

SOBS AND THROBS
Or
Some Spiritual Sidelights

By

Abdul Kareem Abdulla (Ramjoo)

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SOBS AND THROBS

or

SOME SPIRITUAL SIDELIGHTS

WITH A FOREWORD

BY

MAULANA MAZHARUL HAQUE

BAR-AT-LAW

BY

ABDUL KAREEM ABDULLA (RAMJOO)

1929

A real romance about the MEHER ASHRAM INSTITUTE, and the living
miracles of Hazrat Qibla MEHER BABA. . . .

DEDICATION

THE SILENT THROBS OF MY HEART

IN THE SHAPE OF INTELLECTUAL THRILLS

DARE ME DEDICATE THESE FLIMSY FRAGMENTS

OF MY FEEBLE FEELINGS AT THE LOTUS FEET OF

THE MASTER!

FOREWORD

Never before in the recorded history of the world do we find any instance of an institution, where little children have been publicly educated and trained in the secret lore of mysticism. The Meher Ashram, near Ahmednagar (Deccan), possesses the unique distinction of being an institution of this type where one can come across the spectacle of seeing little schoolboys being turned out as saintly children. It has been truly said that the present is the age of publicity and that the deepest secrets of creation are being discovered every day and exposed to the view of mankind. In the material field man has discovered electricity, wireless telegraphy, Xrays, photography, television, ether, and other forces, too numerous to be mentioned here. In the spiritual field he has left the world of matter behind and has gone on to demonstrate the fact of survival and communication and is gradually beginning to learn all about the next world and the conditions of our existence therein. From creation to the Creator is only a step forward and now we are entering the greatest of all the fields—the mighty and awful field of union with the Universal and Creative mind. By this I do not mean that mysticism is a new science, newly discovered for the benefit of humanity. No. It is as old as the cosmos itself. Since the dawn of history every creed and denomination has had its saints and mystics, but the knowledge of the Divine has been confined to single individuals and carefully kept hidden from the vulgar gaze of the masses. Now a knowledge

of these occult forces also bids fair to become public property.

This book is a prose-poem, wherein the Divine Love manifests itself in its deepest signification. A superficial reader will perhaps find in it nothing but the ordinary escapades of a naughty schoolboy; a dogmatic religionist will see in it only the subtle way of the Devil and ascribe the story to black magic. But to appreciate the book fully, it is necessary to read it with the spiritual eye of a Sufi. The story is full of supernormal phenomena which can not be explained on any other hypothesis than that of Divine intervention in human affairs. Scientific sceptics may speak of chance and coincidence, but these are words coined by science and offer explanations, which do not explain anything. They are synonymous with ignorance and nescience. It is true that God does not interfere with His laws, but it is also true that all His laws are not known to man. If this were true, man would become infinite—an apparently hopeless and impossible proposition. This world is full of Divine manifestations from which His laws can be gathered—a fact so well and ably brought out by the able author in the preface to this book.

God-Love is the theme of this work and one has to tune himself with the Infinite to behold the superb panorama of exquisite beauty and Infinite Love displayed in His creation. A message of God-Love being given to the world through the instrumentality of His Holiness Meher Baba, who is the founder of Meher Ashram and the master-preceptor of the boys. Tolerance appears to be the keynote of the Ashram. Difference of caste, creed or colour finds no

room here. Hindu, Muslim and Parsee boys get equal treatment and the Indian and Persian boys live like brothers. Even European boys are not forgotten. Mr. Irani was sent to Europe to bring some boys from there, but his mission did not succeed, because of the materialistic atmosphere prevailing in that country. Sometime, another mission bound on a similar venture is sure to succeed.

The book is well written and is sure to appeal to the reading public. I commend it to thoughtful readers.

Ashiyanah,

Dt. Saran.

6-2-'29.

Mazharul Haque

PREFACE

All praise be to the Lord; not the God of any particular creed or caste, far short of Him, who is supposed to be seated on the Seventh Heaven, with one eye full of honey for a certain kind of believers, and the other, red with rage for the rest—the bulk of His creation—ready to hurl them all into hell at the first opportunity without any discrimination, save that mere label of a certain belief; but He, who is beginningless and endless, birthless and deathless, nameless and formless, the Infinite Existence, in whose comparison the whole of the creation does not exist at all.

The Absolute Knowledge against which all worldly knowledge is mere ignorance.

The Perfect Bliss, the smallest particle of which outweighs all the bliss and joys of the earth put together.

The All-Absolute whom to call and consider even as One is still like grasping at the shadow through the intellect, and so almost equal to considering Him as two or twenty!

The Beloved, that is millions and billions of miles more away from the domain of intellect and intelligence, of wit and wisdom, than the sun is from the Earth; and yet Who is so near as to be nearer than the very chord of life, ready to respond to the music of the heart!

And my humble salutations to the Prophet, the personification of all this prattle and praise!

Yar-e-mara har zaman nam-o-nishan-e-digar ast

Kooll-e-yawmin sooratash dar shakl-o-shan-e-digar ast

(Hazarat Maulana NiyazAhmed)

i.e., every time my Beloved bears a different name and is clad in a different garb; through all times His face is the manifestation of absolute beauty and grandeur in different forms.

Who again, in the words of a disciple of the Great Master Bayazid Bistami, "There is no difference between the two. As God does not walk in this world of sensible objects, the Prophets are the substitutes of God. If thou supposest that these substitutes and their principal are two different things, thou art wrong; is none but He!"

And so, He may play the flute and partly disclose His real identity as Krishna; become the Son and get crucified as Christ; style Himself as Zoraster and set Persia aflame; suffer as Buddha or flourish the staff of miracle in the shape of Moses; get openly slaughtered in Karbala or quietly buried in Kashmere; appear unknown in Africa or take a famous birth in China; reside in Baghdad or live at Ajmere; sing in poetry as Hafiz or ring the "tals" as Tukaram; manifest Himself all over the world like Vivekananda or work as silently as Sai Baba of Sherdi: even in *Muhammed*, one of His most perfect of disguises. He is not lost sight of by a heart that throbs with spiritual sobs in spite of all these varied veils assumed suitable to the occasion and circumstances. Much less can He be missed in His latest mould as "Meher Baba," amusing Himself with the creation of young saints until such time that He is once again pleased to thrill the world from pole to pole with Divinity!

This homage is not only a Muslim formality. Rather I cannot think of a better way of introducing the Master—the key-note of the theme—to my reader, whose temporal qualities are but too well-known to need a fresh narration.

The less I say the better for my meagre knowledge, while I would admit forthwith that I am as dry as a blotting paper where Love is concerned. Then what made me gain the privilege of writing this work from the Master?

One day, in the second week of September 1928, I suddenly got an idea to compile all the super-natural phenomena witnessed about the Master and the many direct and indirect miracles manifested by Him, and publish them in the shape of a booklet, never attempted by anyone to this date, for the edification of such of the spiritual aspirants who might be hesitating to approach the Master for lack of this sign of miracles in Him which is due to non-publicity. But I knew the Master would hardly give His consent to such a venture, since He holds miracles however great at a discount, and gives them no importance against the search for Truth. Yet I could not dismiss the idea from my mind. However, this constant hankering suggested to me to write a treatise on the miracles, setting forth the Master's own views about them. This gave me some hope of securing the Master's consent to my proposition, and I began, awaiting a favourable opportunity for its presentation. But I was so impatient and keen on the point, that before the question was even decided, the opening part of this preface was already written by me.

And lo! The Master gave me the opportunity that

I was yearning for in the shape of a miracle itself. True I had talked with some of my brothers-in-faith about my idea of compiling the miracles, which however had never reached the Master's ears. In the beginning of the third week of September, one evening, when I was musing on this very subject seated under a tree near the Meher Ashram, Mr. Kaikhushru Afseri brought me the unexpected command from His Holiness. "The Master wants you to write the adventures of Ali." The real significance of these words did not strike me until I had finished compiling all the details of this real romance, in their right sequence. At first, I thought the adventures would make, at the most, a long article for the press, and that for the time being, I must shelve my own idea of bringing out a booklet. But what a happy surprise? It has grown into a book and one full of miracles of a very high order.

To make stones and such other inanimate objects jump and move, as was once done by Hazarat Zhu'l-Nun Misri (died 859 A.D.),—he ordered a sofa to move and it went round the room and came to its place—or to send a person into the state of a trance with a mere glance, as was often done by Khwaja Hasan Attar, are from the spiritual standpoint not of greater significance than to make the hearts of little boys dance permanently to the Divine music as my Master has actually done.

Much can be written by way of comments and explanations on the complex subject matter of this book, besides the first and the last explanatory chapters and stray remarks spread over this narrative where-ever deemed to be very necessary, but, dear reader, the less you try to understand Divinity and Spirituality through intellect alone, the better for you. Realize a Spiritual

Sob and experience the Divine Throb and all the apparent inconsistencies, doubts, and irrationality will vanish into the all-absorbing subtle air of reality. Make the great Swami Vivekanand's aphorism "Awake, arise and stop not till the goal is realized" your watch-word. That alone will make you go onward towards true Understanding.

