them, are paying court to Capital, in different ways, for different reasons. Theosophy could and should have supplied to the Indian political movement appropriate philosophical principles and consequential policies, economic, domestic, religious, social, communal, and, above all else, international, whereby the hearts of all the nations might be brought nearer to each other. But this was not to be for some time yet. Annie Besant did her share of high duty in this respect, by drafting a Commonwealth of India [Page 38] Bill, and getting it read also, for a first time, in the British Parliament. ['As this is going to the press, there comes to hand an article contributed to the *Hindustan Times* dated 1-7-1934, on "Labor Policy on India", by Mr. George Lansbury, benevolent, sincere, philanthropic, honorable old gentleman, trusted and deeply respected leader of the Labor Party in Britain, and ex-Cabinet Minister also. In it, he says: "As to what form the Government of India should take, this must be settled by the Indians themselves ... I have come definitely to the conclusion that Annie Besant's scheme is the only way. Some years ago. Dr. Besant and a group of representative Indians, with the valuable assistance of our good friend and lifelong champion of India, David Graham Pole, drew up a Commonwealth of India Bill, which Henry Snell, John Scurr, and myself and others introduced in the house of Commons ... But the Bill never got a second reading ... There is only one way out for a Socialist Government. We should summon, or ask Indians themselves to summon, a Constituent Assembly, and hand over to that Assembly the task of deciding the future Government of India". A. B.'s Bill shows, and she told me herself, that it embodies most of the principles on which was also based the "Outline Scheme of Swaraj" prepared by the late Déshabandhu Chitta Ranjan Das and myself and published in 1923, though cast in forms more suitable for British ways of thinking. This was very right and naturally to be expected from her intimate acquaintance with the Indian as well as the English ways of thinking and feeling. That the Labor Party of Britain is so sympathetic to India, is largely due to her mediation] But the other Congress leaders did not give proper heed to the draft, nor discuss it, modify it, or replace it with any other Constitutional Scheme of their own, in good time, and so failed to give a specific aim and a clear direction to the country's efforts; they did not realise that a well thought-out "End" is as indispensable as good and proper "Means", that the diligent pursuit and practice of the latter should [Page 39] be perpetually accompanied and governed by the clear vision of the former. Let us hope that Annie Besant's unfulfilled work, which circumstances prevented her from completing, in this vital respect, may be carried out by a worthy successor of hers in the leadership of the T. S. in co-operation with Congress leaders, through the realisation by these leaders of the absolute necessity for putting a definite meaning into the word *Swa-rāj* and keeping it perpetually before the

country's eyes, instead of that mere vague word, or the other meaningless word "Independence", to guide it as a beacon-light in its progress through the dark jungle of political striving.

The T.S. and The League of Nations

The Theosophical Society is the seed and root of the true Spiritual League of All the Nations. It has spread thousands of rootlets in over fifty countries of the earth. Without its inspiration the merely political League of (some) Nations can never succeed in achieving its purpose. The two are halves of one natural whole, as the part of the tree below and the part above the surface of the earth. They are indispensable complements to each other. It is a matter for deep regret and apprehension that, for various reasons, the T. S. has not been able to develop properly this most important aspect of its being in such a way as [Page 40] to establish the natural connection between the two halves. If it had done so — and it may and ought to do so now — it would be to the political League of Nations as soul to body, as right principle to right policy, as vitalising heart to limbs. "It shall not profit a man anything if he gains the whole world but lose his own soul". It shall not profit the political League of Nations anything if it spread voluminous official correspondence over all the earth, and succeed not in inspiring its Member-Nations with the theosophical spirit of Universal Brotherhood. Perhaps it is to supplement this aspect of the T.S. that the Collective-Mind, the Vishv-ātmā, Rûh-i-kul, Time-Spirit, Oversoul, Public-Opinion, has been starting other movements also, such as the World-Fellowship of Faiths, recently held at Chicago (in 1933). If the successors of Annie Besant in the T.S. can so conduct affairs as to secure, within the Organisation of the League of Nations, the establishment of an International Committee for Religious Co-operation between the followers of the several great living Creeds, like the existing International Committee for Intellectual Co-operation, or even simply induce the latter to include, within its educational work, the teaching in all lands, of the principles of Universal Religion, *i.e.*, Theosophy, which run through and constitute the essence of all religions, they would surely win Annie Besant's gratitude from on high. [Page 41]

PERSONAL

"Heliodore"

In earlier days she often wrote over the pen-name of "Heliodore". The word means "Given by the Sun", Sûrya-datta. Appropriately she named herself so, by sub-conscious memory. The old books say: "The messengers, the orderly officers, the envoys and ambassadors, of the high gods who have their abode in the Solar Sphere, are always flashing along the pathways constituted by the sun-beams, to all parts of the Solar System, adjusting the affairs of the *jîvas*, the living beings, that make up the kingdoms of Animate Nature everywhere; and human souls also which, by their virtuous deeds, have won the right, are led, after they leave the earth, with sweet songs of invitation and of welcome, by those same deeds of sacrifice in visible shape, along these rays, to their appointed places of reward and rest in the Solar heavens".

amasya dûtāsh-cha, tatha-iva pārshadah
Nārāyanasy, -ātha ganāh Shivasya,
Sûryasya rashmîn avalambya sarvé,
Jîvan niyachchanti charanti sarvadā.

Ehi éhî-ti tam āhutayah suvarchasah
 Sûryasya rashmibhir-yajamānam vahanti,
 Priyām vācham abhi-vadantyo-archayantyah,
 'Ésha vah punyah sukrtô Brahma-lokah'.

To those of us who have been nurtured in such traditions it is easy to believe that her soul [Page 42] of fire and light was such a servant of Those who brood over humanity as parents over their children, and came to and dwelt on the earth for a few decades for the awakening of men to higher things, and has now gone back for a while, to rest and then to come again, as she has promised.

Saraswatî

Her aesthetic dress and distinguished presence corresponded with her noble soul and her magnificent eloquence. In 1901, some thirty-two years ago, after her Benares home, Shānti-Kunja, had been built, in the vicinity of the Central Hindu College and adjoining the Indian Section of the T. S., she desired to renovate an old temple, standing on its grounds, which had gone out of repair. Though her religion was the Universal and Scientific Religion of Theosophy, which embraces all creeds alike, being the parent of them all, yet, having adopted India as her Motherland and made Benares her home, she desired to Indianise herself in ways of living and in appearance also as much as possible, to get into living touch with the heart of the Indian People. And since the then workers of the Indian Section of the T. S. were mostly Hindu, she, by force of circumstance, adopted a few outward forms of the current Hindû religion, and also [Page 43] the Hindû sarî-dress (which, by the way, has become the very becoming dress now of Indian women of all creeds — though many of the men of the different creeds, being much less refined by nature than the women and much more quarrelsome, continue to insist upon communal differences of dress also). Hence her desire to renovate the temple. This was done; and in connection therewith, a small *sabhā* (gathering) of the then foremost Pandits of “the sacred town”, therefore of the whole of India, was invited. They very kindly came. Among them was the renowned Mahā-maho-pādhyāya Pandit Gangādhara Shāstri. As soon as he beheld her, as she stood offering welcome to the learned guests, the words broke forth irresistibly from his lips:

Sarva-shuklā Saraswatî!

