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ANNIE BESANT

AS WOMAN AND AS LEADER

By

SRI PRAKASA

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

CHAUPATTY : BOMBAY

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—*Rigveda*, I-89-i

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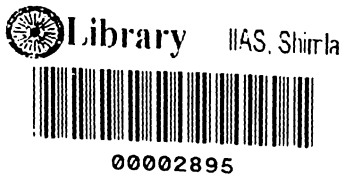

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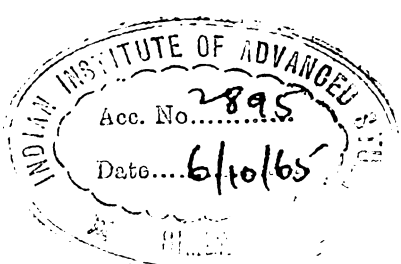

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Mrs. Besant Lecturing

Dedicated

to Her

Whose memory it lovingly and respectfully

recalls and records

AND

to my Father

her friend and colleague

in her work for Theosophy and for India

because of whom such memory

was made possible

THE Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulsions of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages and was to be priced at Rs. 1-12-0.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the reintegration of the Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit:

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the frame-work of the Moral Order; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata,* summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it; the *Gita* by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata*: "What is not in it, is nowhere." After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita,* which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

1, QUEEN VICTORIA ROAD,
NEW DELHI:
3rd October 1951.

K. M. MUNSHI

FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

It gives me very great pleasure to write a little introduction to a most valuable appreciation of my beloved and revered teacher Dr. Annie Besant, by a very old friend of mine, Sri Prakasa—once indeed a most worthy pupil very obviously destined to reach his present eminence.

He has contributed what I can only call a precious study of some of the most vital years in the life of one of India's greatest servants and devotees, for during the period of which he writes, Dr. Besant was not only hard at work building and equipping a great national altar at which the youth of India might worship the very soul of the Motherland and receive in blessing the gift of a truly Indian citizenship, rich in religion, rich in patriotism, rich in practical efficiency for honourable livelihood and useful service, she was also preparing for that wonderful future which was to see in her the foremost political worker for India's freedom and regeneration.

Sri Prakasa is specially fitted to paint the splendid picture of this period, for he is the son of one of the greatest and most learned men of today, Dr. Bhagavan Das, who was during the whole of Dr. Besant's life in India one of her most beloved friends and trusted colleagues. Dr. Bhagavan Das contributed very much to her preparation for her Indian work, and with his wife and every member of his family gave her an Indian home in which she felt herself to be an Indian and was ever surrounded by that warmth which only an Indian home can give.

At Banaras Dr. Besant was Indian more than in any other place. She was happy in Banaras, I think, as nowhere else, not even at Adyar, the southern Indian home she loved so dearly. At Banaras she was just herself in all the intimate age-old nature of her being, and that

this was so was in large measure due, apart from the ecstasy she ever felt in living in holy Kashi, to two great and noble families—the family of Dr. Bhagavan Das and the family of Sri Upendranath Basu, another most stalwart colleague and loved friend with his splendid brothers and children.

In this book there is painted with loving care and most happy memories, a picture of Dr. Besant as she lived on one of the greater heights of her recent incarnation—one of the most cherished summits of her nobly catastrophic life, and to which her thoughts so often turned as she lay dying at Adyar. And I do not hesitate to say that among the many biographies of her which will in due course appear, this fine sketch will rank not only among the most illuminating but also among the biographies which must be read if the life and work of Dr. Besant is to be rightly understood.

For my own part, having been privileged to live near to her during most of the period described, I can most truly say that I have read Sri Prakasa's book with both joy and profit. I am grateful to him for entrusting its publication to The Theosophical Publishing House, which was one of her most cherished activities while she was President of The Theosophical Society, and I most sincerely hope that there will be very many to read it, to learn about a great period in the history of India's renaissance, and to feel inspired to give to their Mighty Motherland something of that extraordinary devotion which Dr. Besant gave to India—ever striving for her, suffering for her, dying for her, but ever supremely happy in her service.

GEORGE S. ARUNDALE
President of the Theosophical Society

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INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

It has been my desire ever since the passing away of Mrs. Besant, to write my reminiscences of her. The desire became stronger each time I was asked to address meetings held in honour of her memory. Whenever I spoke to friends of this wish of mine, I invariably received their support. Mr. Arundale was almost enthusiastic in his reply when I wrote to him about it. My father felt that it would be very right and proper, would indeed be fulfilling a pressing duty, for an Indian of my generation to pay her a fitting tribute before it was too late.

A busy politician's life unfortunately is not very conducive to literary work: he has to deal with so many small items of business requiring immediate attention all the time, that he has but little energy left when he has done with his day's labour. Active politics, however, are responsible more than anything else, for my thinking more and more of Mrs. Besant of late, specially of her qualities of leadership, because of the prevailing confusion, as I view it, in the leadership of the land today. I therefore started writing my reminiscences at long last, about the middle of July this year.

The memory cells worked rapidly and sympathetically, and my first draft was ready in less than a fortnight's time. I found to my surprise that the volume was almost four times as big as I had originally thought it would be. I have been used to writing articles for newspapers and magazines almost all my life; but this is my first attempt at compiling what can even distantly be called a book. Memories crowded round so thick and fast that it was difficult to pick and choose. It has thus taken me more than a month to revise my original draft and put it in some sort of order. I am very doubtful, however, whether

I have been at all successful in doing justice to my subject, and I ask for my kind reader's indulgence at my shortcomings.

I have discussed men and affairs rather freely. Mrs. Besant's work was so all-embracing, and she simultaneously played such important parts in so many fields of activity and left her impress on so many spheres of life, that a careful study of her could easily put one in touch with most of the problems of human existence. Politics and politicians, religion and religious preachers, sociology and social reformers, education and educationists, science and scientists, theology and theologians, have all come pell-mell in these reminiscences; and I have not hesitated to give my own opinions on all these without any mental reservations. Household servants, food, clothing, manners and customs of many lands have all entered freely in my narrative. I can only hope I have been just in my estimates and fair in my appraisement of values. Anxious that my readers should understand all the matters I have dealt with and know all the persons I have discussed, I have added a large number of notes at the end of the book which I hope will be found useful and informing. The numbers of the notes tally with those marked at the relevant places in the body of the book.* The narrative is really complete without the notes; but if any information should be wanted by any reader about any person or, to him, any out-of-the-way word or idea mentioned in the book, I believe the notes will help him.*

I am deeply grateful to The Theosophical Publishing House for so generously and spontaneously undertaking the publication of the book despite the serious financial risks involved in such grievous and uncertain times. I

* These notes have been taken out of this edition to make it more handy as explained in the Introduction to this edition.

should like to express my grateful thanks to Mr. J. L. Davidge of the Press Department of The Theosophical Society for the meticulous care with which he was good enough to read the manuscript, correct the proofs and see the book safely through the Press. I am also particularly beholden to Dr. Arundale for kindly writing a foreword to this book and thus giving it the best introduction to the readers that I can think of.

I must confess to a feeling of embarrassment as I send this book out into the world. I have discussed a great personality, and I am aware that many things I have said are liable to cause misunderstanding. I pray that my readers will pardon me if aught I say anywhere causes the least pain to anyone. I earnestly hope that this book will help many a person who knew Mrs. Besant, to revive his memories of her, and enable others who did not know her, to understand her, to learn from her, and try to act like her in his own sphere of work, high or humble. I also fervently pray that among many other things, this may also help to keep her memory green in a world so full of rushing and tremendous events, particularly at the time I am writing, that even the greatest are liable to be forgotten, no sooner than they are removed from the world's sight by death. Mrs. Besant should live in the hearts of men and women all the world over for more than one reason. I pray that she may: I believe that she will.

SEVASHRAMA,
BANARAS. SRI PRAKASA
September 10, 1940.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

Retrospect and Prospect

UNDER the title of "Mrs. Besant: as Woman and as Leader", I made a study of that great personality in the first edition of this book which was written rather hastily in the summer of 1940. Mahatma Gandhi was about that time preparing for the launching of what was designated as the "Individual Civil Disobedience Movement", and all of us who belong to the Indian National Congress and were working under his leadership, were preparing to go to jail. The Second World War had started a year before and was entering serious phases. Those who were responsible for this conflagration, had not imagined, it was clear, that it would last longer than a few months. The invention of many destructive weapons for use in wars, had led statesmen to believe perhaps that no war could continue for long. There is, however, a flaw in the argument, because when both sides are equipped with similar weapons—whether they be in the nature of mere sticks and bamboos or howitzers and hydrogen bombs—the time for the completion of the conflict, is likely to be of the same duration. I remember a friend casually asking me at the beginning of the war as to how long I thought it would last; and I told him that he could almost take it from me that it would last for five years. He was taken aback; but it did so happen that it lasted a year longer than even that.

Mahatma Gandhi who had an uncanny instinct of being able always to put his finger on the pulse of public feeling in the land, and was also shrewd enough to be able to calculate profits and losses, gains and pains, evidently thought that in the peculiar circumstances of the country, with a war raging in the world in which the British rulers of the land were so seriously involved, perhaps an appar-

ently simple type of political opposition would be quite sufficient for his purpose. He was on the one hand—so it seems to me—anxious that the world's sympathy should be attracted to India's struggle for Freedom by the voluntary invitation of the leaders and their followers, to imprisonment and consequent suffering; and on the other, to keep the spirit of the country alive and not allow it to flag owing to inactivity. At the same time, it appears that he did not desire at the time he evolved individual civil disobedience movement in his mind, to embarrass the British Government—busy as they were with their war and anxious as they doubtless were regarding its outcome—with too hostile a manifestation of protest, lest they should be induced or even provoked to take very serious action which in less troubled times, they might have hesitated to take, and which might, in turn, prove to be beyond the endurance of the people who might be completely crushed out by the action of Authority.

Still, we who were with Gandhiji and had also our personal responsibilities of families, were not entirely without our own misgivings. We feared that the vengeance would be heavy; and so it would be best to write our own wills so to say, and finish our work before getting into jail. The whole technique of Mahatmaji's work—whether in the political or in any other sphere—was to attract the attention of all concerned to the suffering voluntarily imposed upon oneself as proof positive of one's sincerity, in the hope that that would induce those responsible for the commission or continuation of a particular wrong, to do the right and redress it. He never himself inflicted—or even wanted to inflict except perhaps in a very indirect manner—any pain on others. His one object was that anything that was worth doing, must be done in strict conformity with the ideal of non-violence of which he had

drawn up an elaborate code. That is the great lesson that he gave to the world; and the success of it even in the matter of the political emancipation of India, has certainly proved to all mankind that non-violence is not only a theoretical ideal of a visionary, but it is something of practical, everyday application in this hard world of ours. Anyway, along with thousands of others situated as myself, I was also winding up my affairs before plunging into the fray. At that time, my great anxiety was that my book on Mrs. Besant should not be left unwritten. That is why the book was written so hastily and at that particular time. The foreword of my old and much loved teacher Mr. Arundale, then the President of the Theosophical Society, and my own introduction to the first edition, tell the whole story of how the book came to be written. If the reader should feel interested, he can refer to them. They are being reproduced here.

It so happened that my good friend Shri K. M. Munshi, the present Governor of my home State of Uttar Pradesh, happened by accident, to see this book some months back; and he wrote to me saying that he would like to reprint it in the series that was being published by his celebrated Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan of Bombay, which has been doing such good work in reviving India's religion and philosophy, art and literature. The invitation was too tempting for me to be able to resist; and as I was also anxious to bring out another edition, I immediately got in touch with Shri N. Sri Ram, the present President of the Theosophical Society, and enquired if the original publishers, the Theosophical Publishing House, would like to bring out a second edition. I offered to revise the first for the purpose. If, however, they were not willing to do so, I asked for permission to get the same published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. The President wrote to me that they were

not thinking of bringing out a new edition of the book, and that I could get it published at Bombay as proposed. I am indeed thankful to Shri K. M. Munshi and his great institution, the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, for undertaking this task and giving my book a place in their popular and widely read series, and also to Shri N. Sri Ram for readily agreeing to transfer the copyright.

Shri K. M. Munshi, however, laid a friendly condition, and that was that I should write a new introduction to bring the political history of India after Mrs. Besant's death, so to say, up-to-date, making space for this by eliminating the 70 pages of notes that I had added to the original book in which I had given short accounts of the various persons mentioned in the course of the book, and explained the many out-of-the-way expressions used and references made therein. As I have said in my own introduction to the original edition, it was my hope that the readers would helpfully turn to these notes whenever in the course of the reading of the book, they desired further information on or about any particular individual or matter. I had naturally taken much pains in preparing these notes; and though sorry that they cannot be reproduced here, I agreed with Mr. Munshi that they took an inordinately large amount of space, and with the present introduction, would make the book bigger than he has prescribed for the series. So these notes do not appear in this edition; and in fulfilment of his condition, I am venturing to write what he desired, in the form of this introduction, as best I can. Many persons, little known to the outside world, though important both to me and for Mrs. Besant's work in India, are mentioned in this book. They will mean little to the readers in the absence of those notes. Whether the introduction serves the pur-

pose for which Mr. Munshi wanted me to write it, I cannot judge.

II

Mrs. Besant died in 1933. Fourteen years later we became free. It is now seven years back that we attained the full status of sovereign independence; and many things preceded and have followed that great event. To try to write the history of India from 1933 when Mrs. Besant died, to the present year of 1954, thus covering a period of 21 years, is indeed a tall order; and I certainly have no capacity to do full justice to this task, being very ill-equipped for it. Moreover, I could and should really study the various events that have happened in the land during these years, only in the light of the background of Mrs. Besant's work in India with which I am mainly concerned, so far as this book goes. I shall therefore do my best to fulfil the duty assigned to me commensurate with the restrictions I have placed upon myself.

When Mrs. Besant came to the country to start her work here for theosophy and the Theosophical Society, having been drawn to such work by Madame Blavatsky and later Col. Olcott, the founders of the Theosophical Society, we witnessed in India a strange and serious conflict. The country as a whole had come under the political domination of the British who were fast organising an elaborate and efficient system of administration, and were helping in the consolidation of the whole land as one large political unit. Western influences were also naturally fast coming into the country in their wake. English was being widely learnt; schools and colleges, dispensaries and hospitals were being opened at various places; and the discoveries of science were being utilised for the starting of many institutions for the general well-being. Still, the main purpose

of the rulers was the establishment of what may be called a "police State", where the maintenance of law and order was the primary consideration, and where the well-being of the people came only as a very distant second.

The consolidation of British power in India having been immediately preceded by a period of great internal disturbance and of general insecurity of life and property when empires and kingdoms rose and fell, it would not be untrue to say that the strong rule of the British was eagerly welcomed, despite its being foreign, by the generality of the people of the land. English education and the opportunities that the English educated got in the various new professions that were created by the British, made their rule still more popular with various classes and grades of society who soon formed themselves into very strong and well-entrenched vested interests. This education had also further the influence of shaking the thoughts of many of our people who started seriously doubting the desirability of various social institutions that had grown up in the land through the ages, and even questioning the truth of many of the tenets of the ancient faiths.

Many persons came seriously to think that nothing but a complete metamorphosis of India, making her as near a copy as possible of the Western world, could save us. At the same time, great numbers of other folk who continued to live their own lives—glad only that they were reasonably secure—and uninfluenced by foreign teaching, felt strangely disturbed at the phenomenon that was taking away what appeared to be the best in the land, to diverse lines of thought and activity that went counter to their own age-old notions of right and wrong; and these people were inclined therefore to withdraw themselves into a shell in order to keep themselves at least unpolluted. As the British Government did not interfere

with their lives in any way, they felt in duty bound to preserve their faith and custom in their own persons as best they could. Mrs. Besant with her unparalleled powers of speech and with her new found idealisms given to her by theosophy, came like a storm on the Indian scene in the closing years of the nineteenth century, to stand, so to say, as a bridge between these two elements of Indian society that were getting more and more separated one from the other.

Let us dwell for a moment on this scene, for it forms the background of my own study of Mrs. Besant's life and work. There is first of all the British Government in absolute control of the land; and with its strong administrative machinery, able to measure every rood of ground for purposes of revenue, and count every single individual at census time; able to impress every individual whether living in mountains or in forests, with its all-pervading power to punish if not obeyed; and which was accepted by the people at large as something that had come to them as a veritable God-send after the difficult times that the country had passed through in the immediate past. Let us not forget that even Mr. Gokhale when he founded his Servants of India Society early in the 20th century, only about 10 or 12 years after Mrs. Besant's coming to the country, had made it incumbent on all its members to take a vow to the effect that in the inscrutable purposes of Providence, England's rule over India was for India's good.

Then there was the inevitable influence that the ruler invariably has over the ruled. Even ordinarily people try to follow in speech and in behaviour, the ways of those whom they regard as great. Imitation by the disciple of the master is a common phenomenon. The ways of the great for instance, are followed by others readily as we all know. We should not therefore be surprised when the

ways of a foreign ruling race are more likely than any other, to be imitated by those over whom it holds sway, and regarded as very much better than their own. Naturally almost all those members of the subject race who give any thought to the matter, are very often helplessly compelled to feel that there must be something great in those in power and something evil in themselves, that has brought them to the abject condition they are in and given authority over them to these others.

Imitation in externals is the easiest thing to do—and that is all really that can be done—and so the conquered make every effort to live as the conqueror and are also anxious to seek the master's favours. There is nothing to be wondered at, in this. It has always happened in the past, and will probably always happen in the future as well. With the imitation of manners and customs especially when this helps in material advancement as well, due to the favours given by those in authority, one is naturally attracted even to the religion and philosophy, to the art and literature, to, so to say, the cultural aspects of the life of the ruler as well, and begins to regard these to be superior and more desirable than one's own. When the ruler also introduces education in and through his own language and makes it profitable for those who care to learn it, attraction towards him among the classes that avail themselves of the new opportunities, becomes irresistible. Thus towards the close of the 19th century, when Mrs. Besant came to us, we find people taking great pains to study the English language with the utmost care, and make themselves familiar with all that goes with the word English.

Then there are others who feel thoroughly frightened at what is happening. They find their religion and their tradition in serious danger. They find themselves helpless to do anything to stem the tide. They ostracise those who

violate the canons of custom, and withdraw themselves, so to say, from the stream of life, awaiting a better day. They do not argue that there must be something good and great in the conqueror that has put him over themselves. They say that physical prowess is brutish; and just as the tiger that slays a man, cannot be regarded as superior to the person he has killed, so the overriding physical strength of a foreign power cannot be regarded as indicating higher civilisation or culture than those of the conquered. In fact these are lower, so they argue.

So we have to look at the Indian scene of the time of Mrs. Besant's coming in its three main facets: the political dominance of the British; the imitation by some classes of people, of what they regarded as western ways of life and thought, and which, they honestly felt, would not only be materially helpful to themselves, but also be conducive to the welfare of the country and the people at large; and, finally, the feeling in other classes that there was nothing left in the world that was worth having, that they must withdraw themselves into a shell, adhere as best they could to the old ways, and live in the expectation of the day when the high Gods will come to Earth to put things right once again. Mrs. Besant seems to have realised the gravity of the problems and to have set herself in her own way, to try to solve them at this crisis of our country's history in the midst of all the clashes and the conflicts of the time.

III

There was, first of all, the political situation. Here she took full advantage of her white skin; and being herself British—and so in a way above suspicion—she went all out to show that there was no difference between the Indian and the English, and that they could and should live as brothers and fellow-workers in the land. Some

Christian missionaries particularly of the Salvation Army, had also done that; but Mrs. Besant had additional advantage that she had come to learn and not to teach; that she was not here to ask the people of the land to accept another faith, but to know their own better. She was also anxious that there should be better relations between the Indian and the English, so that all mutual bitterness might disappear, and mutual understanding may lead to mutual esteem, and perpetuate the relationship between the two countries as equal partners in a Commonwealth for the good of all mankind. While preaching, therefore, strict loyalty to the British Throne which stood as the dignified symbol of a common endeavour in all the lands owing allegiance to it, she gave no special place to the English people themselves, as members of the conquering race, or as persons in administrative authority over the people. She vigorously fought for this equality inculcating friendliness and modesty among those who ruled, and dignity and self-respect among those who were ruled.

Then she had to deal with persons who were going away entirely from the old moorings under the influence of the new forces and ideologies that came in the land from the West. Here came into play her matchless eloquence. There was her deep, sincere, burning love for the people; and her gigantic brain enabled her to learn up all too quickly the ancient lore of the land—its philosophy, its religion, the basic ideals of its culture. She also quickly familiarised herself with the manners and customs of the people, so that she may be no stranger anywhere she went. Under the auspices of the Theosophical Society, she undertook continual tours in the land, travelling over and over again throughout the length and breadth of the country; delivering literally thousands of lectures depicting in vivid and beautiful language, the glory and the greatness of our

ancient thought and those who propagated them. Her purpose was, it seems to me, to wean all those who, may be, due to their ignorance of the past, and unable to withstand the blinding light of the present, were most unwisely thinking that there was nothing good in themselves or their ancients; and that they must imitate and imbibe all that was foreign in order to come to their own and save their land from further degradation.

When Mrs. Besant told them that India was the homeland of the invisible powers that rule the destinies of men and nations, that their ancient scriptures made them the teachers of the world;—naturally persons who were drawn away from their old moorings, were induced to stop and to think, for these words came from a British person, well-known and highly respected in her own country, who had obviously no axe of her own to grind—in fact, everything to lose and nothing to gain—and who was there only to serve and help them and their country, and who was giving her all without asking for or even expecting anything in return. She thus became a very great force at that time in crying halt to that process that was taking away the educated—and therefore the most influential and powerful —classes of the people not only from the outward forms of ancient days, but actually making them disdainful of these and eagerly attracted by foreign ways which gave them no social position among the rulers, and cut them away from their own people. This work she did with great success by her perfervid eloquence. Her lectures drew large audiences who went back the better for their listening to her unrivalled oratory accompanied by great knowledge and sympathetic understanding. All this was part of her work for Theosophy in the service of which she had really come out to India. She was its greatest exponent in her time, and helped to organise and consolidate the Theoso-

phical Society after its great founders, Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, had passed away.

Then she had also to tackle that orthodox group which by withdrawing itself in disgust and despair, was helping to perpetuate many of the narrownesses that had overtaken India's thought and created many evils due to the struggles of many forces during the intervening centuries. These excrescences had to be removed; but removed in a manner that should not cause any offence or hurt any feelings. Whatever was to be done, should be done in a way so as to give it the appearance of voluntary action and natural evolution. Any violence was bound to arouse opposition and only make matters worse. This very important and necessary work, Mrs. Besant did through the network of her schools and colleges that she founded at various places in the land, the most important being the Central Hindu College at Banaras. Here her students were taught the literatures of the east and the west alike; and while modern science was a part of their educational syllabus, the teaching of ancient religion, philosophy and ethics also formed an integral part thereof. She being a woman in whom the ideal and the real were equitably blended, who was alike a practical worker and a visionary, she introduced in her educational institutions various items of active social reform as well.

The students of her hostels inter-dined with each other, which was not allowed at that time; and she would not admit married students, thus discouraging early marriages that were so common half a century and more ago. Europeans who came to help her in her work, mixed freely with the students and their Indian colleagues; and so all racial discrimination was eliminated. She established girls' schools which were little known and less popular at the time, which brought women out of the shell into which

they had gone, and which helped also in the removal of *pardah*—the system of seclusion of women—which was so harmful for the growth both of womanhood and nationhood. She encouraged and actively helped those of her students who could go abroad, to do so for further studies and broadening of the mind at a time when foreign travel resulted in outcasting and other penalties which are difficult for a human being to put up with because of his being at best only a social animal. Thus she brought about in a very living manner, a great deal of social reform of which we used to hear so much mostly from public platforms. Her lectures on ancient Indian thought and philosophy on the one hand, and her schools and colleges which popularised education and social reform, on the other, to my mind, formed the bridge between the two sections of India's society that were drifting apart, one becoming what was dubbed as Anglicised and the other that was undoubtedly reactionary. She also formed a most useful and practical bond between the English and Indian peoples by her European friends making common cause with the Indian people, and mixing most freely, in her educational and theosophical institutions, with their students and their colleagues, bringing out the good in both, and putting all on an equal basis of their common humanity.

She was British and naturally she could not favour the separation of England from India, when they had once come together whatever might have been the circumstances that had brought this about. In fact she thought that their association was for the world's good, and so brought about for the attainment of a particular goal in human evolution, and the fulfilment of a particular objective of those who, according to her, were in charge of the destinies of mankind. She wanted full freedom for India; but that only as a member of the Indo-British Common-

wealth and an equal partner with other component parts thereof, with the British Sovereign at the head, for like every other Britisher, she was intensely devoted to the Throne. She tried her best to make the Indian youth self-respecting and to hold his own whenever any attempt was made to lower his dignity. She herself came later to be associated with the extremist sections of Indian politics, and as such brought a new spirit in the country, suffered internment, and was elected President of the Indian National Congress, the highest honour that the country could give to anyone at that time. She continued to the last doing her work in the political, the educational and the cultural aspects of India's national life.

Public memory is short and particularly so in our land where we have never been blessed with what is called the historical sense. It would, therefore, not be out of place to recollect that she was really in a way the precursor of the great non-co-operation movement that reached such heights under Mahatma Gandhi's guidance and leadership, and of which she herself became such an avowed opponent. She gave the first flag to the Congress which was green and red—to represent the Muslim and Hindu sections of the people—to which a white portion with the spinning wheel, was added later on to denote the minorities and the importance of cottage industries for a land so poor as ours. It was under her inspiration that for the first time, an official title was discarded—and that too a big and coveted one—by a great and distinguished ex-Judge of the Madras High Court. Then again it was due to her that the first boycott of educational institutions took place when a woman medical student withdrew from a College in Bombay. It would be good to study the events that followed her death in the light of the events of the

immediate past in the shaping of which she herself has had such a big hand.

IV

The history of Europe, they say, from the French Revolution to the battle of Waterloo, is only the biography of Napoleon. It can—perhaps with greater justice—be said that the history of the Freedom struggle of India from 1920 to the attainment of our Independence in 1947, is the biography of Mahatma Gandhi during that time. Mrs. Besant actively entered the political arena of India sometime in 1914 when she started her *New India,* a daily English paper in Madras. The first Great War also began that very year, and Mrs. Besant's slogan was: "England's difficulty is India's opportunity". Mahatma Gandhi returned sometime later from South Africa, and was advised by Mr. Gokhale whom he regarded his political *guru* not to meddle with Indian politics just then, but to watch quietly the situation for one whole year. Mr. Gokhale's line of argument was that India was not South Africa; and that the methods that Mahatma Gandhi might have found useful there, would not necessarily succeed here.

Mr. Gokhale died in 1915, and that more or less synchronised with the close of the year of the self-imposed silence of Mahatma Gandhi. I believe the first Congress he attended was that of Lucknow in December 1916. Invitations had already come to him to visit Bihar to examine the situation there *vis-a-vis* the treatment of peasant-labourers by the European proprietors of indigo plantations, carrying on a very prosperous industry in the countryside at that time. He started taking more and more interest in the social and political conditions of the country; and many persons—our President Shri

Rajendra Prasad among them—were so very greatly attracted by his personality that they left all their worldly concerns, to follow him and do his bidding. He attended the various sessions of the Indian National Congress, and made himself more and more felt as time went on. The Congress was fast becoming a mass organisation, and was no more confined to the educated classes as it had been so long. In the Nagpur Congress of 1920, Mahatmaji came to his own; and from that time onwards, he was the undisputed leader of political India; and even those who differed from him, held him in the highest respect. No political organisation, apart from the communal ones, seemed possible to form after that. The drift between him and Mrs. Besant, however, was complete by this time. They met but seldom after that.

Mahatma Gandhi saw that Muslims were not attracted by the Congress. There were only a few there. His great anxiety was to build up a United India which alone could bring and guarantee Liberty. Even Mr. Gokhale, the author of a standard work on arithmetic, naturally arguing in terms of figures, had said: "There are three parties in India: the British, the Hindu and the Muslim; and any two are greater than the third." Mahatmaji's great effort was to demolish this difference between Hindu and Muslim and make them one. He therefore identified the Congress with the Khilafat movement. Muslim India was very greatly exercised in the early twenties over the fate of the Turkish Khalifa. Mahatmaji made every concession to Muslim feeling in order to bring Muslims into the fold, pledging them every support from the Hindus. Large numbers of Muslims joined the Congress at this time; but as soon as the Khilafat itself was overthrown by the Turks themselves, the movement died out in India, and the Muslims departed from the Congress. Mr. Jinnah

who had little to do with the Muslim League before, and was even an ardent nationalist on the Congress platform, became one of the greatest opponents of Mahatma Gandhi; and so also of everything he stood for; and ultimately got the country partitioned in order that he should have absolute sway on the portion of the land he called Pakistan. Mahatma Gandhi never gave up his great objective of Hindu-Muslim unity, despite all that had happened, and fought to the last for it. He was actually assassinated because he was regarded as favouring Muslims as against the Hindus. Mr. Jinnah, on the other hand, regarded him as Enemy No. I of the Muslims. It would be but right to mention here that Mrs. Besant never approached the Indian problem from the Muslim point of view. In fact she had little to do with Muslims or the theology of Islam, as a practical force in the country's life. Her short association with Mr. Jinnah was only when as an ardent nationalist, he joined her Home Rule movement.

One of the many techniques of Mahatmaji's public work, which he alone could really follow and which others have tried to imitate with disastrous consequences to themselves, or in any case without doing any good to anybody or any cause, was to go on long fasts. In 1924, for instance, after some Hindu Muslim riots in Western India —now Pakistan— he went on a three-week fast at Delhi; and a big conference of leading Muslims, Hindus and even Christians and others, including the Metropolitan of Calcutta, was called to study the situation, and find ways and means of curing the ills of the body politic. I do not think the Conference did much good as it went on from day to day till its Chairman, Pandit Motilal Nehru, got quite fed up, and said with obvious irritation: "Is there any finality to anything? We cannot go on like this for

ever." The Conference ended with long resolutions where music before mosques was put on a level with cow slaughter, and resolutions regarding both were passed in identical terms. This fast of Mahatmaji, as many others, was restricted to three weeks; but sometimes he went on fast unto death like in 1932 over the question of the depressed castes and sub-castes of Hindu society to whom he gave the common designation of "Harijans", and whom the British Government wanted to separate from the main body of Hindus by giving them special representation. We were already having endless troubles as between Hindus and Muslims because of just such differentiation; and Gandhiji felt that a grievous wrong would be done to the Harijans who were so dependant upon the other castes, if they were politically separated from these and thus lost their goodwill. Mahatma Gandhi's life at that time was saved only after the British Prime Minister Mr. Ramsay Macdonald and the Government of India had very hurried consultations among themselves, and succeeded in a formula that was agreeable to Mahatmaji. It must be added here that fasts and penances, such mortification of the flesh, formed no part of Mrs. Besant's method. Leading a strictly disciplined life—industrious, punctual, reliable—she had no use for such self-immolation which her western mind could not perhaps understand, but which had and have such influence on the mass mind of India. Mrs. Besant, in the words of the *Bhagavad-Gita,* was a Yogin to whom the descriptions of such a one as given in that great Book applied to the full: "Yogah karmasu kaushalam" (Yoga is efficiency in action); and also

"Natyashna-tastu yogosti, na chaikanta-manashnatah,
Na chati-svapna-shilasya, jagrato naiva cha-Arjuna!
Yuktahara viharasya, yukta-cheshtasya karmasu,
Yukta-svapna-vabodhasya, yogo bhavati dukkhaha".

(Verily Yoga is not for him who eateth too much, nor who abstaineth to excess, nor who is too much addicted to sleep, nor even to wakefulness, O Arjuna! Yoga killeth out all pain for him who is regulated in eating and amusement, regulated in performing actions, regulated in sleeping and waking); while Mahatmaji was a Sanyasin or a Tapasvin, as also described in the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

"Deva-dvija-guru-prajnya-pujanam, shaucha-
marjavam,
Brahma-charyam ahimsa cha, shariram tapa uchyate.
Kamyanam karmanam nyasam sanyasam kavayo
viduh".

(Worship given to gods, to the twice-born, to teachers and to the wise, purity, straightforwardness, continence and harmlessness, are called austerity of the body. Sages have known as renunciation, the renouncing of desire-prompted works).

It would be helpful, even though saddening, to recall here the days of the Martial Law in the Punjab in the early months of 1919 culminating in the Jallianwala Bagh slaughter in April. Large numbers of persons who had assembled peacefully for a public meeting, were shot down at the orders of a British General who gave no chance to the people to escape, for the only entrance to and exit from the grounds was the one where he had planted his own guns. The whole incident horrified the civilised world, and certainly drove the iron into the soul of the land which it was almost impossible to extract. The first World War had ended in 1918; and naturally having defeated the Germans and flushed with victory, the British evidently did not think it worthwhile to pay attention to the puny little movement of Satyagraha led by a puny little man—the "naked fakir" of Winston Churchill—and so they thought that it would not matter if they showed qualities

of prowess under cover of martial law. They, however, counted without their host; and the puny little man was not so puny after all, and the "naked fakir" though clad in sparse garments, was really clothed in the affection and loyalty of a great people which gave him all the warmth he needed and all the strength he sought.

Mahatma Gandhi who took a leading part in investigating the sad events of those days, along with his esteemed colleagues—Pandit Motilal Nehru among them—was really becoming the undisputed leader of political India by that time. His was the most powerful and deciding voice at the session of the Congress that was held towards the end of that year at Amritsar, the city of the tragedy itself. His active association with the Khilafat movement brought the Muslims of the land to his fold; and in the years that followed, Muslims joined the Congress in very large numbers and formed a most powerful factor therein. Under Gandhiji's guidance and leadership, the Congress went all out to meet their wishes. The Muslim League that became later so powerful, was then at a low ebb in consequence. By the time the session of the Congress was held in Nagpur in December 1920, Mahatma Gandhi's leadership became undisputed; and Shri C. Vijayaraghavachariar, the President of the session, in his address appealed in vain to the British "Do" and to Mahatma Gandhi "Don't", neither of whom I fear being willing to give heed either to his warning or his admonition.

V

Mahatma Gandhi had the system which any person who would look at his life, will see clearly delineated therein, of taking extended tours in the land to feel the pulse of the people whenever he thought of starting a big movement on an all-India scale. It is curious how he really

made the three great attempts to gain this objective at intervals of just ten years one from the other. Whether this was planned or not, I cannot say. Thus we have his great tours of 1920-21, perhaps the first that he undertook, when he prepared the ground by enlisting masses of men and women as members of the Congress, and collecting the biggest amount of money that had been raised for any single non-official cause till then. After having earlier called for the boycott of the visit of the Duke of Connaught, he also called for the boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales towards the end of 1921. It was amazing to see how the streets of our great towns, would be entirely deserted when the Duke of Connaught or the Prince of Wales passed that way, and would be teeming with human beings a few days later when Mahatma Gandhi passed on the self-same roads.

"Ten recluses," says the Persian couplet of the wise Sheikh Sa'adi, "may sleep on one blanket, but two kings cannot be contained in one country:"

"Dah darvish dar glimi bekhospand,
Va do padshah dar aghlimi nah ganjand;".

and just as the Roman Government two thousand years ago, could not allow the writ of Jesus Christ to run where only the writ of Caesar should run—and therefore crucified the Son of God—so the British in India could not permit Gandhiji to rule the hearts of men when it was incumbent on all to feel loyal to the British Crown alone. Despite Gandhiji's assurances, the British took the boycott of their Prince as a personal insult to him. Any affront to their Royalty they simply could not bear. No sooner had the Prince of Wales therefore finished his four-month tour in the land, than Mahatma Gandhi was promptly arrested and sentenced to six years of imprisonment, the Judge himself seeming rather aghast at the judgment he

was passing. Mahatmaji's imprisonment was longer and in a way harsher than what was then inflicted on others of the Congress, for he was allowed absolutely no contact with the outside world. He was given no papers and allowed no interviews. The then Governor of Bombay Sir George Lloyd, who seemed to have had great personal dislike for Gandhiji, is reported to have visited him in jail; and when Gandhiji said: "Your Excellency",—he was always the pink of courtesy—"I do not even know who the Prime Minister of England is today"; the Governor replied: "You have to behave better in order to know that". The imprisonment, however, did not last quite six years, for he was released after two years following a most serious operation that had almost taken his life.

When Mahatmaji was released in 1924, the movement had lost its force and fervour. I remember his visit at that time to my home-town of Banaras; and the railway station that was overflowing with human beings when he came there early in 1921, was practically deserted both at the time of his arrival and his departure, much to the embarrassment of those like me who were in charge of arrangements. Mahatmaji and his party were going to the Provincial Conference at Sitapur; and I remember Jawaharlalji telling me at the station: "It is all rather sad, but let us not worry. We have called this Conference but must see it through". Perhaps Mahatmaji was even then taking a tour to see how the people felt in order that he might be able to launch another movement. If I am not wrong, the tour proved unsatisfactory; and no movement was started. At Belgaum in December of the same year, he presided over the Congress. He attended other annual Congresses also; but though his voice was the most prominent, it did not seem to carry the same

weight and enthusiasm during these years, that it had done from 1919 to 1922. He, however, was not a person to give up a fight that he had once undertaken, whatever the circumstances may be, and however dark the horizon might look.

In 1929, Mahatmaji seemed again to feel that the time had come for action; and again there was his tour throughout the land. Once more all the old fire and fervour had come back, and was visible all round. The people seemed to be ready for action. I remember his tour in my home-state of Uttar Pradesh then known as the United Provinces when Shri Jawaharhal Nehru as the President, and I as the General Secretary of the Provincial Congress Committee, were in charge of the arrangements. It was an extended tour that he made; and either Jawaharlal or I or both were with him from place to place as he travelled. Shri J. B. Kripalani accompanied him throughout. The enthusiasm of the people was unbounded; and the self-same station of Banaras was one seething mass of humanity, which certainly was in strange contrast to the scene of 1924 at that same place. Though elected President of the Congress for that year, he gave place to Jawaharlal Nehru; and at the stroke of midnight of December 31, 1929, the nation as represented by the Congress, declared at its session at Lahore, that complete independence and nothing less was its goal. Everyone was on the tiptoe of expectation and felt certain that something was coming. Jawaharlal Nehru made me the General Secretary of the Congress, and so I became an ex-officio member of the Working Committee, and was thus able to watch the activities of the leaders from the inside.