In conclusion, I beg to say that I have tried my best to be comprehensible and non-controversial as far as my honest opinion allowed me though I may still be criticised in some quarters. But my purpose has been served in as much as I have got my reward from the Master in the shape of a feeling; a feeling that I possess a heart in my bosom which is a thing other than a mere piece of flesh as described by physiologists.

Lastly, I must thank Messrs. F.H. Dadachanji and K.A. Afseri for providing me with all the necessary information and facts concerning this work. But it is with deep gratitude that I acknowledge the very valuable help, hints and corrections made in my task with great patience and diligence by Mr. S.A. Abbas (Khak) and Dr. S. A. Ghani"

A. K. ABDULLA (Ramjoo)

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105	32	Master as was	Master was
122	6	lucky	plucky
129	18	of the community	of the president of
131	15	Shum-ud-din	Shums-ud-din
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154	11	"The	"These
155	14	enhance the	Enhance their love through the love-pain of separation; some Had reached the
155	28	who had	who has
160	1	mediatation	meditation
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SOBS AND THROBS

CHAPTER I

LOVE SPARKS

The deep Divine Love that Ali, the illustrious disciple and one of the chief successors to the prophet of Arabia, had for that great World-Teacher is a well known fact; so much so, that even a momentary separation during the former's novitiate was of great pain to the august pair. It was in reference to this Love that my Master, while discussing the question of the hero of this narrative, had once conveyed, "I intend to make Ali the Real Ali." But where there is a Christ there is bound to be a Judas. In all the history of the Divine attempts at purifying the individual souls from the imagination of matter, Maya has never taken it lightly. Whether in the shape of an individual like Ravana or Yazid, or as a community or society, or in the guise of false prejudices and fanaticisms, it has thwarted with a vengeance the efforts of Masters in their noble mission. And for reasons best known to themselves, Masters generally give a long rope to this Maya, which is also known as *doonya*, *devil*, or *ignorance* by different peoples, different religions and cults.

It is a part of the great universal game that is going on since the great grand-father ate the "forbidden fruit," but here I am going wide of the mark. Really

speaking, I am at sea as to where and how to begin this thrilling romance.

Stranger than fiction, yet a fact of facts is this real romance of the lofty love of a little boy. But then, at the same time, it is also a miracle in itself, since it provides a concrete example of the abstract attribute called *Love*.

Of all the words, these two, *hero* and *romance*, are the most misused, misinterpreted and misunderstood in modern times. Wild passions, lusty actions, youthful follies and emotions of the moment are freely described as *love affairs* under various veils, which are often shamefully very flimsy. Real Love is beyond the domain of flesh and intellect. True, in many cases the spark begins through the medium of the body. But it is the soul that soars after the soul in the infinite region of the heart. The consummation of Love is not in the union of gross forms, but in the union of souls, the merging of an individual soul into the Soul of souls.

Even for a grownup person, the cultivation of this true Love is not as easy as scaling the Everest or flying from the South to the North Pole at a stretch; but it is an achievement that seldom crowns the efforts of real heroes, who silently go about with their very lives in their shirt-sleeves, without the least chance of being boomed in the press or on the platform. There are many, who in spite of untold hardships, painful privations and herculean efforts have failed in imbibing this true life-giving spark. Much less likely is it that a little boy like Ali, the hero of this narrative, could have attained it in his early teens.

It will be seen that Ali is a worthy recipient of the Divine treasure, since a rich soil is necessary for a

golden harvest, and he strived far and fast beyond the capability of an average boy of his age in fanning the fire of Love into a magnificent flame, the origination of which however was solely due to the spark of Love having been actually implanted in his heart by the Master.

For my Master, Religion, Love and God are not subjects to be thought upon and imagined through the intellect alone, or shown only in gilt-edged morocco-bound books. To Him, they are tangible things which can be given to or made to be experienced and realized by one through intellect, inspiration and knowledge, and can be felt as surely as the slash of a whip.

The greatest proof of the possibility of actually experiencing, realizing, seeing and knowing God are the words of the thousands of God-realized personalities that have been in the past, and the few who exist at present, hidden or manifest, amongst many of the religions and communities in the world. Similarly, the existence of Love is commonly known by the existence of uncommon lovers in history, legends and mythology, and through stray cases like the present one that come into prominence in modern times. In fact, Love, lovers and the Beloved are ever present on earth. It is the very foundation on which the creation itself is based. Prominence is a secondary question. I would like to sing on behalf of Ali with the Master Urdu poet *Dágh*:

"Meray havás ishk me kyá kam thay muntashar,
Majnoon ká nam ho gayá kismet ki bat hai;"

i.e., "it was merely a piece of luck that *Majnoon* became famous, though my distraction in Love was no less than his."

The intricate problems of the human existence are

as much entwined about the heart as enmeshed in the head. With the intellect, much can be understood. But "Love alone will unlock the mysteries of the heart." The language of Love is hard to be interpreted through intellect, for all the fine arts, poetry and beauty that it can imagine or create. Even all religions and philosophies fail to give satisfaction to a thirsty soul.

But for this, where is the need of a Master? And what is there left in the attainment of Perfection, God-realization and Self-experience? This could never be understood to *fearless* satisfaction through intellect alone. I say *fearless* because there are millions in every religion who stifle their reasoning and think themselves satisfied with unsatisfactory explanations regarding their existence as conveyed to them by the so-called *Mullas, Dasturs, Pundits and Priests* for fear of being damned and dashed into hell, which exists and rightly exists in every religion in one shape or the other.

Although I personally witnessed many of the Meher Ashram boys weeping and crying for days together without any earthly reason, and found them averse to eating, sleeping and playing, I could not bring myself to believe that the youngsters had kindled the fire of Divine Love in their little hearts. But then, I could not account for this rare phenomenon in any other way, since an impulse, an enthusiasm, or an emotion however deep and strong, has never been heard to make little boys voluntarily abstain from food, sleep and play, and that too for days together.

It was late in the month of March, 1928, that the Master let out the secret. It is seldom that He explains all His actions which are often very queer and extraordinary at the moment. But they are generally

explained automatically in the course of time to His patient and sincere devotees and disciples. In the course of a discussion with the writer and some other disciples, on Monday, the nineteenth of that month, His Holiness, who has been observing a complete silence for the last three years and a half, was pleased to convey by signs.

"Some time ago, I had implanted a spark of Love in the hearts of some of the boys as well as in a few amongst the elder disciples, which makes you see this surprising result these days. With a mere touch, or a look, Saints can give indescribable thrills and novel experiences to anyone they like, but these last for a certain period. Such thrills and experiences are a sort of stimulant to aspirants and have no permanent results. But Kutubs and Sadgurus seldom do that. This is not a temporary gift of that kind. Bodies may come and go, but this spark will never die. It will burst out into a great Divine flame one day."

"Then," I ventured to ask, "Why have you been often advising and insisting upon the boys to try to create love for You, and think of You as much as they can? And where is the need of individual efforts, since You have actually implanted the spark?"

"This spark," replied the Master through His usual gestures and alphabet pointing, "requires personal efforts for its complete manifestation. The more one would think of and try to love Me, the sooner and greater would be the out-burst. Through this spark there is a chance of one actually realizing God, let alone getting advanced in the spiritual planes."

Now, before I introduce the hero, it is meet that I should briefly acquaint my readers with the Institution that made him as such.

CHAPTER II

THE GEM OF AN INSTITUTION

Since the 1st of May, 1927, when the *Meher Ashram* was declared open with four Brahmin, three Maratha and three Mahar boys (all Hindus of different caste) at Meherabad, near the village of Arangaon, in the Ahmednagar District, much has been said and written about it in the public in many countries of the East and the West. Yet to scintillate the multicoloured rays of faith, hope, devotion, love, service and spirituality that this rare gem of an institution has generated, reflecting the Founder's neutral Divine lustre, is a subject beyond the scope of this narrative. Beside its spiritual aspect, the secular educational progress of the Ashramites is no less wonderful. While the crowning glory of it is the creation of a real little Saint of a boy fifteen years old, by name Abdulla Ruknuddin Ahwazi, now popularly known as the *Chhota Baba*, for whom the whole world is a mere dream as an experienced fact and by whom the Omnipresence of the Omnipotent is being actually experienced and realized continuously.

With the advent of fourteen boys from Persia, two of whom were Mohamedans and the rest Zoroastrians, the Persian section was opened on the 17th of July, 1927, in the Hazrat Babajan High School, which is attached to the Ashram. This foreign advent, as well as the first class facilities of Persian teaching, caused quite a flutter amongst the local Mogul community, and gradually the number of Mogul boys in the Ashram began to swell beyond expectations.

To all appearances, the first four months were, for the most part, passed in arranging the hundred and one mundane details that an Institution of this magnitude entailed.

So far as an external manifestation of the Master's internal workings for the Ashram was concerned, the 1st of September, 1927, witnessed the first spark of spirituality. Spiritual classes were opened that evening, and since then the boys were begun to be explained the spirit of all religions, the lives of Divine Heroes in every nation, and discourses on divinity and spirituality itself were given by competent speakers under the personal instruction of the Master for one hour every day.