(All-White Saraswatî!)

The goddess of learning and eloquence is imaged, in the Pûrānas, as white in complexion, in dress, in ornaments.

Undoubtedly the blessing of Saraswatî rested upon her, and she was given her marvellous gift of speech by that great goddess to help in lifting up the head of Mother India from the mud and mire in which it has lain, fainting and trampled on, for centuries.

The Schools and Colleges she founded and helped to maintain, by her own gifts to a [Page 44]

considerable extent; the work she did for the promotion of that very valuable form of practical character-building education, viz., Scouting, for girls as well as boys; for the Labor Union; for the Political advancement of the country, for which she suffered three months' internment at the hands of the short-sighted and small-hearted Government: the daily and weekly papers which she started and conducted to help in the political struggle, mostly at great financial loss to herself, besides editing the monthly *Theosophist* — these will be described by others. I wish to emphasise the fact that her heart was ever in and for Theosophy, as the one source of all blessings, in all these other works.

Personal Relations

The practical application of the principles of Theosophy to the affairs of life has always been a matter of struggle by *sattva*-virtue against *tamas*-inertia and *rajas*-selfishness and evil — as indicated, in concentrated form, in the command of the Gītā, quoted before. The consequence was that Annie Besant, like every other leader “of action”, created strong likes and dislikes around her in her lifetime ; for action has to be more or less one-sided, while thought can be all-sided. Her intensely energetic, challenging, combative, valiant temperament, indispensable for her many-sided [Page 45] work, also tended to keep the environment perpetually in a state of vibrant excitement, as a flaming fire its surrounding atmosphere. But now that she has gone, all dislikes and all thoughts of her human weaknesses are gone also, and only the likes and the memories of her 'superhuman' greatnesses remain and increase, and those who were her most determined opponents are joined in eulogy of her extraordinary personality. Her personal social relations, even with those who differed most strongly from her on public questions, were always gentle and cordial. If any one heard her low and sweet voice in private conversation only, it would not be possible for him to imagine the heights of strength and grandeur to which that voice could rise on the public platform in pleading for the right and in denunciation of the wrong.

A Controversy

Deep as my love and reverence were for her — whom I, because of old *samskāras*, sub-conscious memories, impresses, of relationships in past births, regarded as my spiritual mother in this birth, from the moment I first beheld her, as she alighted from the train, in company with Col. Oclott, on the platform of the Allahabad Railway Station, in the winter of 1893-'4, during the days of the Kumbha-Mélā (a great bathing 'fair') — even I had the deplorable misfortune, once, of becoming engaged [Page 46] in a public controversy with her, in 1912-'13, over the affairs and the policies of the Central Hindū College and the Theosophical Society, in which both I happened to be entrusted with executive offices at the time. When the controversy had blown over, I humbly begged her forgiveness, not for my differing views, [These views amounted briefly to this, that we should all pray with all the strength of our souls that a Helper of Mankind may come, but that no particular person should be accepted or proclaimed or treated as an *avatāra* or initiate or *siddha-yogī* or other such being possessed of high spiritual quality and superphysical powers and accomplishments, *before* he had given proof of being such; though any one should most certainly be regarded and honored duly as such, *after* he had given clear and unmistakeable proof. I have reason to believe that the neglect of the simple precaution embodied in these views — a neglect which was due only to her very great, very generous, very laudable eagerness that help should come to suffering Humanity, caused, in consequence of certain developments, many years after the controversy, great shock and deep disappointment and lasting pain to our beloved Mother, and therefore deep distress to me also and to all who loved her deeply. It seems to me useful to mention this, here, as a caution to all concerned, because, even as every shine has its shadow, so every attempt at Religious

Reform, by reproclamation of the Theosophical Truth, has been accompanied or shortly followed by attempts to make use, for personal interests of various kinds, of counterfeit imitations of that Truth, and the danger of such is very great in connection with the Third Object of the T. S., which *ought* certainly to be pursued, but in the *scientific* spirit, of demonstration and experiment, with due safeguards against the danger. Lest there be any misunderstanding, it should be added here that those developments, such as the dissolution of the Order of the Star in the East by Mr. J. Krishnamurji and his disclaimer of being World-Teacher, were greatly to the *credit* of his moral courage and honest straightforwardness. I, for one, sincerely wish he may evolve into a really useful worker and disseminator and expounder of the eternal truths of genuine Theosophy, Brahmavidyā, Gnostic Mysticism, Tasawwuf, stated openly or allegorically and in veiled language, in the *Gītā*, the *Upanishads*, *The Secret Doctrine*, the *Purānas*, and the Scriptures of the other Religions. [Page 47] but for any harshnesses that might have crept into my language in the heat of argument, because of my coarse and unregenerate nature; and she assured me of complete forgiveness already generously given long ago, before my asking — as was indeed clear from the fact that even during the period of the controversy, her personal kindness to me, in every way, continued as ever before, unabated in any respect, whatever my defects of tone and wording may have been.

Elephant Rides

The mention of the Kumbha-mélā reminds me of an incident that was humorous as well as anxious. Annie Besant had just come to India and was visiting Allahabad for the first time, in company with Col. Olcott, Countess Wachtmeister, and others. At least half a million pilgrims, preparing to bathe, were packed on a stretch of sand, about a mile long and half as broad, between the Fort and the Embankment, on one side, and the stream of the Gangā, on the other. The party went to see the unusual sight. They had also to go across the river to take tea with a friend who had invited them to his camp on the other bank. I was at the *mélā*, on duty, being then in Government service. Earnest Theosophists, in those early days, full of mystic romance and aspiration, all wanted to wear their hair long and look at least like tyros in yoga. [Page 48] I wanted to, also; I had not yet quite completed my twenty-fourth year. The mystical longings aroused in my mind by the first number of the *Theosophist*, which somehow came into my hands, soon after its appearance, and which I had read through with very little understanding, being then at school, and in my twelfth year, had not yet lost their freshness, nor, indeed, have they yet lost it all, though overlaid with the heavy dust of the work-a-day world. But I had gone into government service at the wish of my father, and could not well wear long hair and carry my theosophical romance on my sleeve, for fear of becoming the laughing-stock of my prosy fellow-officers. So Annie Besant, when she stepped out of the train and dawned upon my vision for the first time, seemed to me to be the very incarnation of Theosophy, of high spiritual aspiration, of compassion for all weakness and suffering, of tender helpfulness, with the sadness of the ages in her sweet face, and the halo of discipleship of the Masters, the holy Rshis of the *Purānas*, enveloping her; and I was spending as much time as I could possibly spare from official duties, in attendance on the party.