Meetings of the Working Committee were held in quick succession after the Lahore Congress. At the very first meeting held early in January in Lahore itself, the

decision was taken that the '26th' of the month was to be celebrated as our complete Independence (Purna Swarajya) Day. Some day had to be fixed for the purpose after the passing of the resolution for complete Independence by the Congress. It was necessary also that an early day should be fixed for the taking of the Independence pledge at public meetings as drafted by Gandhiji. The date has now become sacred; and because of the accident that that was the last Sunday of January 1930, and Gandhiji thought it would be most suitable for the purpose, it has now been solemnly declared as our Republic Day. Then came the important meeting of the Working Committee in the middle of February 1930 which was held at Sabarmati where Gandhiji had his *Ashrama* at that time. I had travelled from Banaras *via* Agra and Pandit Motilal came from Delhi. The two trains joined up at the Bandi-Kui railway junction; and after that proceeded as one. Learning that Pandit Motilal was in the same train, I went up to his compartment at one of the way-side stations. He said to me: "Have you thought of anything? What are we to do at our meeting?" I said: "It is for you leaders to think of this and not for me, but" I added, " I have vaguely heard that Mahatma Gandhi was thinking of a campaign against the Salt Laws". He replied: "I have also heard so, but surely all that is nonsense". When, however, the Working Committee did actually meet at Sabarmati on the following day, and Mahatma Gandhi casually said, as he plied his charkha, that he was thinking of a campaign against the Salt Laws, it was the self-same Pandit Motilal who immediately replied: "Salt tax must certainly be opposed. It is in the nature of a poll tax."

I put down this incident for the specific purpose of pointing out the influence Mahatmaji had on the biggest minds of the time. Pandit Motilal was not a person to yield

on anything. He was a very proud man, and scarcely ever imagined that he could be in the wrong or that anyone else who held any opinion different to his, could be in the right. The person who thought it was sheer nonsense to think of violating the salt tax a day before, was all in its favour when Gandhiji had put his seal of approval upon it. The Sabarmati meeting was followed by a regular meeting of the All-India Congress Committee some weeks later in March, to give its approval to Mahatmaji's proposals. Then there was the Dandi march and the satyagraha against salt laws that landed thousands of Congressmen in jail. It would not be true to say that everywhere genuine salt was manufactured; but the Salt Laws were certainly broken and every one encouraged to break them; and the inevitable imprisonments followed.

VI

The British Government called for a Round Table Conference in this interval in England; but the Congress was not in the picture. Leaders of various vested interests as well as political groups went there, but no purpose was really served. Early in 1931 Pandit Motilal died. About the same time, members of the Working Committee were released to enable them to meet and discuss the situation among themselves. They hurriedly assembled at Allahabad both to offer their condolences to the Nehru family, and also to think of what next to do and what plans to make for the future. The invitation of Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, to Mahatma Gandhi was accepted; and the Committee adjourned to Delhi. Readers will see that all this was almost exactly ten years after the first movement of 1920-21 which culminated in the boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales and the subsequent imprisonment of Gandhiji.

From the period of Mahatmaji's release in 1924 to his preparing for the next campaign of 1929-30, for a period of five years, there was complete lull. In 1927, the Congress met at Madras over which Dr. Ansari presided and at which Mahatmaji was not present. Jawaharlal Nehru who had returned only recently from a long sojourn abroad, brought the news of the gathering war clouds; and though the second world war did not actually break out till ten years later, he was very greatly exercised over the international situation of which he continued to make keen and thorough studies, and about the developments in which he kept warning his countrymen all the time. The negotiations at Delhi between Lord Irwin (now Lord Halifax) and Mahatma Gandhi continued day after day. Mahatma Gandhi spent long hours every day at the Viceroy's House. As is common and natural in such matters, hopes and fears alternated all the time.

Mahatmaji used to report to the Working Committee that was in continual session, its members being all accommodated under the hospitable roof of Dr. Ansari. Mahatmaji's moves were generally supported. There were some dissentients also. I remember one evening Jawaharlal was very disappointed and unhappy at what Gandhiji had agreed to, and said with great emotion: "I feel utterly lonely. I do not know where we are going." Gandhiji had prolonged talks with him, and with deep affection explained the situation to him in his own way, winning him over to his side. On another occasion, I remember when some member said he felt that if Mahatmaji conceded some particular point, he was likely to get a bad name, Gandhiji replied in his characteristic manner: "If you want it, I will go immediately to the Viceroy and withdraw what I have agreed to. Do not worry about my

reputation; worry about your own. I know how to take care of mine". That silenced the critic even if it did not convince him. At last a common formula was agreed to between Mahatmaji and Lord Irwin, and the Civil Disobedience Movement that had been only informally suspended, during the course of the negotiations, was formally called off. All political prisoners were forthwith released.

When the Second Round Table Conference met later in the year in London, Mahatmaji agreed to go there. He went as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress. He did not want any colleagues to go with him at all. This Conference like the first, was a total failure as it could come to no decisions, and there were violent differences of opinion among the various individuals and groups that were invited there. Mahatmaji came back towards the end of the year only to be arrested. Arrests of Congressmen followed all over the land. The year 1932 was spent by them again behind prison bars. The process of release from this jailing started early in 1933 though Mahatmaji himself was not finally out for another year.

As I have described in the book, Mrs. Besant died in September 1933 at the time when the Provincial Congress Committee of Uttar Pradesh (then called the United Provinces) was meeting at Lucknow on the morrow of the release of Jawaharlal Nehru, to take stock of the situation. For three years previously, Mrs. Besant had been ill and totally confined to her room at Adyar. She had ceased to take active interest in politics from some time before, though she had attended the Congress of 1928 at Calcutta over which Pandit Motilal presided, and took much part in the proceedings of the Conference that was held simultaneously over the Nehru Report on the constitution of the country. Mrs. Besant had ceased to play

any effective part in Congress activities, though she had appeared on the Congress platform of the Belgaum Congress of December 1924 over which Mahatma Gandhi presided, when the President disturbed the proceedings in order to enable Mrs. Besant to make a speech, she having come for just two or three hours for the occasion, and was wanting to go away immediately to catch her train back.

When Mahatmaji returned from jail in 1934, he took up Harijan work, and made a tour with Thakar Bapa, Hriday Nath Kunzru and others, for the cause. Readers will see that these decennial movements of Gandhiji lasted from about the close of the decade to four years afterwards—the first movement of 1920 was practically finished in 1924; and that of 1930, in 1934. Political life was fairly dull from 1934 to about 1939 just as it had been from 1924 to 1929. There was some legislative activity, but nothing more. Mahatmaji at that time must have been sorely taxed as to what to do. He carried on his many constructive activities for Harijan uplift, Khadi and various handicrafts, but the state of our political life as such was very dismal and almost heart-breaking. His efforts for Hindu-Muslim unity had all proved futile; and except for a few devoted persons like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai and some others, the whole body of Muslims had joined the Muslim League of which Mr. Jinnah was becoming the undisputed leader and master. The cry of Pakistan was growing in volume and intensity; and it was quite clear to me—I was at this period a member of the Central Legislative Assembly—that the British Government favoured it as a counter-blast to the Congress demands, even though at the beginning, they had laughed at it all as fantastic nonsense.

During his Harijan tour of 1934, Mahatmaji visited

my home-town of Banaras, and he and his large party were accommodated in the premises of the Kashi Vidyapith that had also just been released having been locked up for over two years by the Government in the wake of the 1932 movement. The Working Committee also met there. The then Viceroy Lord Wellingdon who had a very deep dislike for Mahatmaji and repeatedly declined to receive him when Gandhiji offered to meet him, had thrown out, so to say, a challenge to the Congressmen to prove their professed popularity with the people by the verdict of the ballot box. To the Englishman, the results of an election are of far greater value than the opinions of mass meetings. Mahatmaji took up the challenge; Government dissolved the old Central Assembly and ordered new elections for it. These were held towards the end of the year. Congressmen were asked to contest the seats. I have reason to think that the Governors of various Provinces had informed the Viceroy on the advice of their supporters, that the influence of the Congress was all finished, and that but few Congressmen, if any, would succeed at the polls. I certainly know that that was so with the Governor of my home State, Sir Malcolm Hailey. The result of the elections, however, was that the Congress swept the polls; and we arrived in large numbers in the Central Assembly. I know also how very disappointed Sir Malcolm Hailey was, as he felt he had been badly let down. He made no secret of it, and told his visitors of it quite openly. Soon after that, he retired.

VII

So far as I can analyse the situation and Mahatma Gandhi's complex mind, it seems to me that Mahatmaji wanted to make it perfectly clear that his movement was not a movement of the weak but really of the strong; that

non-violence was the weapon of the brave and not the coward. Like the heroes of old—of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* which really form the basis of Hindu civilisation and set standards of conduct for men—Mahatmaji never refused to take up a challenge; but he was also anxious that as soon as his strength was proved by whatever standards may be set by his opponents, he should withdraw. That is how he almost always asked persons after winning elections, to come away; in other words, first to prove that they were real representatives of the people by obtaining their votes, and then also to show how indifferent they were to the results of success, and had really no need for official and semi-official positions and patronage for their work for the welfare of the people at large. This line of argument, I know, did not appeal to many even in the Congress; and as far back as 1923, Pandit Motilal Nehru raised a revolt, and founded his Swaraj party to fight elections under its auspices, Congressmen having been asked not to oppose even if they felt that they could not support. This conflict in some form or another remained to the last.

I cannot help feeling, however, that Mahatmaji's line of argument was in keeping with the idealism of Indian tradition, for the ancient legends do tell us that Rama after he had won back Sita, *actually abandoned her*; and after getting back his kingdom, went along with the whole body of the citizens of Ayodhya, deliberately to die in the waters of the Sarayu. We also learn that the Pandavas after winning their great victory and recovering their lost empire, went away into voluntary retirement to be melted in the snows of the Himalayas. Whatever that may be, it is true that sacrifice of material positions even if it may seem to others as flying away from the responsibilities that these impose, has always been very

greatly acclaimed in our country; and when prosperous lawyers and big merchants, when brilliant young people on the very threshold of their careers, gave up everything to serve the cause of the people, they were claimed as veritable heroes and honoured as the real leaders of the land. That was true of Mahatma Gandhi down to the humblest volunteer, whether known or unknown outside his particular field of activity.

The second World War began in 1939. The persons elected in 1934 continued in the Central Legislative Assembly. In 1936-37, elections were held in the Provinces, under the new Government of India Act of 1935; and Congressmen were returned in large numbers to the various Provincial Legislatures as well. Congress Governments were formed almost everywhere. They were, however, called away—ministers and legislators alike—when the second World War began in 1939. Mahatma Gandhi emphatically declared that that was not a war of the Indian people; and so we had no part or lot in it; and also called upon all to contribute neither a penny nor a man: (*Na ek pai, na ek bhai,* as the cry went up in the United Provinces). The second World War was even more serious than the first, though many people thought that it would be finished in a few months' time. My instinct told me that it would last for at least five years. It actually lasted for six.

Mahatma Gandhi by this time was physically too weak to undertake long tours. His mind was, however, working hard; and it was clear he was anxious that something had got to be done before it was too late. He thought of the individual Civil Disobedience of 1940: his earlier experiment in 1933 along these lines had met with no response. He now set himself seriously to his task. The people also seemed to be ready for something and came willingly once

more under his lead. He selected persons at various places who were asked to send information to the authorities beforehand that they would go and deliver a message at a particular place to the assembled people that they should contribute neither men nor money to the war. He did not want this to be a mass movement and desired only those who were morally worthy, to offer Satyagraha. He chose the pious Acharya Vinoba Bhave as the worthiest, to give the lead and go to jail before anyone else.

All duly selected persons sent notices to their district authorities; and before they could go and deliver the proposed message, they were arrested and sent usually to a year of imprisonment. Later some one got up a test case in a High Court. The Judges declared that the mere giving of notice without actually doing anything, was not a crime, and could not be punished. Then there was a general jail delivery; but most persons had practically served the whole term of their sentence already, and so they did not gain much by this belated test case. The British-Indian paper *The Statesman* of Calcutta-Delhi had a regular feature called "Crank's Corner" in which the names of all persons who were sent to jail in connection with this movement, were duly chronicled from day to day. The whole thing seemed very funny not only to the British editor of the paper, Sir Arthur Moore, but to most of us also who actually joined the fray. As faithful soldiers of his army, we followed Mahatma Gandhi; as his devoted followers we were sure that what he was doing must be right and that something was bound to result. In any case, whatever the manner of expression, we had to keep ourselves before the public eye if we were to succeed in our ultimate mission. Politics and publicity, whether we like it or not, have to go together. Whatever may have been Mahatmaji's own estimate of the results,

the fact is that by the time we came out of jail by the beginning of 1942, he was already cogitating in his mind, the launching of what came to be very well known as the "Quit India" movement.

VIII

The war was at a very serious stage at that time, and one can understand the extreme tension under which the British Government and the British people then were. They found it difficult to excuse anyone who could think of positively embarrassing them in any way, when not actually helping in what was to them a righteous cause on which the freedom and welfare of the world depended. It was said long ago that in modern wars even the victors must lose; and I believe the results of the second Great War prove the truth of this aphorism. At Bombay the All-India Congress Committee met on August 9, and arrests immediately followed. Mahatma Gandhi was taken to the Aga Khan palace at Poona, while the Working Committee members were confined in the Ahmednagar Fort. Leading Congressmen all over the land were arrested in their homes in the various districts and kept in the local jails. There was a tremendous upsurge of emotion at various places. In fact the whole country was suddenly in revolt that surprised those who joined the movement even more, perhaps, than those who were opposing them.

It is a matter of deep regret that all those strict canons of non-violence as made incumbent by Mahatmaji, were not observed everywhere, for there was some cruel sabotage of railway trains, though not involving loss of life. Some bad characters however took advantage of the situation and there were burglaries and even murders here and there. The remarkable thing, however, was that

though ordinarily a mass movement like that in those particular circumstances, could have been regarded as a major racial conflict of the Indian and the British, as a matter of fact not a single British life, so far as I know, was endangered; and even in the remotest and most out of the way corners, British people whether as missionaries or merchants, administrators or tourists, were safe from all harm—men, women and children alike. Only Government property was attacked. The struggle was between the Government and the people, and not between one race and another. This was the result of the widespread acceptance of Mahatma Gandhi's principles that they were fighting a system and not those in charge of it or representing it in any way. The remarkable thing that has always struck me is the absolute secrecy with which the Government were able to finalise all their arrangements. Hundreds of thousands of Indian eyes must have seen the orders given for the preparation of various plans: for the equipping and arming of police stations; for the arrest of innumerable persons; for the preparation of various places of imprisonment;—but no one outside knew the nature of what was being done. Even Mahatma Gandhi, as I know, did not expect such widespread arrests, immediately after resolutions were passed by the All-India Congress Committee. He had thought, if I am not mistaken, that nothing will happen for at least three months, and that Government will only watch developments during that period.

This momentous meeting of the All-India Congress Committee, began and ended on August 9, 1942, and arrests were made that very evening and night all over the land. The Government could not take any risks. Almost all persons in Government service have relatives in the non-official world—many were friends or relatives of

Congressmen as well—still no one gave away the secret of Government to anyone. No one knew what was coming. Most persons were taken by surprise. I fear many who have to do with Government today, would now say with sorrow that the secrets of their own Government are not kept so sedulously by those who are entrusted with them, though they should do so even better now since their own people are in power. The main frame-work of the administration continues as before, and the same personnel has been maintained. It is a matter of continuing surprise to me that we seem to serve the foreigner better than we serve ourselves. I know that things will improve; and I only hope that my mention of this curious phenomenon, will not hurt anyone, but rouse us to a sense of our own duties and responsibilities, our own dignity and self-respect.

The movement of 1920-21 lasted till 1924, and that of 1930-31, to 1934 in some form or another. The movement of 1940 lasted till 1945; and when the second World War ended and the leaders returned from their prisons, it was not in a spirit of frustration or disappointment, but in that of self-confidence and fulfilment. It was clear in 1945 that the British had finally decided to withdraw. They had been badly shaken by the great war, even though ultimately victorious. They wisely decided to offer India back to her own people as a voluntary and spontaneous gift and thus ensure their friendship and goodwill for themselves.

It so happened that during all these years that the Congress and Congress-minded men and women were struggling and suffering, the Muslim League was consolidating itself as a communal political organisation, taking full advantage of other people's sacrifices that were weakening the opponents, in order to push its own claim

for a separate Muslim State to be carved out of the living body of the common parent country; and it succeeded. In this it had the full support of the British who said that they had their responsibilities towards the Muslims whom they could not leave at the "mercy" of the Hindu majority; and that it was their duty to ensure the safety of their Muslim subjects. This was made the excuse for the cutting up of the country, regardless of the terrible results that were bound to follow, in murder, violence and exodus of masses of people from one place to another. It will always be a matter of deep pain to many that Lahore where complete Independence as the goal of the Congress, was declared in December 1929, and Karachi where in March 1931, Congress celebrated partial victory after the salt satyagraha movement, are now foreign territory to us.

Though India's first High Commissioner in Pakistan, I could never feel that I was in a foreign land when I functioned at Karachi or at Lahore. The ties were too strong for any such thinking. However, after many conferences and negotiations following the release of the Congress leaders in 1945, an experiment of a joint Cabinet of Congressmen and Muslim Leaguers in the Central Government was tried. That only made matters worse; and the cleavage appeared so unbridgeable that partition was acceded to by even those who had stoutly resisted it before. So at last complete Independence of India was declared on August 15, 1947; and simultaneously Pakistan was also born. India continued to have the last British Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, as her Governor-General while Mr. Jinnah made himself the Governor-General of Pakistan. In the beginning there was a hope that the two States would have a common Governor-General; and a special provision was inserted for the purpose in the relevant

laws. If I am not mistaken, Mr. Jinnah first accepted a joint Governor-Generalship, and then changed his mind. If we had had one Governor-General, I think many of the horrors that were witnessed in the terrible weeks that followed August 15, 1947, might have been avoided. "Of all sad words of tongue and pen", the poet has moaned, "The saddest are these: it might have been;" and there is no use crying over spilt milk or speculating about possibilities of what would have happened if this had not been done, or that had been done. We must take facts as they are and try to understand them in the light of human nature, rather than human idealism: that is the only path of wisdom from which none can dare to stray.

IX

Perhaps it would not be irrelevant if as I close this rather long historical introduction which as I said in the beginning, I undertook to write only at the desire of my esteemed friend Shri K. M. Munshi, I should, since this is a book on Mrs. Besant and not on Mahatma Gandhi, say something of what might be regarded as Mrs. Besant's own contribution to the ultimate consummation of India's Freedom. I have ventured to say in the course of the above narrative, that in a way Mrs. Besant had taken up most of the items that were later elaborated—and no doubt independently thought of—by Mahatma Gandhi. The two personalities were so strong that it was really not possible for them to work together; and each had to have the whole field to himself or herself if he or she were to do anything worthwhile. The parting therefore between Mahatma Gandhi and Mrs. Besant came fairly early as already described in the introduction and further elaborated in the book.

I have studied Mrs. Besant's work in three aspects

of our national life: the British connection; the influence of the West; and the reaction of the new forces on the minds of the orthodox. In a way Mahatmaji's work could also be studied by its impress on these varied facets of the Indian scene. So far as the British connection went, he declared from the very start: "Within the Empire if possible, outside it if necessary". He had no biases or prejudices, one way or the other. He was willing that his country should be a part of the British Empire, not to speak of the Commonwealth, if the British made it worthwhile its being so. He was also prepared to go out if his terms for co-operation and colleagueship were not accepted. So while right from 1916 when he came into Indian politics, to 1929, he strove for the association of England and India on terms of equality and friendship, in 1929 he finally lost all hope of such a union, and declared for complete Independence.

Mrs. Besant would never have agreed to this so far as I can see; and she would have continued to strive for the continuation of the relationship. In a way, perhaps, Mrs. Besant's ideal has been partially fulfilled, namely, that the British Empire is called Commonwealth; and India is a part thereof. She however bears no allegiance to the British Crown which Mrs. Besant would have liked her to continue to do; but she regards the British Sovereign, all the same, as the Head of the Commonwealth of which India is an integral part. There is thus a fusion—if I may say so—of the idealisms of both Mahatma Gandhi and Mrs. Besant; and for this all praise, honour and credit must go to India's great Prime Minister, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, who struggled against heavy odds both in England and India, so that India could become a Republic and still continue to be a member of an otherwise monarchical Commonwealth.

So far as western influences are concerned, I have a

feeling that more of them have come in since Swaraj than existed when the British held sway in the land. I believe young people try to live and want to live today in accordance with what may be termed European styles and standards of life very much more than before. Being, however, a free people, this is only emblematic of a voluntary desire to raise the standards of life in accordance with modern conceptions of these; and they have nothing to do with any desire to please the powers-that-be as was the case before. In fact, while Ministers and others in high positions of political authority today, may live the lives that they lived as non-officials—as politicians and public men—many of their well-placed subordinates who are permanent officers of Government, continue to believe in the styles that they earlier made their own under a foreign regime. It shows therefore that the basic urge is just the opposite of what it was before. There is, however, no doubt that European ways have penetrated into the lives that they lived as non-officials—as politicians and their minds though attached to their country in the matter of its political freedom, are actually very much more detached from the old moorings to which Mrs. Besant strove hard and incessantly to keep them fast.

Having declared ourselves a Secular State—and nothing else was possible in a country of so many castes and creeds all of whom the leaders and framers of the constitution rightly desired, should regard themselves citizens of a common land wherein they should enjoy equal rights and opportunities and be subjected to self-same duties and responsibilities—some folk actually think that religion has no place in life, though here and there we see efforts being made to revive studies of ancient lore which really do not seem to attract the modern youth. Mahatma Gandhi's precepts were all moral and ethical.

He was not worried about the theology or the philosophy of the ancients. In fact it seems to me that in his mental and emotional make-up he was more influenced by Christian ideology than Hindu. As a matter of fact he was not very familiar with India's ancient thought, but he followed this more by instinct and tradition than by any careful study and thinking. His actual life, however, was that of a very simple pious Hindu. All those who came under his influence also tried to live simple lives. He was of an intensely devotional nature so far as the religious side of his life went; and he read the *Ramayana* of Tulasi Das, for instance, with the utmost fervour, just as a village man does outside his little cottage after the day's hard work is done.

Mrs. Besant, on the other hand, had made a careful study of the sacred books of the Hindus, and was always quoting chapter and verse as she delivered her great orations. Her personal life was by no means so simple as that of the Mahatma, and therefore could be better followed by those who came in contact with her. In a way she was more human, for she made allowances for the weaknesses of human nature and the failings of the flesh in others which Mahatmaji found it difficult to do. She also brought the minds of those who heard her, back to the scriptures as such which Mahatmaji's teachings did not. Thus those who came in contact with the Mahatma, tried to be simple in their personal lives as best they could, and tried certainly to be moral in accordance with his teachings, but they were not told—and so did not know —of the glories and achievements of our ancient heroes and preceptors. Curiously enough, Mahatmaji's heroes were of the western world, and he quoted Count Tolstoy, Cardinal Newman, and Jesus Christ oftener than the figures of the history and legend of his own land. No

wonder, the Christian missionary was far more attracted by him than the Hindu pandit. The modern-minded men and women of India came to him for comfort and guidance; and the masses of Indian peasants followed him because he looked so much like them despite his greatness, and promised them freedom from want if they helped him in getting them freedom from foreign domination. In the social and intellectual aspects of life, therefore, Mrs. Besant's influence was entirely different from that of Mahatma Gandhi. Moreover, Mrs. Besant's appeal was more to the middle class educated folk, while the Mahatma's was to the vast masses of the country: hers was to the head, while his was to the heart. That may account both for the differing methods adopted and the results that ensued.

Then there is the third category of persons to whom I have referred, namely those who in high dudgeon withdrew themselves into their shells thinking that the world was going to pieces and that there was no hope for it. They preserved what they regarded were the ancient institutions in what they felt to be their pristine purity, and felt that though they could not save others, they might save themselves, and by example, try to save the world as well from going to complete ruination. I have already described Mrs. Besant's method of dealing with such persons in her own sympathetic and understanding manner. Her lectures about the ancient past gave them the assurance that she was propagating their own faith and even favouring and supporting such of their customs that the sophisticated regarded as superstitious. This must have given them comfort. No doubt she helped in the continuation of the work that Col. Olcott, the President-Founder of the Theosophical Society, had started in Madras by establishing and helping in the establishment of what were

then known as Panchama schools, schools for the fifth caste, really the outcaste, she made no violent efforts to abolish caste. In this matter Mahatmaji's method was positively different. He had practically no personal contact at all with persons who represented the ancient lore such as Mrs. Besant had to some extent directly and to a great extent indirectly through her colleagues of the Theosophical Society and the Central Hindu College.

Mahatmaji was very rightly incensed at the existence of untouchability which he regarded as a great slur on Hindu social system and thus on Hinduism itself; and he took steps to get wells, temples, schools, public places and institutions opened to members of the so-called untouchable communities—*Panchamas* as some called them; but to whom he gave the generic designation of Harijan—on equal terms with others. This kept the orthodox people away from him. They felt that a grievous wrong was being done to their age-long custom and eternal faith. Mahatmaji's precept and practice had their desired effect; and untouchability started disappearing fast not only in the large towns but even in the countryside. The younger members of even orthodox families were drawn towards him by the various other appeals that he made, even if they were suspicious in this particular matter about untouchability. The elders too could not but be influenced by the fact that Mahatmaji's work was for liberating the country from political thraldom which they themselves also felt was against the laws of nature, and which they thought was the main cause of bringing in influences in the land that had dislodged them from their own old high position and created complexes that were ruining tradition and religion alike. They could not perhaps help having some hopes that when independence came, they might also come to their own.

Thus the orthodox sections of the people too were to a certain extent attracted towards him; but as a rule, they still kept their distance. It has often been my privilege to be in charge of Mahatmaji's tours in my home-State, and certainly of every one of them in my own home city. All sorts of people have sought interviews with him, but I do not recollect the case of any single old fashioned pandit wanting to see him; and it cannot be doubted that these pandits have great influence on the social and religious side of the life of the people at large. It was, however, clear that very large numbers of people followed the Mahatma for the political aspect of his work, for that is really the main aspect when a country is under foreign subjugation. It may therefore be said that while the effect of Mrs. Besant's work was slow, indirect and evolutionary in its nature, the effect of Mahatmaji's activity was swift, direct and revolutionary. Both helped the same cause and worked for the same results which are before us to-day, and on which each of us is entitled to pass his own opinion in accordance with his own ideal and temperament.

X

With the coming of Freedom, ends a great chapter of our national history of just about a hundred years, beginning with the times when people heard and talked in hushed whispers of the possibility of political freedom and social reform, to the attainment by India of the status of a Sovereign Democratic Republic. The story that I have myself sought to relate here, begins in the early nineties of the last century and comes down to the late forties of the present, covering roughly the later half of the period. It may be just as well if a few words were also written regarding the achievements of our people

since Swaraj. We are inclined to forget that we have been through a great revolution; and many of us very often behave as if there has been only a change in the complexion of the party in power, the leaders of which in their campaign against the other party, had made some promises which they can be very legitimately asked now to fulfil at the risk of their losing their position and bringing back the party which had been ousted. But the real situation is certainly very different from that.

Really when we come to think of it, the change-over from the British Government to the Government of the people themselves—a transfer of power from an irresponsible foreign bureaucracy to responsible indigenous democracy—is as great a revolution as any we can think of, in history. Because it happened to have been so peaceful —in a way we got our freedom comparatively cheap, to use a vulgar expression—so many of us do not realise its magnitude or appreciate its value. Let us throw our minds back to the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries when the British were getting the better of the French and the Marathas, the Moghals and the Sikhs, and were establishing themselves as indisputable masters of the whole land. What was the condition of the country during those terrible decades? Where was any law and order, as kingdoms rose and fell, and when thugs and pindaris wandered over the land doing what they wanted.

The revolution that brought British rule in India supplanting all Indian and other foreign powers, cannot, in the judgment of history, be regarded as greater than that which gave us back our Freedom from British rule itself. That it was peaceful, apart from the horrors in the wake of the partition that we witnessed on the artificially dividing lines, is due both to Mahatmaji's teaching of non-violence on the one hand, which restrained the

people from doing anything grievously wrong, and to the innate good sense and love of justice of the British themselves, on the other, that led them to do the right thing at last. Though it was peaceful, it was none the less a great revolution; and the various factors that come up to the surface when a change-over of Government takes place, naturally tried to have a good time even in this revolution. When there is a firmly established Government, the anti-social elements are kept in check by fear of the guardians of the law. When, however, the governing power loosens, these are inclined to come up to try their luck. That has always happened in history; and it was threatening to happen here as well. Luckily, the threat here was not on any large and manacing scale because of the nature of our passage from foreign rule to self-rule. One is almost reminded of Kalidas' words in his *Malavikagnimitra*, which with a little adaptation, would mean "a Government that has only recently been established, can easily be thrown out of power by its enemies, because of its not having taken firm root in the minds of the people, even as a newly planted tree which is still weak and unstable."

"Achira-dhishtita-rajyah shatruh prakritishu-arudha-mulatwat,
Nava-sanropana-shithilah turu-riva sukarah samud-dhartum."

Still, there were some disturbances and disorders here and there, though it must be said to the credit of those in authority that they were brought in check fairly quickly. Many people in order to discredit their own Government and being still strangely attached to the foreigner who no more holds political sway in the land, feeling rather lost and lonely in his absence, are apt to exaggerate a few isolated incidents and to proclaim loudly that things were

very much better before than now. One cannot but regret even the least little disorder or improper action on the part of one citizen towards another. Still, the study of actual conditions in the setting of history, will doubtless convince anyone that we have not done at all badly. It may be that some vested interests of the past regime have been hurt in this; but even so, there has really been no upsetting of the tenor of our economic life, regarded almost inevitable in revolutions such as this.

Apart from the problem of law and order, which naturally claims the first attention of everyone, we have declared ourselves a Welfare State where the health and happiness of even the humblest are as important as those of the highest. Not to speak of the new universities and academies of art and learning; the hospitals and research institutes in disease and nutrition; the river valley projects which are not daily visible to the ordinary citizen;—the large numbers of schools and other educational establishments that have sprung up here, there and everywhere; the large numbers of dispensaries—mobile and stationary —that have been established for the benefit of the neglected portions of the land; and the determined and systematic efforts that have been made to grow more food and give better shelter to the depressed;—all go to show that the Union Government at the Centre and the Governments of the States, as its component units, have been fighting steadily—and if statistics are to be believed—successfully, the three enemies of man: ignorance, disease and poverty.

Of course, there is still much to do. We have not even touched the fringe of the problem. The task of world mending is verily unending; but the progress that we have made in the very short period of seven years, certainly shows that we are working on right lines.

The very circumstances of to-day have broadcast sound political education among the people, which is amply proved by the fact that the first General Elections that took place in 1952 on the basis of adult suffrage—on a scale larger perhaps than ever attempted anywhere in the world—were very peacefully conducted. The results certainly expressed the actual feelings of the people as regards their own urges and ambitions. It would be good therefore to think to-day of the two world personalities that gave of their best to our country—Mrs. Besant and Mahatma Gandhi—and inspired also others to do the same. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Mrs. Besant are no more; but we would be failing in our obvious duty if we do not remember them with gratitude, or exhibit ourselves as persons only eager to share in the fruits of their labours, for as Shri Krishna has very properly admonished in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

Ishtan bhogan hi vo devah, dasyante yajna-bhavitah;
Tair-dattan apradaya ebhyah yo bhunkte stena eva sah.

"For, nourished by sacrifice, the Shining Ones shall bestow on you the enjoyments you desire. A thief verily is he who enjoyeth what is given by Them without returning Them aught".

If both these great personalities were to come back to the scene of their labours, and view the Indian scene of to-day, I should think that Mrs. Besant would be better satisfied than Mahatma Gandhi, because first of all being British and wedded to the great principle of compromise, which does not allow the breaking point to be reached, she would reconcile herself to the partition of the country; and looking only at the bright side of things in the land, feel content, realising very well that it is impossible to have all that we want or at which we aim. Mahatma Gandhi being Hindu above everything, was an

individualist and knew no compromise. He was, like most of us, dissatisfied unless he got all that he wanted. "All or nothing" is perhaps not a good policy for life, for it leaves broken hearts behind without doing any good.

Twenty-seven days before his sad and sudden end, I had met him at Delhi on my way back to Karachi in West Pakistan after a visit to Calcutta to study the position there of the refugees from Pakistan in the East, and a hurried visit home at Banaras on the way. It was a long talk about many things; and in the end, Mahatmaji said to me: "All my work of a lifetime has been entirely ruined". (*Meri sari jindagi ka kam mitti men mil gaya*). He was referring to the Freedom we had got at the expense of the Unity of our land, for the partition as it was effected, did not only signify the territorial distribution of the country but also its spiritual dismemberment, for he felt that the harmony among the followers of the many faiths in the land for which he had worked all his life and which he put even above political freedom, was hopelessly shattered, the basis of partition itself as demanded by the Muslim League and acceded to by the British, being communal. It seems to me however that at the time of his passing—despite all the pessimism that had come over him—he was, with much hope and confidence, giving all his attention to the evolving of some formula that might bring sundered hearts together, and might even help to unify the land once again. I have a feeling that if his life had not been cut short all so cruelly, and if he had been allowed to continue his labours, he would certainly have found some way out. But all that would be idle speculation to-day.

I shall indeed regard it as my great good luck if these few lines would help those who read them, to remember with affection and reverence, these two great world

personalities—leaders and servers of mankind—Mrs. Besant and Mahatma Gandhi, who in their own ways worked for the emancipation of our land from its social, political and economic thraldom; for as we bask in the sunshine of the present day, we must pay our tribute or admiration and gratitude to those who worked for us in the darkness of yesterday, and also pledge ourselves that the morrow that is opening before us, will be further enriched by our labours; so that each generation as it passes, may hand over a healthier and happier India to the one that comes after. May we prove in the present, worthy of those who have gone before; and discharge our own duties and our responsibilities to the full, as trustees of those who are to follow.

RAJ BHAVAN,
MADRAS,
September 23, 1954.

SRI PRAKASA

Mrs. Besant in Meditation

EARLY MEMORIES

My earliest memories of *Bari Mem Saheb* ("the big European lady"; "the Great Madame"; or "the Grand old lady")—as Mrs. Besant was always known and as she is still remembered in Banaras—are of a lovable, loving attractive, white lady—white from head to foot—with white hair, white clothes, white stockings and shoes. I cannot remember what my age was when first I saw her. I remember this, however, that long afterwards, introducing me to some friends as she sat on a chair, she said: "I have known him since he was this high", putting her right hand, palm downwards, contiguous to her knee. Mrs. Besant was not a tall woman, and her knee could not have been very high from the ground. If I was only as high as her knee when I was privileged to see her for the first time, it must have been very soon after her coming to India. This is further proved by the fact that in the formal certificate I got from her in 1910, before going to England, she said: "I have known him for sixteen years". She had come out to India in 1893 and I was born in 1890. Even as a boy of three, I think I must have been taller than what she indicated. Anyway, I had my revenge, for not very many years later I was much taller than she!

My memories, however, of her, as of most things, are very clear since my age of eight. In fact I remember most of the dates and incidents since then. These memories centre most vividly round her frequent visits to our home, the most welcome being the one she paid on her return from foreign lands. She went away practically

every year; and when she returned, she invariably came to us for a mid-day meal and brought a large box full of toys. We were a very large Hindu family, my father, Dr. Bhagavan Das, who comes constantly in these reminiscences, and his three brothers, Messrs. Govind Das, older than my father and often referred to in this book as "my uncle"; Radha Charan Sah and Sita Ram Sah, occupying different blocks in the same "compound". When Mrs. Besant came, all the four sub-families gathered at one place for this great day. Everyone was astir; all the children were properly dressed; the best foods were cooked, of which Mrs. Besant ate very little indeed. It was only when I went with her to England and saw her eating better and with more relish than I could there, I realised how tastes differ, and how food is a matter of habit, and how we never get accustomed to strange foods even if we do to the climate, however much we might try. I also remember how the silver of the house used to be taken out for the occasion. Let me say quite candidly that it was not done so much to match the whiteness of the lady as to satisfy certain orthodox old-world notions of the ladies of the family, that gold and silver were not "defiled" even if "aliens" ate out of them, while the common metal of daily use became "impure" by their touch! Gold and silver are supposed to be much purer than other metals; and very wealthy and very orthodox Hindus—we were neither—particularly in South India, always have these even for their daily use.

Those who know Hindu society—now fast changing in the upper strata, particularly in urban areas, though more or less stationary in the rest—will not wonder. Orthodoxy in Hinduism, on the outside, apparent to all, stands confined almost solely to kinds of food and how and by whom it is touched. There are very strict rules and

conventions about marriage also; but those about food are so much on the surface that they would strike even the veriest newcomer. However strong may be the affection that binds two persons, if they are not on such caste footing that they can dine with each other, aloofness in food is strictly observed. It is amusing that in Hindu India, love and affection do not depend upon willingness to dine together: they subsist even when the closest of friends would decline to eat with each other; and till lately nobody thought that there was any harm in this; nobody suspected the least trace of pride or arrogance in it. Mrs. Besant was one of those rare individuals who understood the customs of another almost instinctively, and took no offence where none was meant.

I remember once my father was leading her up the steps of the marble Saraswati temple, in the Central Hindu College compound, gifted by the Maharani of Majhauli, a large landed estate in the Gorakhpur district, who had herself within tents, in strict *parda,* laid the foundation stone of that temple with proper ceremonials, of which I have vivid memory, though I could not have been very old at the time. Mrs. Besant stopped after a few steps, knowing that convention did not permit of a non-Hindu going inside a Hindu temple even though this temple was in the compound of the College which she herself had founded. My father tried almost to push her along, saying it was all right, and that she was perfectly entitled to go in. If I remember right, she mounted one or two more steps, perhaps to please him, but really did not go right up to the inner shrine, and placed her offering at a little distance away.

So in our family, the mothers were still orthodox, and food was served to all on the day Mrs. Besant came, in silver, in order presumably that the difference

should not be known; and ordinarily the presence of silver would always give a guest the idea that special honour was being paid to him rather than that any caste restrictions were being observed. The boys and the girls of the family served the food out in plenty, rushing between the diners and the kitchen all the time. They insisted on filling Mrs. Besant's plate over and over again, even when she was not eating at all. Like almost all great persons of action, she was really a very spare eater. After the meal there was the great gathering, to look into the wonders of the box in which she brought varied things suitable for the different children. I never made inquiries as to whether she made sure of our number; but the fact is that each child received a gift and none was left when the last had got his.

I remember I created a scene once, when according to my opinion, she had made a bad mistake by giving a little toy steamer to my cousin-sister Savitri. I do not exactly remember what she had given me. I do remember this, that I was very disconcerted; but there was nothing left, and it was only a day or two after that that quiet was restored, when—to put it quite mildly—Mrs. Besant "bribed" this cousin-sister of mine with many other gifts in order that she might part with the steamer to me. I also remember that the steamer remained with me for a long time afterwards; and I used to flaunt it by sailing it in a pond in the old ancestral garden-house. She showed us many card tricks at the time of distributing her presents, and explained to us the mechanism of all the toys she gave, and the way each one of these gifts was to be used or manipulated. I remembered this box of hers when I was myself returning from England long afterwards in my own good time; and I also brought a box with me, after hunting for various toys and gifts

for a whole day in a big London shop. I doubt if I gave as much satisfaction to my youngers as she used to give to us.