Within another month, the Master seemed all engrossed in the Ashram affairs and began to remain there for hours together, freely mixing with the boys to the extent of actually playing, and at times eating with them. In November, quite a change came about in the atmosphere, mysticism was rampant everywhere though at the same time the secular education of the boys was never overlooked, or allowed to suffer in the least.

On the 2nd of November, 1927, the Master passed an extraordinary order. All the boys in the Ashram were strictly forbidden to speak with anyone save amongst themselves, or with the Ashram authorities. Even the schoolteachers were instructed not to talk with the boys after the school hours. On the 10th of the same month, His Holiness left eating solid food and began to remain on tea or a little milk, which system

He continued for nearly five months and a half at a stretch, leaving the milk also for some days in the course of this prolonged fasting. And a week after taking to this system, he began to convey to the boys every now and then, through stray hints and lengthy explanations, the importance of Love, concentration and meditation, and thus directly began to inspire the boys to Divine Aspiration!



Syed Ali Syed Haji Muhammed



The Master and some of the Premashram Boys

CHAPTER III

THE HERO

Just at this opportune moment, on the 20th of November, 1927, one fine morning, two Moghul gentlemen arrived at Meherabad, seeking admission for the boys that they had brought with them, into the Ashram. One of them was Mr. Syed Haji Mahomed of Bombay, with his son, Syed Ali, the hero, who barely looked to have seen more than fourteen summers. The boy cannot be said to be fair, though, a pair of dancing brown eyes lend an air of distinction to his round face, with a slightly flat nose, a broad mouth and a prominent chin of determination. But his real charm lies in his manly movements, his commanding gait and erect head. To put it in a nutshell, it is an old head on young shoulders, and the boy looks every inch a miniature-man of action and determination.

At first, the Master refused admission! And He had good reasons besides His spiritual foresight to do so where Moghuls were concerned. As early as the month of July, amongst the newly admitted Moghul boys, were the two sons of a well-known Persian Educationist of Bombay. Before admitting these two boys, the gentleman in question was distinctly made aware of all the rules and regulations, the aim and object, and the general standard of living in the institution. He accepted all these after a personal thorough inspection of the Ashram, and gave a solemn promise to abide by them. But within a few days, he offered to

provide a special diet for the boys, saying that the food provided to them in the Ashram was not satisfactory! The Master was of course greatly displeased with this proposed breach of the Ashram discipline, and with the way the gentleman kept his word of honour! The boys were dismissed, and in the course of a remark, with a very accurate foresight, the Master conveyed, "These Moghuls *are word-breakers, and not to be trusted.*"

But Ali's father persisted in pleading for a reconsideration of the Master's apparently arbitrary decision which was twice repeated by the Master with an equal persistence. In the course of this parley, the boy did not fail to show his mettle. As if drawn by a subtle magnet, he seemed very eager to be admitted, and began to argue his own case and try to reply to the objections raised against his admission in very intelligent and clear-cut terms! An average boy of his age is bound to fight shy in the presence of elders and strangers, particularly if they happen to be the officers of an institution in which he seeks admission for education. This unusual pluck of the boy at once endeared him to one of the Ashram officials, Mr. Kaikhushru Aspandiar Afseri. In the third attempt for a reconsideration before the Master, Mr. Afseri personally intervened, and pleaded for Ali's admission, in a very touching way. If ever the Master can be said to have a weakness, it is this: He is powerless against an appeal from the depths of the heart of His disciples. And Mr. Afseri succeeded where the very angels would have failed. Ali was accepted and forth-with admitted into the fold of the blessed, the Meher Ashram. Of course, his father was explicitly acquainted with all the relevant

details of the Institution, the possibilities in spiritual and secular knowledge of the boys, and the cosmopolitan life led by them, and he readily gave his consent in writing to all the rules of the Ashram, including the one that the boy will not be allowed to leave the Institution until the course is finished or within five years in the least, without the Superintendent's permission, which may be withheld for any period within the above limit without assigning reasons whatsoever.

The boy soon proved himself a noble character and pure-minded and as innocent as a lamb. His tendency towards spirituality and attraction towards the Master were spontaneous. From the very outset, Ali was often seen sitting by the Master whenever he could spare the time for doing so. He is not sentimental but very sensitive. The slightest reproach has been found enough to bring tears to his otherwise laughing eyes. Another fine attribute of the hero is that he is not talkative. During the daily spiritual discourse, he had never haggled over details or caused an unnecessary interruption to the speaker, but displayed a remarkable power of picking up facts and spirit of the subject in his own way, sitting silently or looking here and there as if really preoccupied. But his apparent silence and childish fidgeting did not mean absent-mindedness or disinterestedness. Whenever abruptly asked by the speaker to explain what he had heard in the course of the discourse, in nine cases out of ten, the boy would give a remarkable account of all that he had heard, coupled with his own comments on the subject distinctly and freely or in the tenth case would say outright, "I did not understand!" These particular traits of his silence, restlessness, fidgeting, once

made his class teacher cry out, "Ali, you don't seem to follow me!; what did I say now? And lo! the boy rattled out the whole passage that the teacher had just quoted almost word-to-word. Because of this very good memory, Ali seldom has to cram. He generally remembers facts and meanings by hearing and reading them once or twice. His progress in the school is no less brilliant. The day following his admission to the Ashram he was examined by the school authorities thoroughly before being put into the Fifth Persian, and First English Standard of the school. Within one month, Ali began to read the well-known Persian work, "Gulistan" with graceful ease, and had to be promoted to the second English standard, so good was his progress in this foreign language, too. At the time of writing this, Ali was in the Fourth English, and had completed his Persian course. Of all his virtues, explicit obedience seems to be his watch word. Twice, he has been reported having wept simply because some boys would not obey the Master properly!

Then again Ali is very outspoken. Later on, when his little heart had begun to throb with Divine Love, he used at times to become quite a dunce in the class but would never try to make a secret of it, and admitted the fact frankly before his class teachers, adding one of his pet phrases, "O God, what can I do? My *heart* is cold!" In the same way, when he felt like brilliant, as he actually is, he never felt shy in blurting out, "What a good boy I have become now, Sir; haven't I?" And with all these serious qualities, Ali is not of a reserved nature. On the contrary, he freely and cheerfully mixes with all the other boys and is very active, almost to the point of innocent mischief.

In fact, he is so very agile that for him to go about here and there, jumping and dancing, is as simple and easy as to a squirrel. If there is any trouble to the boys in the institution,—if it could be said to be "trouble" in the ordinary sense of the word, since no organisation is free from it to a certain degree—it is the strict observance of all disciplinary rules nowhere else enforced. The slightest breach of any rule by any boy is at once reported to the authorities concerned without an exception. And so, it is no small credit that he is rarely reported, which shows how strictly he observes the discipline of the Ashram. Yet of all these fine characteristics, Love can fairly be said to be the diamond and crowning jewel in Ali. We shall see in the next chapter more about this *diamond*, and how it was cut and polished by the Divine Jeweler.

CHAPTER IV

THE DIVINE LIFT

We have seen in the second chapter, that just two days before the hero appeared on the scene, the Master had begun to influence the boys directly to higher aspirations with constant hints, and an occasional *silent* lecture on love.

These stray explanations and lectures on Divinity and Spirituality that the Master had conveyed so far, since the year 1922, to His many disciples and visitors, if put together, would, I make bold to say, provide an unprecedented illumination on Divine points such as has never appeared in print or manuscript to this day! While the story of the deep effects, that these discourses have had on many a stony heart, would be another inspirational reading for those who aspire to spirituality. And much as I like to repeat some of the discourses here, the question of space and the sequence of this narrative compel me to leave them for a separate work. Though I cannot help adding that it was only one of these that really saved me from the clutches of Maya, and made me surrender myself to the Master some six years ago.

But the series of Divine Explanations, that His Holiness was pleased to convey since the 23rd of November, two days after the advent of Ali, made all the young and old, who had the good fortune to be present at the time, to hold their breath with amazement. From that day, the separate sections of the spiritual instruction classes, such as the Gujarati, Marathi,

Persian and Urdu, were postponed for some time. For more than a month after this date, the Master continued to convey for a couple of hours every evening these explanations, and all the boys as well as the older disciples were held spell-bound with rapt attention and enthusiasm. And the wonder of it was, that the Master did this merely through gestures and alphabet pointing, maintaining His grim silence through-out. Besides, He conveyed the deep subject matter as He alone can convey, in such a way that the little ones were no less interested and enthralled than the grown-up.

Since then, these have been compiled and form a small booklet, which can well be styled *Creation and its Causes*. It is all very novel, fantastic and fairy-tale-like.

Yet it is the most logical explanation of Divinity and the whole of the creation as far as the *reach of the intellect* allows, that has ever been brought to light in this way. The suns and the moons, the skies and the planes, the ethereal, mineral, vegetable, animal and human kingdoms, births, deaths, heaven and hell, the subtle and the mental worlds, Saints and Prophets, and the very source of all, the Soul of souls are described, explained and shown by the Master as one would describe a city, explain the effects of wine, and show what is music after *actually seeing, drinking and hearing them all*. He would explain and elucidate points so very clearly and logically as would carry the hearers almost to the verge of subjective experience.