In the *Métā*, seeing some elephants belonging to rich pilgrims and richer *Mahants* ('abbots' of various associations of 'ascetics' — contradiction in terms !), the Colonel, with his ever-present eagerness for fun, called out, "Surely Annie would like a ride on an elephant; wouldn't you, Annie?" [Page 49] 'Annie', ready for a new adventure, agreed, of course. An elephant with a proper *howdā* was not in sight. I secured one with only a thick pad, the next best. The beast was made to sit down; the Colonel climbed up the thin ladder agilely, despite his sixty-four years, fixed himself firmly on the pad, and invited A. B. to

come up. I could not go with them because of duties on this bank, and felt very anxious, and wanted her to go across the river by the pontoon-bridge, on an *ekkā* (a two-wheeled horse-cart). But she would not be outdone by the Colonel. After a quizzical look at ladder and beast, with doubt in eye but determination in heart, she negotiated the ladder, and fixed herself beside the Colonel, holding on tightly to the ropes by which the pad was kept in position. Then the Colonel invited the Countess. She approached the ladder. But the huge animal was becoming fidgety by this time. She was not physically strong or active, and hesitated. I added my dissuasions. She decided that discretion was the better part of valour, and went across by an *ekkā*. After a couple of hours of anxiety, I learnt that there had been no misadventure, except that the party were nearly compelled to share in the 'bathing' feature of the fair, for the elephant expressed a great desire to sprinkle itself all over with the holy water as it waded across the shallow stream to the other bank, but fortunately yielded to the energetic remonstrances of the driver and his iron hook; also that [Page 50] A. B. almost frayed the skin of her palms, in holding on to the ropes to avoid displacement by the ponderous swayings and pitchings of the animal, but the handkerchiefs of the party helped to avoid serious excoriation.

A few days later, an elephant in the *métā*. became excited, began pulling off the thatch and cloth tops of the temporary stalls, and making little runs this way and that, amidst the thick crowd which scattered fast from the animal's immediate vicinity, in all directions, but could not go far, being hemmed in by its own immense numbers all round. It was a very anxious time. If the animal got a little worse, it would crush hundreds of human beings to death. The question of getting out soldiers from the neighbouring Fort to shoot it was being rapidly discussed between the senior officers present, when the situation was saved in an unexpected and very interesting fashion. The experienced *mahout* of a bigger tusker drove his animal against the demented one. The two met head to head with a crash. The smaller one was daunted and turned away. The driver of the other seized the opportunity and drove his great beast full tilt against the exposed flank of the other. The latter toppled over clean with a tremendous thud, flinging off its badly frightened *mahout* who had so far clung on somehow, and making a big depression in the damp firm sand. When it got up, it was completely sober; its [Page 51] *mahout* climbed up again; and it went out of the *métā* quietly and quickly, stimulated from behind by occasional prods from the big tusker which followed him out. The *mahout* of the victorious animal was suitably rewarded for his signal service and my retrospective thankfulness was devout that A. B.'s elephant had on the whole behaved soberly. If the incident had occurred before the day of the ride instead of after, I would not have had the courage to obey the Colonel's commands.

Many years after, I think in the autumn of 1915 or 1916, another elephant ride was arranged for her, in Benares, to see the annual *Bharata milāp mélā* — the pageant of the meeting of Rāma and Lakshmana with Bharata and Shatrughna, after the completion of the former's fourteen years' exile — which is, if possible, even more crowded, though much smaller, than the Kumbhamélā; for at least fifty thousand persons gather on an open space less than two hundred yards square; but this time we had one of the Maharaja of Benares' well-trained elephants with a proper *howdā*. I was forgetting; there was yet another elephant-ride. A. B. was the guest of the late Maharaja Pratap Singh of Kashmir, in the small town of Jammu. She was taken through the streets on an elephant. The houses were so small, mostly wood-built and flimsy-looking, that, as we went along, looking full into the second storeys, unable to see the first because the elephant filled the whole [Page 52] width of the very narrow streets, I was afraid that if the animal happened to brush accidentally against any house, it would cause disaster, however unwittingly. This was in 1906, I think.

Affection as Heart-Nourishment

It has been said by some that she was fond of praise. Is there any one in the past history of mankind who has not been, or, in the present, who is not ? If any one should claim that there has been or is, then surely he is making a mistake. The Yoga, the Vedānta, and other scriptures tell us, what introspection can confirm to each, that any one: who lives, lives not by bread alone, but also by affection, which is food for the mental body, the *sūkshma-sharīra*, the *jism-i-latīf*, even as bread is food for the physical body, the *sthūla-sharīra*, *jism-i-kasīf*. Yes, she was fond of praise, inasmuch as, and only so far as, praise meant loving appreciation of her labors. Even the high gods, led by Vishnu, the “All-Pervader and All-Supporter”, Al-Rabb and Al-Muhīt, yearn that men may “raise songs of thanks and praise”, *stuti*, *hamd*, to them:

Stutī-priyā hi dévah, Vishnu-mukhyāh.

Small must be the mind that would blame her for desiring, or would grudge her, a little appreciation to sustain her heart amidst her arduous and incessant labors. To us, Indians, whatever her weaknesses may have been, they are all lovable. [Page 53]

That an Indian should work for India is but duty; if he does not, he is to blame. That, wearing a British body, she should have travailed thus for the birth of the New India, is reason for unspeakable gratitude.

Kasé mardé tamām ast az tamāmī
Kanād bã khwājagī kārô ghumlāmi.

(Rare is the soul that, being Master, brave
The noble task of slaving for the slaves.)

There must be special mystic reason why she spent herself so utterly in the service of India.

Trust of the Distrustful

Once, at a meeting of political workers in Simla — I have heard this reported by a reliable person — a prominent Indian said to her: “Frankly, Mrs. Besant, we find it difficult to trust you quite, because you are British”. She was silent for a moment, and then said sadly: “You are right. The sins of the fellow-countrymen of my present body against your people are such that it must be very difficult for you to trust me. But I am trying to make expiation for their sins, and I will therefore trust you the more”. Together with a small number of other noble-minded and just British men and women, she formed the nerve-stand of Conscience in the brain of the British people, with regard to India. Fortunately the number is now growing. [Page 54]

On another occasion, in 1928, in Allahabad, some young students shouted against her views so persistently as to make the remainder of her lecture, on the then political situation in the country, practically impossible. The reason was that she had been expressing her disapproval of the views of

other political leaders, which views appealed more strongly to the younger generation. Politics is a game of lightning changes. Some days later on, in the course of the same tour, she gave a lecture on the same subject in the Town Hall of Benares. I was put in the chair. Some young men tried to behave in the same way. Fortunately, they quieted down shortly, and listened attentively till the end. After the close of her lecture, before dismissing the meeting, I apologised to her publicly on behalf of the audience, for the excited behavior of the few. Afterwards, on the way back to Shānti Kunja, she mentioned to me the Allahabad incident, and said that though, on general principles, the manners could not be called perfect, yet, in the special situation, they were to be welcomed in a way, as showing that the boys were beginning to speak up against a white person face to face.