The days passed and we grew older. The visits and the midday meal remained, but the gifts began changing. She was very keen on this meal to the last; and when in 1921 my father was in jail during the first non-co-operation movement, and she had come to Banaras for the Theosophical Convention, and I, along with the rest of the Congress-minded political Indians, was angry with her for her politics, I had a letter from her saying: "I have not had my usual invitation to breakfast," I felt abashed. I sent the invitation; but I was too full of current topics, and the meal was not the same. She kept quiet as I kept talking excitedly.

We now used to receive books with her superscription and autograph in her most beautiful handwriting. I know no one who wrote so beautifully as Mrs. Besant; and even if her manuscript covered a hundred pages, the last word was exactly in the same writing as the first. Let any of my readers compare his first page with his tenth, and I am almost certain that he would be surprised at the change the writing had taken on. It was not so with Mrs. Besant. I have seen her letters to my father—of which more later—some covering twenty or more pages; and there was absolutely no difference in the calligraphy from first to last. I still have some of these gift books and they are certainly among my most prized possessions. Perhaps it will interest my readers to know that Mrs. Besant made presents not only to the children but also to her elderly friends. My father also received many tokens of her affection. Besides her own books and portraits, which she lavishly presented to him, she brought valuable fountain pens for my father who has always

been very fond of pens and nibs, is still—at 86—very fastidious about them, and always keeps a large collection of them on his table. If one ever wants to irritate him, one has only to touch one of them! On his table still lies a silver-mounted box with the words "Pens" written on it in silver-relief which was presented to him by Mrs. Besant long ago and which still holds a large number of his pens. My father, alas! is not so strict with his grandchildren as he was with his own children; and if one of them insists on taking away a pen, he is "bribed" with a new one which my father buys for him and so is able to keep his old stock intact.

There is one book that I still have and that I greatly value because of its history which may interest my readers. The anniversary of the Central Hindu College used to be one of the great functions in Banaras in those early years. Various schools and colleges in Banaras now celebrate their anniversaries. In those days only the Central Hindu College did. Those occasions invariably attracted large crowds. Local officials were glad to preside at them. Among the friendliest were Mr. E. H. Radice and Mr. D. C. Baillie, Collector and Commissioner respectively. At that time persons holding these positions counted for very much more than they do today. A memorial tablet to them is placed in the main College Hall, called the Kashi Naresh Hall after the then Maharaja of Banaras. This was unveiled by Mrs. Besant with fitting ceremony. Another friendly official used to be Mr. H. V. Lovett, a later Commissioner of Banaras, who also presided at some of these anniversary meetings. The chief attraction of these was Mrs. Besant's own speech: and she was almost at her best at these annual gatherings. My father, as the Secretary of the College, used to read out the annual report which was also a treat to hear. In 1906

when I was still at school, I had been selected by our very popular and much loved Headmaster, Mr. G. S. Arundale, for the English recitation, on this occasion. A poem by Sir Edwin Arnold, from among a volume of his collected works entitled *The Secret of Death and other Poems,* had been prescribed. Mr. Arundale took great pains to help me to commit it to memory; and himself sat as the prompter in his formal academic cap and gown as a Master of Arts of the University of Cambridge, as I stood on the platform to recite the poem. As usual in such case, a prize is given to the reciter, and I had been asked to select my own prize. By a curious boyish freak of fancy, I selected that very book for my prize. It was not available at the time—the book-shop in the Theosophical Society's compound had not then attained the proportions it later did—and so I did not actually get the prize at the time; and it was assumed that I would get it some day later.

I certainly clean forgot all about the matter. Some months afterwards came a packet by post addressed to me in Mrs. Besant's own hadwriting. I naturally opened it quickly, and was surprised to find a fresh copy of that selfsame book of Sir Edwin Arnold's. On stretching out the packing paper, I discovered that on one part of it there was the Adyar address of Mrs. Besant herself, showing that the well-known London publishers of Sir Edwin Arnold's works, Messrs. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.—I myself visited their establishment in London more than once—had sent it to her direct from London; and after receiving it at Adyar, Mrs. Besant had herself re-packed the book in the same wrapper after rearranging it; and putting fresh stamps and writing out my address, had re-posted it. For a person so busy as Mrs. Besant to have remembered a boy's fanciful demand; to have taken the trouble of writing to the publishers in

London for the book; to have further remembered the person for whom the book had been procured when she received it weeks afterwards; and to have taken the trouble of repacking and re-posting it all herself, was something remarkable. Mrs. Besant was a very neat person and packed her papers most carefully. She made strong and beautiful knots and was almost an artist with the sealing wax. She seemed to take infinite trouble over everything, even over the smallest details of simple ordinary everyday matters. Today, when I myself have to do a fairly large amount of work which is nothing when compared to what Mrs. Besant had to do, and often wish that even that amount were less than it is, and I think of the many incidents when Mrs. Besant took so much pains for me—I feel almost ashamed that I should have ever added to her work. I believe a younger never realises what pains the loving elders take for him; and we are all apt to complain for what is not done for us by others and are scarcely grateful for what is done.

That book is still with me—a very prized possession indeed. I got the school office to paste the usual slip on the book inside the front cover, showing the occasion and the reason for the prize; and later, when I met Mrs. Besant, I secured her signature upon it as Chairman of the Managing Committee. She used to sign hunderds of such prize books herself from year to year. I remember heaps of these books lying for her to sign on her quadrangular *chauki* or *takht*—a large wooden seat covered with quilts on which she used to sit cross-legged like ourselves, and write at a desk, in Shanti Kunj, the "Bower of Peace", her Banaras home—just before these anniversary meetings. She used to sign whenever she got a few minutes to spare in intervals of her heavy work. There was no hurry in any of the signatures at all, and

each signature was just like another and was almost like copperplate compared to signatures of others. It was only when in later years the School and College grew and the number of prizes became very large, and she had to spend most of her time in Adyar after election as President of the Theosophical Society, that a rubber stamp of her signature was used on these prize books. There can really be few people who could have come in intimate touch with Mrs. Besant and not have indelible memories of her wonderful personality and her many personal kindnesses delicately expressed.

It should be clear from all that I have said above that the relations of Mrs. Besant with my family were of the most intimate character; and she was keen that this intimacy should never be forgotten in any circumstances whatsoever. She used to edit the *Central Hindu College Magazine* and she had the peculiar gift—I wish we in India had it also—of encouraging persons around her to put forward their best, by praising almost exaggeratedly any good thing that they might do, and by creating personal bonds with them. I was not quite fifteen when I ventured to send an article for this Magazine, on a common language for India, actually advocating English as such common language. I am amazed today at my own absurdity. I learnt English very early and perhaps then thought that everyone else should learn it also. In the covering letter which I sent with my article, I addressed the editor as "Madam". A visit from Mrs. Besant soon followed, and I was solemnly told that I was not to address her as "Madam", and that if I did not want to address her as "Mother"—an affectionate designation given to her by everyone including myself—I could begin my letters to her with "Dear Mrs. Besant".

My embarrassment can be easily imagined; and not

being used to English methods of addressing letters even when I was advocating English as our common language. I must have been fairly confused at the time. I distinctly remember, however, that I did not really come out second best in the contest. I told her that I had addressed the letter in her official capacity as the Editor of the magazine and not in her personal capacity. After this incident I never addressed her as "Madam" again whether officially or non-officially! My mother was present at this "interview." It is surprising to me that my mother never learnt any English, as Mrs. Besant never learnt any Hindi. My mother asked Mrs. Beasant what the matter was, and when it was explained to her, she quite innocently inquired whether my article was at all good. Mrs. Besant assured her that it was very good, which pleased me very much. If the greatest orator in English of her day, in whose hands the rich language was as plastic as clay, tells the mother of an Indian boy of less than fifteen, that an article of his in the English language is good, he must be superhuman if he does not feel elated. The article was duly printed in the magazine, and I became a butt of ridicule for my fellow students for some time afterwards.

The *Central Hindu College Magazine* was almost a pioneer in college and students' magazines now so common. Mrs. Besant was great at giving attractive and catching titles. She called the section devoted to her editorial notes: "In the Crow's Nest"; the section on book reviews was called "Our Library Table"; and the record of internal and allied external activities was known as "How the Movement Goes."

Only a short time after my article on India's common language, Mrs. Besant gave me some manuscript stories of Rajput chivalry in Hindi to translate into

English for a book she had projected and which when published, was called *Children of the Motherland*. I translated some stories which she re-moulded in her own inimitable style. The book was printed and a copy of it was presented to me by Mrs. Besant. I found to my surprise my name mentioned in the "foreword" as one of those who had "helped" her to compile the book, though I could not recognise anything of my own language in the stories which I was supposed to have helped her to compile.

I remember her listening with the greatest interest to the debates that we used to hold in the mock Parliament we had established at her instance in the Central Hindu College. She would afterwards come down from the gallery, pick out the good speakers and praise them and encourage them and give them little tips as to what to say and how to say it. I remember myself being picked out once after I had spoken rather despairingly about the conditions in the land, as also the most earnest manner in which, after putting her hand on mine, she told me that there was no reason for my being so pessimistic, and that I spoke very well and should develop my gifts. On the radical side in this Parliament there sat with me Prakash Narayan Sapru, son of the great Allahabad lawyer the Rt. Hon. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, lately a Justice of the Allahabad High Court and Sankar Saran, also now retired from the Allahabad Bench. On the orthodox side was Ram Prasad Tripathi, now Vice-Chancellor of the Saugor University of Madhya Pradesh, as also Santi Prasad Agarwal, a well-known lawyer at Moradabad.

Mrs. Besant was a very serious-minded person. She took everything seriously, and, I believe, expected others to do the same, specially in their relations with her. My father tells me that this was due to her having seen the

sad side of life so much; but that she really liked to see young people about her laugh and herself indulged in delicately playful talk, at the morning coffee and afternoon tea, and other such familiar occasions. She had always a very benevolent smile for everyone. All the same, her injunction was strict and peremptory: "Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well," whether it be a big undertaking, or the pettiest detail of daily life, and in this she is correct for all time, as all real workers in the world will endorse. The failures of many in life can really be ascribed to their carelessness and indifference in this important particular.

Mr. Arundale, her worthy, immediate successor in the high office of the President of the Theosophical Society, was always full of mirth and laughter. She loved him most dearly, as he did her, though the two natures were so different. I have often seen her as he joked—and he joked before her and made as many puns as before anyone else, for she appreciated the fun even when she would not indulge in it herself. In London at Miss Bright's I remember some one inquiring where Mrs. Besant was, and Mr. Arundale replying, "She is in the throes of packing." "In the throes of packing!" said Miss Bright, almost aghast—and everyone laughed. At Mr. Arundale's request Mrs. Besant once gave some of us at school, a classroom talk on "How to Speak". Perhaps her injunctions may be helpful to my readers even today. "Do not shout", she said, "you are not necessarily audible if you shout. Pronounce the last syllable of your words distinctly and your voice will carry far". It is remarkable that Mrs. Besant was able to modulate her voice according to the area occupied by her audience. The person on the fringe of the crowd heard her as distinctly as the person sitting next to her, and the melody was such that at its

highest the voice was as sweet to those near her as to those far away. My uncle told me that she would recite English poetry extraordinarily well, and often gave much pleasure to him and a small party of her intimate friends by reading out to them portions of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King.*

A person whose voice could be clearly heard by ten thousand people in the open air, would while conversing with just one man, speak so low that it was almost difficult to catch her words. I understand Mrs. Besant could never dictate to a secretary. All her letters, including business, formal and official ones, are in manuscript. She wrote all articles, whether for newspapers or learned magazines, herself. The manuscript of all her books is also in her own handwriting. It is clear she wrote slowly and thinkingly. That is why her handwriting was so uniform, each letter well-shaped and perfectly legible, and the manuscript was seldom revised so far as I am aware—and scarcely bore any signs of correction. She used to have from time to time private secretaries: in other words, her friends and colleagues who used to travel with her on her tours—my father used to be one of these, and another I remember was Sardar Chiranjit Singh—were glad to be known as her private secretaries. When she got very old, she had younger co-workers accompanying her; but she never had a personal assistant or a private secretary or a stenographer as we know them. She was a great artist in words, which in her mouth were like music, and her voice rose and fell as the waves of the sea in perfect rhythm when she spoke. It is a matter of deep satisfaction that microphones, loudspeakers and amplifiers had not come into existence in her younger days. The contemporary world would have otherwise lost the virgin beauty of her eloquence. Curi-

ously enough, she was perhaps the first to start their use in India by fitting them at a Theosophical Convention in Adyar.

I have heard her lectures on the Hindu epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, as a little boy. These were later printed in book form, as *The Story of the Great War* and *Shri Ramachandra, the Ideal King*, respectively. The former series was delivered in a house in the interior of the city of Banaras where the first classes of the Central Hindu College were opened. I was only about eight at the time and could follow but little. These were her earliest days in Banaras. Her audiences used to be very small then, but she never worried at any time of her life on that score. When the latter series was delivered, the Hindu College had moved on to its own building. She was fond of having some Samskrit prayer in conformity with orthodox Hindu ideas, beautifully recited before these lectures. Kanchi Prasad, who later rose high as an engineer in the Uttar Pradesh and is now no more, used to be a boarder at the time and a favourite of hers. He had a very musical voice and was invariably invited by Mrs. Besant to recite the famous prayer to Shiva in five verses, each dedicated to a letter of the heading "Namah Shivaya" (Hail, Shiva!) before she began her own lecture.

I have heard her many a time in the old Central Hindu College Hall and the Hall of the Theosophical Society in Banaras, extolling Hindu religion and philosophy, the Hindu scheme of life, and defending many Hindu manners and customs that had been subjected to severe criticism both by Christian missionaries and by English educated Hindus themselves. I have heard her lectures on various aspects of Theosophy in Banaras, Adyar, and in London. Towards the end of her marvel-

lous career I have also heard her lectures on Indian politics. Whether the audiences were large or small, she always spoke with the same seriousness of purpose and eloquence of expression.

It seems to me that her best lectures were all carefully thought out, almost prepared, beforehand. She never carried any notes. She never consulted any papers as she spoke. Her memory must have been remarkable, and I believe she just rehearsed her lectures to herself once, before going into the lecture hall; and that was enough for her. She never faltered for a word and her voice never broke. She told us in one of her talks how she was fond of beautiful perorations; how she liked to end her speeches by working up her audience to a certain pitch, leaving their minds in possession of some peculiarly tragic or pathetic scene created by the magic of her words. On this particular occasion she told us how she had ended a lecture with great effect describing India as a mother fallen to the ground in a swoon, who could be killed only by the blows of her own sons, and whom none else could touch.

Mrs. Besant did not like any one to speak after her; and quite rightly too, for who could heighten the impression, the effect, of her speech? They could only mar them. At the annual meetings of the Theosophical Society, when she used to deliver what were called "Convention Lectures"—four in number—one day was reserved for the celebration of the anniversary proper of The Theosophical Society. This usually was the third day of the lectures when representatives from various countries used to speak; and we used to hear with much amusement, not only how English is pronounced in the different provinces of our own country, but also in non-English foreign parts. One of the invariable speakers of

the early days used to be Mr. Vimadalal, an earnest Parsi Theosophist, who as invariably began by referring gratefully to the first exodus of Parsis sorely harassed in their own Persian homeland, and the warm welcome given to them in India in those early days, with the words spoken with eloquent emphasis: "Thirteen hundred years ago a band of Parsi pilgrim fathers....." Mrs. Besant's own lecture used to be the last. The venerable Col. Olcott, with his grand head and face, framed in shining white locks and flowing beard, hero of the American Civil War, President-Founder of The Theosophical Society, used to preside over these Convention lectures himself in the old days; but he never spoke anything after Mrs. Besant.

One year I remember Mrs. Besant started her lecture at the close of the anniversary proceedings, with an apology. She said that usually towards the end of a meal delicacies and savouries are served to whet the appetite. On this occasion all the savouries in the form of earlier speeches from the representatives of the different parts of the world, had already been served; and she now came unfortunately with a full and heavy dish of *dal bhat* (rice and pulse, which is the usual chief vegetarian meal of the north of India). She caused a little merriment, and there was laughter from the audience. The incident is worth recording, because I cannot remember her attempting to rouse any amusement in her audience on any other occasion. She was too serious for it. I doubt if any of her speeches were ever punctuated with laughter like those of many of us—politicians, social reformers, educationists, theologians and others. Not a few of us, myself included, not unoften purposely import or try to import humour in order to amuse the audience and keep their attention!

At these annual meetings no one spoke after her, and

her last words invariably left her audience waiting and anxious for more that, it seemed, was almost sure to follow. So many speakers end their speeches by saying: "I have done"; "that is all that I have to say"; "I thank you for your patience in listening to me"; etc. Not so Mrs. Besant. She just finished off at the very height of her eloquence, and sat down or departed from the rostrum, leaving the audience spell-bound to applaud and demonstrate as they liked. I believe she really preferred to go away, and she always seemed to chafe when she had to continue sitting after her lecture for any further proceedings.

I remember a lecture of hers at Oxford (1911). A clergyman was presiding. At the end of her talk, the chairman got up to speak again, as some chairmen will. This one had already spoken in the beginning, as was but right and proper for a chairman to do. This particular clergyman seemed to have been deeply affected by Mrs. Besant's eloquence—which was surprising, as officially Christian theology has always been at war with Theosophy—and in the second speech he said how grateful he was for the "intellectual treat" Mrs. Besant had given which almost reminded him of the ancient Gnostics. As he closed he informed the audience that the exit from the hall was to the left. Mrs. Besant was displeased; and she later told the organisers of her lecture that it was most improper that announcements about exits and such things should be made after her lecture and not beforehand!

Later, I happened to travel with her during her tour in Scotland. I remember her emphatically telling the chairman—and that was Major Graham Pole—before one of her lectures that if he had any instructions about exits etc. to give, he should have them given before she spoke. As an artist, the anti-climax, the bathos of such announcements, was unbearable to her.

She was also very keen on the arrangement of seats. In India, it is usual to leave the centre of the hall from the gate to the dais as an open passage, as an approach thereto, and the passage is also used by "important" late-comers to walk up leisurely. The speaker usually stands at the upper end of this vacant "aisle." Mrs. Besant never liked that. I was often in charge of arrangements for lectures at the Central Hindu College, and my instructions were that the centre of the hall was to be filled up. I used to fill up the central portion with chairs, and left passages on the sides. She always liked these arrangements. She told me that if a lecturer stands at the end of an empty "land", he feels he has no one to listen to him, and the walking up and down of stray individuals is always a disturbing factor. As I also have had to do a good bit of public speaking since, I know how right she was.

Mrs. Besant was very keen on her lecturing dress. She used to be very, very carefully and beautifully dressed in white at the time of her meetings. White is not a colour either for men or women's clothing in England. But even there she was dressed in white both in the daytime and in the evenings. Unlike conditions in England, in India if we book our luggage and keep it in the brake van while travelling by trains, we are never sure that it would arrive with us at our destination. Very often it is left at junction stations. In England they have no system of even receipts for booked luggage. The guard just leaves all the luggage entrusted to him at the proper stations, and the passengers casually walk up and take away their own luggage. There is scarcely ever a miscarriage. I say this from experience. I was surprised at this system when I was in England over forty years ago, and wondered why my luggage did not get lost. I presume the system still

works satisfactorily. There they do not allow much luggage in the passengers' compartments. In India we always try to take all our luggage with ourselves in our compartments. Mrs. Besant was always anxious to book her luggage so as not to be encumbered with it on the way. In England they have no system of receipts for telegrams either, and I remember my surprised look at the postmistress when I sent my first cable of safe arrival in London, to my father and did not get a receipt. There the telegraph boy who brings the telegrams waits for a reply, and if the receiver wants to send a telegram in answer, he can safely entrust it to this boy. How I wish we could have a system like this in India—and work it with equal confidence.

I learnt that once her lecturing gown was in the box that had been booked and did not arrive at Calcutta with her. She was very worried; and I believe she spoilt her lecture that evening because she had to deliver it without her usual costume. A similar situation arose also when I was going with her to England (1911). Her luggage did not arrive with us at Bombay, though it was all very carefully booked at Banaras. My father, who is always a nervous traveller and had also gone up to Bombay with the party, had insisted on taking all mine in the compartment; and so that was quite safe. We were all guests of Seth Dharamsi Morarji, well-known Bombay magnate of his time and a very great friend of Mrs. Besant. I remember two visits with Mrs. Besant to Victoria Terminus Railway Station at Bombay where she herself anxiously inquired after her lost luggage. Luckily it arrived in time for the lecture which was not till the next day.

Mrs. Besant was always very particular about dress, and anxious to follow scrupulously the customs and conventions of the places she went to. That might account for

her taking to the style of India when here, and of Europe when there. When travelling with her, all members of her party were invariably dressed in accordance with the conventions observed at various times of the day in the lands they travelled. Personally I never could take to European costumes. I never liked them. Mrs. Besant knew this and told me once that I must get over my pettinesses as I expected others to get over theirs.

Though such a finished speaker to whom words and eloquence came naturally, I have a clear feeling that to the last she carefully prepared her lectures. I remember an incident on her Scotland tour of 1911 to which I have referred earlier. A little before we were to leave for her lecture, I came to the sitting room that she had taken in the hotel. I found her in a corner dressed for the lecture with her face to the wall sitting quietly. I approached her to ask about something. I saw her face was taut and drawn and she seemed to be deep in thought. I naturally withdrew. I, however, got the idea then that she was repeating in her mind the lecture that she was afterwards to deliver. I never had courage enough to confirm my "suspicion", but I feel further convinced that that was so by the fact that she invariably closed her lectures at the exact minute. Whenever she was the sole speaker, she always spoke for just sixty minutes. Her perorations began about two minutes before the end; and if any one cared to see his watch—and I often looked at mine—her last word was uttered exactly as the hour closed.

When there were many speakers she used to make sure of how many minutes she was to speak. I happened to be sitting next to her at a lecture of hers to the Fabian Society in London which was to have been presided over by Mrs. Bernard Shaw, the wife of the famous G.B.S., if my memory does not deceive me, but was actually presided

over by Mrs. Sidney Webb. The lecture was to be followed by questions and answers. It was a lecture on India. Mrs. Sidney Webb, just before opening the proceedings turned towards Mrs. Besant and said: "Mrs. Besant, I believe you will speak for about 45 minutes." "I was asked to speak for 40", replied Mrs. Besant. "Oh, yes, yes," said Mrs. Sidney Webb, "that is all right, 40 or 45". Mrs. Besant persisted: "I was given 40". It seems to me that, as I have said above, just before her lectures she used to retire and go over what she was going to speak and time her lectures exactly.

CHAPTER II

SOME GREAT CHARACTERISTICS

MRS. BESANT was punctual to a fault. Usually persons who do much literary work cannot be expected to be very punctual. They do not break off in the middle of an important thought for meals and engagements. They think nothing of keeping people waiting or being late themselves. Not so Mrs. Besant. Punctually at meal times she would put down her pen, discard her spectacles, and transfer herself to her table (in Europe) or *pirha*—wooden seat—on the floor (in India) as the case might be (even without any dinner bells). Whenever she was delivering a series of lectures at the old Central Hindu College, we used to see her just three minutes before the prescribed time of the lecture, from day to day, issuing out of the gate that led from the Boarding House to the Saraswati quadrangle across which it took just three minutes for her to walk, in order to come to the dias in the lecture hall.

My father, like most of his countrymen, has never been

a punctual person. Even his close association with Mrs. Besant could not knock out of him—always intensely busy as he has been—this, "national defect". He has just one watch and one clock, and both are always wrong. The watch gets long rest cures, and is only occasionally wound up—really only when he is going out of the station and taking it with him—but the clock is a 400-day one and is wound up some time in January each year. Like most of his things it lasts: I have been seeing it with him for the last fifty years. It gives a fair indication of time within an hour or so of the correct one. This wonderful clock was revolving in its glory on his large marble writing table—its pendulum revolves first one way and then the other (I think it is called a "torsion" pendulum) and does not swing from side to side—when Mrs. Besant, who had been sitting by him in his room for a long time, suddenly said after seeing her own watch: "Bhagavan, your clock is very fast". "I keep it purposely fast", my father replied. "I am a very unpunctual person, and so I keep my clock fast, and that helps me to keep my engagements approximately correctly". But, Mrs. Besant argued—and it was amusing for me to listen to this conversation: it was very many years ago—"If you know that your clock is fast, you will continue to be slow, and then how can you be punctual?" My father, who will never allow himself to be beaten in an argument, replied: "By a great effort at mental gymnastics, I manage to, as it were, forget that this is incorrect, and so I arrange to get to my work in time", which really he seldom does, judged by strict canons of punctuality.

On another occasion, when Mrs. Besant was to come to tea with us of an afternoon, it was raining heavily. She was to go straight from our place to some function. The time that she had chosen for the tea—if I remember rightly

—was 3.40 in the afternoon. We had sent on our car for her, for if Mrs. Besant did not find any vehicle waiting for her at the time at which if she started walking she could get to her engagement punctually, she invariably started walking, so keen was she to keep her time. Lo and behold! in pelting rain but at the exact minute, we found her walking up from the gate to my father's room in the centre of our garden-house. We rushed with umbrellas to protect her. She came up and leisurely sat down in the verandah and spread out to dry the lapels of the beautiful sari she had put on for the meeting that was to follow. My father said: "Why did you trouble to come so early in this rain? It is not yet time. I believe you were to come at 4". She solemnly replied: "No, it was 3.40". Once when my father and I were slightly late in going to her to take her to the Hindu University, where she had an engagement to see some buildings, we found her half way towards our house, walking briskly. At Cambridge, where I had arranged a public lecture for her, she was worried just before the lecture, though I assured her that I had arranged for a car to take her in time. She would not hear, and to our dismay walked to the lecture hall in her flowing lecturing robes; and the car arranged for really arrived in time—but only to follow later!

At the Calcutta Congress in December 1928, when Pandit Motilal Nehru presided, there was much excitement and much confusion. Rival forces and ideologies were at work, and the various Congress meetings would never begin in time. Mrs. Besant used to arrive at the exact minute notified, and would sit patiently hour after hour while nothing was being done, the leaders just talking to each other waiting for something to turn up. Very often at these Subject Committee meetings after waiting for hours they dispersed, adjourning their meeting to the next day.

I happened to be standing on the way leading to the exit as the meeting was adjourned on one such day. Mrs. Besant was visibly irritated; and passing me said: "Prakasa, I am beginning to understand why the British rule you". The "beginning" was amusing to me as she had been with us for thirty-four years already. When I spoke of the incident to Jawaharlal Nehru, he amusedly replied: "She is rather late in beginning". She was angry at these interminable delays and adjournments and our absolute indifference to the value of time. I knew her weakness for punctuality. I laughingly said to her: "You had better come by the Standard Time and not by the Calcutta time". (In Calcutta they still kept to the local Calcutta time, which is 24 minutes in advance of the Standard Time observed by railways and everywhere else. In other words if it is 8 o'clock according to the Calcutta time, it is only 7-36 according to the Standard Time.) "That is very good advice", she said to me, "I must follow that, thank you". The next day to my utter amazement I saw her mounting the dias of the Subjects Committee exactly 24 minutes (duly confirmed by my watch) after the advertised Calcutta time for the meeting. Let my readers believe me: I am not exaggerating at all. Thus she had saved 24 minutes; but the Congress work continued to be at a standstill then, as on the day before. The programme had not been fixed, the resolutions had not been drafted and everything continued in confusion. The chief problem before the Congress was how to wrest *Swaraj* or independence for India from England. No wonder Mrs. Besant, in her just irritation, criticised the manner in which proceedings were conducted when she had spoken to me the day before. I have heard her say at one such meeting: "Gentlemen, you are not serious."

Finding her sitting quietly unoccupied, I went up

to her and talked of other matters. Her face lit up a little and she seemed glad. I had decided to celebrate the sixtieth birthday of my father that was to fall on the succeeding Mauni Amavasya day which was to occur in 1929 on February 9, about six weeks later. The English date of his birth is January 12, 1869, but according to our lunar calendar which we observe in all such matters, the date shifts from year to year, by a few days. I was anxious that she, as my father's closest and most honoured friend and colleague, should write something about him for the occasion. I told her of my plan and she was glad of it. I asked her if she would be able to come. She said she was sorry she could not, as she would be engaged elsewhere on that day. She told me she would send me an appreciation of my father and his work, and also a telegram of greetings on the day. She made a note of it on some paper. I do not remember her carrying the familiar pocket book in which we put down promptly and painfully our own engagements. I would forget almost all of mine if I did not do this. She used to write on stray bits of paper which seem never to get lost. I also asked her for three large autograph photographs of her as I said those she had given us in the past were all fading, and I was anxious to have her latest portraits. I wanted one for our rooms in Banaras; I wanted another for my father's rooms at Chunar, where he had shifted in retirement; and I wanted one for the Kashi Vidyapith—a national educational institution founded in Banaras by the munificence of Shri Shivaprasad Gupta—where it was my desire to put up portraits of all the pioneers in modern Indian education: and she certainly was among the greatest and noblest of them. She made a note of this also. I later received the three portraits, which are all at the destined places, and I also received the note on my father in time for the

function This I printed as a folder and distributed. I also received the promised telegram of greetings and good wishes on the exact date.

Let me give another illustration of her remarkable memory. As a college student I remember an invitation from her for a talk. In the course of this conversation I talked on many things, and I specially remember my mentioning a fellow student who was a dear friend of mine, and who had done a great deal of valuable service by enabling many poor students of the College to receive their education. I said that he deserved the C.H.C. silver badge. A distinctive badge had been created by the College authorities for those who rendered special service to the institution. The elders received gold C.H.C. badges, the two C's entwining the central "H" facing opposite sides, and the deserving youngers the silver one. Mrs. Besant said that my proposal was very good as she knew the young man's good work herself. She asked me to write his name on a piece of paper. I did so. I was continuing to write the purpose for which the slip was written but she stopped me. She said the name was enough. She would remember. I put the slip on the top of a huge pile of papers on her desk that was waiting to be disposed of. Her table was always loaded with heaps of letters, newspapers, magazines, manuscripts, press proofs and books. No one looking at them, however, could feel that there was any confusion or disorder. She was a very neat and orderly person, and her rooms were simply furnished. She had a huge waste-paper basket in her room at Banaras, which was more often full than otherwise. She had a peculiar method of tearing papers. She tore them just lengthwise over and over again, instead of breadthwise and lengthwise alternately as I believe all the rest of the world does. That saved strain on the fingers.

Some time later at a meeting of the students of the College, without any previous notice or anyone knowing of it, she pulled out this badge, called for that particular student—much to his own surprise and embarrassment—and presented the badge to him. That student was Mangla Prasad, who was the founder and in his time the life and soul of the Vidyarthi Sahayak Sabha, a society for the helping of poor students of the College. He died in 1920 at the very early age of thirty-three of tuberculosis to the great grief of his many friends. Mrs. Besant's memory was truly remarkable. The movement of the Vidyarthi Sahayak Sabha has caught on, and most educational institutions have such associations now. The one we had at the Central Hindu College always received the greatest possible amount of assistance and encouragement from Mrs. Besant herself. In the later years of my college life, we used to celebrate with great *eclat* her birthdays at the Central Hindu College on October 1 each year, and made collections for the occasion which sometimes came to more than a thousand rupees. We used to present all that in a purse to her. She always gave back this money to the various institutions of the College itself, a large proportion going to this Vidyarthi Sahayak Sabha. She would take no money for herself, saying she had pledged herself to eternal poverty in some previous birth long, long ago. Friends bore all her expenses; and though apparently she lived well, she was severely simple in her life, and spent all she got on her public activities. I believe her books gave her a good bit of money, and friends put large sums at her disposal year after year for her travelling.

Though so scrupulously exact as to time at lectures and engagements, Mrs. Besant was very "unpunctual"—in the opposite direction of being too early—when catching trains

or attending amusements. For her to be at a railway station thirty to forty-five minutes in advance of a train was a very common phenomenon; and when I had to travel with her, I almost always found that she had arrived at the railway station long before I did. I cannot account for it, and it always seemed to me rather strange that such a very busy and time-saving person, and one who was constantly travelling, should be willing to waste so much time at railway stations. She was a woman of great repose of mind, even when she was busiest. One never found her hurried or flurried in any circumstance. In fact if any one tried to hurry matters, she would reply, "I do not like being hustled". I believe she would often give the impression that she had nothing to do, as she seemed to do everything apparently leisurely.

Mrs. Besant was very keen on proprieties: she would follow the customs of the place she went to punctiliously, and would be obviously shocked if any one did not follow them. She had come one morning to Cambridge (1912), accompanied by her party, consisting of Mr. Jinarajadasa, Lady Lutyens, Mr. Krishnamurti and Mr. Nityanandam, at my invitation, while I was studying there. I established her in a hotel. I had arranged that she and her party would take lunch with me in my rooms. I went to fetch her from the hotel. In England it was not then customary to walk in public streets without a hat. In the University at that time, however, students had established the convention of walking about in the streets without hats. When she saw me without a hat she asked me what had become of it. She was quite positive that she did not like a man without a hat in the public streets. It seemed very much like my mother asking me in my childhood where my cap was, if I had not one on, as in those days in Banaras it was supposed to be disrespectful not to

keep a cap on in the presence of elders. During this same walk from the hotel to my rooms, I excitedly started walking fast. She stopped and said quite deliberately: "I cannot walk so fast". I was amused. Not very long before at the Theosophical Convention at Adyar (1910) I had seen her walk. She would issue out after tea in the afternoons and make a round of the extensive grounds, supervising all the arrangements, giving instructions to every one about everything. A crowd used to follow her. She walked so fast that it was difficult for many to keep up with her, but at Cambridge only a few months later, she could not walk fast! Elderly respectable ladies do not walk fast in the streets of English towns; and she would not break a local custom. She always preferred to follow, very much like the Buddha of old, the customs of the people she sojourned with for the time being: she wanted no fuss, and no special arrangements to be made for her.

We had established a Theosophical Lodge at Cambridge, a fact duly recorded in *The Theosophist* of the time, with the names of those, including mine, who had helped in the work. She would not let go any occasion to say publicly a good word for any who helped her and her work in any way. I had extended an invitation to her on behalf of this Lodge to deliver a public lecture at this conservative place as well. We were only nine or ten members of the Lodge, and we had all gone to the station to receive her. She had known only two of us before, and the rest were strangers to her. I clean forgot to introduce anyone to her, taking it for granted, as we unfortunately do in India, that every one knew every one else. After the party had alighted from the train and I was forgetting this important formality, she said to me: "Prakasa, will you please introduce me to all these

friends?'' It was not that they were to be introduced to her, but that she was to be introduced to them! I remember once in the drawing room of Miss Bright, her London hostess, she got up from her seat while taking tea, and walked up to a visitor as he entered, saying: "I am Mrs. Besant", as if she needed any introduction! Once I remember, in my later days when perhaps she felt I had grown old and big myself, she actually got up, to my extreme embarrassment, to receive me as I entered her room!

The other occasion when she used to be "unpunctual" was that of amusements. As at railway stations, she arrived at places of amusement also much in advance of the time. She was not a person to go to many amusements; but she was anxious to show Messrs. Krishnamurti and Nityanandam on their first visit to England, when I too formed one of her party, as much of the new world as possible. Instead of entrusting us to others, she used to go out of her way, to various places, to show them to us herself. The only time I saw St. Paul's Cathedral was with her. The year I went to England, 1911, was the Coronation year of the late King George V. In fact we had arrived just before the Coronation, and London was all agog. We went with her to many shows, including some military rehearsals.

The memory that is very clear in my mind is of my first visit to the famous theatre, His Majesty's, where I saw Herbert Tree and other great English actors of the day. The play was *Julius Caesar,* and Mrs. Besant had booked seats for all of us in the opera circle, where everyone was expected to come in evening clothes. We all arrived with her about half an hour before the play began. In England there is no pushing about in the crowds and every one goes about his business quietly forming queues.

Our seats moreover were reserved. There was absolutely no risk; but the whole party had gone with her quite early, after an early dinner. Mrs. Sharpe was to meet us there. She had not arrived when we got there; so Mrs. Besant left word with the man at the gate saying that one of her party was to follow and that she should be allowed to join us. The tickets were all with herself. Mrs. Sharpe came later and expressed her surprise that Mrs. Besant should have come so early. When Mrs. Besant said that she thought it would be convenient to come in good time, I remember Mrs. Sharpe saying: "I should not have expected you to come so early—particularly to an amusement!"

CHAPTER III

PERSONAL LOYALTIES

Such a flood of memory overpowers me as I write about Mrs. Besant that I fear I have been constantly and unconnectedly hopping to and fro between the years 1897 and 1911, and not following the sequence of events at all. I think it is time that I took up the threads again from the beginning and traced various events in their chronological order, if that is possible in a study like this. I do not know exactly how the close associations of Mrs. Besant with my family began. My father has often told us of his first meeting with Mrs. Besant. He was posted as a Magistrate at Allahabad at the time, and Mrs. Besant had come to the town. He had gone to receive her at the station. They must have taken to each other almost at once, for before long, my father resigned his Government service and joined Mrs. Besant in her work for the Central Hindu College and The Theosophical Society. My father

is not an emotional person by any means and it takes a long time for him to thaw. For a great philosopher as he undoubtedly is, he is a very calculating individual, and painfully weighs the pros and cons of everything before he decides upon his line of activity. No one can deceive or exploit or take any advantage of my father, and he deceives or exploits no one either. Some persons, I believe, suspect he is hard, harsh and unsympathetic. He is certainly always wrapped up in his own thoughts and is mainly concerned with his own work and affairs. He has little patience with those who come to waste his time out of idle curiosity or take any advantage of his position in an improper way. Not only is he the author of *The Science of Emotions*, as a rule he is a master of his emotions as well. I believe only three persons have received his real love—they are his two sons and Mrs. Besant, though he has had many friends also, older as well as younger than himself, whose visits to our house I remember, but who, my memory tells me, were almost all more respectful than affectionate in their converse with him and temperamentally very different from him.

For Mrs. Besant my father's attachment was as supreme as it was spontaneous: whenever they met my father always kissed her right hand most affectionately in greetings and salutation. In 1905 when he was very seriously ill, confined to bed for many months—of which I will have something to say later—and Mrs. Besant was travelling in Europe and America, I though not quite 15, as his eldest son, had to bear a very heavy responsibility, as I had to look after the family, do the nursing, and act as his secretary as well. Mrs. Besant's letters came every week. I believe my father and she wrote to each other almost every day when she was in India, but out of Banaras, and every week when she was away from the

country. Mrs. Besant's letters which I had to read were most endearingly addressed, were full of the most affectionate sentiments and were almost always very long. I remember him dictating to me his reply to her one week while he was tossing in pain with an unbearable earache, telling her of his physical sufferings; wondering why he was so suffering, for he was sure he had done nothing in this life that merited so much pain, but was equally certain he must have done something very wrong in his previous existence; and ending by saying: "The hope of seeing you again is the only thing that is keeping me alive". My father is not given to the use of exaggerated language; and it is clear that his love and devotion for Mrs. Besant were something unique.