So far as this *Creation and its Causes* concerns this narrative, it was the Masters inimitable tact in creating the moral of love out of all the various subjects at the end of the discourse every evening, "Love Me and you will find Me. I am ready to make you Vivekanadas

and Ram Thirthas, Ali's and Arjuns; the only prize asked for is Love. Spirituality is offered as a loot. Love alone will get the lion's share. Divinity is being auctioned, make the highest bid with all the Love that you can create and command." Such was the gist of the Master's constant remarks that He kept on adding, from time to time, during and after this special spiritual class as the spiritual sauce to the great Divine Feast that was freely being served to the lucky Ashramites. On the 28th November, 1927, in the course of such remarks, the Master even went to the extent of disclosing a part of His *internal game* to the boys and conveyed through the usual signs, "At first I had intended to advance you gradually in the path, *but the time of the great spiritual outburst that takes place in the world at long intervals is near at hand*, and so I have changed the programme. I am going to advance a few amongst you who will be ready with Love, very soon. It is not late yet. Let your hearts strive and strain to the utmost and create Love and feelings for Me". But amidst all such suggestions, the boys were equally impressed upon not to strain their brains. They were frequently reminded that painful attempts would not avail in creating Love as free attempts, made with joyous enthusiasm and boyish glee, would.

Besides firing their intellect with spirituality in this way, Divinity was directly imparted to the boys by the Master through frequent embraces and pats and fondling them for a number of times in a day. At times, the boys were patted till they fretted and fumed with Love and feelings, and out of sheer ecstasy even disobeyed the Master when asked to go away or take to studies, save the hero, who even in the fever heat of

Love stuck to his watch-word, obedience, and never defied the Master through word or deed, as did some of the other boys amidst the sobs and throbs of their little hearts.

Thus within a fortnight, the atmosphere became surcharged with Love in the Meher Ashram. Many of the boys and some of the grownup members, of the institution began also to look greatly changed. They became reserved and less talkative. They were frequently found preoccupied in the thoughts of the Master, and were found averse to eating, playing and sleeping. Ali led this group prominently.

To a casual observer, Ali still remained the same picture of innocent mischief and boyish activity, but when watched carefully, the great change in his heart was easily perceptible in many ways. Every now and then, the Master's name was on his lips. His hands, too, worked with the vibrations of his heart, and scribbled out his uppermost thoughts in words such as "Meher Baba is my Master", "Aga Ali, the son of Meher Baba", "This book belongs to the humble servant of Meher Baba", etc., on his books, papers and on all odd things that he came across with, and on which the music of his heart could be reproduced whether through pencil, a pen or a scratch with a piece of a stone or metal. Besides, things that belonged to the Master seemed to have a great attraction for the boy, and he could be often seen fondling and playing with the Master's sandals, pillows, coat, etc. Unlike many of the other boys, Ali did not seem to be much attracted towards the Master's photos or in playing with and adoring them, but was very keen in collecting the Master's hair, nails and even a piece of cotton wool

that He might have once used to stuff His ears with. He would treasure these up as one would treasure diamonds and pearls and constantly feast his eyes on them. But the most remarkable point was the great attraction that Ali began to have for the Master's personality. Just as the needle would rush at the magnet when brought near to it, Ali used to seek proximity of the Master at the first opportunity, and remained by Him as long as he could. Still, for a casual observer, there was nothing like a show about him. It was however on the 17th December that the depth of his feelings came to be known generally. Some days before this, he got eczema on his hand, and on this day, the Master decided for Ali to remain in the hospital, aloof from every-day life, till it was cured. And when he was removed there, tears began to roll down his cheeks in a string of sparkling pearls. Why? Simply because he could not bear the thought of separation from the Master even for a few days. He did not however, allow this fact to escape from his lips voluntarily. It was only when the Master argued with him for about an hour or so that the real reason of his crying came to light. His weeping did not cease until the Master conveyed to him a solemn promise that he would not have to remain in the hospital for more than two days, and that during these two days, He, the Master, would come to see him occasionally.

CHAPTER V

ALL AFLAME!

On the 20th December, 1927, the forty-first day of His fast, the Master confined Himself in a double room in the near vicinity of the Meher Ashram. This room was built on the spot as early as in the month of July of the same year, some five months in advance and none could make any head or tail of it at that time. About six feet in length, equally deep underground and four feet in breadth, with a small flight of stairs just sufficient for a single person to pass through this crypt-like place at a time, it was solidly built in lime and stone and resembled a steel safe. In place of a roof, a flat piece of wooden board was fixed over the top, closing the room in from all sides, save the small opening above for the stairs. Immediately above this peculiar pit of a room, another was built of wooden scantlings, bamboo matting and iron sheets. This latter room was a bit more spacious than the crypt right below it. A door was fixed at one end of this upper room for the attendants and visitors who were but seldom let in. The room had three other openings as windows. One of these was at the back overlooking the "Riyá zat-gáh" or "Sádhak Ashram", a set of five separate rooms, each one just large enough for a person to lie down comfortably, wherein five of the grown-up disciples had also imprisoned themselves just a few days before the Master confined Himself. The wonderful phenomena witnessed by some of this latter group

during their voluntary imprisonment does not concern this narrative, that fact has simply been mentioned to give an idea of the wide scope of the Master's internal workings. To continue the description of the Master's prison, the remaining two windows, were in the front overlooking the Meher Ashram, its playgrounds and the rest of the premises connected with it. One of these was enclosed with wire netting for the Master to look through when he retired into the upper room, and the other served the main purpose of enabling Him to appear before the disciples, boys and visitors, as He generally did throughout the day and also during the early hours of dawn. The Master remained locked up here till the 26th of February, 1928. During the period of two months and eight days, the Master never came out of this peculiar lock-up and usually retired for the night in the vault below.

On the same day, the 20th of December, 1927, the Master passed another extraordinary order. "All the boys in the Institution must not even be touched with the hand by any one including the class teachers and the school and Ashram authorities." All these were but the faint, gross indications of some powerful Divine current having been let loose in the surroundings. Yet none of the most enthusiastic of the disciples was ever prepared for the "ALL AFLAME" result that followed quickly.

The fire of Love that was smouldering silently of late in many of the tiny hearts, within a week of the Master's self-imprisonment, began to give out sparks. Strings of pearl-like tears began to flow freely from many little eyes every now and then without an apparent reason. This much was certain that it was neither

due to any physical pain or privations, nor was it due to any grief. Many of the boys on the contrary found relief and a kind of pleasure in weeping out their hearts. Meditation and concentration, weeping and crying appealed to them more than eating, sleeping and playing. They were tears of Love.

Who weeps for Love, he weeps the best.

Who cries for else, he does but jest.

It was this line couplet that the boys were rendering into reality and action. Even during the school recess for a few minutes, the boys could not help giving vent to the throbs of their hearts through soul-stirring sobs, and the school compound used to present a touching scene for a few minutes throughout during this first week of the Master's self imprisonment. Everywhere the huddled-up figures of the boys were found engrossed in meditation or sobbing out the throbs of their little hearts all over the ground and in nooks and corners of the surrounding premises. That even this separation of a few hours from the Master's proximity, during the school periods was unbearable and painful to these boys was an open secret.

But lo! The New Year Day of the Christian era, the 1st of January, 1928, which also happened to be the fifty-second day of the Master's fasting, and the twelfth one since He confined Himself, witnessed the most magnificent outburst of Divinity that has perhaps ever manifested itself in the world in such a way! As if the deep-rooted Divine emotion of the select few had set the rest of the boys into commotion, the majority of them began to cry openly every now and then throughout the day. But it was in the evening that the climax was reached. From the one to the last of every creed

and caste, the boys in the Ashram burst into tears and began to weep and wail as if all their dear ones were reported to be dead at a stroke. For about an hour between seven and eight in the evening, this wonderful phenomenon simply held the onlookers spellbound. The shrieks and cries could even be heard a quarter of a mile away from the Ashram! Attempts were of course made by the authorities in pacifying the boys and ascertaining from them the reason for this outburst. But it was all to no purpose. They seemed to be all engrossed in crying and deaf to all else. "BABA, BABA", the name by which the Master is generally known, were the only words that could be heard distinctly in all this tumult. Only this much was as clear as daylight, that however wildly they might have been crying, when brought in the presence of the Master, they became silent with a magical swiftness.

The following day, during the twenty minutes of recess, a similar outburst was witnessed on the school grounds, but the wonder of it was that at the sound of the warning-bell for resumption of classes, it all came to an abrupt end, although the select few seemed still struggling for subjecting their hearts to the command of the Master in the shape of the ringing of the bell. After a day or two more such collective crying of the boys ceased; yet many still continued weeping now and then for days together.