Vow of Poverty

Long ago, when she became the disciple, through H. P. B., of the Spiritual Hierarchy, she took the [Page 55] “vow of poverty”, the yogic *yama* of *a-parigraha*, of the giving up of the sense of exclusive ownership and possession, which is indispensable for such discipleship. Lakhs of rupees passed into her hands, only to pass out again for the helping of good causes and of persons in want.

A legacy was left to her and to Col. Olcott, in equal halves, personally, without any condition, by a Spanish gentleman resident of, and passing away in, Cuba. The legacy amounted to about two and a half lakhs of rupees. The Colonel gave his share to the Theosophical Society, and she transferred hers at once to the Central Hindû College.

Personal Influence

Far more valuable than the money she thus gave, from time to time, was her personal influence and attraction that secured for the C. H. C. and its attached Boys' and Girls' Schools, the utterly selfless labors of that noble band of Theosophists, some gone on and some still on this earth: Dr. Richardson, Miss Arundale, M. M. Pt. Aditya Ram Bhattacharya, Pandit Cheda Lâl, Mrs. Lloyd, Rai Ishwari Prasad, A. G. Watson, Raghubir Prasad Varma, Indra Narayana Sinha, Kāli Charan Mitra, Govinda Dās, Jamshedji Unwālla, Pandharināth Kashināth Telang, and others, among those gone on; and Upendra Nath Basu, Jñānendra Nath Basu, Miss A. J. Willson, Miss Lilian Edgar, [Page 56] Miss Palmer, Miss Herington, Satyavrata Bhatta-charya, George Arundale, Iqbāl Narain Gurtu, Shyāmā Charan Dé, Durgā Prasād, Sita Ram, and many others still here. It was these who built up, as pure labor of love, the several departments of the institutions, under her guidance. Many alumni of the C. H. C. are justifying their *alma mater* and doing good work in various fields of public life. Other similar colleagues gathered round her of themselves to help her in her multifarious other works. Thus, in the building up of the Indian Section of the T.S., with its Headquarters at Benares, Upendranath Basu and Bertram Keightley, the first General Secretaries, were her principal collaborators, together with local members at all the provincial capitals and other large towns, whose names are duly recorded in the annual reports of the Indian Section and also the C.H.C. which was helped by them equally. Bertram Keightley specially deserves gratitude for his services to H.P.B. and help in the publication of *The Secret Doctrine*. In the building up of the Adyar Library, the Theosophical Publishing House, the Vasanta Press — all most valuable, indeed indispensable adjuncts of the T.S. — Mahadeva Shastri (now no more on earth), B. P. Wadia (succeeded

by others, and now by M. Subramania Iyer), and A. K. Sitarama Shastri have been A.B.'s great helpers; and Ranga Reddy and Soobbiah Chetty have helped her assiduously in [Page 57] the management of the extensive Adyar grounds, and properties. Whenever I had the good fortune (but too seldom) to be at Adyar, I had the pleasure of seeing the 'trio' of Sitarama Shastri, Soobbiah Chetty, Ranga Reddy, making, in company, their regular, daily, morning visit to her.

C.H.C. Workers

Son of a wealthy father, whose donations for charitable works were seldom less than a thousand pounds at a time before a reverse of fortune came — as I heard from himself — Dr. Arthur Richardson had a natural taste for science and became a great chemist; but gave up his professorship of Chemistry in the Bristol College in England, came over to India at the call of Theosophy, worked amongst the plague-stricken in the Bombay Presidency in 1897, and then, at the wish of Annie Besant, came over to Benares and took charge of the Principalship of the Central Hindu College, when it was started in 1898. He had a very small income of his own, about a hundred rupees per month; and of this, too, he spent a large part on his poorer students and on the other needs of the College, which were very many in its early days, and lived the life of an ascetic. At the beginnings of the winters, he used to go to the bazaar and buy a pair of coarse village-woven blankets, for about five rupees a pair then, and passed the winter nights with these, [Page 58] one for bedding and the other for covering, and would *not* allow the College Committee to help him in his *personal* requirements in any way, despite all our entreaties. The boys loved him as a father, and feared him also just enough, for he was a disciplinarian too. His family was the C. H. C., as he used to say. When he passed away in 1912, the citizens of Benares carried his body on their shoulders and followed it in thousands to the bank of the Gangā, and, with chanting of the Gītā, entrusted it to the god of Fire.

This was the kind of worker that built up the C. H. C. and its Schools, under the magnetic influence of Annie Besant. Of course, all could not be such ascetics, yet more than twenty-five members of the staff were honorary workers, and almost none of the others took more than bare subsistence allowance. And some of the honorary workers gave not only much time and much hard work, but also much money and educational material. Thus Professor P. K. Telang presented his father Justice Telang's valuable collection of books, worth some thirty thousand rupees, to the C. H. C. Library, which was thereafter named as the Telang Library. What the effect of such a spirit in the managing and instructing staffs would be on the students, may be judged easily.

He who teaches by *example*, *ācharana*, is the true *āchārya*. And these true teachers gathered because of the attraction of Annie Besant. [Page 59]

Radiation of Beneficence

What sumptuous days those used to be, when she was in residence in Benares! Her arrivals and departures were marked by triumphal processions between Shānti Kunja and the Railway Station. In the weeks, rarely months, of her stay, crowds of visitors, workers, teachers, boy and girl students, office-staff-members, were perpetually circulating between Shānti Kunja and the Indian Section T. S. and the C. H.