Mrs. Besant always inspired the deepest affection for herself in those who were associated with her. She introduced us to the name of her old and famous colleague, Charles Bradlaugh, fairly early in my life. I remember to have read two volumes on Charles Bradlaugh by his daughter, Mrs. Hypatia Bradlaugh-Bonner when I could not have been more than 13 or 14 years of age. I do not know where those volumes are, but I remember being surprised that Mrs. Bonner had given only one chapter to Mrs. Besant. She has described the great affection that existed between her father and Mrs. Besant, and she has even gone on to say that the love was so great that if they had been free, they certainly would have married. Personally, I think Mrs. Besant was the one person who was capable of the deepest of affections without any thought of sex; and she was a woman of such remarkable courage that when she was working with colleagues she did not care what the world thought of her personal attachment to those colleagues and her absolute abandon to the cause for which they were working together.

Mrs. Besant's fidelity to her friends was also of the highest order. She would neither say any evil word about them nor hear even the friendliest of criticisms of them. She would herself speak words of high praise of her colleagues whenever she had an opportunity of doing so to others. She boldly, almost recklessly, defended Madame Blavatsky when charges of charlatanry were levelled against her; she strained every nerve to protect Messrs. Krishnamurti and Nityanandam when her guardianship of them was challenged, and aspersions and insinuations of all sorts were made against her and her colleagues; and she was in her best fighting mood defending Mr. Arundale and his wife when orthodox Madras was up in arms against them for their international and interracial marriage. Her faithful stand by Mr. C. W. Leadbeater, her friend and colleague, through thick and thin, is a remarkable example of courage and true affection. One day she was expatiating on Bradlaugh's philosophy to my father when he said with his usual impatience at any intellectual lapses from the strictest possible canons of logic: "Charles Bradlaugh seems to be putting the cart before the horse", and Mrs. Besant replied quite irritably: "No, my dear, he was doing nothing of the sort". I believe she disliked anyone talking evil of others. I remember my uncle describing to her a member of the Government of India as the worst possible man. She soothingly put her hand on his head and said, "Govind, my dear, there may easily be worse persons in the world".

Mrs. Bonner has described Mrs. Besant, so far as I recollect, at this distant date, in just a couple of sentences which do not appear on the surface to be very complimentary: "She is a woman of no originality, but has a masterly capacity of assimilating other people's ideas and putting them in glowing language. She is bound to be

the head of any movement she cares to join". I cannot say whether Mrs. Besant was original or not. In a sense, in the very nature of things, there can be very little that is strictly original in the world. All thoughts have already been thought; all deeds have already been done. We can only repeat old thoughts in our own words and do the old deeds over again in our own way. There is no doubt that Mrs. Besant, like all human beings, had to learn, and she eagerly learnt from others. I believe much of her knowledge of ancient Indian philosophy and psychology came from my father, and of *Bhakti* (devotional) literature from other Indian colleagues.

And, of course, she herself read standard English translations of important Samskrit works in the intervals of her own incessant and immense lecturing and writing work. She has eulogised my father's work on philosophy, psychology, and social organisation greatly, in a number of her own books, and regarded them as very original; though he has always stoutly maintained that there is absolutely nothing new in what he has written, except the wording; that all the thought expressed in his books, is derived from ancient Samskrit books; that he has only reinterpreted them in new words; that it was Madame Blavatsky's great books—*Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*—primarily, and western evolutionist science secondarily, that threw light for him, upon such of the significance as he has been able at all to see, of those old texts, and which significance, according to him, had become hidden and forgotten in the course of time. My uncle, however, always said that all that was nonsense; that he never saw any of my father's thoughts in the old books with which he felt he was equally familiar; and was really sorry that my father always unnecessarily and forcibly tried to see the reflection of his

thoughts in the teaching of the ancients and would not boldly give them out as his own and take credit for them himself. Well, I have nothing to do with this quarrel; I do not understand these things—and do not want to either, though I am inclined to agree with my uncle in this particular.

I myself view the problems of life from an absolutely different standpoint. Mrs. Besant's mind was very receptive; her brain grasped things very quickly. Her sympathetic imagination and understanding made things easy for her. As to her glowing language, there can be no two opinions. That she always did become the head of any movement she joined is amply proved by the moving story of her life. No sooner had she joined Charles Bradlaugh than she was the foremost leader of socialistic thought and endeavour in England. She had hardly joined The Theosophical Society when she became the greatest figure therein. She actively came into Indian politics only in 1914: by 1915 she became a force to be reckoned with. In 1916 she was being canvassed for the Presidentship of the Indian National Congress; and she actually became the President of the Congress in 1917, giving a new tone to it and establishing many very necessary and desirable conventions. An important one started by her and very well worth mentioning because of its effect, was that the elected President for a Congress session was the President for whole of the following year, that is so till the next annual session. She insisted on this right for herself, and actively worked for the Congress throughout the year of her Presidentship. Her example caught on, and the convention established by her became later a part of the Congress Constitution. Before her Presidentship, the President just presided at the session for which he was elected, and then went away into comfortable private and professional life.

She was particularly severe on Lord Sinha who after presiding over the Bombay Congress in 1915, became everything afterwards except an active worker in the Congress cause.

I do not know how far the story is correct, and I cannot verify it as both the actors are no more alive. But here it is as I heard it. A lecture by Mrs. Besant on Jainism had been notified somewhere in Madras. My uncle was accompanying her on her tour at that time. She developed high fever on the day, and everyone advised that the lecture should be cancelled. She said she would go through with it at any cost, since it had been notified. She asked my uncle to tell her something about Jainism, and he told her the intricacies of its theology and philosophy in a few brief sentences. Her fever at the time of the lecture was so high that my uncle had almost to carry her from the entrance of the lecture hall to the dais. He was a strong man physically except when he was down with asthma, which he regularly was, during the winter months, unless at the seaside. Mrs. Besant could hardly stand, and she had to be held while she was standing. She could never speak sitting. Soon she warmed up and treated her audience to an hour's fervid eloquence on Jain philosophy. My uncle is reported to have told the person who passed on this story to me, that the main ideas of Jainism were what he had communicated to her, but if he himself had tried even for a whole lifetime, he could not have put them in the language she did! And he knew the English language remarkably well! He was an omnivorous reader of English books; and moreover he was by no means a modest man and was justly proud of his knowledge. I remember Mrs. Besant herself once referred to him as an encyclopedia of information.

Mrs. Besant's high regard for Charles Bradlaugh

remained great and undiminished to the last; and in the midst of controversies, she invariably remembered him as an ideal fighter as her notes in *The Theosophist* testify. The tribute she paid to him when he died can still be read with profit. Mr. Bradlaugh's family however were not happy at the parting; and it seems to me they never forgave her as they could not understand the change that came on her. In one of her lectures to us students, she spoke of him as 'the dearest friend of her earlier years' and asked us to emulate him in the way he did things when meeting wrongs done by the strong and the powerful, to the poor and the humble. The Chapter dealing with Mrs. Besant in his daughter's life of Charles Bradlaugh, to which I have referred before, is headed, if my memory does not deceive me: "My father loses a friend—and gains one". The one he gained was Mrs. Besant herself. I forget the name of the person whom he lost. I read about Charles Bradlaugh and Abraham Lincoln—all figures introduced to us by Mrs. Besant in her speeches to the Central Hindu College students—as far back as 1903, or so. About ten years later, when Mrs. Besant came to Cambridge (1912) we arranged a tea party for her in the rooms of V. C. Patwardhan, a dear friend and earnest Theosophist, and like so many others, a great admirer of Mrs. Besant. He was a contemporary of mine at Cambridge. A more angelic man I think it would be difficult for me to meet; and it was a matter of deep sorrow to me that his life—in many ways a tragic one—ended on an operating table in America. Another contemporary of mine was Charles Bradlaugh-Bonner, also a student like Patwardhan and myself at Trinity. He was the son of Mrs. Hypatia Bradlaugh-Bonner, and thus was a grandson of the great Charles Bradlaugh. He carried on the tradition of the grandfather so far as religious belief was con-

cerned. He was an important member of a society at the time at Cambridge called "The Heretics". I invited him to this party we were giving to Mrs. Besant and to my great surprise and disappointment, he declined to come. At the party itself I told Mrs. Besant that Bradlaugh-Bonner was also a student of the College at the time and she said she would have been glad to see him.

Mrs. Besant seemed to have found out, almost immediately on her arrival here, what the trouble was with India and her youth; and so she introduced in her casual as well as public talks, many figures of European and American history, besides the ancient heroes of our own land, in order, I believe, to fill our minds with high ideals and spur us to high endeavours, so that we might help in making our country what she ought to be in the world. I think she soon saw how fond we are in India of words and how averse to action. Once she told us of the words of Charles Bradlaugh to her—almost the first: "You have a fatal facility for words, Mrs. Besant. You ought to study for two hours before you speak for one." I have advised many budding politicians in India to that effect—but in vain. I find it difficult to follow the advice myself very often, I fear. Mrs. Besant herself, however, with her vast erudition and the scrupulous care she took to be sure of her facts, seemed scarcely to be in need of such counsel.

When thinking of those early days, the days of the foundation of the Central Hindu College, many faces come to my memory. There was Dr. Richardson, the Principal, and Harry Banbury, the Headmaster. Dr. Richardson was a great man of science; and in those days when there was no money, he would painfully make with his own hands, various coils and other things to teach science. He was an enthusiast, and he introduced "object lessons" for the various classes of the school also, so that

we could be early introduced to the wonders of modern science. At his invitation, his teacher, Sir William Ramsay, when travelling in India, came to Banares, and delivered a lecture at the Central Hindu College. I have only a vague memory of the lecture he gave and the experiments he showed—of various colours produced in glass tubes. They were perhaps the earliest experiments in electricity. Harry Banbury was fond of Sandow's exercises and dumb-bells and drills. There was Mrs. Lloyd, a dear old lady, "the mother of the Boarding House", as she was affectionately known. She made us all members of her "Golden Chain" and made boys say—I quote the first words of pledge from memory: "I am a link in the Golden Chain of Love that stretches round the world, and I must keep my link bright and strong". This was followed by beautiful words breathing brotherhood and affectionate goodwill for all—men and animals alike!

Then came Mr. Arundale and his aunt and adoptive mother Miss Arundale. Miss Arundale was an English lady in the truest sense of the word, very conservative, spruce, strict and correct. She was so to the last. When I congratulated her on her son's wedding, she said: "I am glad George has married; but", she added, referring to the bride, "I wish she had been English". Almost all English folk working in the Central Hindu College and The Theosophical Society took to Indian clothing; Miss Arundale was one of exceptions. She always ate with forks and knives. I was first introduced to these implements of the dining table by her. We gave Mr. and Miss Arundale, when they first came out, a warm welcome at the Moghal Sarai Junction railway station, ten miles away from Banares, where all passengers for Banares from Bombay have, and in those days even from Calcutta had to change, and where we often went in large

numbers to offer welcome or bid farewell to Mrs. Besant and other elders.

I was by no means a very quiet student at school or college, and I gave anxious hours to many teachers. Mr. Arundale often felt quite nervous about me and would have long and friendly talks with me. In politics, even as a boy, I was an extremist; and once I used strong language against the powers-that-be at a public meeting of students in the city at which he was presiding. He spoke about this to my father, who felt that perhaps Mr. Arundale had taken my words as a personal insult, and asked me to offer my apologies to him. I did so and assured him that I meant nothing personal. Mr. Arundale told me that he did not mind what I said; but the days were bad—the bomb had just then come into Indian politics—and he did not want me to be arrested. The C.I.D. was strong and kept vigilant eyes on students. This was in 1907 and my first arrest did not come till 1930; but it did come after all! This was followed by three others so far, in 1932, 1940 and 1942. The last was in connection with the "Quit India" movement in the midst of World War II, the end of the war and movement alike ushered in the sovereign independence of the country.

In one of the talks I had with Mr. Arundale at the time, he told me how he had come to India. He had taken a good degree at Cambridge and was justly proud of it. He had gone to a lecture by Mrs. Besant in London, and was deeply affected by her eloquence and by her pleading for justice to India. He was still in the hall intoxicated by her eloquence—Mrs. Besant had retired from the rostrum—when some one came and told him that Mrs. Besant wanted to see him outside the lecture hall. Mr. Arundale was surprised, felt flattered and hurried to her. It seems that she just quietly told him: "I should

like you to come and help me in my work in India". The invitation was no sooner given than it was accepted; and the aunt and the nephew were soon on their way to our country. Mr. Arundale went on to say that if he had received the applause that Mrs. Besant was receiving at the time—since then, Mr. Arundale, who himself had become a finished speaker, and worthily succeeded Mrs. Besant to the Headship of The Theosophical Society, and deservedly received such applause himself many a time—he would have lost his head, and would not have thought of anything else. The echoes had scarcely died in the hall; but Mrs. Besant had already finished with the topic; and had switched her mind off to other things. She was collecting her colleagues for her work, who were only glad to be invited to serve her. That only shows how Mrs. Besant was a born leader, and how she was able to spot the proper persons with the proper qualities for the proper work and bring them together to work for a common cause.

Mrs. Besant always disliked having any piece of paper in front of her while she was speaking. She thought that was a great impediment. Once I remember her reading out her annual survey of the work of The Theosophical Society at an anniversary of The Society in Banares. She had placed the manuscript on the table, and was reading out finely, as if she was speaking. Still it was not the same. I remember that towards the end of her lecture she said: "Let golden links unite those whom Karma's iron chains have drawn together". That was her ideal of the bond that was to unite all workers together who were working for a great ideal. I do not wonder that even a solitary-minded, individualistic-natured, studious, scholarly person like my father, content in every way, and desiring nothing more than not to be disturbed, should have been drawn so intensely to Mrs. Besant. He *did* work hard for

the Central Hindu College, largely for her sake; and he, who if he hates anything hates travelling, did travel also with Mrs. Besant from end to end of the land in the service of the Central Hindu College and The Theosophical Society. He could, however, never be induced to go outside India. It was because of Mrs. Besant's encouragement, and not unoften at her express wish, that he wrote his books. He does not very readily oblige others by acceding to their wishes in anything: but he, I believe, seldom said "no" to Mrs. Besant.

I have many memories of large dinners and tea-parties in our house when the persons connected with the Central Hindu College whom I have already mentioned, came to us, as also many others—Theosophists from other parts of the world who had come to Banares for Theosophical meetings. I almost feel old as I mention the names: Countess Wachtmeister was one, another was Mrs. Windust. These had been fellow-workers of Madame Blavatsky. Mrs. Windust paid a visit to Cambridge when I was there and was very pleased to find me there. She gave a talk to The Theosophical Lodge there on Madame Blavatsky and said that Madame was by no means a very comfortable person to live with. Mrs. Besant, though a devoted pupil of Madame Blavatsky, was temperamentally a very different person; and I think most people liked to live near her who had a chance. I must not forget Miss Palmer, Miss Edger, Miss Herrington, Miss Wilson (of whom I will say something later also), Mr. Wodehouse and Mr. Ernest Wood who stood against Mr. Arundale for Mrs. Besant's successorship. I do not remember Mr. Leadbeater ever coming to our house. My father used to spend long hours with Mrs. Besant almost every day; and when she did not come to him, he would go with his papers to Shanti Kunj, and work there in the verandah

adjoining Mrs. Besant's room where I often went to him on business. Among my own countrymen who had gathered round Mrs. Besant, besides my elder uncle and my father, were the Basu Brothers, Upendra Nath and Jnanendra Nath and their cousin, Kali Charan Mittra; Mr. Durga Prasad and Pandit Cheda Lal; then there were Pandit Aditya Ram and Mr. Gurtu followed much later by Messrs. Telang, Trilokikar, Unwalla, Dalal, Sanjiva Rao, Taraporewala, Kanitkar and others. I should like to give a paragraph to each. I feel I know each well enough to do so. But I dare not. Enough to say—their tempers, temperaments, even beliefs and ideals, were very different from one another, but they were all devotedly attached to Mrs. Besant.

I should not forget a picturesque figure of the time. The Japanese priest, Ekai Kawaguchi, a good friend of ours, also lived in the staff quarters of the Central Hindu College for nearly seven years, and wrote an interesting book on his travels in Tibet, which Mrs. Besant published under the title: "Three Years in Tibet". Another person who lodged at the time at the staff quarters was Hafiz Saiyyid, one of the few Muslims who have been attracted to the Theosophical Society. He keeps his old contacts still most affectionately and is an earnest member of the Society. I must not forget either Abhay Charan Gui, the head clerk of the Principal's office. Abhay Charan was an amazingly efficient individual, his handwriting was most perfect, and he wrote so swiftly that few could keep pace with him. He called out the names and took the attendance of three to four hundred students in less than as many minutes. Mr. Arundale used to say that he himself was the Principal only in name: he was a mere rubber stamp, a signing machine; the real Principal was Abhay Charan, who did all the work, and was methodical and

conscientious to a fault. I had won a scholarship of rupees twelve per month from the Allahabad University, for passing fairly high in their First Arts (or Intermediate) University examination. He used to receive the money at his office and give me the scholarship regularly. As I left for England immediately after my B.A., that is the next higher university examination, before the amounts for the last two months were received, he kept this money in an envelope in a corner of his drawer. More than three years later when I returned and went to the College to meet old friends and teachers, I went into the College office also. As soon as he saw me and before even acknowledging my greeting, he pulled out the drawer, took the money out of it and handed it to me saying: "I have kept it for three years for you". He took my signature in acknowledgment, and then proceeded to the inquiries and good wishes usual for such occasions.

Perhaps the description of one of these early dinners at our house may not be uninteresting. It was a large party. I fear the house had not silver plates enough for all. We, in India, are a simple people, and we are not taken aback when we have a large party to entertain. Not unoften even ordinary middle class families entertain a thousand guests on one single evening on occasions of marriages and other important ceremonials. We use banana leaves for plates and earthen vessels for cups, tumblers, etc. We all eat with our fingers and so no knives, forks or spoons are needed. Then we have no courses, and all the food is served at once. The servers—usually younger members of the family—keep constantly going round replacing those items of food that may have been eaten. Even the richest people in India feel no "inferiority" in themselves serving out food to guests. On ceremonial occasions, custom often demands that this should be done.

The hosts themselves eat after the last guest has left. We sit on a cloth or wooden seat, spread on the floor, and put the food on the washed bare floor, in front. All of us boys and girls had been busy arranging this dinner in one of the large rooms in our old house. It was the rainy season, otherwise we would probably have laid out the leaf-plates under the skies. There was a large variety of sweets, and we were told to put only half of each piece of sweet on each plate, as European people do not like Indian sweets very much: they find too much sugar in them. This caused me surprise then, and I appreciated the situation only when I ate my first chocolate, only to throw it out in disgust; even now I do not like it very much.

Orthodoxy was still strong; and many Hindus, otherwise earnest Theosophists, did not dine with non-Hindus, even though brothers in the faith. Some, however, did come. On one of the plates we had arranged in a very symmetrical manner, in the shape of a garland of flowers, the various kinds of sweets. This plate we had reserved for my uncle, who was a hearty eater, and so we had not cut the sweets into halves as on the other plates. My father and his brothers were all very large eaters. Those who knew them in their younger days often told me and my cousins—by way of comparison uncomplimentary to us—that they used to spend all their pocket money on good food and good books. They built up perhaps the largest private library of the time in Banares, besides big muscles. It appears they all took heavy physical exercises and heavy meals at the end. They also read too much. My generation has done none of these things and I am not sure if they are much the worse for the lack!

As the guests trooped in, Mrs. Besant passing this particular plate, liked the arrangement on it and smilingly

insisted on sitting there. We do not reserve seats or mark the names thereon of guests as they do in Europe. The plates are served before the guests come in. I remember she left the whole plate practically untouched. She seemed to have realised our custom fairly early, that we —specially in North India—wasted our food to a great extent, though we as a nation are admittedly very poor and most of our people do not get even one square meal per day. Unlike European hosts, we give no choice to the diner to take what he likes and only as much as he can eat. Here the servers are supposed to judge the diner's appetite, and often despite his repeated protests that additional helpings are not wanted, delicacies and savouries, and even more solid eatables, are piled on perforce. It is taken for granted that guests are shy, and viands must be given liberally. It is possible that in the early days Mrs. Besant used to say, "No, thank you"; but when she found that all that was unavailing, and things *would* be placed upon her plate, she probably gave up. I never found her say "yes" or "no" as we piled edibles before her; and she just left everything, only eating a little of what she happened to like. A thing like this would be impossible even at the most sumptuous of feasts in Europe. I fear this system of waste of food has been with us through the ages. Megasthenes and Fa Hien—Greek and Chinese travellers over two thousand years ago —have remarked that Hindus had no fixed times for meals and wasted much food. The evil has persisted to this day.

Mrs. Besant became a vegetarian after she came under the influence of Theosophy, and many of my Indian readers who have had occasion to serve food to Mrs. Besant, might remember that the two items that she really liked were the *samosa* and the *papar*. *Samosa* is a triangular

salt savoury, usually stuffed with potatoes and small raisins and grains of peppercorn; but in our family, those made at home were stuffed with fried and ground cereal known as *moong* pulse. My mother took special pains to prepare these for Mrs. Besant herself. Mrs. Besant liked them very much; and we often sent these for her tea, and put a supply of them with her when she was travelling. Indeed she was so fond of them that she actually deputed Mrs. Rukmini Arundale to learn how to make them from my mother. She also liked *papar*, 'cracklers' (mentioned as *poppadam* in English restaurants). She found the Madras ones very hot, with too much pepper, and almost to the last I used myself to send to her packets of these North India *papars* which were not so hot. Another thing that she liked very much was ice cream, at least in the early days; and so this dainty was prepared almost every evening at Shanti Kunj. I remember to have partaken of it often enough there. I doubt, however, if she ever came to like any of our main Indian dishes either of the north or of the south. She used to get quite thin in India, and invariably returned looking healthier after a visit abroad.

I can understand this from my own case. After starving on strict vegetarian diet for three whole years in England, I returned to India only 122 lbs. in weight. I must say, however, that in England I kept very good health and was scarcely ever ill and did not even catch cold, though all my English fellow-students as well as the lecturer kept coughing and blowing their noses as snow fell in plenty and the cold winds blew hard. I was then running my twenty-fourth year and was over 5 feet 8 inches in height. I *did* eat on my return, and amazed everyone by the amount I took. I believe my mother was quite frightened, but I was only making up for lost time, and within six months I was 172 lbs. at which I kept

steady for long. Food is a matter of habit, and though Mrs. Besant was scrupulously and punctiliously anxious to follow our system and eat our food, she never throve on that. She, however, took plenty of tea. I almost think the afternoon tea used to be her principal meal here— as it was mine too in England—and she would take hot tea after her lectures also. She was also fond of table butter. It may interest readers to know that she did not care to spread her butter on toast or bread as every one else does. She put a lump on its edge and bit it off! She got the amount she wanted without the trouble of spreading it out!

She was very particular about table manners, and gave me strict instructions about them. I quite see that she tried to follow our ways also equally carefully when in India. I have heard that on one occasion, forgetting herself, she horrified the whole table in England, by throwing almonds and other dry fruits in her mouth with her hand held a little away, as we do in India, instead of holding them in the hand next to the mouth and delicately nibbling them as they do in Europe. Despite such close association with Mrs. Besant, my father never learnt any English ways either in dress or in food. He has always been very careful about his clothes, on which he has always spent much time and trouble. He has invented many new styles and cuts of *kurtas* and caps also. But he has never put on European clothes. As to forks and knives, he does not know their use at all. He likes a spoon though—and that with a vengeance—for he would sip his tea with a spoon (which would not be correct manners in England) till he is almost half through his cup. He masticates liquid foods also! My father is almost as fond of coffee and tea as Mrs. Besant was. He got these habits from her. As we eat with our fingers in India, we carefully wash our hands and rinse our mouths after every meal.

Mrs. Besant was never able to hollow out her hands and hold water in them. She could also never throw out the water from her mouth in a stream. As children we were very much amused at her failure as we poured water on her hands to wash after meals!

When I was travelling with her on board the steamer, the food so disagreed with me and the prevailing smell so disgusted me that I rarely went to the dining saloon. I hated formalities, and did not care to change my clothes so often. Dressing for dinner—and that too elaborately—has always been regarded almost a religious duty for an orthodox Englishman. I also felt giddy on that first voyage, though I was not actually sick. Once sitting next to her at dinner, as the ship rocked and I felt far from comfortable, I put my elbows for rest and support on the table. She immediately struck the elbow next to her with her hand, and I was told later that it was bad manners to rest one's elbow like that. Non-English readers may be amused to know that though it is bad manners to rest on a dinner table with the elbows, it is perfectly correct to spread out the fore-arms lightly on the table and rest them in that manner. The English people centre all their good manners round the table; and the strict discipline that English children get there, stands them in good stead in all situations in later life. I have come to realise that a man behaves in life as he behaves at table; and if we Hindus are individualistic and observe untouchability, are unpunctual and slipshod; it is largely because we dine alone, have strict canons of "touch" and "not touch" at meals, have no settled hours for them, and are invariably unpunctual there; and we just eat as we may, regarding food almost as an evil necessity, which must be finished off as quickly as possible. The Englishman is very different in all these particulars, and so he is also very different in life.

So Mrs. Besant gathered men and women around her for her work. They were of different temperaments; they came from many countries; but they fulfilled the tasks she allotted to them with rare devotion, for they constantly felt they were all doing her work; and, in serving the cause, they were really serving her. She was particular about the welfare of all who helped her, and all who were in any way connected with her. In her will, her personal servants, Lakshmana and Bhagelu, received annuities enough to enable them to live comfortably; and while she lived she used to take scrupulous care that the needs of all her workers, high or humble, should be satisfied as far as she could satisfy them. I can give no greater proof of that than this that when my father suddenly became very seriously ill in 1905, she used to come to nurse him for whole nights in succession, after doing her full day's work. We were all very small children, and my mother was at her wit's end at the time. More than once in those anxious days we thought my father could not survive. Mrs. Besant had already booked her passage for Europe whence she was to proceed to America. She called many times in the course of the day to inquire after him; and till she left, every night she used to come to our home and relieve my mother and us, and nurse my father herself. My mother and the children used all to sleep in a long verandah adjoining the room in which my father lay ill. Professional nurses are unknown in our country outside the large towns even now: at that time they were absolutely unknown. I remember I myself could not sleep very well those days because of the hovering anxiety, and often found Mrs. Besant waking my mother in the middle of the night to attend to my father as necessary.

Mrs. Besant left for Europe and then for America soon afterwards; and we received anxious inquiries by

letters and cables from her from time to time. I have already mentioned how Mrs. Besant wrote to my father every week, and he to her, when she was out of India. She addressed my father in her letters in the most affectionate manner; and at the end of those letters, she used to subscribe herself as "Heliodore" ("Given by the Sun"). In the book jointly written by Mrs. Besant and Mr. Leadbeater called "Man: Whence, How and Whither"—and this was written soon after 1911 when hopes were roused in Mrs. Besant and some of her colleagues of the coming back of Christ to earth in the person of Mr. Krishnamurti, then a young boy of about 11, who had just then been taken by Mrs. Besant under her guardianship—almost all persons connected with Mrs. Besant at the time were given names after the various stars. They were all supposed to have worked together in the ages past, birth after birth. Mrs. Besant is given the name of "Herakles", and Mrs. Marie Russak is called "Helios".

Though in the list given in the beginning of the book of the various characters of the story, my father is not mentioned, the Capricorn of the narrative is he. My father is very argumentative as to things he does not believe in; and as Mrs. Besant and he had differed in opinion over his new cult in The Theosophical Society—then known as the Krishnamurti cult, though later Mr. Krishnamurti himself repudiated all cults and even organisations—Mr. Leadbeater must have been rather upset at my father's strong public criticisms of the beliefs he was endeavouring to propagate and the incessant demand my father made for proofs of things said. I believe this book is more Mr. Leadbeater's than Mrs. Besant's, though large portions of it were written by Mrs. Besant herself in Italy in 1912 where she had specially retired for this piece of writing; and with due respect I do not wonder

that Capricorn should be referred to as having been "cantankerous" even tens of thousands of years ago!

CHAPTER IV

LETTERS, LECTURES AND RECREATIONS

Coming back to the pleasanter theme of these weekly letters from Mrs. Besant from England and America in 1905, which I had to read out, and the answers to which were written by me to my father's dictation, there are one or two points that are very clear in my memory. One was that week after week in these envelopes came a packet of used stamps of various countries marked "For Bhal". Bhal is the abbreviated pet name of my younger brother Chandra Bhal who was an enthuastic stamp-collector at the time. As Mrs. Besant had then no secretary that I know of, she herself must have taken the trouble to cut out these stamps from the various packets and letters that came to her: she sent them on week by week for my brother. Her post was always very heavy, and my brother must have asked her for the used stamps on them little realising what extra trouble we were giving her. She gave us stamp albums as presents and also post-card albums. In our old papers there are still numerous picture post-cards addressed to Mrs. Besant which were sent to her as greetings from her friends and which she passed on to us for amusement and collection. Friends whom my sons have asked for stamps have sent them once or twice; the sons of my friends who have asked me for stamps, have also got them once or twice; but it was something unique that Mrs. Besant should have sent these stamps—and large quantities of them—from week to week when abroad, and almost day to day when in India. I wonder if

these incidents have anything to teach to those who seek to be leaders of men.

One week I remember her letter to my father brought a big cheque—I believe it was for £1500. This was the proceeds from a single lecture of hers in America. Many cheques came from her those days, but this one stands out in my memory. The money was for the Central Hindu College, my father being the Secretary of the Institution. In the letter that came with this, she said: "If only every lecture of mine gave as much, the dear C.H.C. would never be in want." She seemed always to remember all her work everywhere. With these letters also came press cuttings giving interesting accounts of her personality, activities and lectures. Punctual as she was, she happened to be three minutes late at a lecture in America, and this was duly recorded in one of those cuttings which I remember began something like this: "Arriving three minutes late, Mrs. Besant immediately went up to the rostrum and pressing three middle fingers of her right-hand on the table she began. . . ."

Mrs. Besant while lecturing did not use many gestures. The few she did were very characteristic. I do not know if any one ever remembers her speaking from the right of the table. My memory is that she would always walk to the left even when seated towards the right, and almost always begin her talk by pressing the three fingers, noted by the American journalist, on the table. A few characteristic gestures of hers I remember, otherwise she spoke just simply and straight. One was pressing her right elbow to her side and resting the out-stretched palm of her right hand on that of the left. Another gesture was—and that she employed at the height of her eloquence when periods rolled like thunder—spreading out both her hands, palms upwards, sometimes at right angles to her body, sometimes

at 45 degrees acute, sometimes 135 degrees obtuse, and keeping steady at that for some moments. Still another gesture was putting her right-hand index finger on her mouth right across the middle and shaking her body from side to side, or dramatically stretching the right hand in front with the index finger pointing to the distance, keeping the left hand hanging by her side.

A person who delivered so many lectures would naturally be expected to be hoarse sometimes. She never was. She never strained herself and so she never broke her voice. We politicians are often husky; but not she. Her pronunciation was so perfect and her voice carried so well that large audiences could hear her easily. If the audience was too large and the fringe of it could not hear her, I do not think she worried. If there was any disturbance during her lectures she never lost her patience: she just went on. Soon the music of her voice silenced the opponents; and even when they did not agree with her, they heard her with respect. Usually speakers are careless. Many go on drinking cold water as they speak, and some I have found drinking cold water even after their speech. She never required any water to drink while speaking; and at the end she certainly never took cold water, but hot tea.

She would not stand under a fan when she spoke, and to the last she never spoke sitting, and often I have seen her perspiring profusely as she finished. When my father travelled with her on her tours, he used to wrap her immediately after her lecture in a warm white woollen shawl, regardless of the weather and regardless of her perspiration. If she had to sit after the lecture on the rostrum, she would sit there with the shawl wrapped round her, unconcerned at the heat. In the plains of India, even in the winter, she used to get quite hot and wet with perspi-

ration after an hour's speaking. This shawl wrapped round her throat and shoulders prevented her from catching cold. Curiously she often suffered from a slight dry nervous cough while at home, but never during a lecture except towards the end of her days. My father tells me that on inquiry he learnt from her that in her younger years she had a very weak throat and lungs, but had to make public speeches all the same. A medical specialist advised her to go on with her public speaking, and told her that it would either kill or cure her. She persisted and was cured of the weakness, but this little cough remained behind, incurable, which however did not hinder her work in any way.

So far as I can venture to judge of a matter like this, I am bound to say that she was at her best in the setting of the London Queen's Hall. She would come punctually to the minute, go to the centre of the rostrum, put both her hands on a little wooden rest in front, and start her lectures straight away. There was no president to disturb, either at the beginning or at the end. The English audience is a quiet one and never very enthusiastic. Even students do not rise when the lecturer enters a room. On my first day at Cambridge when the tutor came into the class to give us his first instructions—various dont's and do's—I was the only person who got up, following the custom we have in India, and then immediately sat down seeing that no one else was getting up. I realised that that was not customary there. At these Queen's Hall lectures of Mrs. Besant, I have seen the audience standing up out of respect to her as she entered the hall. She left immediately the lecture was over. Some of her perorations there were really superb.

I have also heard her in the Albert Hall in London, which is the biggest hall there with a seating accommoda-

tion for 10,000 persons. It was a crowded meeting that evening (1912), at the close of a very long suffragette procession. The women's movement was strong in 1911 when I went with Mrs. Besant, and increased in strength during the years I was there. I saw this procession in which Mrs. Besant played an important part. Various women that took part in the procession were dressed after the great women of the past who had played their part in history. Queen Boadicea, Joan of Arc and others were all there. I do not think Mrs. Besant was given any part that evening because it was obvious she was great in her own right. So far as I remember she wore the Mason's robes that day. Usually Masonic Lodges admit only men: but there is a Co-Masonic organisation in which women are also members. Mrs. Besant was a high personage in that. In Banares there used to be a Co-Masonic Lodge in the hall of which the meetings of the "Sons and Daughters of India"—I refer to this organisation in some detail later —took place. While Mrs. Besant was walking in the procession, some old workman called out: "Well done, Annie; keep on, Annie." I was told later that he was probably one of those who knew her in the old days when she was a labour worker, and when it was quite common to use Christian names in addressing each other. She walked all the way in that procession, though she was 63 years of age at the time, and delivered a speech along with others at the end. The only time I had heard Mr. Zangwill was on that occasion. He was full of mirth and humour.

The hall has a peculiar characteristic, which those of my readers who may not have noted before, may note now if they have any occasion to be in London. While the lecturer is speaking, there is at some time or other during his speech, an answering echo from a portion of the hall in the form of a scratching like the grating of

metal on metal. It is a circular hall; I was in one of the upper galleries, and the dais seemed to be far away from me down below as at the bottom of a well. In every other person's speech—and there were many short speeches that evening—at some time or other, the scratching was sure to be heard. Mrs. Besant's speech, however, passed without this scratch. Some time later there was a talk on this subject at the lunch table of Miss Bright. If I remember rightly, Mrs. Besant explained that every hall has some defect which is exposed at a particular pitch—and only at that pitch—of a speaker's voice. A speaker must instinctively find out this defect and avoid that pitch. Well, public speaking is an art, is it not? Many of us are public speakers of sorts, but has there been another like Mrs. Besant?

There is a description by Mrs. Besant of a lecture of hers in Australia. Readers may find it if they delve sufficiently in the old volumes of *The Theosophist*. I quote only from memory. She arrived at the lecture, as was usual with her, at the exact minute. The hall was crowded. The policeman at the gate said to her: "Madam, there is no room". I believe they are very strict out there, and every hall is licensed to hold so many persons and no more. "It does not matter," said Mrs. Besant to the policeman, and tried to proceed. The policeman knew his duty better, and barred her way saying there was no room and that she could not go in. But Mrs. Besant replied: "Then there will be no lecture." The policeman entered into the humour of the situation, laughed and let her go. Is it not true that in life generally—in professions and everywhere else—there is always room at the top, as in the most crowded of lectures there is always room for the speaker, and also for others on the dais! Such is the tragedy and comedy of our earthly existence.

Let me just add a word about the suffragette movement in England which was very strong during all the three years that I was there. At odd parties I used to meet women connected with the movement and sometimes heard their lectures in Hyde Park as well as in other public places. I was greatly struck by their earnestness. Women had many grievances and they were trying hard to get them removed. Their greatest grievance at that time of which I write, was that the wife of the Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith, was not at all sympathetic to them, and their attempts to interview the Prime Minister were very often unsuccessful. That was also the time when a graduate lady threw herself in front of a rushing horse in the Derby in order to attract the attention of the world to women's lot in England. She died soon afterwards in the hospital to which she was removed. I saw the solemn procession that went through the London streets carrying the coffin of this lady (1913).

A familiar method adopted by the suffragettes to call public atention to their grievances was to break the glass panes of large London shop windows. Mrs. Besant was always keen on woman obtaining her proper place in the scheme of things; and though she did not support the breaking of shop windows, she supported the movement. There were arrests of prominent suffragettes; and there were hunger strikes and forcible feedings in jails. A cry was raised for their better treatment; and Mrs. Besant also wrote some strong paragraphs in her *Theosophist* in support. Thus we see that the grievances regarding political rights and treatment of political prisoners have not been confined to my country alone!

It is a surprising thing that the demand of these suffragettes was only for the suffrage. *i.e.*, a right to vote for and be returned to Parliament so that they could influ-

ence the legislature to pass equitable laws for women. Mrs. Pankhurst and her daughters, Christabel and Sylvia, were keen suffragettes and suffered much for the cause. The latter started a weekly paper called the "Suffragette", which was issued every Friday afternoon. I spent every Friday afternoon between lunch and tea at the University Union at Cambridge writing letters home and used to post these letters at the General Post Office just in time to catch the weekly mail boat to India. I always saw an elderly spectacled lady selling this paper just outside the post office at that hour and invariably purchased a copy from her. It may perhaps amuse my readers when I say that as a protest against the usual shop-keepers' system of having beautiful girls to sell their goods, the suffragettes posted perhaps one of the ugliest women they could come across, to sell their paper at Cambridge. They wanted the students to be attracted to the cause by what the paper contained and not by the looks of the person who sold it.

One of the Indian lady students studying at the time in London was Shrimati Anasuya Sarabhai. She was very keen on women's rights, and she used to be particularly wild at the treatment women received in India. She and I had many good-humoured bouts discussing woman's problems. The suffragette movement in England could not have had a greater supporter than this lady, who herself belonged to one of the wealthiest families of Ahmedabad. I remember visiting the suffragette establishments in England with her, and seeing how high-born ladies would stand behind tables and counters selling suffragette literature. They found it difficult to do things quickly and make up accounts immediately as is invariably done by innumerable English women who bravely work in London shops and restaurants for an honest living. But these ladies were earnest and worked for the cause at con-

siderable and—judging from ordinary standpoints—unnecessary inconvenience to themselves.