But in all this inborn and locally affected crying, the weeping of Ali was the most singular. The throbs of his heart, though seemingly vibrating his very bones, brought out almost silent sobs. He never talked sentimentally or in lofty words. He neither desired spiritual

advancement nor asked for Divine enlightenment. The proximity of the Master was all in all to give him peace and contentment. The happiness of his heart, and the tranquility of his mind when he happened to be near the Master was not a mystery even to a casual observer. At such moments, he used to look the very picture of peace and calmness.

From the second week of January, however the Master began to avoid close contact with Ali. This "crack-lover", as my friend Mr. Dadachanji, one of the faithful disciples of my Master likes to call him in his notes and diaries, was kept at arm's length for some time. Perhaps he was sufficiently surcharged with Love to the bursting point. Although the Master avoided personal touch, He seemed bent upon keeping Ali's feelings strung to the last tune. The boy was often called to the Master only to be dismissed with a curt enquiry instead of an embrace or a loving pat that he so long used to get. This treatment of the Master was a sort of fuel to the fire of Love that was all aflame by now in his little heart. In spite of his characteristic suavity, Ali could not curb the twitches and twinges that flickered on his usually complacent features on such occasions. He suffered and bore all this bravely and patiently as only a true lover can bear and suffer. For a heart that is not aglow with such deep Divine emotions, it is simply impossible to imagine even one-tenth of the poignancy of the pain that was caused to this brave and bold lover through such deliberate separation and intentional pin-pricks of the Master. And for all that, Ali neither disobeyed the irritating commands of the Master, nor uttered an undignified word to His face, much though he fretted and fumed

when he got away from Him. As if to show to what extent this noble soul could go in controlling his emotion and obeying His commands, the Master on the evening of the 17th January, in the presence of many other boys and disciples sent for Ali nearly a dozen times, each time dismissing him on one pretext or the other without letting him come within His loving clasp, for which the hero was as impatient as a fish out of water. The Master Himself could not help bursting into a silent eulogy of Ali that He conveyed through His usual gestures to those around Him. The gist of it was:—"Here is the concrete example of that noble sentiment, "Masti may bhi sar apna Saki kay kadam par ho", i.e., "Let my head remain on the feet of my Master, even when I am in the overpowered state of Love. Ali is in the overpowered state, still, he is not indifferent in carrying out the commands in spite of the tumult in his heart." On the 28th of January, the Master openly declared Ali to be quite ready with sufficient Love to enable him to be taken away from the domain of the "Bound" to the region of the "Free", but for a final touch from Him! Then why this "touch" was withheld? Well, here came in the devil as mentioned on the opening page of this book, and formed quite a story by itself which will be duly narrated in a separate chapter. In the meantime, let me tell my reader as to how and why the Master, pending this final touch which has been withheld to this date, gave Ali a glimpse of that, which is beyond the gross.

CHAPTER VI

BEYOND THE GROSS

What a coincidence! Just twenty four hours after the Master made the memorable declaration about Ali's readiness, it was also proved to the hilt in a very tangible way. The day following the one described in the foregoing chapter, i.e., the 29th of January, in the evening at about 6-30, as usual of late, the Master began to impart some pinpricks to Ali. In the presence of many of the boys and disciples, Ali was taunted with remarks such as, "He is very keen about his studies these days and has no thoughts for Me, and is always thinking about his father." The effect was soon evident. It was the first time that Ali lost control over his heart. Much as he tried, he could not help sobbing out loudly amidst profuse tears that were rapidly rolling down his cheeks; and at this display, which was very unlike him, the boy was so very exasperated that with a jump he got away from the Master's seat and began to run at random as fast as his legs could carry him. Mr. Afseri, who happened to be standing near by amongst the disciples, was signed by the Master to follow him, and he soon overtook the boy. Afseri, with his excellent command over the Persian language, and an inborn sympathy for these loving souls, generally always succeeded in restoring the composure of Ali and the likes, but this time, for all his attempts and persuasions, he failed to pacify Ali. And therefore he had to take the boy again to the Master who was as usual seated by the window inside the upper room. But the proximity

of the Master made the hero go more wild with his sobbing and crying which had by now become terrible to look at. The sobs were heart-rending and Ali's whole frame shook, as if vibrating with a high voltage electric current, while tears rolled down from his eyes in an unbreakable chain. After some time, the Master signed to Mr. Afseri to bring the boy inside. By this time, Ali was almost unconscious, and so the gentleman had actually to lift him up while conducting him inside. Scrupulously avoiding a touch of His Person, the Master however allowed Ali to be brought very close to Him, and began to convey some pacifying words.

It was nearly 9:30 at night, this piquant drama had continued for nearly three hours, and for all the Master's remonstrations, Ali seemed beyond the capability of controlling his soul-stirring sobs. On the contrary, the situation was growing more acute every minute. The on-lookers were turned into statues, speechless and breathless with wonder at the sight, specially when the boy seemed breathing his last amidst those terrible sobs. At this the Master left arguing with "intellect to intellect" and seemed forced to take recourse to the language of the heart. And did anybody hear it? No, many saw it. It was a pat, an embrace and a kiss! Let me tell you exactly how. The Master gathered Ali up in His arms, patted his head, imprinted a silent kiss on his forehead, and then placed His head on the boy's heaving bosom for two or three minutes, and finished. Ali became as calm as a mill pond. No sound, no vibrations, no movements. He seemed to be sound asleep! Not the slightest trace of the terrible storm remained visible on his features. For about fifteen to twenty minutes, he was left undisturbed

in this divine coma; then the Master beckoned to Afseri to wake him up. But here was another surprise for the on-lookers! Ali would not open his eyes, and when his eye-lids were pulled up, the iris was found turned inward. He was looking beyond the gross!

Under the Master's instructions, several questions were then repeatedly put to him, but no reply was received. However, after some time to the question "How are you, Aga Ali?", there came a reply "Khush"(happy) in a very feeble voice, which seemed to come from a great distance. The following two questions were similarly replied by him:

"What do you see?"

"Baba!"

"Where?"

"Everywhere!"

To see everywhere that which is everywhere is happiness indeed, and worth a thousand deaths, but alas! Even a thousand deaths are not sufficient to gain this sight. In the course of a discussion the writer once had with a Hindu Divine, the latter when told, "What tedious expectation! One has to wait for years and years to gather the fruit" he blurted out, "my dear Sir, years! If you are offered perfect sight at the end of ten thousand years, take it. Strike the bargain, it is very cheap..." "But for one", to use Dr . Reynold A. Nicholson's words, "not only journeys to God, i.e., passes from plurality to Unity, but in and with God, i.e., continuing in the unitive state, he *returns* with God to the phenomenal world," like my Master to give such a sight is a question of a touch, and a glance of Grace! I don't mean that Ali got the Perfect Sight that day. Rather it was a mere glimpse of

THAT which is "beyond the gross", but all the same it was a genuine *Sight*. To go into the details of the degrees of Internal Sight is not within the compass of this little book. Suffice it to say, that Ali, one day, will get as perfect a sight as gained by his more fortunate co-ashramite, ABDULLA, the "Chhota Baba", during this very month of January, 1928, when he received the "final touch" from the Master, which no power on earth could withhold at the right moment. Maya, with all its devilish paraphernalia of war will be helpless in the end. Although it has, for the time being, succeeded in separating the Moth from the Flame.

Now to revert to the sequence, at the last reply of the boy "Everywhere!" the Master quickly signed for his removal. He was taken into the hospital, and given some suitable treatment for the physical exhaustion and shock that he had incidentally been subjected to and made comfortable on one of the beds there. One of the disciples was instructed to remain awake by the hero's side for the rest of the night and report his condition. The Master Himself did not retire to the lower chamber till two o'clock that night and continued enquiring for the boy's state every now and then during those four hours. In the course of a remark, His Holiness was pleased to convey, "Much as I liked to leave him alone for some time, his terrible sobs forced Me to give him the Sight, but for that he would have dropped his body."

The next three days. Ali was detained in the hospital and kept under strict nursing. He looked well and moved about freely since the very next morning, but seemed dazed and dumb-founded and there was a vacant look in his eyes, while he did not take food for



Chota Baba Hazarat Abdulla

the first twenty-four hours.

On the third day, the 1st of February, a marked change came about Ali. In place of lethargy, keen activity was seen in his movements. Often he was seen running here and there all over the Ashram ground as if in chase of something that was receding away from him, and looked very disturbed and ruffled. To a casual observer, the boy looked starked mad! In spite of it all, how very considerate was he about the Master will be seen from the following episode.

For the first time, the secular education of the boys had been neglected for some days during this upheaval of Love. But on this day, the 1st of February, the Master desired all the boys to once again begin attending the school strictly according to the fixed time tables. Many boys at first persisted in being let alone, and some had substantial grounds to do so, considering their disturbed intellect and throbbing hearts, but all gave in after more or less of persuasion. Of all, Ali had the greatest right to be exempted, since, when he could not think of eating and playing, or remaining at ease even for an hour or so, at one fixed place, how could he even think of attending the school? Perhaps, he would not have been called upon to do so without even requesting for an exemption, but what a noble soul! Just because the Master would be pleased, Ali himself appeared before Him, and of his own accord, offered to go to school. Only those who have a proper idea as to an ache in the heart and a stir in the soul would, to a certain extent, understand the significance of this sacrificial offering. Perhaps it was this noble and spontaneous offer that made the Master's task very easy in persuading the other boys.