College and Schools, Boarding-Houses, Staff-quarters, all arisen after her first arrival in Benares. New buildings were rising every year, additions were being made to the grounds, new departments of activity being opened, crowded, bustling, pleasing social gatherings and public functions taking place at short intervals. The words of Bhîshma, the 'great-grandfather', of the Mahā-bhārata, come into the mind. Yudhisthira was living incognito with his four younger brothers, in the Court of king Virāta. Duryodhana's spies had failed to discover him. Duryodhana was very anxious to find him. Bhîshma advised: "My son!, where lawfulness reigns and dutifulness governs, where physical hygiene has banished disease and moral sanitation has driven away vice and misery, there you will find Yudhishtira the Dharma-rāja, the lawful king and the king of duteous righteousness. Where human beings have grown high of character, clean, pure, upright, [Page 60] healthy and happy, gentle and truthful of speech and brave of deed, there you may infer the presence of Yudhishtira. Where men are no longer small-minded, jealous, fault-finding, peevish, arrogant, but mutually sympathetic and helpful, there you may infer the active influence of Yudhishtira's noble example. Where, crimes have disappeared, where there are no more any weaklings, where the land is duly tilled, manured, irrigated, and the crops varied and the yield abundant, where the cattle are tended tenderly and the land flows with milk and curds and butter of rich quality, where the air is cleansed with holy incense, the waters protected from contamination, the edibles all tasteful and wholesome, where beneficent new activities are springing up daily all around, where peace, prosperity, contentment, good-will, are visible and palpable, where festivals and rejoicings are always taking place, there you will find Yudhishtira I "

Truly health is as infectious as disease, and the power of a high soul to uplift all others that come into contact with it, is great. William James, the famous psychologist of the U.S.A., honored as much in Europe as in his own country for his brilliant and valuable work, has expressly spoken of Annie Besant as "that high-souled woman" in his large and well-known book, *Varieties of Religious Experience*. Alas, that it should be so, but greatness has its weaknesses also. Yudhishtira's weakness was craving (despite [Page 61] Narada's warnings) for imperial suzerainty of the world through the performance of the rajā-sūya sacrificial ceremony, and playing with dice too freely. Our beloved Mother's was, playing with beliefs and assertions about superphysical matters similarly.

Loved by Servants, Respected by King and Queen

How she mixed with the lowly and the high-placed with equal good will! Her domestic servants in India loved her whole-heartedly. If she could only have found time to master the Hindustāni language and spoken it as she spoke in English, she would have moved the three hundred and twenty-five millions of India as no other has moved them.

When King George and Queen Mary of England, then Prince and Princess of Wales, visited Benares, in 1906, I was surprised one morning to see the then district magistrate, Mr. Radice, waiting in the veranda of Shānti Kunja. I laughingly asked him to what cause was due this most unusual presence of "the lord of the district" (executive heads of districts and others belonging to the higher-paid ranks of the Bureaucracy give themselves high airs as a rule) in this waiting attitude in the porch of a humble home. He smiled and replied that he had been commanded by the Princess to [Page 62] take an invitation to Annie Besant. I announced him, and the invitation was duly complied with by her. The British-Indian government officials generally did not look upon her activities with a friendly eye, but the future queen of England knew better how to appreciate and honor the most famous Englishwoman and Orator of the time.

A Friendly I.C.S.

It may be mentioned here that Mr. Radice was an exceptional I.C.S., with pro-Indian sympathies, and helped the C. H. C. on several occasions. Thus, during an outbreak of plague, there were a great many deaths in some unclean and ill-built houses adjoining the C. H. C. Boarding-House. He helped the C. H. C. Managing Committee to acquire them at a fair price and demolish them and clean up the whole site, and so saved the students from a physical danger. On another occasion, he did greater service by helping to save them from a moral danger. The *Upanishad*-verse says, "What the gods tried to do for good, their step-brothers the titans ran after and stained with evil". While Annie Besant and her venerable colleague, about seven years older than she was, the late Pt. Chedālâl, Superintendent of the Boarding-House, and other co-workers, were doing all they could to raise and refine the moral character of the youths put into their charge by their parents, a wretched [Page 63] creature, under cover of a confectionery shop, started a liquor and brothel concern in the neighbourhood, and began enticing the boarders. Mr. Radice, with his magisterial powers, helped to suppress the miserable traffic and warn the evil man away from the locality. Mr. Radice died prematurely after transfer to Lucknow. At the instance of Annie Besant, the C. H. C. Managing Committee put up a tablet to his memory in the hall of the College, recording their gratitude for the help received from him.

A Rare Sight

Annie Besant's perennial tours for the T. S. and the C. H. C. have been mentioned. In the course of one of these we saw a sight which is rarely seen even by professional hunters — a lion up a tree!— I think the year was 1908. She went to Gwalior and put up in the Guest-house of the Maharaja, who was trying to become interested in Theosophy, at the suggestion of one of his ministers, the late Rai Shyam Sundar Lal, an earnest member of the T. S. Sleeping in the guest-house, we heard the roaring of lions repeatedly in the night, and close by. Enquiring next morning, I learnt that the Maharaja kept about a dozen lions and lionesses (imported from Africa) in a high-walled open enclosure of about ten acres, with a few trees scattered sparsely over it. I was curious [Page 64] to see them. She kindly agreed to go also. We went and mounted by a staircase to the roof of a small single-storey house built right against the wall of the enclosure, near its main gateway, and overlooking it. We saw the animals walking about all over the place; we saw the gateway being opened, about two feet, and a *bhishtî* (water-carrier) with a large skin of water walk in quite fearlessly in the company of another man who evidently thought himself quite adequately armed against all the lions with just a big bamboo; we saw the *bhishtî* pour the water as a matter of routine into a large shallow stone trough, placed some twenty feet away from the gate at the foot of a large tree, while a lioness was standing watching the operation another twenty feet away, with nothing but the open space between, and the gates ajar, by quite two feet, through which the animal might have passed with a rush any moment, if it had wished to; and then, happening to look up into the tree, we were startled to see a lion, slightly above the level of our eyes, about twenty-five feet away from us, lying flat on its chest and stomach along a very gently sloping branch which issued from the trunk at about two feet from the ground, and looking at us quietly; its legs were dangling in the air, one fore and one hind on each side of the branch. Annie Besant said she had not seen or read of such a tree-climbing lion proper; nor [Page 65] had I, except once, though in my younger days I had been rather fond of hunter's books, from Du Chaillu's downwards, describing adventures with the large predaceous. The exception was that I, just once, came across the sentence, "we treed a lion", in one book on African game, I forget now by whom, Oswell or Gordon-Gumming or some other.

Re-kindling of Self-Respect in India

What part the Theosophical Society and the C. H. C., and the tours she made, the meetings she held, the lectures she gave, all over India, for them, month after month, year after year, have played in arousing solidarian national consciousness and self-respect in the English-educated section of the Indian People — “National”, yet always subordinate to the Humanist Ideal, because of the brooding of Theosophy over it so far at least as *her* teaching was concerned — this will appear clearly to every one who studies the history of this country carefully from 1880 onwards.

Great Leadership

She was indeed a great leader in every respect, with the soul of fire, the burning eloquence that could melt stones, the imaginative vision, the [Page 66] great and high aspiration, the quick decision, the generous and trustful nature, the scrupulous discharge of promises made, the exceeding considerateness for juniors and subordinates, the anxious fulfilment of their hopes even casually aroused by any words of hers, and, above all else, the mystic power of magnetic personality, which inspire and attract and *keep* followers.