Mrs. Besant's life, on the practical concrete side, has, I believe, three lessons to give: take care of your time; take care of your friends; take care of your health. Numerous are the illustrations I have already given as to how she was a most punctual person; and a punctual person alone can take care of his time. She did make 24 hours yield more solid work than three times as many hours do to almost any other worker. She was constantly travelling; but she utilised all the time while travelling for her work. Though she would patiently wait for her train and appear perfectly at ease at railway stations, she spread out her papers as soon as she was comfortably established in the train itself. She wrote hundreds of letters while travelling, and did much literary work besides. She always carried a large number of books with her. She used to be a great reader of papers, magazines and novels as well. She used to give a book to each of the persons travelling with her, and collected them all when the destination came near. One had to deliver back the book even if one were in the midst of an engrossing story! She always slept well even while travelling in trains: that may be the secret of her stored up energy for heavy work in the day. There was almost always a settled sadness and seriousness on her face. She did not like slipshod work; and she insisted on things being done properly. When we showed any carelessness and indifference in going through some ceremonies that were prescribed for the meetings of the "Sons and Daughters of India",—an organisation founded by her for the training of young men and women in honest and straightforward service—she reproved us, saying: "Whatever has to be done should be done well. If we follow ceremonial, we ought to do

that properly". Verily, what is worth doing, is worth doing well.

In any meeting Mrs. Besant would naturally be among the most distinguished; but she was scrupulously respectful to the president whoever he might be. At a meeting of the mock Parliament of the Central Hindu College, she had been invited to speak from one side. Ganga Shankar Misra, a brilliant student of the time, was in the chair; and as she entered she bowed very gracefully and almost too respectfully, to the student-president (the "Speaker") much to his embarrassment: and took the seat which he pointed out to her. When she was given a Doctorate of the Banares Hindu University, she seemed to be as pleased at the time of receiving the diploma, as any boy could be who receives his first certificate of success at an examination. I have seen her introducing a lady student to the then Vice-Chancellor of the Hindu University, Sir Sivaswami Aiyar, for the grant of the requisite degree. She took off her academic cap and made a tremendous bow to the Vice-Chancellor. She did what even the Bursar at the University of Cambridge did not do when introducing me to the Vice-Chancellor for the degree there: and they are particular about these ceremonials at that ancient University. All these gestures of hers were like those of a man; but she evidently knew the English Court etiquette prescribed for ladies also by heart. I have seen her making elaborate curtsies to the Viceroy, as the representative of the King. When I saw her doing so to Lord Minto the then Viceroy, on his visit to the Central Hindu College in 1910, I felt that I was seeing a picture out of Dumas' stories of the medieval French Court. I have seen English ladies making much respectful curtsies to her in England, despite her protests. This visit of Lord and Lady Minto was a very anxious

one both because of the political and weather conditions. Untimely rain fell in torrents on the night before, and all arrangements made for the reception under Mrs. Besant's direct supervision, under *shamianas* were spoilt. When, as a prefect of the College, I got to the College early in the morning to see what could be done, I found Mrs. Besant already there to look to the new arrangements which were scarcely complete before the Viceregal party arrived. However, everything passed off successfully; and both the Viceroy and his wife had to scrape off a good bit of mud from their shoes on the foot-boards of their car before they could depart. I think Lord Minto was the friendliest of all Viceroys to Mrs. Besant personally and her work in India as well.

She had amazing grace, almost regal in its dignity, for special occasions. A large party was given by Lady Churchill and Lady Lutyens in a large London hotel in 1913. I happened to be in London just before then and had gone to see Mrs. Besant. She asked me if I would be in London on a particular date, and when I said I would be, she herself gave me the invitation to the party that was to be held on that date and said I must come. Our hostess, Lady Lutyens, was surprised when I suddenly appeared at her party and was almost apologetic for not knowing I was in London and not sending an invitation to me. I jocularly assured her that I had not come uninvited as Mrs. Besant herself had given me the invitation; and we both had a good laugh.

I had met Lady Lutyens in a curious manner. Soon after I went to England with Mrs. Besant, there was a Federation of Theosophical Lodges at Oxford (1911). After the meetings, walking back to the hotel in the midst of a number of delegates, I found a lady walking by my side and speaking to me about India and Simla, and ask-

ing me about myself. When I asked her if she knew India, she said she had been there as a child. I learnt from her that she was the daughter of Lord Lytton, Viceroy of India in the seventies of the last century. I had read many books by her grandfather, the famous novelist, Lord Bulwer Lytton, and soon found common ground in talking to her about them. I often enjoyed Lady Lutyens' hospitality in London when I used to meet her delightful children. On one of these occasions—and only one—I met her husband Sir Edwin Lutyens, later the architect of New Delhi. I had the pleasure of receiving her once at my own house in Banares, when my father gave a party to Mrs. Besant at the time of a Theosophical Convention (1923). At this London party, which was a very brilliant one, it was a sight to see Mrs. Besant, the white-robed chief guest of the evening, going from table to table and greeting the other guests and having a pleasant word for everyone, in all her stately dignity rivalling a queen's.

So Mrs. Besant took great care of her time and took great care of her friends. Let no one think she was careless about her body. She took scrupulous care of her health. I do not remember to have ever heard that she was so ill as to drop her work or cancel her engagements till towards the end of her life. Talking once to Mr. Polak, a great English friend of hers, I found he was surprised to know that Mrs. Besant was a great horsewoman. But she was. At 60 she could ride as well as any person a third of her age. There was a fine black Arab horse—I think it was named Sultan and was a gift to her from Dr. Balakrishna Kaul, a famous physician of Lahore—which Mrs. Besant used to ride. We have some pictures of her on Sultan; but I do not remember to have ridden out with her at any time when she

Mrs. Besant Riding

was riding that horse. My memories are of riding with her when she was on a very fine mare named "Morni", meaning "Pea-hen". When Mrs. Besant was not in Banaras she used to put that mare at my disposal and I rode it. It was a real pleasure to be on its back. I remember the poor mare dying. I was present at the death. Mrs. Besant was not then in Banaras. Mrs. Besant was old-fashioned. She was very conservative in personal habits when we come to think of it. She never rode astride, though a large number of women had begun so to ride even then. She rode like the ladies of old, mounted on one side of the saddle. I do not know how she managed it, for we men are always told to "sink our knees in the saddle" when we ride. How ladies keep their balance and hold fast to the horse with both legs on one side, I cannot say. But Mrs. Besant rode wonderfully well.

She trotted and cantered and galloped and could be for long hours on horse-back. That was the only occasion so far as I know when in India she dressed in the usual riding habit of an English lady, including the head-gear, and was not necessarily in white. I often rode out with her in 1908 and 1909. I was only 18 and she was 61; and curiously enough, I would get tired before she did. On one occasion I remember she felt I was fatigued and said to me: "Are you tired, Prakasa? Shall we go back?" Sheer self-respect forced me to say that I was not at all tired, and that she could go as fast and as far as she liked. I have met with many accidents while riding, and have memories of them even today as I ride. That "self-respect" which kept me by Mrs. Besant's side in those days, still keeps me on a horse's back. Riding still continues one of the few hobbies and recreations that I have. My sorrow is that horses are now disappearing from public places, and even the roads are

now constructed of materials suitable for motor traffic and are becoming increasingly unsafe for animals' hoofs.

Riding is a manly exercise, and Mrs. Besant was very much a man. I never remember her knitting: I have always seen her with a pen in her hand. When Mahatma Gandhi's movement of the *Charkha*—the spinning wheel—began in India as a solvent (according to him) both of our political and our economic ills, I said to her once in the course of conversation that her mother must have spun, for textile factories could not have begun to function so widely in those early days. Readers will remember pictures of famous British ladies with a spindle. Fairy tales of the East and the West alike are full of women spinning and weaving. Mrs. Besant said to me: "Not only my mother, but as a girl I have myself been familiar with the spinning wheel".

At one stage of her political work in India, when she was closely associated with the Indian National Congress, and it was made incumbent on members of the Executive to supply a certain quota of hand-spun yarn, Mrs. Besant took to spinning on the *takli,* which she described as a "twirlgig less than a foot long." Mahatma Gandhi sent his son, Devadas, to teach her how to handle the little instrument. I believe Mrs. Besant was the most perfect "gentleman" one can think of—the word "lady" is not so expressive. A gentleman they say is at home everywhere. Mrs. Besant was not only so herself, but made everyone else who came to her, feel so: she did not make any one feel inferior to her in any way. She would talk seriously with a scoffer; she would discuss matters earnestly with a child; she would be at home alike with the poor and the rich, the learned and the unlearned, the friend and the stranger, in any part of the world. She would

always be most scrupulous of other peoples' feelings—another great characteristic of the gentleman.

But she was a woman and a mother also, and knew domestic economy and domestic duties as any other woman. I remember her presiding over a meeting of the Central Hindu College hostels. The Hindu College Boarding House was a great experiment. Mrs. Besant realised the value of interdining, and though some of her colleagues were orthodox, she was able to manage to introduce interdining to a limited extent, though even this brought the wrath of many ultra-orthodox Hindus on her head as the ruiner of the Hindu faith even though ostensibly working for it. At this meeting of the boarders too, there was the usual report of activities and the usual catalogue of grievances. No meeting of students or perhaps any set of human beings can at all be complete, I fear, without this catalogue. One of the complaints was about the dust nuisance. Mrs. Besant in her closing speech, told the students to throw used tea leaves in the air and then sweep the floor. That would abate dust. I do not know whether it does. I have never tried it. But I remember this prescription.

Another prescription of hers may also be helpful, and that is how to keep one's rooms cool in the hot weather. Her own system was—which she recommended to others—to shut all the doors before the hot winds begin blowing, that is about nine in the morning; to sprinkle water on the floor, and keep a fan going. This enables sufficient light to come in for work and saves one from the worry of the paraphernalia in the form of *khas-khas* and other complications adopted by wealthy people to keep themselves cool and comfortable, and which in a way, are dangerous, as coming out of rooms equipped with these, suddenly in the hot sun, brings on cold and cough and distempers of all sorts. Few

can be sure that they will not need to go out of their rooms throughout the day.

At this meeting of the boarders, the secretary in the course of his report had somewhere used the word "native". In those days Indians, that is "natives of India," used to be referred to as "natives" in railway trains and other places. I think it is due to her that a protest was raised against the use of this word, and Indians came to be called "Indians". Words by use and misuse do undergo changes in their meanings. In those days, "Indian" officers really meant European officers serving in India. "Anglo-Indians" meant Englishmen who had resided long in India. "Eurasians" meant persons of mixed blood, Indian and European; and "natives" meant full-blooded Indians. "Natives" was, however, a term of contempt.

I remember an article, "Rise of the Native", in an English magazine published in England, written by some detractor of coloured peoples there. My father gave a reply to it in the Central Hindu College Magazine, and naively asked whether "revolt of the native" meant the revolt of Englishmen who were natives of the place where the article was written. I remember many quarrels with railway authorities over the use of the word "native". Compartments in railway trains used to be marked in those days separately "for natives" and "for Europeans". All that went long before Swaraj came. "Natives" later became "Indians", "Eurasians" came to be called "Anglo-Indians"; and "Anglo-Indians" were correctly known as "Europeans".

In her closing speech that morning at this students' meeting, Mrs. Besant told her audience of students that the word "native" should not be used. The poor secretary started turning the pages of the report in order to make

the correction then and there. As he fumbled through the pages, Mrs. Besant casually turned to him and said: "It is towards the bottom of the third page". It was surprising that she should have followed the report so carefully and remembered even the pages where different words appeared. I do not know if any other President or Chairman would even care to listen closely.

Another word that has been disliked is "vernacular" used for Indian languages. Mrs. Besant herself used it and saw no harm in it. My friend, Shivaprasad Gupta, corresponded with her on the subject; but she said it contained no reproach to the provincial languages of India. Recent Government circulars have, however, discouraged the use of the word. Jawaharlal Nehru, in his *Autobiography*, says it means the language spoken by slaves. Lord Morley in his "Recollections" seems to use it for a local county dialect, some sort of a *patois*.

There is one other word that I should like to see abolished, and that is "coolie" for porters. I have come to dislike the word ever since I heard the late Lord Balfour say in the House of Commons that the English worker was not a Chinese or Indian coolie! That showed the word did not indicate an honest profession, but was actually one of contempt. Latterly the word has been coming into disuse in various parts of the country, but in Madras it is extensively used, and people see no harm in it. When I have objected, I have been told that it is a Tamil word meaning a person that works for wages. So long I had the impression that it had a Chinese derivation meaning slave labour. Anyway it has a bad odour and ought, I think, to go.

Thinking of the Central Hindu College Boarding House of those days, let me record a mischievous prank of the boys. Mrs. Besant used to speak of spirits and

disembodied beings. The boys, naturally sceptical, decided to have some fun at her expense. They hung bunches of keys from various windows on the upper floor connecting them with strings. At nights they used to pull the strings and made the keys jingle all over the compound. They would then draw long faces and tell the authorities that there were surely some evil spirits about the place. Mrs. Besant herself made anxious inquiries and gave instructions to the young folk as to what to do and what not to do when spirits were abroad! Pandit Chheda Lal was the superintendent of the Boarding House—and a very strict disciplinarian he was; but the boys would hoodwink even him though he assured them all that he knew boys well and could never be taken in by any of them, however clever!

Mrs. Besant always spoke strongly for physical exercises and encouraged students everywhere to take to them. There used to be many quarrels between Europeans and Indians in railway trains those days; and she felt that boxing alone could save us. I think my father was for jiu-jitsu, the Japanese exercise, that was made familiar to us during the Russo-Japanese War (1905). There was an annual meeting of the Central Hindu College in 1909, and one of the old boys was coming to attend it from Calcutta. He was a short thin Bengali young man of aristocratic birth. He had been bullied out of his compartment—a second class—by a European fellow-passenger on his way. He had spoken about it to Mrs. Besant and she was angry. She wrote a very strong article in the Central Hindu College Magazine, which brought upon the College and its authorities the wrath of the local Government. The Lieutenant-Governor of the Province at the time was Sir John Hewett, and he wrote to the Commis-

sioner in Banares to call members of the Managing Committee and tell them of his displeasure.

To invite persons only to insult them used to be a pleasant pastime of high officials in India. Those were difficult days. There were student movements all over the land; and various circulars had been issued enjoining "loyalty" on staff and students. This meeting of the Commissioner with the authorities was not very pleasant. Mr. Arundale was full of fun even then, and told the Commissioner that it would be best to have a sliding scale of loyalties, the highest educational authorities pledging loyalty to the King and the lowest to the Commissioner! Nothing really happened, and the episode ended with mutual threats and thanks.

Long afterwards, after retiring from Government service, Sir John Hewett came to India as an agent of some business company. He happened to meet my father at the Banares Cantonment railway station as he was passing, and my father had gone to receive some guest. Sir John, recognising him, said half apologetically: "You must be hating me, as I was not very friendly to your College", and made inquiries about the institution. My father told him: "The College is flourishing, and has grown into a University, thank you; and as to hating, that was rather the other way round, according to what you have yourself said, just now!"

Besides riding, Mrs. Besant excelled at croquet. As a little boy I had played croquet but never knew Mrs. Besant had played it too. I was with her while she was travelling in Scotland in 1911, and we were staying at a beautiful country house in Durie with Mr. Christie. He had extensive lawns; and after lunch there was croquet. Mrs. Besant and I were partners. She played with the enthusiasm of a child and made the game a very serious

affair. She had no "kindness" for her opponents. When she managed to croquet a ball, it was difficult for the next person's turn to come. She would croquet all the balls, take a loop, croquet them again and take another, and so on. When it was my turn and I happened to croquet an opponent's ball she would shout: "Sky him, Prakasa, sky him!"; and the balls went tumbling from end to end of that vast field, and tea time came and the game was not over. She was physically strong also. At Gaya hallowed by memories of the Buddha, there is a very high flight of steps over a hill. On one occasion Mrs. Besant went up the steps to behold the scenery around, from the top. She just went on and on without stopping; and sedentary lawyers, local members of The Theosophical Society who were with her, fat and unused to physical exertion, followed panting and stopping at place after place to gather breath.

I remember in one of her lectures she said: "I am a woman who never knows when she is beaten." It certainly was so at croquet. She had invited me to a little place called "The Lodge" in Esher, not far from London, where she had retired with her party for a change and quiet writing. It was a beautiful summer evening and after tea there was croquet. The lawn was small, very unlike the Durie one, and the loops were very near each other. Mr. Arundale and I were partners; and Mrs. Besant and Krishnamurti formed the other side. Mr. Arundale began the game, woefully saying to me: "Prakasa, we are bound to lose". The play went on very well for me, and towards the end, as it was getting dark, I managed quite accidentally to strike the final peg taking Mr. Arundale's ball also along with mine to it. We won. Mrs. Besant seemed almost annoyed. She said to Krishnamurti: "Krishna, we must play them again and beat them". Mr.

Arundale pleaded that it was really too dark for any further play. I was too dumfounded at my success to speak. The play began again. We could not continue it much further though, as the twilight disappeared quickly and we had to go indoors.

CHAPTER V

THE GATHERING STORMS

As old memories rush to my mind, I am finding it almost impossible to put the incidents in chronological order. I have found it easy to allow one incident to lead me on to a similar one even if that happened years afterwards, instead of putting recollections down in the order of time. That is why I am going constantly backwards and forwards; and at this stage I intend to go back to the year 1905, the year of my father's dangerous illness as well as the year when Indian politics began to take a serious turn causing anxiety to all. I attained fifteen years of age in August of that year, and all the memories are firm and fresh in my mind. My father had moved on from the old ancestral house to a new one which he had purchased and named "Sevashrama" ("The House of Service"), in April 1905. This was near the centre of his activities—The Central Hindu College and The Theosophical Society. He was in splendid health when we came; but within ten days or so he was suddenly attacked by high fever and varied complications followed. The illness of my father, though it continued for many months, lost its edge by the time Mrs. Besant returned from her European and American tour of that year.

Lord Curzon was the Viceroy, and among his many wise and unwise acts was the partition of Bengal. At that time it created a tremendous furore; and on October 16,

1905, the date on which it was effected, Bengali Hindus all over the country decided to observe a day of mourning. They declared a boycott of British goods and encouraged the use of *Swadeshi* articles. They regarded the partition of what was to them more a country than a mere province, as a clever device on the part of an extraordinarily intelligent Viceroy for cutting the Hindu Bengal intelligentsia into two, and favouring Muslims at their expense. Sir Bamfylde Fuller, the first Lieutenant-Governor of the then newly-formed province of East Bengal, openly said: "I am like a man with two wives: one Hindu and one Muslim. If the first is unkind, I favour the other". He became very unpopular. Soon afterwards the story went round that Sir Bamfylde greeted some Indian students at a party in London and introduced himself to them. One of them mischievously called out loudly: "Are you the man with two wives, a Hindu and a Muslim?" No wonder the whole hall looked aghast and crowded round with amazed inquiries. The very circumstances in which Sir Bamfylde came to hold his office made him unpopular without any fault of his own. Something happened besides the adumbration of this doctrine of "political bigamy", because of which Sir Bamfylde resigned, and his resignation was immediately accepted by Lord Morley, the then Secretary of State for India. Perhaps this partition was not so bad as the one that was made in 1947 simultaneous with Indian independence and the creation of the new independent State of Pakistan. The partition was annulled in 1912 by a proclamation to that effect of His Majesty George V when he came to Delhi for his Coronation.

Whatever may be the feelings and opinions of various persons concerned now, at that time Hindu Bengal was very angry, and a terrific agitation was raised which continued almost unabated till the partition

was annulled. Surendra Nath Banerjea, the great orator of Bengal, one of the foremost leaders of public opinion of the day, was in the vanguard of this anti-partition movement. I remember his perfervid eloquence when speaking on the resolution against the partition, at the Banares Congress in December 1905. On the date of the partition, October 16, 1905, the Bengali students of the Central Hindu College came barefoot to the College as a mark of mourning. Mrs. Besant had come to know that there was going to be a demonstration of this sort. She had her own ideas of discipline among students, and she was a very strong-minded person. She was always determined to see a thing through when she once made up her mind. There were many Bengali members of the staff also, and she knew that all of them felt strongly about the partition. She did not know how things would shape themselves. She came to the College on that day and stood at the gate herself and sent back every student who arrived barefoot. She would have no political demonstrations inside the precincts of the College. She became very unpopular for a time, and was attacked in the press very vigorously. It was taken for granted that "her true colours were now revealed"; that "she was at best a representative of British imperialism"; that "all her work was a mere pretence"; and so on.

We are all familiar with the language of controversy —and political controversy is the mother of almost the worst language that one can think of. She vigorously defended her conduct—she seemed to be herself fond of controversies and entered into them always with zest. Some say she was a proud woman. Madame Blavatsky is reported to have told her: "You are as proud as Lucifer". I have never seen this pride in her; because a proud person simply does not care what another says, and generally walks away disdainfully without answering his opponent.

Mrs. Besant was keen on putting her own point of view to the persons who opposed her. I remember her vigorous address at the anniversary of the Central Hindu College that followed, when she said that politics were for the old and not for the young; and boys as high as this—and she bent low showing the height to be only about 3 feet—cannot be expected to know the merits and demerits of the partition of Bengal. It is for the elders, she said, to *practise* politics; the youngsters must only *study* them. The controversy, however, continued to rage round her. At a meeting in the College, the Bengali librarian, Ashutosh Chatterji, a versatile and almost an erratic genius—speaking in Bengali, irrelevantly introduced the partition episode. She managed to understand the reference and called him strictly and almost angrily to order, which confused the old gentleman very much indeed.

The Prince and Princess of Wales—later their Majesties King George V and Queen Mary—were to come to India soon afterwards; and the Congress was to meet in Banaras. The situation was severely tense; but Mrs. Besant held her ground. She had herself directly invited the Prince and the Princess to visit the Central Hindu College. I think she knew the Princess personally. It was not easy for local Government officials to gulp down the fact that she could arrange this visit over their heads. I am sure that, owing to their general unfriendly attitude towards the Central Hindu College—despite Mrs. Besant's stand in the matter of the partition of Bengal so far as the demonstration of the students was concerned—they would never have allowed this visit if the invitation had been sent through them.

Mrs. Besant had early realised the value of Swadeshi for the economic regeneration of our country and she was always pleading for Swadeshi. She herself wore Indian-

made cloth, having identified herself with our country, which she always said was her real Motherland; and she used to visit every week a Swadeshi bazar that had been organised in Banaras in the wake of the Swadeshi movement started after the partition of Bengal, and she would purchase many knick-knacks there. She was sufficiently interested in Indian politics even then, and in the condition of our countrymen abroad. She presided in Banaras over a lecture given by Mr. Polak—to whom India owes much for his work and suffering for our countrymen abroad—regarding the condition of Indians in South Africa, and delivered a strong speech, and gave the first contribution in money herself at the meeting. She however, wanted to keep students safe from all harm, and thought it best that they should grow up into manhood before plunging into active politics. She was very keen on character and hard study. These are important from every possible standpoint, to train the youth for proper manhood. Empty talk and unmeaning demonstrations without actual work, were not to her liking, and were even alien to her nature.

Swadeshi was nothing new to me. An old Maharashtra teacher of mine, Pandit Hari Bhatta Manekar, was a great Swadeshist, and had come under the spell of Mr. Tilak's teachings many years before the partition of Bengal. He used to encourage me and my cousins, whom he gave lessons at home, to use only Swadeshi articles, and very often brought *dhotis* for us from the village town of Mau, where there are still large numbers of weavers. It is an important little place in the district of Azamgarh, adjoining that of Banaras. The support to Swadeshi thus given by Mrs. Besant was valuable for the Central Hindu College, for most of her colleagues as Theosophists were internationalists in the political and economic sense, and be-

came Swadeshists only under her inspiration. I remember a speech in those days of Mr. Arundale, in the Nagari Pracharini Sabha Hall, when he said, putting forward the lapel of his coat: "I have got here only pure Swadeshi cloth"; adding with an amused smile: "It is all pure Manchester". His audience entered into the humour and gave him a tremendous burst of applause. They had been used to Mrs. Besant's use of the word "Swadeshi" which meant Indian to her also.

I remember the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales to the Central Hindu College very well. Because of the growing political agitation in the country, there was much anxiety felt, and the local officials wanted to post police guards inside the College compound. Mrs. Besant had her own principles, and she took full responsibility for the safety of the Royal guests and would not allow governmental authority to intrude on the College premises. The school cadets were drawn up all along the route, and the College authorities had decided that they would surround the Prince and Princess so that if there was any mishap of any sort, they should suffer first. The then Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces (as Uttar Pradesh of today was then called), Sir James Digges La Touche, had himself come to the College the previous evening, and gone round to satisfy himself that all was well.

The official arrangement was that the address on behalf of the College was to be given to the Prince and Princess as they sat in their car, which was just to stop for a moment (by the side of a large open quadrangle, surrounded on three sides with buildings, and on the fourth by a road), and then go away. The car stopped. Mrs. Besant went up to the Princess and asked her if she would not alight. Pink of courtesy as English royalty has always been known to be, the Princess herself opened the door of her car and

stepped out. The Prince followed. The casket with the address was put in the car and my little sister—Sushila—a great favourite of Mrs. Besant, was given a garland to put round the neck of the Princess. This little sister of mine was scarcely eight years of age at that time and the Princess was a tall person. The Princess graciously bent her head a little to allow my sister to put the garland round her; and Mrs. Besant lifted up my sister to enable her to do so. The party stayed for a few minutes shaking hands and chatting and then drove away.

This was in January 1906. In December 1905, the Indian National Congress had duly met in Banaras; had passed a resolution of welcome to the Prince and Princess after much opposition and many tense moments in the Subjects Committee; and had also strongly condemned the partition of Bengal. I believe all concerned heaved a sigh of relief when the car cleared the College compound without any incident, with the students rushing after it and giving the occupants a hearty send-off. The next morning Mr. Radice, the District Magistrate of Banaras, came to Mrs. Besant's residence to invite her to the guest-house of His Highness the Maharaja of Banaras whose guests their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales were. Mrs. Besant left a request with the Princess for autograph photographs for the Central Hindu College, of His Majesty King Edward VII as well those of the Prince and Princess themselves. These duly arrived later and were unveiled with much ceremony by Mrs. Besant, and continued to hang on the old walls for a long time.

There is one little incident in connection with this visit that may be worth recording, as casting a sidelight on a beautiful trait of Mrs. Besant's character. The school cadets—little boys all—were lining the route. Mrs. Besant wanted one of them—I believe it was Lok Bahadur Sah,

a very determined self-confident Nepali youngster—to take his stand a little on one side as his presence just there was interfering with some arrangement. She was going round looking after the arrangements herself just before the Royal party arrived. The little boy said quite firmly to this head of the institution at whose will everything there was moving, that he could not obey her order and that he was bound only to obey his commandant—another boy, by the way—and that she must speak to him. Another person in Mrs. Besant's position might have lost his temper; but not so Mrs. Besant. She realised that she had made a mistake; she praised the boy; she apologised; and I believe the necessary alignments were made according to her wishes after she had conveyed them to the "proper quarters." They say "no one is a hero to his valet"; that "familiarity breeds contempt"; that "no one improves on close acquaintance". All these general propositions were falsified in the case of Mrs. Besant. Perhaps she was the exception that proves the rule.

This description of the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales to the Central Hindu College enables me, with the reader's permission, to dilate a little on Mrs. Besant's general attitude regarding Royalty and the relations between England and India. She was a very loyal person and she was devoted to the Throne. She wanted every one to be the same. She had great respect for persons born to rule. In fact she extended this respect even to Indian Princes, who were by no means sovereign authorities in her time, and whose status was very often the subject of critical speculation. The independence of India and its status of a sovereign democratic republic, has abolished the Order. The Maharaja of Banares of the time—Sir Prabhu Narayan Singh—was a great friend of Mrs. Besant, and a great patron and benefactor of the Central Hindu College. He

was a fine gentleman and had much grace and dignity about him. Unfortunately his custom of receiving his visitors in audience was rather strange. He used to sit on a raised marble seat, and later as he aged, on a cane rocking chair, while his visitors sat on the carpet spread on the floor below. He received Europeans in another room round a large marble table, when all including himself sat on chairs of equal height. Mrs. Besant visited the Maharaja with my father one afternoon. They were ushered into the usual Darbar hall. It appears that the Maharaja sat on this raised seat, and Mrs. Besant and others sat on the carpet on the floor. I remember my father's talk with Mrs. Besant after this. Mrs. Besant did not seem to have minded it at all. She did not appear to have even thought of it. She argued with my father: "But, my dear, he is a Prince". He, however, felt that, at the least, the same kind of courtesy should be shown to Mrs. Besant at the palace, as was done to the British officials and their ladies. He wrote to the Maharaja's Chief Minister privately however, and at all subsequent visits to the Maharaja, Mrs. Besant was seated on a chair at the marble table.

It may perhaps interest my readers if I narrate a small incident here which shows how considerate Mrs. Besant was for the comfort and convenience of others, how anxious indeed she was to extend scrupulous courtesy to others, and how careless she was about her own "dignity" and "position". It was the year 1910 when she was touring about in the interest of her newly-formed Association "The Sons and Daughters of India". Mr. Arundale and a party of us students went over to Allahabad for a meeting to be addressed by her, and to which she came from another place. We were all guests of Shri Shirish Chandra Basu and stayed in his house in the city. After Mrs.

Besant's lecture in the evening, the party returned to the host's place. Pandit Motilal Nehru and Dr. Tej Bahadur Sapru unexpectedly called to see her. She had just settled down on the floor of her room, and her servant Lakshmana was giving her her usual cup of tea. I happened to be near by. She tried to rise to receive her visitors and asked for chairs which we rushed out to fetch for the visitors, there being none at the time in the room. The guests wore European clothes, as leading lawyers in India usually do, and sitting in those clothes on the floor is not convenient. They however quickly sat down on the floor themselves out of courtesy to her, and waived the chairs away. She really did not mind if she were seated down below on the floor and others on higher seats! There was really no social pride in her nature at all! But that did not mean that her colleagues also did not mind if they suspected any lack of proper respect on the part of others towards her!

When Mrs. Besant had such consideration for Indian Princes, her great respect for the Crowned Head of the British Empire can be easily appreciated. She often proposed that a member of the Royal Family should come out to India as the Viceroy so that the Princes of India may not suffer the indignity of having to take a lower place than a person of less exalted birth who came out as the representative of English Royalty, and thus took a higher place than themselves, some of whom thought they are descended from the Sun and the Moon, even though others were obviously creations of the disturbed times that followed the break-up of the Moghal Empire, and some were deliberately created for strategic purposes by the British themselves.

Mrs. Besant was always keen also on India becoming a self-governing partner in the British Commonwealth of

Nations. I believe the first person to use the word "Commonwealth" in this connection—later—instead of "Empire", was Mrs. Besant. She thought that India and England had been brought together for the good of the world, and that any breaking of their ties would spell disaster for mankind. I remember the opening words of the address that was presented to the Prince of Wales. They were grand and sonorous, and in Mrs. Besant's own best style: "We feel the happy augury of these auspicious days that bring the august representatives of the greatest modern Empire to the greatest centre of ancient Indian learning...."

The days, however, got worse and the political situation deteriorated rapidly. The first bomb was thrown in 1906, and the secret police flooded the land. Anxious must have been the days for all those who were in charge of the young, for the young were excited. They were full of hopes and fears; they wanted to be up and doing. Mrs. Besant herself was nervous; and her visits to the College became more frequent, and her talks to the boys more earnest. The Central Hindu College Parliament was founded by her. At its sittings, ceremonials of Westminster were solemnly repeated and free discussions were permitted. The idea of such Parliaments has caught on; and they are now found at most colleges and universities in India. Soon afterwards she founded her Order of the Sons and Daughters of India, into which we were all admitted with great ceremonial, where we pledged overselves to high and honest work, and where the elders vowed that they would not ask others to do what they were not prepared to do themselves. That was Mrs. Besant's method of harnessing youthful energy to good ends, and making sure that people did not incite the young to go into danger from which they themselves kept away. We founded night

school for workmen. We students ourselves taught in those night schools, and for some time I was supposed to have been the Principal of these.

In her talks during those days, she often spoke of Charles Bradlaugh and commended the methods of his work to us. She referred to him as "the dearest friend of my youth", and spoke of him as a "poor man's lawyer," and told us of his courage; of how he pushed back the garden gate of some rich country gentleman who was encroaching on the public road—such encroachments are not made only in India!— defying the person concerned to prosecute him; and how strong physically he was, though he never recovered from the rough handling he got in the House of Commons for his bold stand against the dogmatic theology of his time which made it incumbent on all persons to take oaths on particular occasions. Readers no doubt know that the entire credit must go to him for the option now given both in law courts and legislatures, to make solemn affirmation instead of taking oath to speak the truth or be loyal to the Constitution. All those who have conscientious objection to taking the oath have reason to be eternally grateful to Bradlaugh for his great work. I have myself often thanked him in my heart for it. For Mrs. Besant he remained the ideal of what a public worker should be, to the last of her own days. Mr. Bradlaugh was a great name in the early days of the Indian National Congress for his active sympathy for Indian political aspirations, and he would surely had been one of its Presidents if he had lived a little longer. A public hall in Lahore is named after him, as "The Bradlaugh Hall". His portraits could be found in many Indian homes, and I had hung one up in my rooms also on which I had enthusiastically inscribed one of his slogans: "The world is my country; to do good is my Religion."

Irresponsible governments will always look with suspicion at educational institutions. Such was the case, not very many decades ago, in Austria and Germany—perhaps it still is there; and so it was in Russia. So it was in India too. It is a case of what cannot be cured must be endured. We have all to grin and bear misfortunes as they come. There was not much trouble in our College any way, because the personal relations between the staff and the students were always cordial; and the students' hostels where usually such troubles rise, were in constant touch with the authorities. Mutual friendly converse used to let off steam, and Mrs. Besant's personal care and help in students' difficulties endeared her to everyone. Everyone trusted her.

A young man had been turned out of an official college in another town for having kept the picture of a Bengali revolutionary in his rooms. Friends of his wrote to me, and I brought the matter to the notice of Mrs. Besant. The young man was admitted into the Central Hindu College. It should be noted that the Central Hindu College was a purely non-official institution, and never accepted any financial assistance whatsoever from the Government, with Mrs. Besant at its head, though it was offered to my father, as secretary of the institution, personally, first by Sir James La Touche and again by Sir James (later Lord) Meston when they were heads of the Province. Later this young man rose high in Government service. There was another young man who had been ordered to be whipped for his activities in a Bengal school. The irate father brought him out of the school and came to Mrs. Besant who admitted him in her College. Curiously enough that young man rose very high in the service of the Bengal Government—and in the education department too!

Not only in politics but also in other matters, Mrs.

Besant helped her boys. There was a young man who would fail again and again in his examinations. The Principal Mr. Collie, got tired of him and said he must go and try his luck in some other college. The matter reached Mrs. Besant's ear and she, like a very reasonable person, naturally thought that failure at examinations was not a sufficiently heinous crime to send a young man away. He remained in the College to try his luck again and to fail again. Mrs. Besant had a great memory for faces—a great and necessary quality in leaders. This young man happened to pass Mrs. Besant as she was coming down the steps of the College one afternoon. I was very near. Mrs. Besant stopped him and asked him if his case had been satisfactorily settled. He said it was and thanked her. This was Shivaprasad Gupta, later the well known patriot and very generous philanthropist whose horizontally large size gave occasion to Mr. Arundale to indulge in a pleasant joke at a public meeting. As Shivaprasad came in, Mr. Arundale said: "Take a few chairs, Mr. Gupta."

Mr. Arundale was always a very ready-witted person, and his humour was always chaste and delightful. During Mr. Besant's tour in Scotland (1911) when she was accompanied by Mr. Arundale, Krishnamurti and Nityanandam—and I too formed a member of the party—we came to Dundee. My memory of it is that it is a city of great contrasts: beautiful natural Scottish scenery on the one hand, and chimneys belching out smoke from huge factories on the other. Mrs. Besant asked Mr. Arundale to show us round the town. We issued out of the hotel. Mr. Arundale hailed the first taxi and pulling out a crown from his pocket and handing it over to the driver, said most nonchalantly: "Give us five shillings worth of Dundee!" I do not know whether the careful Scotsman at the wheel did give us five shillings worth of motor drive.

My own memory is that he gave us a quick spin round and very soon deposited us back at the hotel! As a matter of fact, Mr. Arundale himself was not keen on going out that day at all and was glad to come back so soon.

Then Mrs. Besant would also send little messages of cheer and goodwill to students who were ill and ailing. There were two brothers, Senapati and Gajapati, in the boarding house; they were very popular. Later they moved on to a house of their own. The balustrades of their new house were not ready, and the elder brother tumbled off and came down three sheer storeys. He survived; but his legs were permanently injured. He could never walk again. He was taken to the hospital, where he remained for long months. Here he received a letter from somewhere outside India from Mrs. Besant sending a word of sympathy and cheer. This young man, to the sorrow of all who knew him, depressed by physical ailments and serious domestic bereavement on the death of his wife, committed suicide some years later.

Another Principal of the College in the old days that comes to my memory, was Mr. Collins. He was a kindly Englishman, and it was the easiest thing in the world to get a holiday from him. Students are proverbially fond of holidays, and no wonder he was very popular because he readily gave them. One of the funny systems in north India is what is called a rainy holiday. Rain falls in torrents there during what are known as the monsoon months. They immediately follow the hot summer of about three months and practically continue for about six; and though very welcome, greatly disturb normal work, particularly studies after the long summer vacation. The idea is that boys ill-equipped with umbrellas and mackintoshes because of their poverty, should not be expected to come to their schools and colleges when it is rain-

ing, as they are bound to get wet; and if they have to continue in that condition for five or six hours, they are equally bound to get ill. Not unoften even in large towns one has to wade waist-deep in water on the main thoroughfares after a heavy downpour. The situation in the countryside is very much worse.

Mr. Collins would give us leave even when there was the slightest rainfall about the time the college classes began. Even if the boys were not at all wet, some of them would stand under eves or pipes and get purposely wet and appear like that in the prayer hall where attendance was taken and prayers said before the day's work began. These boys would sit in the front benches and ask for a holiday as soon as the attendance had been taken and prayers recited. Mr. Collins would feel their coats and finding them wet declare a holiday. I remember one year my father telling a colleague of his in the management of the College, how astounded he was to find that out of 365 days of the preceding year, 206 had been holidays for one reason or another during Mr. Collins' Principalship. I was at school when he was the Principal and had really no direct dealings with him; but I remember him well, as in the very early years, the schoolboys and the College students sat together for attendance and prayers. When the institution grew, they used to sit separately in different halls.

Mrs. Besant was fond of having first-hand information of the various facets of Hindu life. In those days *Sabhas*, that is, gatherings of Samskrit pandits were common. At these *Sabhas*, learned folk would discuss various knotty points very learnedly. Samskrit pandits unfortunately, as a general rule, are not very cultured in the graces of social intercourse; they invariably raise their voices very high and discuss little problems of grammar or logic with

tremendous vigour. The person who invites a *Sabha* gives as a parting gift to each of these men of learning, presents of cash and sweets and even shawls if he is rich enough, as honoraria. These *Sabhas* were common in my family in the old days; both my uncle and my father were always great admirers of Samskrit, and friends of men versed in the ancient lore. My father is a profound scholar of Samskrit himself, and my uncle, though not so learned in the inside of books, was much more familiar, and of very many more than my father, with their outside. He had a vast store of information about rare Samskrit manuscripts, and at his desire I copied out a whole rare *Smriti* from the India Office in London, borrowed for me by my University authorities, when I was a student at Cambridge, and sent it to him.