Now, although Ali went to school, the extraordinary condition of his heart continued to be the same, and a special watch was kept on him throughout the twenty-four hours. Of all his normal tendencies, eating was the one to which the boy became very averse. He did not avoid food, but he simply could not take it. So much so, that on the 2nd of February, the Master had to feed him with His own hands, with some rice and milk. However, on the following night, Ali began to sleep well, and the more he slept the more conscious he became. By the 4th of February, Ali was almost his old self again, the Sight having been cut off by the Master!

But the disappearance of the glimpse of the "Beyond" brought about a violent change in Ali. The uppermost thought in him now seemed to be to run away somewhere, perhaps in search of the "lost treasure", just as he had been running after the receding Sight recently. Once, he actually managed to run away a mile to the surrounding fields and hills, but because of the special watch kept on him he was brought back. His uneasiness on this score grew so keen that the Master restored to him the Sight once again, on the 9th of February, simply by passing His fingers on the boy's fore-head. However, the following week, Ali continued remaining very turbulent and truculent. The Sight was perhaps being flickered by the Master before being completely withdrawn pending the Final Touch. But his Love for the Master seemed to be greatly intensified. Even while asleep, he was often heard repeating "Baba", "Baba", and once was actually found in a devotional pose, lying on his back with both hands clasped in a characteristic

salute. He looked as if paying homage to the "King of his heart", although he was sleeping soundly at that time.

It will remembered that Ali frequently used to amuse himself with the Master's odd things including a pair of sandals, patched at a hundred and one places. However, to the horror of the onlookers, the boy, in a fit of feelings, one day that week, suddenly grabbed at and snatched away a fairly big piece of the leather strap from the sandal and began to chew it down frantically. Before he could be stopped by anyone, the piece was actually gulped down by him.

Now, before turning the other side of the shield in the next chapter, I may be excused for making a few comments on that which has already been written in the foregoing lines, besides narrating a little story as a sidelight. One should not run away with the idea that merely through constant thinking and hearing about Love, this attribute was created in Ali. Or that Ali was the only recipient of the Master's Grace in this connection. For a million times, we may repeat the word Love, but it would remain a painted rose on paper. The fragrance of a rose will alone be found in the rose itself and similarly Love will remain a sealed book to us, until actually realized.

Then, although Ali's characteristics clearly show him as a rational, and non-sentimental boy and not one who would be easily led away by empty suggestions, there are a few more boys in the institution who would each make, if not so long, an equally soul-stirring story of their great heart struggles as a direct result of the Master's Grace. Still perhaps, some would say this all about irresponsible and impulsive boys in their early

teens; but I have already made some passing remark about the grown-up disciples having actually experienced the Master's Internal power too, and as a further example, I cannot help mentioning the name of one of them, my worthy brother-in-faith Mr. K.J. Dastur, M. A., LL. B., the author of "Success in Life", and "His Divine Majesty Meher Baba and the Meher Ashram Institute" the principal of the Hazrat Babajan High School, a man of letters and a journalist of no small merit. I have had the pleasure of his acquaintance since the very first day that he came to see the Master in the month of June 1927. True, from the very outset, he seemed drawn towards the Master and believed Him as God-realized. He proved himself humble for all his literary talents, rationality and logical expositions, yet he looked every inch an M.A., LL.B., that he was in all his actions, words and mode of life. And this continued for some months until the season of Love began at Meherabad, in the month of December, 1927. But what a transformation it brought about in Mr. Dastur within the two following months. It will be best narrated by the fortunate gentleman himself some day. Suffice it to say, that this Master of Arts and Bachelor of Laws became the real slave of the Master of Divinity and for some days knew no law other than the Law of Love. He became indifferent to all external embellishments. Sandals took the place of socks and stylish boots on his feet, and at times, these sandals were also given up; while the smart-creased trousers became baggy and loose; and the head lost the pith-hat, as well as his smart gait that was no longer there. At times, he reeled and rolled, while walking, as if drunk to the last drop. Wherever he sat, it was a huddled

-up

figure, with the head buried over his throbbing heart. Sleep and food lost their irresistible craving for him for days together. Instead of his usual pithy conversation, he became silent to a degree, and was heard chanting even at odd hours some lines in the praise of the Master as a devout Hindu sings the Bhajan. The most spectacular change witnessed about him was when once or twice he went into a "fit" and simply rolled in dust on the bare uneven ground with scarcely any regard for injury to his person and clothes. But this is all about the external change that came about in him. To describe his internal experience fully is the work of a full chapter. However, I would say this much that he saw with his open eyes in broad day-light, that which even Yogis yearn to have a glimpse of with their eyes shut in deep meditation, besides experiencing the thrills and throbs of Love internally. "I have never loved anybody in my life and was quite free from this attribute until the Master played havoc with my heart! To say I love Him is not enough. O, let me wash *those loving feet* with the blood of my heart", and so on is but the gist of Mr. Dastur's remarks that he has been conveying off and on since being imbibed with the Divine Spark from the Master.

Long since, Mr. Dastur has regained his natural composure, but his intellectual attainments are nontheless poorer for his heart-ache. On the contrary, the Divine throbs of his heart that continue to this date help him a great deal in his penmanship, which will one day surely thrill the literary world, as instead of "believing" the Master to be God-realized, he has begun "experiencing" him as such. He now leads a perfectly normal life, pure and simple.

CHAPTER VII

"THE DEVIL'S WORK!"

I never mean to deny anybody the right of honest criticism or genuine difference of opinion when I say that I strongly condemn the mischievous and spiteful bluster of the busybody, the root-cause of all ugly rumours, and thus incidentally and unconsciously one of the finest tools of Satan.

Of course, unless one is fully satisfied both in the head and in the heart, one must think twice before believing in a Personality as Divine. Otherwise, in the words of Benjamin Whichcote, an Independent Christian Divine of the seventeenth century, "Conscience without judgment is superstition, and judgement without conscience is self-condemnation." Moreover, the dividing line between the real and the unreal is very thin when judged by the external appearances. Can a stranger gauge the vast differences in character between that Great Soul Gandhi and a common farm-labourer of Gujarat, if only the photos of both of them are placed before him for discrimination? Popularly and generally, Perfection and Divinity are measured through miracles. But this practice is very dangerous, although invariably the performance of miracles is one of the signs of Perfection. My Master had once conveyed: "From the spiritual point of view, an honest house-holder is a thousand and one times superior to the ascetic and mystic, who work wonders by way of miracles without realising the Truth." The sure test

of Perfection, is one's CHARACTER AND CONDUCT. But alas! How few are there of *spotless characters themselves* to undergo the trouble and inconveniences of investigations before jumping to hasty conclusions. "Risk not, gain not", is a universally accepted maxim, and is also actually practised by all in worldly affairs. Hence where is the harm if one were to risk some loss of time and labour and even something more in the sacred cause of spirituality? And really speaking, there is no question of loss in the Divine search. I do not feel the least hesitation in saying that however fruitless an action might appear at the time, a well-meant thing done in the cause of Truth never goes in vain. And to gain God is worth losing all. Gaus Ali Shah Kalandar, one of the Perfect Mussalman Masters of the eighteenth century, once said, "Sacrifice your wealth for the sake of your health, and do not hesitate to part with both (health and wealth) where your honour is concerned; while give up all the three (health, wealth and honour) in the cause of religion, but for God, don't hesitate in losing all (even religion).

Lest I may be supposed to be beating about the bush, I will come to the point at once. We shall have to go back a little, and to remember that so far as the open manifestation was concerned, spirituality began to give out sparks at Meher Ashram in the month of December, 1927, ultimately leading to the great spectacular Divine outburst in the following month of January, 1928. Simultaneously with this process of the Divine lift, the devil also began his hereditary work, and various sorts of rumours slowly began to spread about the holy Meher Ashram, finally culminating in the subject-matter of the following chapter entitled,

"The Result." At first, these rumours were local, and generally in reference to the strange behaviour of some of the boys in the Ashram, who were all alleged to have lost their mental balance. In the absence of first-hand information from the proper authorities, a casual and inquisitive observer was honestly liable to be led astray in believing the boys as having actually gone off the mark, from the way they at times behaved. But Dame Rumour soon set many a tongue a-wagging indiscriminately. Gradually not only this rumour about the boys losing their sanity was badly distorted and greatly exaggerated to mischievous and spiteful lengths, but several other unfounded allegations were added to it by the busybody. Thus by the end of January, quite a long chain of almost clumsy and silly but no less dangerous rumours was created round the Institution. Dangerous because unfortunately they did not remain restricted to the local area. Echoes of these rumours were also reported having been produced far and wide, causing grave misgivings in the hearts of many of the parents and guardians who had entrusted their beloved charges to Meher Ashram authorities. Whenever possible, on enquiries, the former were never denied a proper explanation by the latter. Save for this, the wild rumours were treated with the silent contempt they deserved, by the authorities. *So far as the purpose is served, it is seldom worth while to pay heed to the clamouring of the idly inquisitive world in connection with one's words and actions in the cause of truth.* The purpose of this book is not to refute or explain all the fair and unfair criticisms against the Meher Ashram; but so far as it concerns the parents and guardians of the boys in the institution, a few remarks here will not

be considered unjustifiable.