Her trustfulness and generosity, because of her intense, high-strung, nature, and her eagerness to help and quicken the uplift of Humanity, were, indeed, at times, rather reckless; and, as could not but happen in such conditions, she sometimes received and trusted wrong advice, and sometimes undeserving persons took unfair advantage of her open-handed liberality and readiness to help — whom she always incorrigibly forgave, despite repeated experience. But mostly the help went to the deserving — persons as well as causes.

Loyalty to Old Colleagues

Her loyalty to her old colleague, Charles Bradlaugh, was great. She used to speak about him, now and then. One evening, in 1902 or 1903, a number of us were sitting around her on a large *chauki* in the hall of Shānti Kunja. She was praising him in glowing terms, and quoted, with splendid elocution, some words of his to this effect: [Page 67] “The thought makes me very happy that my dead body should help to fill the ditch over which future generations might pass to victory”. With young-mannish flippancy I remarked that while I, like all Indians who had heard of him, was a great admirer of his magnificent public spirit, I never could understand how he managed to reconcile such an ardent, soulful, spiritual aspiration as that voiced in those noble words, with his a-theism or agnosticism or denial of Spirit and of Life beyond this body, or whatever else it was; and that it seemed to me that to draw such self-sacrificing philanthropy and such active sympathy with unseen and unknown future generations, out of Disbelief in a Common All-pervading Spirit, was as miraculous a feat as that of Baron Munchausen, who, when his charger happened to gallop too far and got struck in a quagmire, gripped it hard with his knees, caught hold of his own pigtail, gave it a tremendous jerk, and threw both himself and his war-horse clean outside the quagmire. Annie Besant was visibly annoyed by my impertinence — though I was rather a favorite of hers then, and that was why I ventured on it — and pulled me up sharply, “Mr. Bradlaugh did nothing of

the kind”, and changed the conversation. Afterwards I begged her pardon for my pertness and assured her I entertained great respect for Mr. Bradlaugh — but I also added that I was still not quite satisfied about the logical [Page 68] consistency between the practice and the theory. She agreed, and explained that such souls were subconsciously or supra-consciously believers in the Universal Spirit, to which explanation I readily agreed, in turn.

Generosity

One small instance will show the readiness of her sensitive response even without a direct request. Pandit Ambā-dās Shāstri, also now passed away, teacher in the Ranavīra Patha-shālā, the Samskr̥t Department attached to the C. H. C. — the gift to it of the late Maharaja Pratap Sinha of Kashmir — had, with difficulty, laid by a sum of money, for the marriage of his daughter. Salaries were much smaller then. One morning he came to the Patha-shala almost in tears. The money had been stolen. My elder brother, Shri Govinda Das, also gone on, heard of it, and happened to speak to her. “What was the amount”, she asked. “Rs. 400”, said her informant. At once, out of her own pocket, she sent the amount by him to the Pandit.

Asceticism

Annie Besant's food was always of the simplest kind, and vegetarian. Her dress was not always inexpensive. An Indian lady, a very great public [Page 69] worker too in her own way, once remarked to me, quite good-humoredly, at a public function, that A. B.'s dress — of white silk and gold sari with a few jewels — was not “ascetic”. I explained to her that her heart was, and that that was enough in her case. The aesthetic dress was part of her radiant appearance, and helped in the kind of work she had to do all over the world; and the jewels had been presented to her by friends, who would not be denied, with the insistence that they must be worn; one was a signet-ring entrusted to her by H. P. B. The Purānas describe cases of 'ascetics' of both kinds, those dressed in royal robes, discharging loyally their duty to the people, and also those covered with ashes from the burning-ground. Both are perfect ascetics, having cast off the sense of private and exclusive property. Yet no ordinary person may try to imitate either lightly, deceiving himself and others that he has thus transcended proprietary egoism, without having really done so.

The three months of the summer of 1901, she spent in Srinagar, Kashmir, as the guest of the Maharaja. The *Text-Book of Hinduism* was drafted there; it was published by the Board of Trustees of the C. H. College, with some additions and alterations in accordance with the suggestions of representatives of very different schools of thought within the pale of Hinduism, to whom copies of the [Page 70] draft were sent, and after securing their general approval. After the drafting was finished, she decided to make the pilgrimage to Amar-nāth, which is made annually by considerable numbers of the devout, some of whom come from very distant parts of India. The party went in the charge of Dr. Balkrishna Kaul of Lahore, an enthusiastic worker for the T.S. and the C. H. C. in those days. Jagadish Chandra Chatterji, who also did good work for the T.S. in the earlier years, not only in India, but in Europe and the U.S.A. also, was one of the party. He was a good Samskr̥t Scholar, and, some years afterwards, published some valuable old Samskr̥t works on behalf of the Kashmir State. In 1901, he helped in the work of the *Text-Book of Hinduism* by finding out appropriate texts from the scriptures. Miss Lilian Edgar, another good and steady worker of the T.S., was also with us. A.B.'s party started for the pilgrimage about the middle of July. It had

to be done partly by boat up the Jhelum, partly on horseback or on *bongla* (a sort of sedan chair, for the ladies), and the last stages on foot. The temple of Amar-nāth is a large natural cave, situate on the top of a Himalayan peak about 16,000 feet above sea-level, amidst vast grand scenery of perpetual snows. The image of Shiva is a triangular block of ice standing in an angle formed by the rocks within the cave. On the last day of the pilgrimage (going, and the first returning), a remarkable experience befell us. Our [Page 71] feet were walking on a great stretch of snow, our bodies were wrapped in warm clothing, but our heads (at least mine was) feeling very hot, and the sun was burning and blistering whatever part of the skin of the hands and the face was directly exposed to its rays. I protected my head with a turban of loose cloth, but even that was not enough, and I had frequently to scoop up handfuls of snow and put it on the top of the turban. Amidst such amenities, of sun and snow, A. B. suddenly determined to do, and *did*, the last part of the climb, some two or three furlongs, *bare-foot*, against all dissuasions. I cannot remember that any other member of the party performed the feat. I am sure I did not. After having reached the destination, before entering the temple-cave, she, like the rest of the party, and as is the custom, bathed in the waters of a stream which was gurgling through the hollows of masses of snow on one side of the cave. For the return journey however, her feet went on strike. They had been too much maltreated by the snow on which they had been forced to walk, and, even more than the snow, by the small sharp pieces of stone which were freely scattered over and mixed with the snow. So we had to swathe her feet in cloth-bandages, and brought her back with some difficulty to the place where the *bonglas* had been left. Such is an example of her capacity for asceticism. [Page 72]