I remember one of these *Sabhas* at our ancestral house in the heart of the city of Banares, to which the family invariably moved in the old days whenever there was any marriage, or any other important ceremonial was to be performed. There was a great gathering of learned Pandits of the time; and I remember Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Gangadhar Shastri, a tall slim figure, holding his own in a vigorous discussion which I could not follow. Mrs. Besant was present and was attending to the talk most earnestly. Pandit Gangadhar Shastri was perhaps the most learned Samskrit scholar of his time, and it goes to the credit of the then Government of India that it recognised his merit and gave him a C.I.E., *i.e.*, Companionship of the Indian Empire, besides the Mahamahopadhyayaship. Governments do not necessarily recognise and decorate the really deserving. This great Pandit, when first he saw Mrs. Besant, was so struck at the sight that he instinctively and spontaneously cried out: "Sarva-shukla Saraswati"— (here comes) the all-white Goddess of Learning (Saraswati)".

In June 1908 I was just completing my eighteenth year when I was married. I have seen in my father's old papers a pledge that he seems to have taken under the inspiration of Mrs. Besant, not to marry his daughters before they were in their 11th year and their sons before they were in their 18th year, and not to allow consummation of these marriages before their 14th and 21st years respectively. These ages seem to be ridiculous today; but they stood for much reform fifty years ago. I had a letter from Mrs. Besant on the occasion. I have it still. I reproduce it below:

Telegrams:
Olcott, Madras.

Theosophical Society,
Adyar, Madras, S.
June 20, 1908
Melbourne.

My dear Prakasa,

Your father tells me that you are to be married this month and I must write to send you and your bride my cordial love and blessing. When you see more of the world and of the women of other races, you will learn to appreciate more than you can yet do, the priceless value of the Indian wife, of her purity, her loyalty, her single-minded devotion. She has the disadvantage of a too limited view of life and of too narrow interests; but if, during your absence, your young wife devotes herself to study and learns to understand the larger view, she will be on your return, a real helpmate, a woman in whom your heart and brain will alike find rest and joy.

Dear lad, young India has a difficult road, between old thoughts and new endeavours. But it also has the splendid opportunity of welding together the old life and the new. In this country, where democracy has its way, and ignorant numbers rule, one feels, more intensely than ever, the coarsening and vulgarising effects on a nation of

the masses wielding power before character and wide views of life have been reached. And they are not happy: they are rowdy and noisy, but discontented. I look to you as one of the young men who may do much for India if you can learn prudence without chilling enthusiasm, and keep a warm heart under the direction of a wise brain. May you grow into all that those who love you hope for.

Your affectionate grandmother,
Annie Besant

I think it is a very beautiful as well as a very wise letter. It came all the way from Australia whence she brought a pretty blanket as a present to my wife which I happen still to have with me as a prized memento both of Mrs. Besant and my wife. It showed her personal interest in a boy—both in his present and his future. It showed that she had made up her mind that she would see to it that I was sent abroad for higher studies. I doubt if I had any idea then that I would go out of India; but I remember that after this letter I did make up my mind to go out at any cost. It shows how she realised the shortcomings of the Indian home and how keenly she felt that with a little care, the home could be made better and brighter. It also shows how high in her esteem stood the Indian woman, and how unfair we were in not realising her value. And it gives indications of her ideas about the future world and her appreciation of the shortcomings of existing political and social ideologies in the West in her time.

SOME PROBLEMS OF LIFE

I HAVE said before that my father was very argumentative when an opinion was expressed with which he did not agree; but when the opinion was the same as his, no arguments were necessary. I was always an extremist, though extremism in India has now gone so far that persons like me are almost back numbers. I know this, however, that I was a source of anxiety to all who loved me. I often argued with my father and received many rebuffs from him. I also remember how he earnestly counselled patience and commonsense when I fought with all and sundry at railway stations, because they used to reserve benches on the platforms 'for Europeans only', and I insisted on sitting on them. My father used to be very nervous, and took me often to odd corners and reasoned with me. I believe he was really worried about my safety. So far as he himself was concerned, he did not hesitate to express his views and act in accordance with them whenever occasion so demanded. At heart, however, he was really always loyal not only to the British connection but to the British Government itself. He had much respect for the English people also as such. He had served the British Government of India as a magistrate for about ten years in his younger days. He has also, I think, much regard for hereditary position, and may be said to be, in a way, very class conscious. He has, I fear, very little regard for persons who happen to succeed after struggling in the world, or the professions. His class sympathy is international. Curiously enough he was quite upset at Russian noblemen having been driven to sell match boxes and shoe laces in public streets, as a result of the Revolution. If anyone speaks of the "accident of birth," he is invari-

ably silenced by an angry remonstrance of: "What about the accident of the long tongue? What about the accident of the cunning brain?" The interlocutor dare not argue further, though I think there is a flaw in my father's argument, and much can be said in reply. It has therefore been, I fear, difficult for him as for many other elderly persons, may be, or other reasons, to adjust himself to the changed environments of the land in the wake of Independence with its own urges and ambitions.

My father must have been a magistrate very much out of the way, for he has never visited Naini Tal, the recognised Mecca for all government servants of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (now Uttar Pradesh), the summer capital of the State Government in British times. When I was coming down with him from Ranikhet on a motor bus so late as 1928, and passed the turning whence a road branches off to Naini Tal, on our way to Kathgodam—the nearest railway station for those hills—I casually said I was sorry we had not seen beautiful Naini Tal on that trip, though he must have seen it many times. He said he had never seen it at all. "Not even when you were a Deputy Collector?" I asked. "No", he said. I do not know if there has been any other Deputy Collector of those days in the United Provinces who had not been to Naini Tal, for some reason or another. Rest and recreation after hard work is one pretext; recuperation of damaged health is another;—when the real reason was, more often than not, to secure some influence there to get a lift, to supersede some contemporaries, or to obtain a transfer from a less to a more desirable station. My father was always a very respected officer and never cared to secure any influence whatsoever for anything. Hopes had been held out to him of higher offices than were then usually open to Indians; but he decided to resign Government ser-

vice in order to take up the work of honorary secretary of the Central Hindu College, at the desire of Mrs. Besant. His resignation was greatly regretted in 'high official quarters'. Mr. Ross-Scott, a Judicial Commissioner of Oudh, spoke of this regret to Mrs. Besant, who mentioned the fact in *The Theosophist*. So my father never went to Naini Tal; and even more than 40 years after he resigned from Government service, if I happened to meet while travelling, any of his contemporaries of the various districts in which he had served, and if they learned who I was, they almost rushed to embrace me, expressing the highest praise of my father's work and worth, and lovingly related incidents of his days in Government service.

Though vast changes have taken place in the land since those far-off days, I think my father, now over 85 years of age, is not at all satisfied with the shape of things. We are now a free people and have declared ourselves a sovereign democratic republic. His old ideal of Indo-British Commonwealth, I think, still appears to him to have been a proper solution to our difficulties. Except in the very early days when he felt that Mahatma Gandhi would help towards the recovery of India's lost soul, he was never attracted either by his personality or his political aspirations. Gandhiji's philosophy of life seemed to him to be all wrong. The goal of national freedom had no pull for him. To him they have always been and still are—meaningless words. His ideal is apparently simple and doubtless fundamental. He wants happiness for all, and thinks that that can be best secured and truly ensured by good and wise men ruling for the good of all: to put it in his own words, he wants the rule of the Higher Self over the lower.

The problem of what is high and what is low remains, however, as before to baffle our minds. It continues to

clamour for a solution, if there is one. Moral judgments in the best of minds may be perhaps only based on conventional conceptions of right and wrong for the time being; and it is also not impossible that unconsciously our own biases and personal circumstances may influence our judgment. The fundamental challenge of democracy still remains: even if those who regard themselves as 'good' judge from their own standards others as 'evil', should not these others so judged have a chance to say that the boot is really on the other leg; and that in any case they should have their share in administration and legislation so that their well-being may not be neglected, as they too have to bear the burden of taxation and to take their own heavy share in the carrying on of the world's work? They can justly feel that they have reason to fear that the good, so-called, may suppress them completely, calling them evil, and deprive them of all to which they are legitimately entitled. Then Democracy's challenge goes further still. Its ideal is not to get mere happiness for all under benevolent despotism, even if that were possible, which it seriously doubts. It wants everyone to be trained and equipped to take constant, intelligent and effective interest in the affairs of the State, and be ever prepared to shoulder the burden and responsibility of office if necessary. Democracy requires everyone to be always ready to fight for freedom and self-government, and not to be satisfied with mere happiness as ordinarily understood. The challenge of Socialism is perhaps even more clear and serious.

I believe Mrs. Besant, with her own experience of her early years of strife and struggle, had at the bottom, a sense of values different to that of my father. I think, though, that she often came under the spell of my father's logic, and was affected by my father's learning and earnestness; and in the new-found idealism and in her quest for a

new world of peace and goodwill, she agreed with my father when he talked to her of India's ancient thought and how the great Rishis of old had solved the problems of life for all time; and how their solutions still hold good, and how the world could still be saved if the ancient remedies were applied to modern ills. I have personally no doubt that at heart she remained to the last what she was in the beginning, a great democrat and a greater socialist.

The ordinary man of the world—and I count myself no better and no worse—with his struggle and his difficulty, with his search for immediate solutions of immediate problems, with his impatience at idealistic theory and with his demand for concrete practical suggestions, asks: "Did the ancients solve their problems only for themselves, or did they do so for all mankind?" Are not their solutions confined to merely verbal quibbling however noble the language, however elevating the thought, when we look at the simple fact that their own existence had been made possible only because others had not solved those problems in their way, but continued to live the ordinary life of the world in a manner contrary to the one prescribed by them. Verily the task of world-mending is unending, and at best an individual, however great, can do but little. It is something if he can even genuinely help himself.

So my father still continues to think in terms of simple goodness and happiness, even when he is fully abreast of the latest thought and doings of man in all the varied spheres of the world's activity, and surprises even experts by the extent of his reading and information on their own subjects. I once remember an out-and-out Marxist socialist —who was all for Lenin and Stalin—utterly amazed, after a talk with my father at his actually knowing more of the subject and conditions in Russia than the socialist himself did. My father is equally at home in any subject one can

think of, and invariably astounds his visitors by his well-informed conversation. The extent of his intellectual information and the depth of his knowledge are truly wonderful. I am amazed as to how he has been able to study and retain so much. My father's ardent desire however is to be left in peace, and I doubt if he wants any very drastic changes in the body politic. His test is the cardinal test of happiness, which, after all, everyone fundamentally seeks. I do not, however, think after an analysis of both Mrs. Besant's thought and work, that her standpoint was exactly what my father's is; and it is possible that sometimes her simple words in answer to simple queries were liable to be misunderstood or misinterpreted.

I remember an occasion when my father asked Mrs. Besant in my presence at our house whether people in Europe were happier than in India. "No", she replied. He was satisfied: he said as much. I was not. I felt then even as a boy, and I feel still, that freedom is greater than happiness—we shall not quarrel about words, for the quarrel will never end, and not only these but every word will have to be quarrelled over endlessly. Even at that time I was bursting to argue—but dared not. Though Mrs. Besant said what she did, I must say, with all respect, that after my own visit to Europe, I doubt if we in India are in any way happier—in whatever sense the word may be taken—than our brethren in Europe. A scholar and philosopher, however, like my father, with his traditions and various advantages he has had, cannot perhaps be expected to take the same point of view as regards political freedom and spiritual happiness as ordinary persons of the world. Mrs. Besant was not a philosopher in that sense, and her active life and work in varied spheres for human betterment, are evidence that I can produce at least to my own satisfaction. We must also not forget that Mrs. Besant

had more or less a comfortable and sheltered existence in India; and her nearest contacts here were only with the well-to-do; and so she had less personal knowledge of our sorrows and difficulties than she had of the common people in England. It is also possible that she regarded the contentment of our masses, despite their impossible physical conditions, as real happiness. The masses of Europe are very different indeed to ours in this respect.

Miss Arundale, a great devotee of Mrs. Besant, aunt of her successor to the presidentship of The Theosophical Society, seemed to me to have had a closer touch with reality. I have a fear that my father was like many others who, not having seen Europe at first hand, have not altogether correct notions of things there as reflected in literature. We read of divorces in America: the even tenor of the life of happy families is not recorded in the daily press. One out here gets the idea that America is full of divorcees; and that almost every marriage ends in a divorce. In our condition of political subjugation and practical outcastes among nations, we, like all suppressed peoples, often felt an unholy delight when we read and heard of evils in others; and regardless of the beams in our own eyes, looked at the motes in others with microscopes which we felt they themselves had supplied, but which they in their turn used to expose evils among themselves with the desire of curing them, and utilised their talents and endeavours to eradicate them. American families, so far as I can learn from Americans I meet, are also as happy as any can be; and on the other hand there are heaps and heaps of divorces in India allowed and even encouraged by custom although the law does not recognise them officially; and there is plenty of domestic cruelty and unhappiness besides, to which we conveniently shut our eyes. We do not record them; we do not care for them;

and we think they do not exist. I most earnestly hope that in the set-up of Swaraj, conditions will change; and we shall drop our ostrich policy and look at facts and actively work to remove undoubted evils.

My father asked Miss Arundale once whether English families were happier than Indian. "The sum total of happiness and unhappiness", the wise and careful lady replied, "is practically the same; but the English happy family", she went on to say, "is happier than the Indian happy family." This is perfectly true, because in a happy English family there is great sympathy and understanding between the wife and the husband who are true helpmates to each other, which they are not here particularly in educated middle-class families. Even so Count Tolstoy's dictum rings true: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

I should like to break off here for a few moments and discuss the problem that was very serious for me in my boyhood and youth, and may perhaps be not without interest even now. Orthodox Hindus flocked in large numbers under Mrs. Besant's banner in the early days of The Theosophical Society; and my fear is that on the whole her influence on her Hindu friends was not very conducive to a true appreciation of social values. Mrs. Besant spoke enthusiastically of Hindu customs, and found a scientific explanation for many that to the social reformer appeared positively evil and harmful. She doubtless brought back a pride for Hinduism at a time when scepticism was sweeping over the land: that was certainly all for the good. I fear, however, very often she went too far, for many of our people started thinking that even their bad customs were good, and quoted Mrs. Besant as their authority. Times have changed. The conditions of life have changed. Men have changed with the times and conditions. Even my father's opinions have

undergone change, though he does not think so. In the matter of marriage and *pardah*, in the use of beads and silks, in the matter of shaving the head on the death of a relative or the offering of libations to the souls of the dead, I find a great change in my own house, so far as outward expressions are concerned; and my father is still luckily for us, the head of it as he was decades ago. To many of us the dictum of George Bernard Shaw applies, inasmuch as we have come to regard those beliefs to be superstitious that have ceased to be our own.

Old Samskaras, old habits and conventions of body and mind, however, are not easily changed; and I really believe that at bottom my father is still a very orthodox man. He has to adapt himself to changing conditions, as all wise men have to, if they are not prepared entirely to abolish themselves. If his writings are closely examined, I fear even when he is preaching the essential unity of all religions, his words are tendentious, and ultimately he feels the superiority of what he thinks were the old Hindu ideals of life and conduct, and makes earnest, elaborate, painful and even artificial attempts to read them into the teachings of other faiths also as a support to his own conclusions. At his present advanced age of 85, he continues to work hard for long hours every day interpreting old thoughts; and only a few years back he brought out a book containing some thousands of Samskrit slokas composed by himself, in an attempt to speak direct to the Samskrit Pandits, and give them his interpretations of the texts of their sacred books regarding social organisation, and tell them how they can save themselves if they like, from the ruin that otherwise inevitably faces them. He is as much concerned as any Hindu can be, at the diminishing numbers of his co-religionists because of conversions to other

faiths, their mutual dissensions and their ever-decreasing influence on world affairs.

My father is a man of very simple personal habits; and not many modern industries have reason to be grateful to him for encouragement. I think even the number of cakes of soap he has used in his life, can be counted on one's fingers' ends, for he believes in giving a fearful rubbing with a rough wet towel to his body in his bath instead of gently applying scented soaps to it. He has never purchased any sofas or padded chairs, and has always believed in hard furniture. The appointments of his home, the manner of his food and clothing, are all very simple and old-fashioned.

One of the greatest achievements of Mrs. Besant, I think, is to have got my father to do her work. He is not a person who would oblige anyone by doing anything readily at his desire, let alone bidding. But Mrs. Besant's work he did. He wrote books at her wish and helped her work in every way. If only my father had written in Hindi, his own language, he would have been read by thousands of his own countrymen who would doubtless then have enthusiastically spread his doctrines and thus attracted the learned of other lands, who in their turn would have eagerly translated his works. He largely wrote in English and wanted to appeal only to a select few in many lands. He seemed to be satisfied by attracting the attention of a limited number of thoughtful people in the various countries of the world than millions in his own.

I was told by a friend who had spent some time with the great poet Rabindranath Tagore at his University of Shantiniketan, that it was a matter of deep regret to him that my father has not been appreciated by his countrymen as he deserved to be; and he particularly blames us of the Hindi-speaking regions to which my father himself be-

longs, for not having taken full advantage of his presence among them. Tagore himself was an outstanding example of how even an Indian of his day, despite the political subjugation of his country in his time, and of the limitations in which his life was cast, could bring his thought to the fore if he was great enough and wrote in his own tongue. Tagore may have become a world figure after getting the Nobel Prize for literature, but he was very well known in Bengal before then; and Bengalis were constantly on the lookout to compel the world to recognise him. Though my father has written hundreds of stray articles in Hindi, his main works are in English; and his message has therefore been confined to very few, and has not been heeded by the multitude to whom ultimately all proposals for human betterment have to be directed. To me it is a pity that when he turned his thoughts to an Indian language, he should have chosen Samskrit, which, without meaning any harm, is in a way a dead language, instead of a living growing spoken language; and Hindi, which is his language, is by no means poor and has no reason to be ashamed of its history or tradition. Free India has recognised it as her national language. It is the language which has been used by some of the greatest of writers of all time. It is possible my father wrote in English also for the reason that he wrote for Mrs. Besant, and wanted her to understand him directly, and spread his thoughts herself throughout the world in her language.

In any case Mrs. Besant was able to induce him to write; but she was not able to induce him to travel to foreign lands. He has always hated travelling, and so has not been able to get into personal touch with others, which gives greater inspiration and compels attention more quickly than a distant reputation for learning. Even today

if any one would like to get at the root of his philosophy of life, he asks him to read his books. He declines to give the enquirer a rough outline of his thought in a short hour or so which the questioner busy with his own life's work, naturally prefers. It may be that a short talk may rouse the enquirer's curiosity sufficiently to induce him to read the original books. He has also never cared to attract persons who might attach themselves to him and form a group for the effective spreading of his ideas and the clarification of his views. Moreover, his chief books being in English—and the latest in Samskrit—they cannot be read by most of those who seek spiritual assitance from him. And more curious than anything, though my father was closely associated with the greatest orator of her and his time, he was never induced to cultivate the art of speaking. He does not like to speak *ex tempore;* and all his speeches, whether at public meetings or in select gatherings or even in the Central Legislative Assembly, have been most carefully and elaborately prepared manuscripts, though it is an axiomatic truth that the spoken word is more powerful than the written one, at least as long as the author is living and can speak directly if he likes.

I personally do not understand why in the old days Theosophists were so keen on supporting and upholding most of the old customs of the Hindus and giving scientific explanations of them, even when non-Hindu Theosophists did not really follow these in their own lives though they preached them in their books and speeches. Mrs. Besant used to be very eloquent on Hindu rites and ceremonies, and I remember to have got quite upset now and then sitting among the audience and listening to what I thought —I speak with all respect—nonsense. In one of her lectures when she was talking of the offering of water and other things to the souls of the dead, and how the same

was very helpful, I said to Miss Willson who was sitting next to me: "I do not believe all that". Miss Willson was angry. No one could be a more faithful friend and disciple than Miss Willson. She was a very good friend to my family and very devoted to Mrs. Besant. She turned round on me, saying quite angrily: "Do you mean to say Mrs. Besant is talking fibs?" "I never meant that", I said, "I simply do not believe in what she is propounding". "In English that simply means," Miss Willson continued, red in the face, "that she is lying". Miss Willson was English and I am not. I cannot pretend to know the language well enough even now to understand the delicate shades of the meanings of English words: then I was very young besides. I doubt, all the same, if my words could be interpreted as she interpreted them, and I think one can legitimately doubt the efficacy of such ceremonials without being suspected of imparting motives to those who did. I do not think Mrs. Besant or Miss Willson ever offered water themselves to their dead ancestors.

The only explanation that I can find to Mrs. Besant's preaching of that time, was her intense desire to stem the wave of utter scepticism that was then sweeping over educated Hindu India, resulting in their seeing nothing but evil in everything that belonged to themselves, and nothing but good in everything that belonged to others. All praise must go to Mrs. Besant that she roused an apathetic and sleeping people from their slumbers; revived in their hearts their fast-dying sense of self-respect and pride in themselves, their traditions and their past; and compelled them to find their feet and seek their place among the great nations of the world. She was probably sure that the proper equilibrium would at last be found between the two extremes, and that all would be well in the end. Mr. Srinivasa Shastri was right when, paying his tribute

to Mrs. Besant after her death, he 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."

I owe much to Miss Willson, and I cannot forget that during my father's illness after Mrs. Besant had left for Europe in 1905, she was a most capable and devoted nurse for months on end. I learnt the art of nursing from her. She taught us how to carry out doctors' instructions, how to keep a chart, how to give medicines, read the thermometer, and a thousand and one details that a nurse must know. Miss Willson used to give lessons in English to my mother which were all wasted. Another person who tried to teach English to my mother—also without success—was Miss Davies, afterwards Mrs. Ransom. Miss Willson and she lived in contiguous rooms in Shanti Kunj a long time and were good friends. Both of them kindly corrected my conversational English, all which correction was of very great help to me. Miss Willson knew German and French also, and once translated in English an elaborate and enthusiastic tribute that had been paid to my father by a French writer, M. Andre Chevrillon, in his book on his travels. I met this gentleman and had lunch with him when in Paris during the Christmas of 1913. He and his family welcomed me most heartily, and I spent a pleasant afteroon with them at St. Cloud, when he presented to me a copy of that book.

Miss Willson would allow no criticism of Mrs. Besant, and was her faithful attendant to the last in her illness. The effect of that incessant nursing told upon her. She lost her memory almost completely, and she was a pathetic figure when last I saw her in December 1936, when she stayed with us in Banaras: she could not recollect my

father's rooms in our house in which she used to work for hours every day for months; not even her own portrait hanging there. Most sad of all, she did not recollect 'Shanti Kunj', the house in which she lived with Mrs. Besant for many years. She recognised no one of Banaras except my father to whom she had been a very good friend indeed. She constantly remembered 'A.B.'—the familiar initials by which Mrs. Besant was known and referred to by all her colleagues. Miss Willson died not very long afterwards. Mrs. Besant so inspired all those who came in contact with her that not only they themselves forbore from criticising her in any way, but strongly resented even a most friendly criticism of her made by any one.

I remember a scene in Harrogate where I was staying in the premises of The Theosophical Society's branch there (1913). Next door lived Mr. and Mrs. Hodgson-Smith, very old Theosophists, venerable with age and very respected. They had made a communicating door and would walk in from their house to ours through this and spend an evening with us. Mr. Hodgson-Smith, though old, with a long white beard, was still agile enough to jump on to the sills of his windows and brush and clean the window panes himself, with his legs dangling inside the rooms and his back to the street leaning most dangerously. Once Mr. Hodgson-Smith began by saying: "Let us talk of Mrs. Besant; we all like her so much." He started giving some reminiscences, and there was a mild, dim, distant and very affectionate criticism of her in one of these. One of the ladies present, Miss Fuller, began crying. Tears ran down her face and she said: "I cannot stand any criticism of Mrs. Besant." The conversation was immediately turned.

I myself have been sufficiently under her spell. Some years ago I happened to be dining with a very high

European official in the Government of India. I had spoken in the Central Legislative Assembly of my association with Mrs. Besant in order to assure everyone, when I was criticising government, of my love for the English people as such even when I stood against their rule in India, for every country has a right to be free and no one country has any right or justification to rule over another. This high official started chaffing me and made some insinuations against Mrs. Besant which he wanted me to confirm. I said to him: "I have played as a child in Mrs. Besant's lap, and I will not have that." The wife realised the indiscretion of the husband and turned the conversation very quickly, saying: "Mr. Sri Prakasa was only a child at the time, how can he know?" I do not think there would be many who are so free from criticism behind their backs and who have had so many unknown defenders as Mrs. Besant.

I have already said I was not a very pleasant student at school or college for the authorities, and I was always getting into some trouble or other. The authorities, however, were good to me, and I always received the greatest amount of consideration and affection from them. Some of my fellow students, I fear, suspected that it was due to my being the son of the much respected honorary Secretary of the college and one of its chief founders. I personally do not think so, for the same consideration was extended to all, however much their inferiority complex might drive them to think otherwise. I am talking of 1907, when I was in the tenth or the highest class of the High School, and Mr. Arundale was the Headmaster. The student movement was strong in the country, and authorities were anxious. However they may have treated students elsewhere, the authorities of the Central Hindu College, under the inspiration of Mrs. Besant, were scru-

pulously considerate and sympathetic, and took much personal interest in them, especially the more active-minded, who might be regarded either as 'naughty' or 'high-spirited' from different points of view. They attended most of the students' meetings and themselves addressed them. Mrs. Besant used often to visit the college and give talks to the students. She also had private talks with many.

My class had occasion once to quarrel with the Assistant Headmaster, Shri Shyam Sundar Das, who deserves all praise for his affectionate concern for the students, and for his unique services to the cause of Hindi, now declared the national language of India, but then very much ridiculed and discarded, to which he gave his whole life with rare devotion, battling against heavy odds, both private and public. I do not think I realised the value of the man as I do today. He had gone out of the class for a few moments, and as is not unusual, the students made a big noise in that interval. He came back and angrily inquired who was making the noise. The students used to sit in the alphabetical order, and as my name began with an "S", I was seated on the last bench. He started asking one student after another as to who had made the noise. Everybody said he did not know. At last came my turn. I said, little realising what I was doing: "I know, but I will not tell you". The teacher was angry and ordered the whole class to be detained after the school hours, a form of punishment then in vogue. Being the highest class, with a set of troublesome students, he detained himself as well to make sure that we really were detained, and that one of the junior teachers in charge of the detention class was not bullied by us in any way. The incident was over. I believe it affected Mr. Arundale, the Headmaster, and he seems to

have consulted Mrs. Besant in the matter. He himself came round that evening to my house, to my surprise, to talk over it, and I think I assured him that it was all right and that I had no grievance. I also assured him that it gave me much consolation to know that both Mrs. Besant and he thought that I was right in not giving away any class fellow and allowing the whole class including myself to be punished. Sometime later Mrs. Besant indirectly referred to this incident in one of her lectures in the school hall and commended the standpoint of the students.

When the academic year was closing, Mr. Arundale was leaving for England for a holiday. Many functions were arranged in his honour to bid Miss Arundale and him farewell. Miss Arundale herself was an ideal teacher and used to give most illuminating lessons to the lower classes of the school. The main function was a send-off in the school hall and the unveiling of Mr. Arundale's portrait—presented by the students—by Mrs. Besant herself. I was put down as one of the speakers, and the self-same Assistant Headmaster, who was in charge of the school for the time being, wanted us all to show him our speeches beforehand. In my own speech, in the midst of praises of Mr. Arundale—and they were all well-deserved—I had also put in some criticism, which also, let me hope, was not entirely undeserved, for what human being is perfect, and as Lord Morley says in his "Recollections", the best judges of a man are his office assistants, that is, those who are under his control, his subordinates in some way or other. Mr. Arundale with his bubbling humour, was himself among the first to recognise that he was not perfect! And it was a good thing for us, his students, that he was not! A more human man it would be difficult to meet; and that accounts for his popularity wherever he went. Shri Shyam Sundar Das insisted that I

should take those portions off. I was equally adamant, and so I was dropped out. Mrs. Besant came to know of it, and a visit from her to my house followed. She went into my mother's rooms; and seeing her in the house I naturally ran after her. The usual ordinary inquiries about everybody's welfare followed, and then Mrs. Besant said to me as if quite casually: "What is the trouble about your speech, Prakasa"? I said: "There was some objection to some words in my speech and I could not understand why there should be that objection." "May I see it?" she asked. I brought it out; and after reading it, she said: "I see nothing wrong". Then I pointed out the words that were objected to. She very nicely said: "Then why not take them out?" I had really no option left. How could one insist after that? The words were taken out. I was again put down in the programme and the function passed off most successfully and gave joy to everyone.

It may amuse readers to know that one of the functions arranged in honour of the departing Headmaster, Mr. Arundale, was an address by the "D" club, a College students' amateur dramatic society with a Donkey as its crest. The address began with a superfluity of D's—it need hardly be added that it was drafted by Mr. Arundale himself: "We, your fellow donkeys of the 'D' club dare to declaim on the date of your departure.... their deep devotion and dutiful dependence...." Mr. Arundale had just then given up smoking. He had been an inveterate smoker—specially of pipes—and he sported, like any Cambridge undergraduate, quite a number of them on the mantlepiece of his old residence "Gyan Geha"—"The House of Wisdom"— built originally for and named after Mr. Gyanendra Nath Chakravarty by his life-long friend Mr. Bertram Keightley, who had been a colleague of

Madame Blavatsky in the earliest days of the Theosophical Society. This house was later purchased by Mrs. Besant, and together with her own house, "Shanti Kunj", contiguous to it on the eastern side, bequeathed to the Indian Section of The Theosophical Society housed further east. The whole now forms one large compound. It was here that Mr. Arundale used to take great pains to prepare members of the 'D' Club for their prescribed parts in the dramas that were staged, and in which he himself used to take an important part. I believe some idea had got afloat that smoking was not good for the spiritual life, and so smokers at the Central Hindu College were giving it up. They started burning incense sticks under their noses as a substitute, and this became a fashion too. Mr. Arundale took to eating a lot of cardamom to give the necessary taste to the mouth in lieu of tobacco. So heaps of cardamom were presented to Mr. Arundale on the occasion of bidding him farewell.

I cannot allow the year 1907 to pass without a reference to Mrs. Besant's election as President of The Theosophical Society on the death of Col. Olcott. There was almost a storm over it. Mrs. Besant was finally elected by an overwhelming majority; and I remember a cable to my father that arrived late one night from Mrs. Besant herself, who was out of India at the time, giving an analysis of the voting throughout the world. My father was of course Mrs. Besant's enthusiastic supporter. Mr. Keightley had been suggested, I believe, as a candidate, whom, I understand, Mrs. Besant herself favoured, and whom she asked Col. Olcott to nominate before his death; but the Colonel nominated Mrs. Besant instead, and she was elected and re-elected to the office till she passed away.

The years that followed were all stormy ones. The situation in the country was by no means getting plea-

santer, and educational authorities all over the land were having anxious times. In the Central Hindu College itself, besides the political difficulties, there was a protest amongst the students against the dogmas of the ancient faith that were taught to us. I was among the greatest critics and sceptics despite the fact that I got almost cent per cent marks in the examinations in 'religion' which like many other subjects had, and still has, a strong intellectual—though perhaps not so great a spiritual—interest for me. Mr. Arundale was very deeply devoted to Mrs. Besant, and his anxiety was great at my being so "irreligious." This anxiety was shared by others, and Mr. P. K. Telang was reported to have said: "Irreverence will make a moral wreck of Sri Prakash". Mr. Telang was one of the finest gentlemen one could think of. He was great both at books and at games, and almost immediately on his arrival became one of the most popular figures in the College.

It will always be a matter of deep regret to me that, long years afterwards, because of differing loyalties to political parties, I had to take a strong stand against Mr. Telang in an election contest to the provincial legislature. The contest was hot, and the Congress candidate, whom I was sponsoring, won in the end. This, I fear, had a very bad effect on Mr. Telang's mind. I do not know why that should have been so, particularly in his case when he was such a great sportsman. I have myself lost elections and have continued to thrive after that. I believe his was a very delicate nature, and was hurt quite easily. He felt that his services were not appreciated by Banaras to which he had given so much, leaving his Bombay home. Some years later he died. Serious physical illness followed the mental upset after failure at that election. I have reason to know that Mrs. Besant was also deeply hurt. Other worries also intervened, and he passed away prematurely,

to the great sorrow of those who knew him. I felt sorry that I had acted against elders to whom I owed so much in my younger days, and I should be unhappy indeed if even in any remote and indirect manner I hastened the close of Mr. Telang's valuable life.

In those days I remember a conversation with Mr. Arundale at Shanti Kunj, in which Miss Arundale and he were also living at the time with Mrs. Besant. He was most affectionate; and he said that if ever I thought of joining The Theosophical Society, he hoped I would let him have the "privilege" of being one of my proposers. Curiously enough, though I had fought against The Theosophical Society's theology—if I may use that expression —in India, I was greatly drawn towards The Society when I was abroad. In distant places in France, Germany and England, I met much kindness from members of The Society, and I found that among them alone was India a country that was honoured and Indians were welcome. In her condition of subjection, no one else cared for either her beliefs or her people. Theosophists alone regarded Indians as brothers, and also regarded India as their spiritual homeland. That had a great effect on me, and I applied to become a member of The Theosophical Society in 1912 when I was a student at Cambridge. Even so, I wanted to become a member of the Indian Section, and I wrote to Mr. Arundale if he would like to support my application in view of the wish he had expressed to me years before. He wrote back from India to say that he would have been glad to sign my form, but unfortunately was too far away. I do not remember who signed my forms, but my certificate of membership was signed by my father as secretary of the Indian Section, and Mrs. Besant as the President of the Society.

My father was then in the midst of a fearful public

controversy with Mrs. Besant over what I have referred to before as the 'Krishnamurti Cult'. This controversy was shaking The Theosophical Society from top to bottom at that time. I helped to found a branch of The Society at Cambridge with Mrs. Pitt as the president. Mrs. Pitt was a dear elderly lady, the widow of a Madras civilian, and lived at Cambridge with her mother, Mrs. Poole, a bright old lady looking younger than her daughter: both mother and daughter were very kind to Indian students, who gathered almost every week in large numbers for tea in their hospitable drawing-room. Mrs. Pitt often visited India also, and was deeply devoted to the memory of her husband. It was on behalf of this branch that I had invited Mrs. Besant to visit Cambridge. I realised only too well when abroad, the truth of what Mrs. Besant used to tell us, adapting an English saying: "He knows not India who only India knows".

The year 1912 was a very sad year for The Theosophical Society; and though I myself formally joined The Society in that very year, I feel distressed as I remember the articles I read in 'Theosophy in India'—the official organ of the Indian Section—in the summer of that year, sitting in a projecting verandah of the upper storey of a house in Wurzburg, in Bavaria (Germany), overlooking a railway tunnel. These issues of the journal contained angry articles against the cult of the coming Christ by my father who, as the General Secretary of the Indian Section, was ex-officio Editor of the journal as well. Mrs. Besant also wrote some notes in *The Theosophist* at the time full of sorrow and grief. I am in no position to judge the merits of the controversy; I can never presume to judge Mrs. Besant or my father, and as to judging between them the thing is simply unthinkable and impossible; but I know that the two were never the same to each other again after

those unhappy days; and though personal affection on both sides remained, and though my father still kissed her right hand in greeting and welcome when they met, so far as the onlooker could judge, the fire and the fervour had all gone, and it seemed almost as if the heart-strings that bound them before had snapped.

Not long afterwards some 25 members of the new persuasion resigned from the Central Hindu College in a body, and they were the best and the most self-sacrificing workers of it. Some students also went out with them, and I remember receiving at the Charing Cross station in London, some of those who proceeded to England after the parting. Messrs. Wodehouse and Dalal came from among the dissenting members of the staff, and among the students were Rama Rao and Yadunandan Prasad. My father had a hard time after the break-up, to keep the Central Hindu College going and arrange for a formal handing over to Sir Sunderlal and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya who had founded the Hindu University Society with which negotiations had been going on for some time past for taking charge of the Central Hindu College. These new authorities were very different from the old ones in outlook and ideal, in temperament and method of work, in their appeal to their fellow countrymen, and the type of persons they preferred to work with. Mrs. Besant thereafter diverted her energies to other educational institutions and worked in other fields of activity.

So far as the parting between Mrs. Besant and my father was concerned, it was clear that it made a gap in the lives of both which was never filled up. However sad might have been the parting of the friends of the Central Hindu College, my personal sorrow was even greater—if that is possible—at the Central Hindu College losing its independent status. How I wish it had been possible for my

father and such of his friends and colleagues who still remained with him, to have carried on the College for a few more years. I have no doubt that those who later founded the Kashi Vidyapith, with its high ideal of never taking any assistance from any Government even if it were a Swaraj Government, and never permitting any control by Governmental authority, would have been happy to have amalgamated themselves with the old institution. This would have given great power to workers in the cause of independent education, and would have helped them to carry on the traditions of the old College with great enthusiasm—and I believe success.

It is pleasant to recollect how my father was always held in the highest esteem by his colleagues. At one of the meetings at the Central Hindu College, Mrs. Besant presented him on behalf of his fellow workers, a silver inkstand with a golden image of Saraswati. My father, when he got up to thank his friends, was visibly embarrassed. It is curious he can never make a social speech full of polite nothings, though he is admittedly one of the most cultured gentlemen one can meet. He could only say: "I hope when I dip my pen in the ink-wells of this inkstand, I shall be able so to write such letters that those who receive them will send larger donations for the College than I have received so far." I took charge of the inkstand at the end of the meeting, and as I was coming home with it I happened to pass Mrs. Besant near the Theosophical Book Shop where she was standing chatting with friends. On seeing me with the inkstand she said: "This is the way sons steal their fathers' goods". "I have got this," I replied, "for years of selfless service," quoting the inscription on the inkstand—and everyone around us laughed aloud.

My father is an older member of The Theosophical Society than Mrs. Besant was. His membership certificate, which is signed by Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky and is still in our possession, is dated the 4th month of the 10th year of the Society, *i.e.* sometime in 1885. Mrs. Besant did not join The Society till 1889. She graphically describes the occasion in the last chapter of her Autobiography, which is captioned "Through Storm to Peace". My father is very proud of the fact that he was an older member than Mrs. Besant. He is perhaps the oldest surviving member of The Society today in the world. My father always delights in finding something which makes him feel 'older than the other fellow'; and so even when a person like Mrs. Besant, whom he loved and revered so much, is concerned, he points out that he is older than she was so far at least as the membership of The Society is concerned. When Mrs. Besant proudly told him once: "I am now a great grandmother," my father said perhaps not with equal joy: "I have been one for some time." Unfortunately generations go very quickly in India with our early marriages and socio-religious conventions! In India the burdens of the family continue to fall on the old which is not the case in Europe.

If someone is older than my father in years, my father will find out that he himself intellectually is as old if not older, inasmuch as he took his graduate degree as early as or earlier than the other. I happened to be present at a conversation of his with Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya on one occasion. My father who is fond of comparing ages, started doing so, and it appeared that Pandit Malaviya was about seven years older; but further comparison showed that both of them had taken the graduate degree at the University about the same time, my father having become a Bachelor of Arts at the exceptionally early age

of 16. My father at this said that intellectually he was not younger by any means. So many of us like to remain ever young—that saves us much trouble—but not so my father, who seems always to like to feel old.