Such of the rumours as any sane man would laugh at, for example, "The boys were forcibly detained in the Ashram to extract a ransom from the parents", I will severely leave alone. As to the allegations of the Ashramites having gone mad, let me point out that upto this date, there is not a single boy in the institution who has become a wit less sane than on the day he was admitted to the Ashram, though I will never hesitate in exchanging sanity for sanctity. Even Chhotá Bábá Abdullah, who has been made a real Saint of a very high order, in as much as He is now in the sixth plane and worthy of not only being called a "Wali" or a "Mahatma," but a "Pir" or a "Sant", is perfectly conscious, sane and cognisant of all his actions, although in the beginning He remained, to all appearances, completely unconscious for four days.

Another rumour said that the Ashramites were all tried to be converted into the Zoroastrlan Faith since the Founder belongs to that religion. The Founder of the Institution is no doubt a True Zoroaastrian and so perfectly true that he is no less a Christian, a Mussalman, a Hindu, a Sikh or a Jew; in short, He belongs to every religion, cult, yoga and philosophy that tries to teach Divinity in any form and through any medium. He is "religion personified!" What sent the majority of the Mogul parents into a fit of the blues was the rumour that all the Asliramites were forced to pay obeisance to the Master to the length of placing their heads on His feet, which amounts to a "Sijda." I do not belong to that school of thought in Islam that forbids the "Sijda-e-Tazima" to one's Shaikh i.e. the Spiritual Guide; and for me, there is no better

"Moosalla", i.e. a prayer carpet, than the august feet of Meher Baba; but I emphatically deny this charge that far short of the Moslem boy, any boy in the Ashram is forced to bow down to the Master. On the contrary, I challenge anyone to disprove the fact which is on record in Meher Ashram that the Master had in the beginning advised all the Mahomedan boys only to "kiss His hands" whenever they felt like paying Him reverence and this system had continued for a long time. But the boys themselves were not satisfied with it, and just as they were not forced to bow, they were also not forced to desist from it. The Divine enthusiasm knows no law. That great and widely revered Perfect Master, Hazrat Ali Ahmed Sábir Kalyari, has been reported to have once danced round his own Master, Hazra BábbáFarid Ganj Shakar, chanting the following lines:—

"Ká'bá khwanam yá payambar Mushaf ast in yá Khuda
Isteláh-e-Shauq bisyár ast-o-man deewaneh am."

i.e. "Should I call thee Kaba, the Sacred Shrine or the Prophet, the Messenger Divine; Or Thou art the Quran, the Word Sublime or God Himself on earth?" The phraseology of Love is so overpowering for speech as to make me distracted! I will no longer detain the reader here besides speaking a few words on the secular education of the boys. Apart from the individual explanations conveyed personally to the respective parents and guardians at the time of admitting the boys, the aim and object of the institution has never been made a secret. The early announcements that appeared in almost all the well-known newspapers of the country about the opening of

this Institution were made under the headlines of "An Ideal Spiritual Educational Institution" and the like. And though spirituality remains the paramount object of this Institution, the secular education is not the less efficient for it. On the contrary, the progress of some of the boys of this Ashram in the matter of worldly education may perhaps constitute a world-record." Probably the reader would think it to be a very sweeping claim, but I would substantiate it with a couple of examples.

One, DUTTOO SAV, a Hindu boy of 15 years of age, began to learn English in the Hazrat Babajan High School from the alphabet, and *within ten months only*, he came up to the SIXTH Standard English. Not that he was all of a sudden placed in this standard, but he was promoted gradually in the space of ten months. And I would like to add that with all other boys of his standards, he, too, was strictly examined by competent teachers before being promoted to the higher standards, (the curriculum of the Bombay University being strictly followed). The marks gained by this boy when he was in the Fifth Standard (English) in the Promotion Examination that was recently held on the 10th of September, 1928, are as follows :—

English Text	36	out	of	100
English General	38	"	"	100
Arithmetic	45	"	"	50
Algebra	21	"	"	50
Geometry	35	"	"	50
History-Geography	34	"	"	100
Science				
Second-Language (Sanskrit)	70	"	"	100
Total	279	"	"	550

As a second example, I would cite the case of my own son, Muhammed Usman (Dadu) aged nine years. For two years, he was attending one of the first class schools in Poona, besides getting private tuition before being admitted to the Meher Ashram in the month of February, 1928. Without going into the details, I would say this much, that in two months, he made such a decided progress here that he had not done in two years there. I mean no miracle, although the progress is undoubtedly miraculous; but this speaks for the efficient teaching and tuition here. And no wonder, that for the average hundred boys of the school there are no less than twenty competent teachers, out of who three are graduates, and seven under-graduates of the Bombay University besides many non-matriculantes. While the majority of them not only worked for the sake of ordinary duty, but with the prime object of rendering direct service to the Master, and therefore they put their heart and soul in their duties. Over and above the daily school periods for five hours, the boys are made to study for nearly three hours every day, while extra tuition is also given to the very promising ones amongst them. In short, the institution provides a rare chance for the boys to cultivate and develop their respective secular and spiritual faculties to the full.

To return to the theme proper, these rumours gave rise to the possibility of some of the boys being taken away from the Ashram before their terms were finished by such of the guardians who may fall victims to the rumours and believe them as facts on the impulse of the moment. This was a very deplorable prospect and where the boys who had been affected with Love

were concerned it was also dangerous. To be suddenly removed from an atmosphere in which their hearts had become harmonized was likely to impair their health and intellect. The reader may well imagine the consequences, if per chance, Ali had been taken away on that fateful night, the 29th of January.

Perhaps it was to precipitate the impending troubles, or to ascertain precisely as to which of the boys were likely to be taken away, or it also may have been meant to impress upon the guardians likely to go back on their sacred promises that the Master, in the first week of January, advised the authorities to take the consent of the parents and guardians of all the boys in the Ashram, afresh on duly stamped bonds in place of the existing plain agreements, of their free consent and promise, to let the boys undisturbed for five years. Steps were immediately taken and with it, matters began to take a new turn. Some parents were found steady enough to stick to their words and honour their promises, and readily corroborated their original agreements by signing the new bonds. Some did so after great persuasion and explanations. Some asked for time to consider the matter, and a few began to show open hostility to their own words of honour. Thus the Divine atmosphere of the Meher Ashram began to get affected with the devil's workings, and somehow it was felt that a rift in the lute was imminent.

But the expected happened very soon. Just as the Master had begun to convey through the usual signs about sending a representative of the Ashram to Europe, to invite the Christianity of the West to participate in the Divine Loot, on the 25th of January, two of the Hindu boys of the Institution were taken

away by their respective parents without paying any heed to importunities and persuasions. Two days later, yet another four Hindu boys were forced to leave this fine institution by their respective guardians. The 30th January witnessed the exit of the first Mussulman boy being snatched away by the "devil" in the shape of prejudices, that for all the explanations of the authorities could not be dislodged from the minds of his guardians. The advent of February did not improve matters. On the very first day of this fateful month another Hindu boy was made to miss the opportunity of his life, and was taken away from the "fold of the blessed." These rapid exits caused no small consternation amongst the Ashram workers, yet happily so far as the affected boys were concerned, there was no definite sign of any trouble. On the contrary, the question of some of them, including Ali's, was already decided. On the 30th January, the authorities received a letter from Ali's father, in reply to their request for a fresh bond of agreement, saying ". . . the boy is yours . . . entrusted to your charge with full faith . . . no objection to your training him as best as you think.' And what a coincidence! The reader will remember that on the same day, the 29th of January that this letter was written, Ali began to see "beyond the gross."

By this time, Mr. Rustom K.S. Irani, the eldest son of Khan Saheb Kaikhushru S. Irani of Ahmednagar, and one of the Master's earliest and beloved disciples, was instructed to prepare himself for a visit to England and a few countries on the Continent, to personally invite the youth of the West to take advantage of this unique institution, the Meher Ashram.

Accordingly, the latter finished all the necessary arrangements and returned to Meherabad, on the 16th of February, to report the same to the Master. But the very next day, the 'Devil's Work', brought out its result!



CHAPTER VIII

THE RESULT

The devil played the trump card on the 17th of February, 1928, the 99th, 59th and 26th day of the Master's self-imprisonment, liquid-fasting, and remaining only on water respectively. Rumours had at last penetrated even into the Mogul community in right earnest.