Relations with Animals

Before she went over to Adyar, as President of the T. S. in 1907, her one physical exercise, in Benares, to keep herself in health, was riding, sometimes varied by cycling. A very pretty mare was once purchased for her. We called it "Fairy". With the proverbial 'cuteness of the horse-dealer, the vendor, a good horseman, did not tell her that the animal showed at times, without warning, a very distinct will of its own. This was discovered afterwards when even the experienced coachman, then in her service, who had been a professional horse-trainer in his younger days, found difficulty in managing it. But, most curiously, with A. B. the animal was always docile. Only once did it cause her some trouble. After a round of seven or eight miles one evening, when we were within about a mile of Shānti Kunja on the way back, she called out that her saddle seemed to be slipping sideways. So we stopped, and, hitching my horse to a way-side plant, I helped her to alight, and then we walked back with the reins on our arms. We could not make sure whether the fault was the animal's, or the groom's who had put the saddle on and fastened the girths. But she had the impression that somehow the animal got dissatisfied and misbehaved, for the thing occurred after seven or eight miles had been got through [Page 73] without any trouble, and the girths had been fixed at the usual holes. It is known that some horses, rarely, have the trick of contracting their chest. Squirrels were very fond of her and always came to the veranda at tea-time, for the many morsels she used to give to them. Such little personal incidents are mentioned here to illustrate the way in which her personality acquired its great influence over even animals.

I once asked her why she did not keep pet dogs, when she was so fond of animals and animals took to her so kindly, and the psycho-spiritual science of Theosophy told us that the progress of animal-souls towards the human stage was quickened, they developed intelligence and "individuality" more rapidly, if domesticated and petted by human beings. She said that it was so, and she had kept pet dogs in England, but found that they pined greatly in her absence, so she had given up pets as her life became more and more one of perpetual wandering. The "pining" for a loved friend was, of course, part of the

means of individualisation, but she could not bear the thought of it.

Motherly Nature

Her pets, after her coming to India, were human children and young men and women. She had the true mother-nature, and felt [Page 74] unsatisfied unless she was caring for and helping the younger generation, collectively as well as particular individuals, to grow. Many young men and women have developed fine qualities and powers, and matured into noteworthy individuals, who might have been very different, if she had not brooded over them with maternal as well as wise anxiety. She helped them in every way, and, when they became at all able to undertake work, entrusted them with responsible tasks, and placed burdens on them, compelling them to go through that best way of education, learning by doing, and thus to acquire self-confidence and stand on their own feet. In this respect she was outstandingly different from those leaders who, either because of excessive anxiety lest the work be spoilt, or excessive distrust of colleagues and subordinates, or excessive belief in their own capacity to do everything, retain too much work in their own hands, do not divide labor properly, or, having done so, continue to interfere too frequently, and thereby bring about just what they would avoid, hindrances, delays, repetitions, waste, confusion, and the radical weakness of the one-man-show. She always divided labor freely between the younger workers, keeping only the final threads in her hands, and was always inviting suggestions. Thereby she made all her own and others' work easier and more successful, and created [Page 75] the best conditions for its continuation in her absence.

Anxiety Regarding the Future of the T.S.

It is true that, for various reasons, which her great age and diminishing energies made it impossible to control, an anxiety grew in her mind, in the last three or four years, as to the future of the T. S. This found public expression in what she said during the Annual Convention of the T. S. in December, 1930, the last time she came to Benares, for that Convention and for the All-Asia Educational Conference and the Women's Conference; the last time when I had the joy of beholding her dear face and touching her dear hands and feet. She invited public discussion of the subject at the Convention, and also in the pages of *The Theosophist* afterwards. [At her wish I contributed a paper on the subject to *The Theosophist* in 1931. A fuller statement of the suggestions is now being published in another pamphlet *Ancient versus Modern "Scientific Socialism" or Theosophy and Capitalism, Fascism Communism.*]

Inward Calm

But of course she had faith undying in the Spiritual Hierarchy, and knew in her heart that all was for the best, that those who sent H. P. B. and H. S. O. to found the T. S. and who had guided [Page 76] and inspired herself in the earlier years would see to it that what was needed to be done was done, inside or outside of the T. S., though, of course, defective instruments hamper the strongest and most skilful hands, and the Karma of human beings cannot be discounted even by the Spiritual Hierarchy.

Retirement

There is a mysterious verse in the *Mahā-bhārata* which says that “the seventh night of the seventh month of the seventy-seventh year (of every life-time that is long enough to reach that point) is known as the *Bhīma-rathī*, (literally, 'the dreadful car', 'the vehicle of fear'); it is difficult to cross beyond, for sinful souls”

Theosophists may well put their own mystical interpretation upon it, as indicating that critical period in the 'fourth round' (the seventh Manvantara, with its seven root-races, seven sub-races of each, etc.) when souls that are not ready to go forward, drop behind, or, if positively and incurably vicious, meet with a worse fate, something like annihilation.

In the literal sense of the verse, Annie Besant's great *punya*-merit, great store of good karma, [Page 77] took her far beyond this seventy-seventh year, in the life of her physical body. In the superphysical sense, we may well believe that she was one of the fifth-rounders, who, according to *The Mahatma Letters*, have been appearing on this earth, from time to time, to help on younger souls.

After 1930, she gradually gave up work more and more. Even by her long illness, which was not so much an illness as a quiet retiring inwards of the soul, in ever increasing degree, while the body faded away slowly and peacefully — even by this, she helped the persons in charge of the various departments of the great work, at the Central Headquarters at Adyar and elsewhere, gradually, without too sudden a shock, to become accustomed to her absence.

My Personal Debt

How can I tell my own heavy personal debt to her ? I was never worthy to unloose the latchet of her shoes; yet she allowed to me the privilege of doing so, and serving as her personal assistant, in Benares and on some of the long tours she made in India year after year in connection with the work of the T. S. and the C. H.C., for some ten years, before she made Adyar her principal residence after taking up the Presidentship of the T. S. Once, in 1905, I fell very ill with malarial fever. She was, as usual, very busy with all kinds of work, and, [Page 78] besides, was preparing to leave Benares for England, for the summer. One morning, on coming back to my senses, after a night's mind-wandering, I was astounded to learn that she had passed nearly the whole of the night on a sofa, near my sick-bed, taking turns with my wife in trying to soothe my wretched worthless mind and body. What wonder that we all regarded her as veritable mother.