CHAPTER VII

ENGLAND AND INDIA

In 1910 it was finally decided that I should go with Mrs. Besant to England the next year. Mrs. Besant gave me a certificate: one was necessary from a respectable person who knew me well, for attaching to various applications. It was in this that she said she had known me for 16 years. When I said to her, it could not have been so long, she firmly replied: "It is sixteen!" Among the various nice things she said in the certificate, she wrote about me: "He is hot and impetuous, but generous and forgiving". Hot and impetuous I certainly have been despite ageing years—but as to being generous and forgiving, I do not know what I was then: I do not seem to be that now, anyway! My father was anxious lest these words might go against me. But Mrs. Besant said that certificates that contain only nice things have no value! I have followed the same principle about her too in these pages!

Mrs. Besant booked her passages very much in advance. It was to be a large party consisting of Mrs. Besant, Mr. Arundale, Messrs. Krishnamurti and Nityanandam, and myself. Mrs. Besant was taking Messrs. Krishnamurti and Nityanandam for education to England. Her idea was —which never materialised—to put them in Oxford. The passages were booked as early as November 1910, though we were not to leave till April 1911. Full of proprieties, Mrs. Besant superintended the ordering of the proper

clothes, and I remember the agent of the well known European tailoring firm of Bombay, Messrs. Asquith and Lord, measuring me for various suits, and I was equipped in a very first class manner at enormous cost. Mrs. Besant always travelled first class first, and my single fare from Bombay to London by the P. & O. steamer *via* Port Said and Brindisi, whence we travelled in Pullman cars to Calais and on to Dover and London, all first class first, cost nearly Rs. 1000. This was the fastest mail route those days—and the most expensive one at that—and Mrs. Besant always took that to save time.

Mrs. Besant visited our house very often those days to see to the other equipments that were being made for me. She would reject anything that was not absolutely conformable to the highest class arrangements of English life. The steamer by which we were to travel was to leave almost immediately after the B.A. examination of the Allahabad University in which I was appearing that year. At the examination time, while I was staying in the Hindu Boarding House at Allahabad, I suddenly developed very high fever. I remember to have answered my philosophy paper with a fever at 104 degrees. I lay in my room more or less unknown and even neglected. Suddenly one afternoon Mrs. Besant came to see me. That would create sensation enough, and the authorities after that called on me again and again, and even local gentlemen arrived to inquire after me, full of complaints that I had not informed them of my existence before! Mrs. Besant gave me good advice as to what to do and what not to do during that illness with the examination on. When that was over, I returned to Banaras, and almost immediately afterwards left with her and a large party, including my father, for Bombay, whence I sailed with her for England.

I was not at all conversant with the ways of putting

on European clothing, and I remember Mrs. Besant's visit to my cabin on the first evening when she told me how I was to put on the formal dress for dinner. She would sit on the deck writing and reading almost all the time. She would amuse herself now and then with playing by herself the game of cards called "Patience". She was very patient in her play as in everything else. The *SS. Mantua,* by which we travelled, was a very crowded steamer at that time, as large numbers of persons were going by it for the coronation of King George V which was soon to follow. I particularly remember the Maharaja and Maharani of Baroda, who often came up to Mrs. Besant for a chat with her. The night before we reached Aden, Mrs. Besant delivered a lecture in the dining saloon on Karma and Reincarnation and such things, which were far beyond the ideas of the fashionable holiday crowd that filled the saloon that night to hear her. I saw my first English dance on board that steamer also; and saw many sports by which passengers while away their time. The most glorious sight, however, that I saw on board the steamer was the rising of the sun as if springing out of the waves, when I went on deck very early one morning expressly for this purpose while the ship was asleep.

Mrs. Besant was greatly worried throughout the voyage about my food. I simply could not eat anything. I avoided going into the dining saloon practically all the time and used only to get some tea and toast and simple tit-bits from time to time, in my cabin. Once at table I ate only a number of potatoes. Mrs. Besant said: "Potatoes will make you fat but not strong"; but I could not be induced to eat much. From *SS. Mantua* we changed into a small boat, *SS. Isis,* at Port Said. There was a heavy swell in the Mediterranean, and all the day and night that it took to reach Brindisi I just lay quietly in my cabin. I was

considerably relieved to get on *terra firma* in Italy and in a train for the rest of the journey. We were in the Pullman cars, and very comfortable ones they were. Large crowds used to greet Mrs. Besant at various stations, reminding me of my own country: human nature is the same everywhere, and the manner of expressing affection, admiration and respect of a crowd for their leader is also the same. These railway compartments had corridors, and one could comfortably walk from the engine to the guard. Once when I was sitting in my own compartment moping and feeling homesick and solitary, she suddenly came in and taking me in a very warm embrace expressed her great concern at my eating nothing and feeling so sad. She encouraged me with cheering words and assured me that all would be well and that I would soon be getting into the way of things. Her sympathy, affection and understanding were something unique, and those who have known her cannot be sufficiently grateful to her.

Mr. and Mrs. Leo, astrologers, who had come to India for the annual Convention of The Theosophical Society during the previous Christmas, also travelled by the same boat, and Mrs. Besant asked them to take me in for a few days in their own home in order to accustom me to English ways before I went on to rooms in a vegetarian boarding house. This house she had helped to found, and it was looked after by Mr. and Mrs. Whyte. Mrs. Besant had reserved rooms for me there. Mrs. Besant and the rest of the party went on to Miss Bright with whom they stayed at 82 Drayton Gardens. I often visited Mrs. Besant there and had lunch or tea with the household. She was a most considerate person, and would not trouble a servant if she could help it. I once saw her bringing her heavy suit-case down the stairs. She was to go out somewhere. I rushed up the steps to take it from her. Anyone in the house

would have been glad to help her if he had only known. A friend had put a car at her disposal. She would tell the chauffeur every time she returned as to the exact time when he was to come next. She would not detain him unnecessarily and thus enabled him to have plenty of leisure for himself. I fear most masters try to get their 'money's worth' out of their servants by insisting on their being about the house even when not wanted. That was not her way.

Some of Mrs. Besant's Indian friends did not hesitate to entrust her with commissions which she faithfully fulfilled. Mr. Gyanendra Nath Chakravarty had given her a fashionable dressing-gown of his and asked her to bring another exactly like that. She had asked me to pack it with my luggage. Some weeks later in England she called for it. I had forgotten all about it. After some search I discovered it and restored it to her. I had packed it in my bed bundle as the most convenient place for it. Bedding, however, is not needed for travellers in Europe, as they find beds ready-made in hotels, boarding-houses, ships, railway trains, and even in private families where they may stay as guests. Unlike us in India, who receive and accommodate as many friends as may happen to come in, a host in England, even if a friend, would not be able to receive his friend if he has not a bed in the house vacant for him. My bedding remained packed after Bombay and was needed again only when I returned to India after more than three years; for then I spread it in the train from Bombay to Banaras. I believe she ordered a dressing-gown exactly like the one given to her by Mr. Chakravarty and brought it with her for him when she returned to India some months later.

Mrs. Besant's idea was to put me in Oxford, and she took me to Oxford when she was visiting the place. She had

already interviewed Mr. Arnold at 21 Cromwell Road, then in charge of Indian students in England. She introduced me to him. He was far from enthusiastic about her proposal for me. During her visit to Oxford, she took me also to Mr. Pargiter, a retired judge of the Calcutta High Court, who was settled there doing some work in ancient Indian history, and was in charge of Indian students at that University. Mr. Pargiter was not enthusiastic either, and was full of complaints against Indian students, who, he said, neglected him; but he promised Mrs. Besant that he would let her know if there was any chance of my being admitted, in about three weeks' time. When I was with her in Scotland staying with Mr. Christie at Durie, Mr. Pargiter's letter reached her saying that there was no room in Oxford for me. Mrs. Besant was greatly disappointed. She became quite anxious. Her host, Mr. Christie, coming to know of the situation, asked her if he could be of any help, as his own son was at Trinity College, Cambridge, and he could perhaps get me admitted there. Mrs. Besant was grateful for the offer. Mr. Christie wrote to his son's tutor, who later desired that I should be sent to see him. Mrs. Besant entrusted me to Miss Arundale and asked her to take me to Cambridge. I returned with Miss Arundale from Edinburgh to London, and Mrs. Besant continued her tour. In the meantime the result of my B.A. Examination was out, and my father cabled to Mrs. Besant that I had passed. Mrs. Besant was still in Scotland and she sent a telegram of congratulations to my London address, having put the letters "B.A." in the address itself so that the envelope of the telegram told me what the contents were. Armed with this telegram, I went with Miss Arundale to interview the Cambridge tutor. Miss Arundale was a most careful, helpful, and affectionate guide. Mr. Christie's son met us at the railway station

and took us to a hotel. He arranged for the interview with his tutor, Dr. Barnes, who became famous as Bishop of Birmingham with his unconventional views on theology and social matters. His recent death came to me as a matter of great personal grief and loss.

Miss Arundale and I went up to see him. His exterior was exceedingly cold and forbidding, but, as I came to know only too well later on, he was a warm-hearted person—kind, considerate and friendly. I fear his exterior repelled many of his pupils—including English ones—and a Russian student, Chrouschoff by name, condoled with me at my having him as my tutor. Dr. Barnes was very kind to me though, and I have the most pleasant recollections of my dealings with him. He was a man of few words and finished business quickly. He told Miss Arundale that there was only one seat in his College—Trinity—available for an Indian; but it was reserved for either an Indian Prince or a Government scholar. If neither turned up, I could be taken. Miss Arundale ruefully exclaimed: "My poor boy is neither a Prince nor a Government scholar." Miss Arundale had been a most devoted mother to Mr. Arundale, and that afternoon at Cambridge she went on to St. John's College where Mr. Arundale had studied, tried hard to meet Mr. Hart, a great friend and contemporary of Mr. Arundale and then a lecturer at his college, and at last spoke to him on the telephone from the Union as he was many miles away from Cambridge during the summer holidays. I had later a lunch with Mr. Hart, when he received me kindly as a pupil of his old friend, and knowing I was a vegetarian, had just boiled cauliflower both for himself and me! He affectionately complained that Arundale had completely forgotten his old friends and congratulated me on having been his pupil in India.

After six weeks of waiting, Dr. Barnes asked me to

see him again, telling me that I could be taken. I made my solitary way this time to Cambridge, after taking further instructions from Miss Arundale in London; had an interview with him; and was admitted. I spent three happy years at Cambridge, the memories of which are indelible in my mind. When Mrs. Besant came to Cambridge, true to the tradition of English mothers, she wanted to interview my tutor and inquire about me. An interview was arranged, and she went up the old staircase to the tower in which Dr. Barnes had his office, and I stood below in the great court of Trinity in some anxiety, looking at the face of the huge clock that had ticked away centuries of time, and always gave the most beautiful of chimes; and I looked at the green grass of the great court that undergraduates could not step on, but M.A.'s could walk across with impunity; and I saw the pleasant fountain in the centre of this court.

Mrs. Besant had a long interview, and when she came down and I went towards her, she called out enthusiastically: "Prakasa, you have a very good character, you have a very good character". I did not know exactly what to make out of it, but she went on repeating: "You have a very good character indeed. Your tutor was telling me all about it". I think the tutor was over-kind and over-generous to me. Trinity College was very different to the Central Hindu College. There was no trouble of any sort at Trinity: the discipline was very strict; we did not meet many teachers. As I was a vegetarian, the tutor had kindly arranged for special dishes for me in the Hall, attendance at which was essential. I could not take part in college activities as I did at home. I was a very quiet student at Trinity and broke no rules. There was a rule that undergraduates were to come indoors by 10 at night. There was a small fine for coming in between 10 and 11, and a little

more for turning up between 11 and 12. I had very few fines to pay because I was almost always in before 10. In fact I studied hard from 8 to 12 at night, and so not many fines had to be paid.

Once, unfortunately, after attending a Theosophical meeting at the Garden City of Letchworth, not very far away, during a coal strike, when trains were running late, I got back to the Cambridge station close upon midnight instead of about quarter past 11 as scheduled. There was no bus running at that late hour. The last horse tramway had been taken away from the streets of Cambridge in my time. The dear old horse was garlanded and the tram bedecked with flowers on their last journey. The bus had just come in to displace and replace them. I walked as fast as I could and even ran a part of the way. I got in two minutes too late. I was summoned before the Dean the next day. The Dean, seeing my discomfiture, said: "Do not be frightened!" At this I plucked up courage and replied: "Why should I be frightened? I am not responsible for your coal strikes, and for the late running of your trains. I had the tutor's permission to go to Letchworth and I did my best to get back to my rooms in time." "Oh, is that it? " he said; and nothing more happened. That was the only time I was summoned before a Dean.

Another rule was that one must dine at least five times a week in Hall. Despite all my tutor's arrangements for so-called vegetarian diet, I hated Hall, and so I always took a very heavy tea in the afternoons and a light supper about midnight in my own rooms, before I went to bed. I simply gave my attendance in the Hall by shaking my cap at the marker who was a remarkable person for remembering faces and names. He missed making a mark once. I did go to the Hall, but perhaps came away thinking I

had been seen when I was not. I was summoned for this also before the tutor and had to explain.

I am not surprised, thinking of this record, that Dr. Barnes thought I bore a good character. He said to Mrs. Besant that he was a little anxious about my health because he thought I worked too hard, and did not take sufficient physical exercise, and was 'biting more than I could chew'— an unfortunate habit that I fear I still have. He was surprised when at the end of just three academic years I was able to take the Cambridge honours degree called the "Tripos" both in history and law, and also a barrister's degree in London. After that I hurried home to India by the first available boat. I was out of Banaras for exactly three years, three months, and three days; and I have never really been out of India again.

My father had entrusted all the needed money to Mrs. Besant; and she was as careful at accounts as at everything else. The following letter from her which I happen to have in my possession will interest my readers:

The Lodge,
Esher, Aug. 15, 1911.

My dear son,

I am paying Dr. Barnes £20, *Mrs. Whyte* £8.15 *which carries you to September* 22, *and enclose* £29-19-8, *the balance I have, so that your father can send further money to Mr. Arnold or you, as he prefers. I am very glad all is arranged at Cambridge. Can you come down on Monday for a couple of days?*

I think you have been very economical.

Yours affectionately,
Annie Besant

There is an enclosure also in her own hand: a copy of her note to my father:

Nov. 10, '10 Cheque	*Rs.*	*600*	*Nov. 10 & Feb. 11 Passage*		*936/-*
April, 11, '2 „	*„*	*4000*			
April, 20, '11 from Prakasa (notes)	*„*	*600*	*April 21, 1911, Asquith.*		*1040/-*
	Rs.	*5200*		*Rs.*	*1976/-*

May 11.	*Balance Rs. 3224/-*		*Travelling*	*£18*	*10*	*4*
	In English £215/-		*Boarding and Lodging 18 weeks*	*31*	*10*	*0*
			Cash ..	*10*	*0*	*0*
			School of Languages ..	*5*	*0*	*0*
			Grays Inn books etc. ..	*100*	*0*	*0*
			Cambridge fees .	*20*	*0*	*0*
				£185	*0*	*4*
			Balance	*29*	*19*	*8*
		£215 0 0		*£215*	*0*	*0*

I have given balance to Prakasa.

In response to this, I went and spent a happy and quiet day and night at Esher with her. It is most surprising that she should have kept the accounts so carefully, and sent them on to my father, enclosing a copy to me in a formal manner. I am ashamed that she should have had to take so much trouble for me. It was very gratifying to me that she thought me economical, for not many Indian students are supposed to be so, when they have their own money to do with as they like in foreign lands. Still, the expenses were heavy enough, though I am glad and grateful that I was able to go to Cambridge and spend three years abroad.

In 1914 I returned home. Mrs. Besant had paid a short visit to England even in 1914 and had invited me to lunch before she left for India. I myself was soon to follow. Mrs. Besant has duly recorded the lunch in *The Theosophist*: "A pleasant interlude was welcoming to

lunch Mr. Sri Prakasa, the eldest son of Babu Bhagavan Das Saheb of Banaras, who has just been called to the Bar and has taken the B.A. and LL.B. degrees of Cambridge University. He goes back to the Motherland loving her the more dearly for his stay in England".

I thought the P. & O. was very expensive. Other reasons also prejudiced me against it; and though Mrs. Besant herself was faithful to the P. & O., with its motto 'Quis Nos Separabit?' ("Who can—or will—separate us?"), to the last, I booked my passage by *SS. Marienbad* of the Austrian Lloyd Co., which gave better vegetarian food, was much less expensive, more comfortable, and less formal, being less fashionable. I arrived in India just four days before the Great War of 1914 began.

The Austrian Prince had been murdered after I had left Cambridge and London, which I had done immediately on taking my degrees in June 1914, but before I got aboard my boat at Trieste in Austria. I found the flags were half-mast there, as I went into the town, having crossed over from Venice, and having understood no newspapers as I travelled through France, Switzerland and Italy, though I got off at many places to see new sights and cities.

Many fellow-countrymen, including the great Dr. Seal, Sarat Chandra Bose, and my old friend Apurva Kumar Chanda, came from England direct and joined the steamer at Trieste. From them I learnt that war was impending and the situation serious. We all got safely to Bombay, but our Austrian steamer was captured on her voyage back at Port Said, as the papers later reported. The P. & O. steamer that arrived that week was *SS. Salsette*, and she had had a very dangerous voyage, something having gone wrong with her engines on the way. The *Marienbad* had also received an S.O.S. from her in the Arabian Sea and was hurrying to the rescue when she was informed that all

was well and that the necessary repairs had been effected. Mrs. Besant knew that I was due that week and thought I must have come by the *Salsette*. I received an anxious telegram from her from Madras soon after reaching Banaras congratulating me on my safe return after such a terrible voyage. I telegraphed back to her conveying to her my grateful thanks and respectful greetings, and assuring her that I had a most comfortable voyage by the *Marienbad*. I was happy to be back home and they received me most kindly at the old Central Hindu School and College. Many of my teachers had unfortunately left after the crisis of the previous year, but I was happy to find my old professor of Philosophy, Professor Adhikari, officiating at the time as Principal, and Mr. Taraporevala as Headmaster. Then I met for the first time another notable figure, Prof. De, who must be included among the old guard as his inspiration was also Theosophy and Mrs. Besant, though he did not join the College till 1913. He retired (1940) after giving 27 years of honorary and continuous service to the Hindu University and all his life's savings besides. He resides on the premises of the University as its Grand Old Man, universally loved and respected.

Mrs. Besant went to England every year that I was there, and I used to see her at 82 Drayton Gardens, the beautifully furnished and richly appointed home of her hospitable English hostess Miss Bright. Once I called on her in urgent need as I had run out of money. That was before my account was transferred by her to Mr. Arnold of the India Office. I could not see her as I was told she was busy and no visitors were allowed. I was upset; but I left a note. I got back to my own place, after visiting one or two other places, within two or three hours; and I found a registered letter waiting for me with a cheque. In England the post is delivered most promptly and punc-

tually. She was a great letter writer. One could almost be sure of the time a reply to one's letter would come. She attended to all her correspondence most regularly and punctiliously herself. I received replies to all the letters I ever wrote to her till 1927, after which she definitely weakened and had to give up replying to all letters. The last letter I had from her was in 1929 on the occasion of my father's 60th birthday. Her mailbag was always very heavy, but I doubt if anyone has any complaint against her for not attending to his letter. She wrote everything in her own hand, even the most unimportant slips.

It was good that sometimes she closed her doors to visitors. We public men in India know to our cost how disturbing visitors are; at what inconvenient hours they come; and how long they stay. But she was always strict. In 1929 my younger brother, Chandra Bhal, happened to be in London, on a sight-seeing tour. Mrs. Besant was also there, and he called to see her. He met a similar fate. He could not see her. He left a note behind giving his address. She seemed to have replied immediately afterwards, but the letter miscarried and got back to her through the back door of the dead letter office. She posted it to him to our Banaras address with another letter telling him that she was doing so, as she wanted him to know that she would have been glad to see him. The earlier letter had contained an invitation to tea, and my brother was very sorry that it should have miscarried.

Some time after Mrs. Besant had passed away, my brother, Chandra Bhal, started a movement for setting up a statue of her in the grounds of the Central Hindu College on behalf of the old boys, who owed so much to her. As the President of the Old Boys' Association, I wrote scores of letters to old boys whom I could recollect. The response was very poor—a great disappointment to my

brother and me. Some were certainly very enthusiastic—Mani Bhushan Banerji gave away a whole hundred rupees, far beyond his means, feeling he owed everything to Mrs. Besant. Ganpatrai Saksena sent me a contribution unasked, having seen our notice in the newspapers. Mr. Dwarkanath K. Telang helped greatly, and Mr. Jamnadas Dwarkadas parted with a marble bust of her in his possession and gave it to us. We raised a memorial in the old Central Hindu College grounds, though not so fitting and imposing as we would have liked it to be. This was duly unveiled by my father, and stands there outside the portico of the main hall, in the midst of a small garden. We were all happy that Chandra Bhal took the matter up and succeeded in seeing it through. The pedestal on which the bust stands has some beautiful Samskrit verses inscribed on it, in honour of Mrs. Besant, specially composed by Shri Kali Prasanna Chakravarti. It remains a matter of deep regret to me, as to others, that the *alumni* of the old Central Hindu College—quite a number of them in well-to-do circumstances—did not show more gratitude. One ought, however, to be thankful for small mercies, for did not the Greek philosopher utter a truth for all time when he said: "Ingratitude is man's peculiar vice".

In 1914 Mrs. Besant became an active politician and vigorously took up the cudgels for a drastic reform in the Indian system of administration. She had gone through a terrible experience just before, as she had to fight a very heavy lawsuit in connection with her guardianship of Messrs. Krishnamurti and Nityanandam, which she ultimately won in the Privy Council. Curiously enough, the lawyer who opposed her in the Madras High Court was Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer, who later became a close associate of hers in the Home Rule movement and was General Secretary of the Congress when she was the

President thereof. Mrs. Besant very chivalrously paid handsome compliments to her opposing lawyer for his ability; and in a note in *The Theosophist* she wrote: "This brilliant young counsel should have a great career before him." I had occasional correspondence with her in connection with articles I used to contribute to her daily paper "New India", and weekly paper "The Commonweal". She printed most of these articles over my own signature, but used some of them as leading articles for her papers also. She was a person of marvellous dynamic force wherever she went, and within two years of her coming into active Indian politics, she was being vigorously canvassed for the Presidentship of the Congress at the Lucknow session of 1916, and was actually elected the President next year, in 1917, at Calcutta. She had undergone three months of internment during that year for her political activities, along with her colleagues, Messrs. Arundale and Wadia.

Let me pause here and take a bird's-eye view of the field of Indian politics during 1914-18, the years of the great World War I as it is called, since thirty countries were engaged in it, twenty-six on the British side, and four on the German. That war shook the world from end to end; but was very much eclipsed by the war that followed a quarter of a century later as World War II. These years were also the years of Mrs. Besant's most intense work for India's political freedom. The war had thrown all our politicians off their guard and our politics out of gear. Political leaders did not know exactly what to do and how to do it. Politics and personalities go together the world over—in India perhaps even more so than elsewhere. The liberals—the great leaders of moderate Indian politics—were for every assistance being given to England and support afforded to Government in every way. But Mrs. Besant

suddenly came out with the slogan: "The moment of England's difficulty is the moment of India's opportunity", which staggered the 'old guard', who became positively incensed when she started describing political leaders as 'yesterdays' and 'tomorrows'.

Her dynamic personality and the clear, strong, definite lead she gave, brought the young around her; her Home Rule League became a power to be reckoned with; and her "New India" became the most popular and influential paper. The offices of "New India" were in the city of Madras; and Adyar, the Headquarters of The Theosophical Society, where Mrs. Besant resided, was some miles away. It is interesting to note that at that advanced age—she was 67 at the time—not only did Mrs. Besant take up the stupendous task of editing a daily paper, besides doing all her other work, heavy enough as it was, but she also learnt motor driving, and used to drive her own car through the crowded streets every day between home and office. I have never myself seen her drive. I have only seen photographs of her at the wheel. She has praised her motor-car—not herself—in the pages of *The Theosophist* for the good work it had done for her. She was not a woman of any prejudices; and she utilised to the full all conveniences that science gave, for the spread of her own ideas and the fulfilment of her own mission. She used railway trains, steamships, motor-cars, aeroplanes, anything that came in her way, that could help the cause for which she stood, and enable her to do her work easily and quickly. Is not that very unlike our own orthodox preachers, some of whom would not carry money in their pockets, and others would never use a vehicle for locomotion!

A most important convert to her cause was Jawaharlal Nehru, the son of Pandit Motilal Nehru, the great lawyer of Allahabad and the then moderate of moderates, who

lived all too well in luxurious surroundings of the most up-to-date European pattern. Pandit Motilal Nehru seemed almost to say that India could not do better than imitate England in every way, and that we would not be able to do anything unless Indians became Englishmen. People think to this day that his coming into extremist Indian politics, from the rigours of the sufferings of which —he was jailed again and again, and despite advancing age and declining health, he had to do much travelling and table work also—he died earlier than he otherwise might have done, was due entirely to his son's influence over him. I do not know. I knew Pandit Motilal fairly well. He was a very strong-willed and a very proud man, and when once he made up his mind, he simply did not care for consequences. Mr. Gokhale died (1915) not long after the Great War began, and Mr. Tilak had just come out of his long imprisonment (1914) and had started hammering as hard as ever before. Mr. Surendra Nath Banerjea and others were soon engaged in reforms and talks of reforms and working of reforms.

Suddenly burst upon the scene Mahatma Gandhi, with all the halo and glamour that surrounded him on account of his South African work, with his strange archaic personal habits; with his stranger notions of right and wrong; and strangest of all, were his ideals of solving all the ills of mankind by unheard-of remedies. Mrs. Besant and he came nearest together in many aspirations and ways of doing things. Only Mrs. Besant was very human, and Mahatma Gandhi seemed far away from the mundane creation.

Mrs. Besant herself had said somewhere that the only Mahatma she recognised in politics was Gandhiji. 'Mahatma', in Theosophical parlance, stood for Great Spiritual Beings—those who looked after the welfare of the world, whose chosen disciples the great leaders of The Theo-

sophical Society regarded themselves. Dadabhai Naoroji was too old; Sir Pherozeshah Mehta seemed broken-hearted; and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was building up his Hindu University at Banaras. Mrs. Besant, Mr. Tilak, and Mahatma Gandhi held the stage. Mrs. Besant was allied to Mr. Tilak sometimes, and to Gandhiji at other times. She seemed to be half for Mr. Tilak's standpoint and half for Gandhiji's. All the three, however, were too big and domineering to work together: each must have her or his own way; and the rift between Gandhiji and Mrs. Besant came early.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

At the time of the foundation of the Banaras Hindu University in February 1916, there was a number of lectures delivered by eminent people in, to me, the very familiar, Central Hindu College Hall at Banaras. Curiously enough, I was again in charge of the arrangements for these lectures, and had the seats placed as I used to, when I was a student there many years earlier. Mahatma Gandhi was the speaker one evening, and the then Maharaja of Darbhanga, Sir Rameshwar Prasad Singh, was the chairman. A galaxy of Indian princes bedecked with jewels, sat on the dais. Gandhiji started his speech in his well known deliberate voice. His sentences were short, his voice had a rasping sound that carried far. He was speaking in English. He spoke of the dirt and squalor which we permitted, and complained against the filth he saw as he went to the temple of Vishvanath. He went on to say that we were responsible for spoiling English people who were quite nice in their own country, and who became so un-

pleasant when they came in contact with us. Then he spoke of India's poverty. "Princes, go and sell your jewels", he said, turning towards them and asked them to use their wealth for the unhappy and the unfortunate. The audience was 'electrified'. Was it some Christ saying: "Go and sell your coat, and come and follow me". Then he referred to the terrible police precautions that had been taken for the safety of the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, who had come to lay the foundation stone of the Hindu University. The town was flooded with the dreaded C.I.D., members of the secret police. It seemed to be in a state of siege.

When Sir Sunderlal, Pandit Malaviya, and my father were going to the station to receive the Viceroy, they found as they passed our gate—our house was on the way—that our men were having a debate with a C.I.D. man who was trying to enter our house to post himself on the highest roof (which was just above the ladies' rooms) in order to keep a look-out thence. My father was angry. He stopped the carriage and told his companions: "You may please go on to receive the Viceroy. I must get down to protect my home". Things, however, were satisfactorily settled: the man went away to another roof not far away, and my father went on to the station. My brother was in the College Cadet Corps stationed round the foundation stone of the University, and I was in charge of a portion of the amphitheatre. My mother and my wife were all by themselves in the house. When our house too was not safe from such police attention—and if I may say so in all humility, my family had been one of the well-known families of Banaras for generations, and my father by his lifelong public work and learning, had won greater goodwill and respect for it from the people and had greatly added to its stature—the situation in the town can be imagined.

Mahatma Gandhi had come to know of all this and was rightly upset. He referred to these excessive police precautions and the hardships caused to the people; and even went on to say—tactlessly as the world will say, or as his secretary and continual biographer, Mr. Mahadeva Desai, will perhaps describe, 'with devastating simplicity': "It were better that a Viceroy took the risk of being shot than that the innocent people of the town should be harassed thus." The highest local governmental officers were all at the function.

Mrs. Besant became restive as Mahâtma Gandhi proceeded. She was a woman given to the strict observance of the proprieties. She was herself at the time a leader of extremist politics, but she seemed to feel that that was no place for the expression of such sentiments. She perhaps also felt that the speaker was using language capable of being misinterpreted. The audience was spell-bound: one could hear a pin drop; but there was obvious disturbance on the dias. Mrs. Besant spoke to one or two distinguished persons near her that all that was not right. The matter was brought to the notice of the chairman, who was already feeling restless and nervous. Some person advised the Princes that they should not stay. The chairman stopped the speaker, and then allowed him to explain what he really meant. Gandhiji began, but was stopped again. Events then followed in quick succession, and it is difficult to remember them. The audience cried to Gandhiji to continue: he refused, saying he would obey the chair, and only speak if permitted. The Princes left; the chairman left; the meeting ended in confusion. The local officers were even preparing to take some action against Mahatma Gandhi, but wiser counsels prevailed and nothing untoward happened.

It was clear that Mrs. Besant and Gandhiji could not

work together. Mrs. Besant joined hands with Mr. Tilak, whose name was as yet greater than Gandhiji's in Indian politics; whose programme was more intelligible; whose ideals were more practical. The Indian public had no direct personal experience and knowledge of Gandhiji. He was to them a legend and a mystery. At the Lucknow Congress of December 1916, Mr. Tilak and Mrs. Besant had their way more or less; the Congress-Muslim League pact was also sealed, Mrs. Besant appealing to the Hindus to yield to their Muslim brethren for the country's sake. The Congress passed into new hands; the old folk were all ousted; new ones took their places. Mrs. Besant was interned for three months in 1917, and in December of the same year she presided over the Calcutta Congress.

Gandhiji's influence was, however, growing apace. An attempt was made to patch up the differences of old and new by making Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, the Congress President in 1918 at Delhi. He was a friend of everybody; was respected by everybody; was welcome in every society; and was never a man of very strong views, one way or the other. Delhi, however, exposed the widening chasm between the various leaders. I remember an angry conversation between Mr. P. K. Telang and Mr. Sankarlal Banker at a private house in Delhi, during the Congress session (1918). Mr. Telang supported Mrs. Besant, and Sankarlal, who had been closely associated with Mrs. Besant, along with Messrs. Telang, Jamnadas Dwarkadas and others in her Home Rule League work at Bombay but was all for Gandhiji now, angrily exclaimed: "Go on, Telang!"

At the Amritsar Congress, held in 1919, after the Jallianwalla tragedy, the breach became complete, and Mrs. Besant retired from the Congress more or less. The Congress passed into Gandhiji's hands. The mishandling

of the Indian situation by the British Government in India after the close of the Great War, was responsible for the bitterness in the Indian mind; and Gandhiji's understanding of the situation *vis-a-vis* the psychology of the people, much like that of Lenin in Russia, made him the uncrowned king of the land. Many of the greatest men and women of the country rallied round him: Mr. C. R. Das from Bengal, Mr. Rajendra Prasad from Behar, Pandit Motilal Nehru from the United Provinces, Lala Lajpat Rai from the Punjab, the brothers Vithalbhai and Vallabhbhai Patel from Gujarat, Mr. C. Rajagopalachari from Tamil Nad (South Madras), Dr. Pattabhi and Mr. Prakasam from Andhra (North Madras), Mrs. Naidu from Hyderabad, Mr. Kripalani from Sindh, Dr. Ansari and Hakim Ajmal Khan from Delhi, also, the Ali Brothers, Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, as well as Maulana Abul Kalam Azad—all rallied to his banner. Mrs. Besant was never reconciled to Gandhiji. I heard many of her speeches on politics after he had come on the scene: she seemed bitter and unhappy. In one of her lectures she irritably referred even to the harmless Gandhi cap, wondering why it was so called, as she had seen it in vogue ever since she had been in India!

At the request of Pandit Ram Narayan Misra, the then Headmaster of the Central Hindu School, she unveiled a portrait of Gandhiji in the Central Hindu School Hall, called the 'Sharga' hall, having been donated by a student of that name who died in a London Hospital of an accident. I was present. She seemed obviously ill at ease. She had accepted the invitation out of courtesy; and Pandit Ram Narayan, as all his friends knew, had an unconscious habit of putting people in embarrassing situations by his well-meant efforts at bringing irreconcilables together. She was painfully avoiding the use of Gandhiji's name, referring to him sometimes, as 'this eminent man'

and sometimes as 'this great Indian'. It seemed to me that she did not like to call him 'Mahatma', and did not like to hurt the feelings of her audience either by using any other honorific designation.

Mahatma Gandhi's personal regard for Mrs. Besant seemed to have been great in the early years. I remember a conversation between Mr. Chintamani and Mahatma Gandhi at the Allahabad residence of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya in 1917, at which I happened to be present accidentally, during the days Mrs. Besant was in internment. Mahatmaji's proposal was that he with a party should go to Ootacamund where she was interned, and ask her to come out beyond the prescribed boundary and thus defy authority. Mr. Chintamani asked: "If she does not agree?" Mahatmaji said: "So far as I am informed, she is not averse to a proposal like this." "And then?" asked Mr. Chintamani. "Then we shall see what to do. A satyagrahi does not think of so many steps beforehand."

I may note here that my father's great aversion to Mahatmaji's philosophy of life was Gandhiji's unwillingness to see many steps beforehand and insist on constantly repeating—and following in his own life—Cardinal Newman's dictum: "One step enough for me." My father regards this process as dangerously short-sighted, and feels that our want of success in our political endeavours under Mahatmaji's lead—as it then appeared—was due to this policy of deliberately shutting his eyes to a long view of things; to not weighing of pros and cons; to not thinking of possible consequences and alternative plans.

Mrs. Besant and Gandhiji were not happy with each other. If they could have pulled together it would have been all for the good of India; but both were masterful personalities, and collaboration between them was almost impossible. I believe she attended only two Congresses

after 1919—at Belgaum in 1924, when Gandhiji was presiding; and at Calcutta in 1928, when Pandit Motilal Nehru was the President. I have already given some sidelight views of the latter. In 1924 she came in only for a few hours to Belgaum, accompanied by Shiva Rao, now an eminent, much sought-after and popular journalist at Simla and Delhi and a Member of Parliament, and Yadunandan Prasad, who died, like Nityanandam and Patwardhan, in America, all cut off in the prime of their lives.

Gandhiji sat in the rostrum at the Belgaum Congress, a little away from the main dais to keep a check on the speakers and control the audience. Loud speakers and microphones had not then come into the country. He stood up as Mrs. Besant entered the huge *pandal* at the further end, and the audience stood up with him to bid her welcome. Many persons were quite angry with Gandhiji at having extended such extraordinary regard and consideration to Mrs. Besant. She walked to the dais and sat among the ex-presidents. I happened to be very near. She immediately wrote out a note in pencil and addressed it "President", and handed it over to me—she recognised me at once in that crowd—saying: "Prakasa, will you please give it to the President". I went up at once to Gandhiji and handed over the slip to him. Gandhiji soon after stopped all proceedings and invited Mrs. Besant to speak, and asked the audience to give her a most respectful hearing. Mrs. Besant had become very unpopular in politics—that is the fate of most politicians—and she was often interrupted in her public speeches, though she remained herself undisturbed even if anxious and troubled. I forget what she said. My memories of her earlier speeches are keener than those of her later ones: but I believe it was all in the nature of a warning against the way the Congress was going.

Mr. Polak happened also to be there when she was speaking. He also had only just then arrived, and sat near me. He had been a colleague of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa and had suffered handcuffs and imprisonment for India, and was also a follower of Mrs. Besant as a Theosophist. He had by then, however, allied himself in politics to the moderate Liberal Party in India and was of their persuasion, though he kept his friendships strong with everybody, and was very sore a couple of years earlier when he had been refused permission by Government to see Mahatmaji in jail. After her lecture Mrs. Besant at once left for the station. She had made a very long journey just to deliver this speech, and the President was glad to give her an opportunity to do so. Her eloquence, however, was going from her. The old fire was burning low. She was already beginning to forget words of which she used to be a profound master; but her earnestness, her sincerity, her courage, her devotion remained the same to the last.

She was true to the country of her adoption, and served her in her own way and in accordance with her own lights till the end. I was myself discontented with her attitude in the later years. On one occasion, during those years, she had come with Mr. Krishnamurti to have tea with us. I was very excited, and tried to cut into her arguments with heated words. She spoke quietly and then suddenly became silent. However strongly she might speak on the platform, in personal conversation she would never carry on any controversy. There she strictly followed the injunction of the ancients not to argue too heatedly with persons one loves and with whom one desires friendship; and her personal relations with her old friends remained always undisturbed.

Soon after my father's imprisonment for his alleged

activities in connection with the boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales to Banaras (1921)—the Prince of Wales who later became King Edward VIII and had to abdicate his throne because of his marriage (1937)—she informed me of her coming to Banaras for the Theosophical Convention and sent us her sympathies in our sorrow and anxiety. I had sent my carriage to the station for her but did not go myself. The carriage did not return for a long time and I wondered. She had driven straight with Miss Willson and Pandit Iqbal Narayan Gurtu to the district magistrate, and armed with his permission, had gone to the Central Prison to see my father before going to her own home; and this after three nights and three days in the train travelling from Madras. She *did* love her friends. In the question and answer meeting at that Convention, she was asked by some tactless individual, perhaps too loyally inclined towards Government, why she had gone to see my father in prison when she was opposed to his politics; and the questioner got a fitting though courteous answer.