Another incident comes into my mind. She was against the Non-Co-Operation movement started by Mahatma Gandhi in 1921, in consequence of the flouting, by the British-Indian Government, of the demands by the Congress for some little punishment of the officials responsible for the Amritsar Massacre of 1919 and the subsequent horrors of Martial Law in the Punjab. I happened to disagree with her again, but fortunately this time without any public controversy. In private, I argued with her good-humouredly that it was she herself who showed the way by getting interned by the mis-Government in 1917. She said it was different. So we agreed to differ. But when I happened to find my way into jail in the winter of 1921-'22, in the very good company of many others, she, full of tender anxiety for my personal welfare, accompanied by Miss A. J. Willson, went to see me in the Benares prison. I was deprived of the satisfaction of serving out my full sentence of one year, and was let out after only five weeks, because the governmental lawyers looked into the [Page 79] file of the case and found serious flaws in the proceedings. The revision seemed to have been made *suo motu*. But I have a suspicion that it was due

to the fact that my honored friend, Dr. (Sir) Subramania Iyer, Ex-Chief Justice of Madras, devoted member of the T. S., wrote strongly to the daily press on the subject, and that, quite likely, A. B. suggested to him to do so, though she never told me about it. If she had done so, I am afraid I would not have expressed much gratitude, for many thousands of Indians, in all walks of life, were (and have since then, again and again, been) taking a 'perverse' pleasure in being locked up by the present mis-Government! But, of course, I was very glad that the officials immediately concerned in my case, were convicted, out of their own mouths by their own superiors and without any motion from us, of serious irregularities ! Also, out of spite against the Government and shame at being out of prison while my fellow-convicts continued to remain behind bars, I did not return to my house, but lived on the premises in which the recently started Kashi Vidya-pitha (a nationalist educational institution) was housed, until the year of the original sentence ran out. Notwithstanding all such perversities on my part, her personal kindness to me continued undiminished.

If, so far as service of my fellow-men is concerned, I have not been able to become other than a failure, despite all the care and affection she bestowed on [Page 80] me, it is due only to my own inherent and incurable deficiencies. But so far as I myself am concerned, much of what I hold precious I owe to her. What stronger proof of her gracious kindness to me could there be than that, in 1929, she said in *The Theosophist*, that “the bond between us ... will . . . last through the change called death and will bring us together again in a future life” ? This was again published less than three months before her passing, in the facsimile of her handwriting, in *The Theosophist* for July, 1933. Elsewhere she has said that I have had the privilege of working with her in past lives. I reverently share this belief, for many reasons, however unworthy I am of the great privilege it implies. Those who believe that the soul is immortal, that it puts on and puts off garments of flesh repeatedly, that strong loves (as also hates) make bonds between souls which last life after life, that effects are not produced without causes, and that uncommon colligations must have uncommon causes — those who hold all this generally, will not find such a particular belief impossible to hold.

She is now taking well-earned rest in congenial realms of light, before she takes up yet another task on earth again. As she says at the close of her *Autobiography*: “I am but the servant of the Great Brotherhood, and those on whose heads, but for a moment, the touch of the Master has rested in blessing, can never again look upon the world [Page 81] save through eyes made luminous with the radiance of the Eternal Peace”.

In the meanwhile, we all offer our tribute of *shraddhā*, in the words of Shri Sarojinî Naidu, our “love and homage, to her whose radiant spirit rekindled India's faith in her own ideals and destiny”, and put new life into a people almost dead in soul. As Mahātmā Gandhî has said: “As long as India lives, the memory of the magnificent services rendered by her will also live. She endeared herself to India by making it her country of adoption, and dedicating her all to it”.

She was, verily, the Mother of the New India. The students, the staff, and the managers of the C. H. College, long ago, placed a Samskr̥t verse below her portrait in the College Hall:

Sad-buddhi-dugdha-dānéna,
Vātsalyén-ottaména cha,
Māt-éyam, mātār-osmākam

Kévalam janma-hétavah.

(Our mothers did but bring us into this world of sorrows. But this — who has compassionately nourished us with the milk of righteous knowledge — this is our true Mother.)

Last Rites

It will be a lasting sorrow for me that my lack of the needed meritorious karma prevented me from sharing, with those more worthy spiritual children [Page 82] of hers, my worthy sister Miss A. J. Willson, Shri Jinarājadāsa, and others, the work of attending on our Mother in her last days on earth. Yet I take to my heart, with deep gratitude, the consolation that it has been given to me today to perform the son's last sad duty of entrusting to the goddess of the sacred river Gangā, in the holy town of Kāshî, the ashes of her body, in accordance with her wishes.

Realms of Light

These wishes were, I humbly believe, intended only to honor the customs of the Hindu Religion, some of whose simpler non-sectarian outer forms she had decided to adopt in outer life here.

Dvau imau purushau loké
Sûrya-mandalabhédināu
Yogî yoga-samāruhah,
shûrash-cha samaré hatah.
Nahi téna pathā tanu-tyajah
Tanay-āvarjita-pinda-kānkshinah.
Bhāwanā yadi bhavét phala-dātri,
Māmakam nagaram éva hi Kāshî,
Vyāpak-opi yadi wā Param-Ātmā,
Tārakam kim-iha n-opadishén nah.

“Two souls”, the old books say, “pass through the photosphere of the Sun and enter into His Heart of Peace — the warrior who falls, face forward fighting in defence of the weak and the righteous, and the yogi who has climbed the steps of yoga, [Page 83] striving all his life to see the Vision of the Self”. She was both such warrior and such yogî. Luminous souls like hers do not need the extraneous help of even such sacred ritual and the mediation of the physical and superphysical aura of Gangā and Kāshî; they soar into the empyrean and pass into the regions of Solar Splendor by their own inherent grace and power and direct inner touch therewith, chanting, as they go, the sacred *mantras* of the Vēda:

Agné! naya supathā rāyé
Asmān, vishwāni Déva! vayûnāni Vidwān!
Yuyodhi asmaj-juhurānam énah,
Bhûyishthām Té nama uktim vidhéma !

Pûshan, Êkarshé, Yama. Sûrya, Prājāpatya! vyûha rashmîn, samûha téjo, yat Té rûpam kalyāna-tamam,

tat Té pashyāmi!

Hiranmayéna pātréna
Satyasy-āpihitam mukham,
Tat Twam, Pûshan!, apāvṛnu,
Satya-Dharmāya drshtayé!

OM!

“Eternal Spirit of Life and Light!, that knowest All!, We bow to Thee. We merge ourselves in Thee. Consume our sins, and lead us by the shining paths to the Place of Peace.

Thou that nourishest and pervadest all, that regulatest and illumineest all, after having given [Page 84] birth to all, Thou Spirit of the Sun!, permit that we may pass through Thy o'erpowering glory, on the pathway woven of Thy beams, and so behold Thy most auspicious and all-blissful Real Form!

Giver of Life! permit that the golden veil which covers Thy Face be lifted from our eyes, so we behold the Central Source of the Light of Truth and of the Righteousness that issues ever from that One Holy Truth!

OM I ÂMÎN ! AMEN !