When we come to think of it, it might almost be said that Mahatma Gandhi, who had been the undisputed leader of the Indian National Congress—and as such of a major portion of political India—since 1920, only intensified the programme that had been chalked out by Mrs. Besant in the days when she led the extreme wing in Indian politics. She seems in a way to have heralded Mahatmaji's non-co-operation. It was under her inspiration that almost the first person to non-co-operate from an official educational institution was Mrs. Shiva Kamu, later a sister-in-law of Mr. Arundale; and it was for Mrs. Besant's sake, when she went into internment, that almost the first person to throw off a title—and a big one at that—was Sir Subramanya Iyer, an ex-Chief Justice of the Madras High Court,

who made history by sending a letter to the President of the United States of America over the Indian situation. It was because of this that Sir Subramanya had a row with Mr. Montagu, the then Secretary of State for India, when the latter came to India (1917) to investigate and recommend reforms almost as the direct result of Mrs. Besant's agitation. However much she may have opposed Gandhiji's movement and the direction Indian politics took under his guidance towards non-co-operation, she may be said to have started the movement herself even in its details.

It was the strict rule of Col. Olcott, the President-Founder of the Theosophical Society, that the annual Conventions of the Society should be held alternately at Banaras and Adyar (Madras) and nowhere else. Seth Dharamsi Morarji of Bombay, the invariable Bombay host of Mrs. Besant, a most devoted follower of hers, an earnest Theosophist and a millionaire-philanthropist, is reported once to have offered to meet all the expenses of the Theosophical Convention, including the travelling charges of all the delegates, if only an annual Convention could be held in Bombay. The proposal was turned down by the very strict Col. Olcott.

A large number of orthodox Hindus in the professions of law and Government service were attracted to The Theosophical Society by Mrs. Besant's inspiration and came to these annual Conventions. They felt proud of their own faith because a 'foreigner' was sponsoring it; they felt confirmed in their own superstitions because they found a 'foreigner' was apparently upholding them. I do not know if many of those retained their allegiance when Mrs. Besant took to extremist views in Indian politics! As a boy I used to be a volunteer at the Conventions of The Society at Banaras; and had to serve the crowd.

They were very orthodox in their habits and very troublesome in their ways. In their opinions on public questions they appeared to me to be very timid. We volunteers had a hard time; for though the functions of The Society went off punctually and the delegate-members attended them punctually also—as Mrs. Besant would wait for no one and make exception for none, and in accordance with her strict instructions, first-comers were served first regardless of age or sex at her public meetings—they were always late for meals; and we boys, mere negligible volunteers that we were, could not get away much before midnight in those cold December weeks when the Conventions took place at Banaras.

During the days when Mrs. Besant was closely associated with Indian politics, and was at the same time President of The Theosophical Society, the Conventions, however, used to be held where the Congress was held. Both used to take place during the Christmas week. I remember those Conventions at Lucknow (1916), Calcutta (1917), Delhi (1918) and Amritsar (1919). The 1915 Convention was even held at Bombay thus fulfilling Seth Dharamsi Morarji's wish though he was not alive to partake in it himself—when the Congress had also met there. I did not attend the session myself. At Amritsar Mrs. Besant broke from the Congress finally; and though she attended two more Congress fitfully, in 1924 and 1928—I do not remember if she attended any others—she was really never of the Congress again. The Conventions then went back to Banaras and Adyar. Mrs. Besant fulfilled all her engagements during these Conventions while seeming to be attending to Congress work also all the time. She was wonderful in the way she could do things. At the Amritsar Congress she went on writing letters and correcting proofs at the presidential table at which she sat next to the

President, Pandit Motilal Nehru. She was her own reporter for her paper "New India," for which she reviewed Lord Morley's "Recollections" in a running train.

I should like to record here my memory of the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee that was held in Banaras in the summer of 1920. In December 1919 at Amritsar, the Congress had passed into the hands of Mahatma Gandhi, who had made an offer to the British Government for peace and goodwill despite the Amritsar massacre and the Punjab wrongs generally of the martial-law days of that year. The Committee that had been appointed by the Congress to investigate the wrongs had presented its report, and the same also, curiously enough, was signed in Banaras some months after the Amritsar Congress. There was, however, no response from the Government to meet the Congress demands, and the All-India Congress Committee meeting was called in the summer of 1920, also at Banaras. Pandit Motilal Nehru, the then President of the Congress, had paid me a special visit to express his desire that I might take charge of the arrangements, which I gladly did. This Committee was particularly called so that a special session of the Congress could be held before the usual annual session scheduled to be held in due course in December 1920. A special session was regarded as necessary because it was felt that the first elections to the new legislatures that were to take place as prescribed under the scheme of reforms introduced after the visit of Mr. Montagu, and the presentation of the report by him and the then Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, should, in the circumstances, be boycotted by the Congress. These elections were scheduled to take place before the annual session of the Congress in the following December, and the verdict therefore of a special session of the Congress before then became necessary.

When I took charge of the meeting I felt that as the Central Hindu College and its hostels were vacant owing to the summer vacations, I could easily house the members of the Committee and hold its meetings in the spacious rooms and halls of the institution. I had, however, counted without my host. The Central Hindu College had long before this passed into the hands of the Banaras Hindu University, as readers will recollect from my earlier references, with Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya as its virtual head. I had no doubt that I would easily be able to get his permission for the use of these buildings for this purpose. My surprise was therefore great indeed when, despite my telegrams and letters, entreaties and exhortations, he not only declined to allow the halls of the old College for the meetings of the Committee, but also refused permission for the use of the boarding house even for the accommodation of the members. I was amazed and confused, and did not know what to do and where to go.

It was a job, making arrangements for the accommodation in private houses of members who were to come in large numbers from all over the country. That, however, I managed. The problem of the meeting still remained. As the matters to be discussed were to be important, I did not want to go to the municipal Town Hall as that place was much too public. I therefore bethought myself of the hall of The Theosophical Society; and my father was good enough to help me out of my difficulty by himself telegraphing to Mr. Purnendu Narayan Singh at Patna, then the General Secretary of the Indian Section of The Theosophical Society. My father was greatly surprised at the attitude of Pandit Malaviya, who had himself been among the foremost political leaders of the land and had twice already presided over the Indian National Congress. He was present at this meeting of the

All-India Congress Committee, and was by no means, a silent spectator either!

I obtained the General Secretary's permission for the use of his hall for the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee, much to my relief. The meeting was duly held there. It was perhaps one of the most momentous meetings of the Committee ever held till then, as the non-co-operation or civil disobedience or Satyagraha (call it what one may) movement that was to play such an all important part in India's public life for the quarter of a century that followed, practically started from that time. Mrs. Besant came to that meeting from Madras. Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Mr. C. R. Das, Lala Lajpatrai (who later presided at the special session that was called at Calcutta in the succeeding September), Mr. Tilak (who would have presided at the Congress but who died before then) were all there. When Mrs. Besant came to us for her usual breakfast during this visit, I told her of the difficulties I had had in arranging for the meeting and how thankful I was to The Society for placing its hall at our disposal. She was glad that though the Congress was going away in a direction she did not approve of, The Theosophical Society, of which she was the President, had come to my rescue even at that juncture. I was duly grateful. It was a matter of deep regret to Mrs. Besant and my father, founders of the College—and to myself also as a very old student of the institution—that it should have gone into such hands that it was not possible to get its buildings for a national function, and that even the request for their use by the original founders themselves, could be so unceremoniously turned down.

Mrs. Besant has, in her Autobiography, described in vivid language her own coming into The Theosophical Society after her first meeting with Madame Blavatsky.

Readers of that book will remember that she was given Madame Blavatsky's "Secret Doctrine" to review by the famous W. T. Stead. The study of the book changed her mind; and from an unbeliever she became a believer; and joined The Theosophical Society. That was in 1889. I had read her Autobiography while yet a small boy, and I was also familiar with W. T. Stead's "Review of Reviews", "Books for the Bairns", "Penny Poets", etc. I always had a great desire to meet him, since my childhood. While in England, I happened to be invited to an evening party at W. T. Stead's through some mutual friends. Mr. Stead was sailing for America by the ill-fated "Titanic" soon afterwards (1912); and he gave a little party at his home just before starting. He died on that voyage. I have been told that he himself had feared that he would be kicked to death in the London streets for his heresy and unorthodox opinions. He was, however, destined to meet a watery grave at sea. At that meeting I saw him for the first and the last time. He was a remarkable and attractive figure; and I do not wonder that his relations with Mrs. Besant were so cordial.

I have already spoken of the storm in The Theosophical Society after the coming of Messrs. Krishnamurti and Nityanandam in Mrs. Besant's life. She was not a person to give up friends even if friends gave her up; and she fought hard for her colleagues. The split, however, sadly affected the Central Hindu College. The workers who followed Mrs. Besant left the College; and my father found it difficult to manage its finances unaided. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya's idea of a Hindu University had been taking shape; a Hindu University Society had been founded by Pandit Malaviya, Sir Sunder Lal, Maharaja Sir Rameshwar Prasad Singh of Darbhanga and others, in 1911, and Mrs. Besant and my father were also members of

that Society. The Government had made it a condition that the Central Hindu College should form the nucleus of this University if the latter was to be recognised by law. Pandit Malaviya had always fought shy of the Central Hindu College and Mrs. Besant; but now there were pourparlers. They were still going on after the internal split in the College in 1913, and I remember the visits of Pandit Malaviya and Dr. Sunderlal to my father at Banaras soon after my return from England. Thus the College passed the more readily into Pandit Malaviya's hands, and it expanded into the Banaras Hindu University.

To many of us of the old Central Hindu College, the memory of this merger will always be sad as long as we live; for the Central Hindu College stood for something else and unique. It refused all Government aid, while the Hindu University is receiving a great deal and ever clamouring for more. Such aid destroys inevitably the vitally necessary independence of educational institutions. The Hindu University is a great institution— a fine creation of a great man who deserves all praise and admiration for it. But the Hindu College is dead. I happened to be elected to the first Court of the Hindu University. Mrs. Besant and my father were there also. My father delivered a long speech, criticising many aspects of the Hindu University; but Mrs. Besant was against him who had been her right-hand and closest colleague in the building up of the old Central Hindu College; and supported Pandit Malaviya instead, in the very hall my father and she had built together. For me it was a curious sight; but Mrs. Besant would support the person whom she had once pledged herself to support.

That, however, did not mean that she was happy at the change. Mrs. Besant's notes in *The Theosophist* of 1912 and 1913 show how hurt she was at the way things

were going at the University, and she particularly felt unhappy at Pandit Malaviya giving a pledge to a questioner of his that his University would have nothing to do with Theosophy. That led her, as the notes in *The Theosophist* testify, to the formation of the Theosophical Educational Trust and her proposal to found a National University. The arrangement, as we were all given to understand, was that Mrs. Besant and ten of her colleagues of the old Board of Trustees of the Central Hindu College would be taken as life-members of the Court of the new Hindu University. There was some confusion somewhere; and in the regulations as finally framed and passed, this particular item was not entered. They wanted to take Mrs. Besant on the Court any way, and so the rule was made that only Hindus could become members of the Court except the first one. Thus Mrs. Besant and also Mr. Arundale could be and were all elected to the first Court. When their term of office expired, there was trouble about her re-election. I wrote to her a letter asking her if she would permit me to propose her name for re-election as a Hindu, for I took her to be one from every possible consideration. Here is her reply:

Telegrams:
'Standard', Madras.
Telephone No. 12.

"New India",
P. O. Box. 39, Madras, E.
November 22, 1920.

My dear son,

Thank you for your nice letter.

I pressed on Pandit Sunderlal and more than once on Pandit Malaviya, the unfairness of ignoring the condition on which the C.H.C., its buildings and funds, were given over to the Hindu University. Both acknowledged it and promised to remedy it, but the promise remains unfulfilled.

We elected the then President and ten trustees as life-members of the Court. As I was English, my name was put in the schedule of the Draft Bill, but had disappeared from the Bill as passed. The names of the elected persons are in the Trustees' Minute Book. I believe there is ground for a suit, claiming back the land and buildings, but I have never wished to bring one.

I do not think you can call me a "Hindu". I am one by belief, but not by birth, and I think parentage is an element in the name. My claim does not rest on that foundation, but on my share in building up the C.H.C. and the condition made when we agreed to hand it over and to make possible the Hindu University. I have said many times that I cannot claim to be a Hindu, because of my birth, but am one in all but that.

Thanking you for thinking of me,

Yours affectionately,
Annie Besant

This is a characteristic letter. It is a delicate one. It shows how she felt the change that had come over the Central Hindu College. It shows her devotion to her old colleagues. It shows how anguished she was that a solemn undertaking was not fulfilled. It shows how grateful she felt even for small remembrances from folk who themselves owed so much to her. It also shows how she honoured the conventions of faith, and how despite her own personal beliefs, she would refuse to force herself into a place whence customs, however silly, barred her. I have preserved this letter among my most prized possessions. Luckily the University authorities, though they did not have the regulations properly changed to bring her and her ten colleagues permanently on the Court, got these changed sufficiently to enable them to elect a non-Hindu, who was

on the first Court as a member thereof, even afterwards. This was done specially for Mrs. Besant, and she, I think, was regularly re-elected as a member of the Court to the last.

CHAPTER IX

AS SHE LIVED AND DIED

How methodical Mrs. Besant must have been, and how careful even about little details, are evident in everything that pertains to her. She once discovered that some stray issues of *The Theosophist* were missing from her collection in the Adyar Library. She wrote in *The Theosophist* that they were so missing, and asked if any friends could help her in replacing them. I found that I had complete volumes of those years in our private library; and I wrote to her offering to send all the volumes because we did not need them, and it would be best to have a complete set at one place at least. Here is her characteristic reply:

Tele { graph: Olcott, Madras
phone No. 663

The Theosophical Society,
Adyar, Madras, S.
Jan. 21, 1921.
Calcutta.

My dear Son,

It was very nice of you to be willing to spoil a volume of the Theosophist *to fill our need, but the single copies have reached us, so I have your kind thought and the volume remains intact. Believe me, dear Prakasa, that my feelings to you all are quite unchanged. Differences of opinion should not touch old ties.*

I hope to be in Banaras by the Punjab Mail on the 26th *and to stay till the morning of Feb.* 2. *Please tell*

your father, with my love, and say that I expect to be asked to breakfast one day.

Yours affectionately,
Annie Besant

She would be grateful even for small considerations: she would assure everyone of her continuing love; and she would not even forget to remind one that she must have her breakfast at the old place in the old way!

Mrs. Besant was really a very methodical person. On my way to England, seeing my luggage neatly tied, she told me: "I love neat packing." My father is also very particular, and it is the despair of his servants and his sons—the arrangement of his luggage—when he travels. Even for short journeys, his luggage is tied up long in advance. He does it all himself: it is no good any one interfering or offering to help. He would tie his bedding in specially made straps, and he actually measures with his span from the edges of the bundle to make sure that the straps are absolutely symmetrical and equidistant each from each. He himself had carefully packed my luggage for my European voyage, and so no wonder Mrs. Besant thought it was neatly tied. Her own luggage was always equally neat, tidy and compact.

It may perhaps interest my readers if I say something here about my father's extreme orderliness and punctilious neatness. All his things—keys, papers, money, clothes, books etc.—are always at their prescribed places. He would put everything in its allotted place immediately after use, and one can always find what one wants of his things at the place one has always found it before. This is so to such an extent that it might sometimes have even tragic consequences. A servant who had left his service and turned a thief, got entrance into his rooms at Chunar one night,

breaking open some doors. He opened just the drawers and bags that contained what he wanted and decamped with the purse and silver tumbler. He left everything else absolutely undisturbed. My father would rub off the ink from the nib every time he stops writing; carefully cut the pages of a book as he reads; underline and sideline the passages he likes with the help of a ruler; get his books bound so that the binding might not abut the edges of the pages lest they fall out by their weight from the binding as they very often do when lying in the almirah. He most carefully folds his clothes and extracts all pins and unfastens all strings from the papers and packets sent to him and preserves them for future use. He carefully keeps a diary *cum* engagement book and an account book; and unlike anyone whom I know and who uses a cheque book, he would never sign a cheque without making sure from the pass book that there was enough money in the Bank. He has very strict principles regarding expenditure being within the income and never either lending or borrowing. The porters at railway stations have a very difficult time if they do not arrange his luggage in the compartment at the exact place and the exact angle he wants them. Philosophers are not supposed to be practical, and if there is one word in the English language that my father abhors, it is 'practical', and if he chides and lectures at extreme length to any person in the world, it is to the one who uses that word in his presence: but if in all my experience I have known one man who is really practical—in the truest sense of the word—it is my father. His philosophy of life enables him to be that without perhaps his knowing it.

There is not an iota of physical or mental indolence in my father. He sits from hour to hour and always upright in his chair—without bending forward at all, scarcely resting

Dr. Bhagavan Das

his back against the back of the chair—even in his old age with intense concentration of mind, reading or writing, regardless of heat or cold. He makes his own index on the books that have it not; adds many new items in the indices already existing; corrects spelling and grammatical mistakes; as if he were reading proofs for the press. If the type is small he uses a magnifying glass; and he consults a dictionary or even an Encyclopaedia—leaving his chair immediately to do so—whenever in doubt about anything. He makes his own glossaries and scarcely takes the help of any secretary or stenographer. Though old, he would lift heavy trunks, bedsteads etc. himself and place them in their right position if they are not all properly placed—that is parallel to the sides of the room. He is always keen on rectangles and does not like circles or semi-circles in buildings or arrangement of furniture or even flowerbeds. He is a great builder; and most of the buildings of the old Central Hindu College are in accordance with his plans. He has no need for round pillars even and prefers square or rectangular ones. To him it is a matter of deep regret that the Hindu University buildings are not in straight lines, but in a so-called semicircle which even though they appeared beautiful on the map when originally drawn, parallel to the curve of the river Ganga, are an eyesore to him as they abut one beyond the other when looked at after construction. He warned the engineers against this when the plans were originally discussed—but to no purpose!

In one of my talks with Mrs. Besant in the later days, I said to her: "You have been with us for over 30 years; you have given your all to my country during this long expanse of time; will you not please tell me what defect you find in us that prevents us from rising, that keeps us down where we ever were before!" She wanted to put me off—

she was so scrupulously polite and so anxious never to hurt anyone. But I was not to be warded off. I had my way. She yielded and said: "Prakasa, I am sorry to say, you are not a generous people"; and she continued to tell me—she did not mention names, but I could spot them as she spoke, for I knew them all so well—how our leaders do not encourage the younger people; how they try to put down talent in others; how jealous they feel of anyone coming up; how they spoil their own work by not taking steps to hand it on; and so on. All she said was very true. I know this unhappy trait amongst us only too well.

Mrs. Besant herself was generous to a fault, not only in her estimate of fellow-men, but also with her very limited financial resources. She once made up for the loss by theft of many hundreds of rupees of a Samskrit teacher of our College, which he had painfully saved for a daughter's marriage, and which was stolen on the eve of that marriage. Many persons took unfair advantage of this trait of her nature and deprived her of money of which perhaps she stood in greater need than themselves. I have not only known of persons coming to her for money pretending that their pockets had been picked while travelling, or some relative had died whose body had to be cremated, but also know of a son of a well-known politician who came to her saying that his father was away and his mother being in great need, had sent him to her for help. She would freely give away her money, and to this young man she gave the comparatively large sum of one hundred rupees. Not satisfied, she sent her secretary later on to the politician's house to find out if the money was sufficient, and if more was needed. The secretary had already suspected something wrong, but his advice had not been heeded by Mrs. Besant who was quite impervious when bent on a mission of charity. The secretary went to enquire,

and the politician's wife was aghast when she learnt of what the son had done, and told the secretary how the son had gone astray and was bringing infamy on the family by such conduct. She sent her profuse apologies to Mrs. Besant and begged her never to give him anything in future. There are many other instances. But let these suffice. And unlike others who would complain about such deception, she never made any grievance of it, nor did she change her ways!

My first baby came in 1916. Soon after the event Mrs. Besant visited Banaras. My father was not here, and she asked me to bring my wife and baby to her at Shanti Kunj; and so my wife and I went with the baby and fruits and flowers. Mrs. Besant took the baby in her lap and I stood behind the baby's head. The baby turned its eyeballs backward as babies will, to see a familiar figure. Mrs. Besant told me never to stand behind a baby's head like that, for that hurts the baby's eyes; but always in front. Mrs. Besant knew to all these things also. I have passed on the information to many careless Indian parents after that, with what effect I know not. In England Mrs. Besant introduced me to her son, Mr. Digby Besant, a wealthy businessman, about whom Mrs. Besant said one day at table at Miss Bright's: "Digby is becoming shamelessly rich". I met her daughter, Mrs. Besant-Scott, and grand-daughter, Miss Besant-Scott, also at the self-same table. I met them only once or twice; and though with Mrs. Besant the bonds of our family were very strong, there were no continuing bonds between the two families as such, as not unoften is the case in our own country.

My wife died in 1926. Mrs. Besant was in America at that time. The news was in the Indian papers. She always had Indian papers sent to her in weekly bundles when she was travelling abroad. When I had gone to

England with her, she used to get weekly bundles of the Allahabad daily, the *Leader,* and after reading them would sent them on to me by post. She wrote from America a letter of condolence to me which I reproduce below. It is so movingly characteristic: so sweet, so beautiful, so consoling:

NEW HOTEL SHERMAN, CHICAGO,
Sept. 6 1926,
S. Paul's.

My dear Son,

I am very sorry to hear that your dear wife has passed to the other side. It is a sad thing for a man to lose the Light of his Home.

Please give my loving sympathy also to your father and mother.

Always affectionately yours,
Annie Besant

It is a very short letter; but she made time to write this much at least. She was aging rapidly. She knew my wife so well; and she also knew what she had meant not only to me but to the whole household.

Mrs. Besant's last visit to Banaras was at the time of the Theosophical Convention in December 1930 and January 1931. Mrs. Besant's mind was fast failing. I saw her twice during that visit of hers. She did not remember many things; and when I said good-bye to her after the second visit—and that was the last good-bye—she said: "You will remember me to your wife, won't you?" Not to hurt her, I replied: "I will certainly." My wife had passed away more than four years before. Mrs. Besant had sent me a letter of condolence; and she had herself visited the vacant home many times afterwards; but she had forgotten everything. I came away wondering sadly

what was happening to that powerful mind. She has gone now. I have no more message to receive from her, and that message she left for my wife has remained and will ever remain undelivered. She went away to Adyar never to come back again. Her memory—and memory is mind—failed more and more afterwards. She suffered greatly in those last days, so I learn from persons who were with her then. She was faithfully attended upon by Miss Willson to the last, and she left her body when she was within twelve days of completing 86 years of age.

In her declining years, whenever she came to Banaras she used to detrain at the Kashi railway station because she could walk from the platform to the waiting car without having to go up any steps or slopes, while at the more familiar Banaras Cantonment railway station, which was the nearest to her home in Banaras, there are the steep slopes of an overbridge to negotiate. This Kashi station stands right on the southern bank of the 'Ganga': Mrs. Besant abhorred the English form of "Ganges", always gave to the holy river its own indigenous name, and insisted on everyone else doing the same. An old friend, Damodar Prasad, Headmaster of her Theosophical School in Banaras, told me once that as he was bringing away Mrs. Besant from the Kashi station on one occasion, and she saw the river, she said: "Bhagavan Das has often promised that he would cremate me here in Banaras, on the banks of the Ganga. I do not think, though, he will be able to do so." This seems to be almost like the wish of an old Hindu woman wanting to be cremated in Kashi on the banks of the sacred Ganga and at the hands of her best loved son. She died in Adyar, and so my father to his great sorrow could not assist at the obsequies.

I happened to be at Lucknow at the time of her passing. I was presiding over a meeting of Congressmen that had

been hastily summoned by Jawaharlal Nehru to take counsel together on the political situation, after his sudden release from jail on account of his mother's serious illness. A colleague, Har Prasad Saksena, suddenly said, as the meeting was proceeding, that they should adjourn as a mark of respect to Mrs. Besant's memory as the news of her passing had just come. I was stunned. I seemed to collapse on the pillow that was put behind my back, for presidential distinction, on the floor where the members were sitting. I simply could not utter a word. I believe I had no idea that Mrs. Besant could die. I simply said to the meeting: "We must stop all proceedings and observe silence." Politicians, however, cannot observe much silence—I fear they must talk incessantly—and after a minute or two Jawaharlal said: "We had better talk of Mrs. Besant". Mrs. Besant's relations with his father, Pandit Motilal Nehru, had also always been very cordial, and Jawaharlal had been known to her since childhood. He paid a warm tribute to Mrs. Besant, and I simply kept on exclaiming from time to time: "We owe much to her, we owe much to her".

I could not follow the proceedings at all closely. My emotion was overpowering me, though the meeting continued for a long time; and being the President I could not leave either. But I remember I walked up quickly to the head telegraph office of Lucknow immediately the meeting was over, and sent a telegram to Miss Willson saying: "Offer heart's reverential homage to memory of departed great". I had an acknowledgment of this from Miss Willson from Darjeeling some weeks later. The strain of nursing and the sorrow of the parting were too great for Miss Willson. She too lost her memory soon afterwards, and she died as her great leader had died, when life had ceased to have reactions on her and her memory was dead.

Her only memory was Mrs. Besant; and she repeated constantly almost like a child, when last I saw her: "I have known A.B., I have known A.B.". Indeed, it was a rare privilege to have known Mrs. Besant: a privilege of which one can be justly proud and which one can never forget. I am proud and happy that I had that privilege myself in an abundant measure.

My father received the news of Mrs. Besant's passing as he sat in his chair working in his retirement at his table in Chunar. My mother tells me how tears trickled down his aging face and long white beard. I doubt if many people have seen my father in tears. Like others, he has also suffered numerous bereavements; only three, within my memory, have affected him: the death in 1903 of my youngest brother, a bright young boy of three from whom great things were expected by the fond parents; the death in 1922 of his own younger brother Shri Radha Charan Sah to whom he was deeply attached; and the death in 1926 of my wife who had grown up as his own daughter, having been wedded to me when she was only 11, and having been with him when my sisters had been married and when I was studying abroad. But even on these three occasions I do not think he shed tears, as he masters his emotions almost cruelly and would not let the world know how he feels. Mrs. Besant's death, however, brought tears even to his eyes—though Mrs. Besant was really too old and ailing to live any longer, and it must have been a relief to her to go; and my father also was too old with wisdom and experience himself to cry over a mere death.

My father was, however, keen on fulfilling his last duties by Mrs. Besant; though curiously enough he is not very keen on ceremonials and ordinarily he goes through them—when he must—fairly carelessly. She was cremated at Adyar and a portion of her ashes was brought, in obe-

dience to her will, to Banaras. Though her wish for cremation at Banaras could not be fulfilled, her ashes were carried with reverence in a great procession of citizens and members of The Theosophical Society after a meeting in the Theosophical Hall, to the Ganga. My father himself carried them in an urn in his hands, bare-head and almost barefoot, for he took off his leather shoes and put on a white cloth cover—on sacred occasions we use no leather—and deposited the ashes in the river from a decorated boat, full of friends, colleagues, admirers, including a high Government officer. The river at the time was in flood and it was with difficulty that the boat was taken to the middle of the stream. Immediately after, he presided over a public meeting in the Town Hall, where tributes were paid to her memory. I was suddenly called upon to speak also, and with emotion related some of the incidents of my childhood.

The citizens assembled at the meeting passed a resolution requesting the municipal authorities of Banaras to name after her the road that passes at the back of Shanti Kunj, her old residence, and on which open out gates leading to The Theosophical Society's quarters and the old Central Hindu College, opposite each other, all hallowed by innumerable memories of her. The resolution was duly forwarded by my father as the chairman of the meeting, and her name was given to the road and is inscribed on large marbled-cement boards, specially erected for the purpose by the roadside.

The story of the "Annie Besant Road" in Banaras will be found interesting. My father was the Chairman of the Municipal Board, Banaras, from the beginning of 1923 to the end of 1925. He was perhaps the most remarkable chairman that the Banaras Board ever had. He was very keen on the dignity of the Mayor of the town,

and raised the status of the Municipality as a self-governing institution to a very great extent. The Board under his guidance was also able to introduce many reforms in the administration and to afford various civic amenities that were unknown before. He fought throughout his term of office for the city's freedom from official interference. Once in the course of official correspondence, the Commissioner of Banaras, had taken up what my father thought was an offensive tone. He sent the letter back inscribing: "Returned in the original for being properly worded." The Commissioner—a kindly English gentleman who became a friend of ours afterwards—paid a visit to my father, expressed his regret, and said that the wording of official correspondence should not be regarded as anything personal. There was a cordial conversation and tea to close the chapter!

At the last meeting of that Board, before its relinquishment of office and the election of a new Board, the members unanimously expressed the desire to name the road that runs from the Banaras Cantonment station past our house, after him. He declined the honour with many thanks, saying that he would prefer the road to be called the 'Vidyapith Road' instead, in honour of the Kashi Vidyapith that also stands on the self-same road. At this desire of his the road was named accordingly. An address was presented to the retiring Chairman by the staff of the Municipality and a group photograph of the members was also taken. Very unlike what happens in such portraits, my father is seen in this standing at the back with other elderly members whom he insisted on taking there, while the youngest members are seated on chairs in the front row. Was not this nice of him? I may add here in parenthesis an amusing episode. We all know that officers very carelessly sign their names not only illegibly

but aslant, and also inscribe their notes on the margins of documents in slanting lines. There was a definite note from my father for the office that signatures should be legible and that the lines of manuscripts should not be aslant but parallel to the edges of the pages. He looked into and knew all details and amazed everybody with his knowledge of them. He was a hard taskmaster but a very sympathetic one. He worked harder as Chairman than two permanent officers put together!

The Boards that succeeded his Board found it difficult to carry on his traditions, and affairs went from bad to worse. In fact the Government superseded the Board and took its affairs in its own hands. Just before the supersession, however, they had decided to name after him the road stretching beyond the Vidyapith Road and running between The Theosophical Society and the Central Hindu College building, both of which owed so much to him. My father knew nothing about this, neither did I nor anyone else connected with him. The public meeting in the Town Hall of Banaras in memory of Mrs. Besant was held during the period of the Board's suspension, when the city's municipal affairs were administered direct by Government through its officials. Soon after the resolution reached the official administrator over the signature of my father, the Executive Officer of the municipality called on me and told me that the previous Board had decided to name the identical road after my father, and it was now embarrassing to find a letter from my father himself asking that the road should be named after Mrs. Besant. He was anxious that I should find out if my father would still desire a change. My father was surprised when he learnt of this, and was most emphatic that the road should be named after Mrs. Besant and not himself. It is interesting to note that the long stretch of road right on from

the Banaras Cantonment station to what is known as the Bhelupura crossing in Banaras—a distance of quite three miles, which is now called in two parts the 'Vidyapith Road' and the 'Annie Besant Road'—was to have been named after my father by two successive municipal Boards if he himself had not interfered. It is gratifying to find that they gave the names he himself proposed instead. I think it is a good example for those persons who are most anxious to have roads named after themselves and employ methods to achieve their objects which are far from right and proper.

A grateful city has thus tried in a humble and inadequate manner to keep her memory green; but why did Mrs. Besant die at all? Perhaps for the simple reason that all must die. No one can be immortal. But why did Mrs. Besant suffer so much towards the end? Why did her body survive her mind, so to say? My own theory is, which I once mentioned to Mr. Arundale, when he said there may be something in that—that she had overworked her brain which, unable to bear the strain, at last gave way. Her body, however, pure and unspoilt, would not go. So it outlived the mind, bringing much suffering to her. At last it too had to go; and she went with it. And so Mrs. Besant died; she passed away to the Unknown; anyway, her body was consumed by fire and cannot be seen. This great woman—woman indeed in her appreciation of values; in her affection for the young; in her capacity to attract love and give it; in her intimate knowledge of human problems and her intuitive wisdom in meeting them; in her simple, serene, and severe domesticity; this great leader—leader indeed in the way she spotted out talent in the men and women she met; in the manner she pulled such persons out of obscurity and pushed them into the light; in the way she bound them to herself in

the strongest bonds of personal affection and got her work done by them willingly, eagerly, devotedly; in the hard work that she herself put in from day to day, giving her message by tongue and pen, all the time travelling over and over again throughout the length and breadth of the world; in her courage to face all dangers bravely, and never asking any one to do what she was not prepared to do herself; in her clear vision of the goal and her equally clear idea regarding the means that would take her there;—this great woman and leader died.

So disappeared this Personality from the stage of the world, which had once almost challenged God on His Mighty Throne and questioned His very existence, let alone His Greatness and His Goodness; had hurled anathemas on His established Christian Church, almost a couple of millennia old; had charged Society with high crimes and misdemeanours for maintaining glaring differences between rich and poor; had led what was perhaps the first peaceful industrial revolt, in the form of a strike of match-girls in London and had disturbed the even tenor of smug self-satisfied and ease-loving social life of conventional English men and women.

So passed away this great Pioneer of an Indian education that was to be free from financial assistance and control of Government, under which boys and young men could breathe the air of freedom, having been specially freed from the fear of corporal punishment; this great preacher of a new and reformed Hinduism whose main tenets she made famous the world over, and whose philosophy of life she taught to those who called themselves Hindus but knew not what that meant; this great advocate of practical social reform in all departments of human life; this fiery lover of liberty for India, who first initiated new modes of political work here, roused a slumbering people

to a sense of self-respect, and took them on to paths of true patriotism and active resistance to wrong.

So went the way of all mortals, this author of a hundred books; the deliverer of twice ten thousand lectures: the inspirer of a hundred million people the world over; this great dreamer of the dream of a new world of peace and goodwill; of a new age of national freedom and international co-operation; of a new union of the peoples of the Earth; of a new orientation of the religions of mankind in the light of that Theosophy which was so dear to her. Optimistic to the last, she worked in her own person to the last also to bring this dream to birth and fruition, to make the vision a living reality in the world of human beings.

So Mrs. Besant went away; the familiar figure of *Bari Mem Saheb*—"the grand old lady"—can no more be seen; her familiar hand can no more be touched; her familiar voice can no more be heard. Where has she gone? I do not know. It is all a vast unknown to many, to me unknowable also; but she herself used to speak of it as if she knew it all very well herself in person. I cannot say. I hope she is right. I hope those who love meet again somewhere; I hope—but I also fear that cannot be.

And so I have come to the end of my reminiscences. In the very nature of things, alas, there can be no more. These reminiscences, many of them, may be of an intimately personal nature; but I think they have a public value also. Mrs. Besant worked in many spheres, and always left the impress of her personality everywhere. One wonders, however, whether in the wicked world in which we live, any one, however great, can really leave any lasting effect on anyone else. Life seems to flow as ever before; and joy and sorrow, health and disease, love and hatred, seem to remain revolving in an unending succession just as night

and day, despite the endeavours of the best and greatest to cure the evils of existence. Neither precept nor example seems to exercise any influence; and just as Vyasa of old with uplifted hands begged people in vain to follow Dharma from which alone, he said, flowed stable riches and joys for all, and lamented that no one listened to him, and everyone always went into wrong ways, so, I fear, Mrs. Besant and all other great teachers of mankind may also exclaim and sorrow. It all seems so futile.

Have I myself been able to follow Mrs. Besant in anything? some may ask. Well, to come down from the sublime to the ridiculous, since the age of 10, if not earlier, I have been a very punctual person. Her punctuality attracted me early. I have by now become almost a byword for good humoured joke among my friends for punctuality. People are almost inclined to set their clocks by my arrival and departure at places, though I hope I am not so bad as all that. And in India punctuality is a bad habit; it does not 'pay'. Here, the last comers are usually served first; and I have to waste a lot of my time because I get to places punctually. Once I rushed my father along, driving the car myself almost too fast for safety, to keep an engagement with Mrs. Besant; and when we arrived on the minute, my father said to her: "Prakasa wants to vie with you in punctuality".

The other thing I have unfortunately followed Mrs. Besant is in the matter of replying to letters. I do not know if there has been any letter written to me, till I came into office on the advent of Swaraj in 1947 and work became too heavy for me to attend both to official papers and private correspondence, to which I had not replied, provided it has reached me and not miscarried or been swallowed by official censors, who have always been active in India. It also is a bad habit here: correspondence grows

to enormous proportions; the expense in time, money, and energy is heavy in coping with it; high expectations are roused, and the delay even of a few days in reply—however busy I might be—brings complaints from those who have little to do and themselves scarcely attend to correspondence; and worst of all, persons from whom I should like and love to hear, do not write, while my heavy mail bag brings all sorts of communications I would rather not have. May I just add that the wordly wise man never commits himself on paper and so seldom writes. A person used to writing letters is constantly inclined to put his pen to paper and not unoften gets into trouble. I do not know if Mrs. Besant ever did: I certainly have sometimes been surprised at the results of my well-meant efforts to be courteous in attending to the letters from all and sundry!

There are other things too that I believe I have learnt from Mrs. Besant. Of that I must not and cannot speak myself. But I will say this, that following Mrs. Besant can lead no one to what is called worldly success. She herself almost seemed to have a great deal of regard and even respect for those who had succeeded in life in the material sense; but for herself she followed the paths that led to failure; and those who tried to follow her must have some other than the usual sense of values and must take failure itself as success. Hers was the path of service to mankind: to give of what she had and even more than she had; hers was not the path of exploitation: of taking—as successful persons take—from others very much more than they can afford to give and indeed very often all that they have. Those who followed her have served but have not succeeded. The mean—the right, proper, balanced, middle—path has, I fear, yet to be found whereby men may serve their brother men and not ruin themselves in the bargain.

Those friends who have had the patience to wade through my pages thus far, may feel inclined to say that when apparently I knew Mrs. Besant so well, would I not write something about the lessons her life has to teach; would I not give an appreciation of her work. It would, I fear, be impertinent on my part to try to appraise Mrs. Besant's work for the world and for India. I simply could not do it. I fear—and I am sorry and almost ashamed to confess it—I did not even understand her main work that pertained to worlds other than this, and to lives removed from those on this planet, and on planes away from the physical. I believe spiritually the distance between her and myself was so great that that side of her work I could neither apprehend nor appreciate. I had nothing to do with it.

There was another side, and to me a bigger and a brighter side. I could see her physical self, and I loved it for all its beauty, its dignity, its grandeur, its simplicity and its nobility; I could also see her concrete work and admired it fervently, intensely. I clearly sensed her strong mind, her sympathetic imagination, her earnest constant longing for the betterment of the lot of her fellow men and women, children and animals, on earth. And there was absolutely on the surface for all to witness her courage and devotion, her truth and chivalry, her incessant hard work and utmost reliability, her intensity of purpose and sympathetic understanding of human nature, her loyalty to comrades and generous disposition, her efficiency in action and strength of will, her meticulous care of little as of great things, and her high regard for small as for big persons, her appreciation of values and of men. All this I have tried to understand and have even tried to follow, however humbly and distantly, however unsuccessfully and ineffectively. She verily was an ideal and an

inspiration; and all that I can do today, as I close these reminiscences, is to lay at the feet of this great lady—one of the greatest beings that took human form, certainly the greatest person among all with whom I have been privileged to come in contact—my tribute of devotion and of gratitude. I offer as one who always felt like a baby in her presence, a grandson's love to a grandmother. I could do no more even if I tried; nothing to my mind can possibly be more; and I cannot do better than close with the heartfelt prayer with which she ended many an inspiring book of her own:

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