The elder brother of one of the most promising of the Moghul boys in the Ashram, Muhammed Hussein, appeared on the scene that morning, with trouble glistening grimly in his eyes! In place of his usually smiling face, remarkable civility and respectful enquiry for the Master, he greeted the Ashram authorities with this curt sentence, "I have come to take away Muhammed Hussein." It was a simple sentence, yet enough to send a shiver of horror into the hearts of the authorities concerned in view of the boy's fine readiness for the reward of Love from the Master. The more the man was tried to be explained and persuaded, the more silent and reserved he became. "I simply want to take the boy away from here", was the only audible thing heard of him in reply to every argument. He would not even say what his supposed grievances and complaints were.

While for that poor boy Muhammed Hussein, the advent of his brother was the appearance of the "Messenger of Death." Holy horror was only too visible on his twitching features to be missed even by a casual observer. Still hoping against hope, the enraged brother was somehow detained the whole day

by the Ashram authorities with a view that perhaps he may get cool enough after seeing for himself the Ashram life, and may express his objections. But all this proved of no avail. The man remained adamant to the last. It was as if in the language of the Holy Quran, God had sealed all his faculties against reason and truth.

Much as all wished to avoid the final blow to the poor boy, there was no escape from it. The man was conducted near to the Master's seat, and Muhammed Hussein was formally handed over to him in the presence of many other boys and disciples at about eight o'clock that evening. The boy was all sobs and throbs, with a dreadful look in his eyes, as if he was not entrusted to his brother but a butcher to be taken away to the slaughter house. But none were prepared for the awful scene that followed immediately. As a final bid for freedom, Muhammed Hussein suddenly shook himself off from his guardian's grasp, and began to run away as fast as he could. It was Mr. Afseri who succeeded in overtaking the poor and innocent fugitive, and once again brought the violently struggling figure of the boy to his brother. The latter was, by now, simply a beast to look at; with eyes red and dilated, chest heaving like the very bellows, teeth clenched firmly and fists ready for any emergency, he took a panther jump at the poor boy. The devil in him was aroused! And he caught hold of the boy's collar, shook him as roughly as if he were an overfilled bag of flour, and began to drag him away as one would a dead dog. Even this did not satisfy the enraged Moghul, the brute in him made the usually good man go to the length of even slapping the already helpless boy. The spectators were simply

stupified, and stood still like statues, with horror and indignation. But for the Master's august presence, there were a few who for all the laws and penalties would have converted the "mad Moghul" into a bag of broken bones. Still for all the discipline, one of them could not help crying out, "Behave, and be human in handling that poor soul!" "Alive or dead, I am going to take him away", was the only answer gasped out by the man who went on half-dragging, half-lifting the struggling boy. It was only when he was seated in the Tonga, holding the boy securely that at last he blurted out his complaint! The meditation and kissing of the Master's feet by the boy were his chief complaints. What flimsy grounds to create all the row about. I feel more pity than indignation for the man. Had he conveyed this earlier, I am sure the Master would have granted his request, and even forced the boy to desist from this practice. However, it was too late. But in spite of all this humdrum, the love-mad boy was sane and brave enough to convey a parting message to the Master in the very presence of his fretting and fuming brother. They were simple yet touching words. "Tell Baba, I am being dragged and driven away. I won't forget Him; but convey to Him my last weeping words, not to forget His promise to me." Tears were freely rolling down the eyes of all those who witnessed the result of the Devil's work! And the Master? Yes, His Holiness's bright brown eyes were also shedding pearls, perhaps washing away the sins of the Moghul along with those of the others of his category.

I feel like expaining, as far as I can, this phenomenon, as to why, One, who is capable of converting the whole creation into all smiles, wept Himself. But I will

curb it by quoting only a couplet from that God-Conscious Kabir's life-giving poetry, being alive to the fact that the romance of Ali is already too much mixed up with explanations to be followed easily in its correct sequence. Kabir says:—

"Chalti Chakki dekhker, diya Kabira roy,
Do patan kay beechme, sabit raha na koy."

i.e. "Kabir is weeping at the sight of the grinding mill of the world which is going on merrily since none (of course excepting those lucky few who stick to the Central Pin=Qutub=Sadguru=Adept of the Age) remain safe between its two eternally moving rollers of life and death."

The Master did not retire for rest throughout that night and continued weeping silently for a long time.

And now I will show how this incident affected our hero. Along with a few others of his kind, Ali remained by the Master 'till about midnight weeping for the lost comrade, when the Master asked them all to go to sleep. All including the hero obeyed the command and retired to their respective beddings. But for all his efforts, Ali could not sleep that night. As if haunted by a nightmare, he was found very restless and tossing himself to and fro on his bed. At two o'clock in the morning, the night-watchman could not help reporting his condition to the Master, who at once instructed Mr. Afseri to go and ask the boy to stop worrying about, and sleep soundly. But Ali's prophetic reply simply took Afseri's breath away. The boy seemed to be in a trance, and on hearing the message, exclaimed, "What strange scenes do I see? What strange sounds do I hear? O! It is all the din and dust of the city life!" And in spite of repeating

attempts, Ali could not at all sleep that night. Somehow, the boy began to feel his own stay in the Ashram in jeopardy. And many shared with him this thought. In spite of his father's recent letter, all felt now that where these Moghuls were concerned, promises and agreements were but mere scraps of paper, and remembered the Master's early words,— "These Moghuls are word-breakers and not to be trusted."

The following day, the 18th of February, was the Master's 34th Birthday, but in spite of the usual celebrations, it was felt to be very gloomy and dull in comparison with previous records. The Master began to remain very reserved and preoccupied. His attitude towards the selected boys was also changed, and they were begun to be kept at arm's length. Did he cease loving them? Certainly not! On the contrary, His Holiness showed no less concern for them than before, as is clearly apparent from the following incident.

On the 19th of February, when some one chanced to utter the name of Ali, in the presence of the Master, He at once conveyd through signs, "Oh, why do you remind Me about him! Now that his name has reached my ear, better call him here." The moment Ali received the call, for which he was perhaps eagerly waiting at the time, he came scampering towards the Master, and simply fell into His arms! The Master sent him away after giving him a hugging embrace, and as if nothing had happened, resumed the discussion that was going on before Ali's name had crept in it!

The 20th of February witnessed a great consternation at Meherabad! Mr. N.C. Talati, one of the Master's disciples in Bombay wired that day, that Ali's father wanted him back. Enough! The devilry had

reached its zenith! I will not detain the reader, with the details of all the excitement, conferences and confabulations that took place between the Master and the disciples, and amongst the latter themselves about this reported breach of promise on the part of Ali's father. But the most important point in the Master's declarations was this: "If Ali goes, everything goes: I will come out of the confinement, and break up the whole institution!" How very strange! Just for the sake of a single boy, the whole of this ideal institution was to go to the dogs! And the disciples have had sufficient experience of the Master's workings to believe that He meant every word He said. To break an institution, if it serves the purpose, is not stranger than Swami Vivekananda's remark as to dying a million deaths if there-by He could *serve* one individual.

However, two of the disciples, offered to go to Bombay and try to bring Mr. Haji Mahomed round, and the Master allowed them to do so. The following day, the 21st of February, a telegram was received from this pair from Bombay "successful...." That one word "Successful" serves the purpose of this narrative, and in fact, it was the only word that gave relief to many an aching heart. But this relief was greatly marred by the black clouds that once again appeared at Meherabad in the shape of some more Moghul parents, with their typically black turbans the very next day. They sang the same song! "We want to take away our boys. "But unlike Muhammed Hussein's brother, they talked some sense. Their only objection was that they feared the boys here will lose their religion. Besides explanations and arguments, the authorities, under the Master's command, offered one of them, who seemed

to be an educated and religious Syed, to become the "Mulla" of the Meher-Ashram, and teach the Mohammedan boys of the Institution the ritualistic side of Islam, and that as a compensation, he will be paid rupees one hundred and fifty per month which he earned elsewhere. What more could one desire as a proof of the Institution's or its founder's bonafides in the matter of the alleged attempt at spoiling their hereditary faith? In spite of it, although they were greatly impressed with all the arguments, they took away three more boys from the Institution!

But the matters did not stop here. Just another day, and lo! It was Ali's turn to get some shocks. On the 23rd of February, the business partner of Ali's father came to Meherabad early that morning to take him away. However this gentleman proved himself a rational being. He admitted having heard undesirable rumours, and demanded explanations thereof. He gave a patient hearing to all that was explained to him, and verified all the statements of the authorities through personal inspection of the Meher Ashram during his stay that day, and declared himself fully satisfied. He did not only leave Ali alone, but also enlisted the two boys that were with him to the care of the Ashram authorities, besides promising to persuade his partner, the father of Ali, to let Ali remain here! Yet for all that, the worst did happen in a dramatic way within two days of this episode, and forms the subject-matter of the next chapter.

CHAPTER IX

"SNATCHED AWAY"

It was expected and yet unexpected! But all the same, as already said in conclusion of the last chapter, the worst did come to pass. Ali was snatched away. But let me narrate the dramatic details of the situation in full, so as to convey to the reader a further idea of the note-worthy traits in the character of the hero, which show him head and shoulder above the other boys of the Ashram.

It was on Saturday the 25th of February 1928, at about 7:30 in the morning that the Ashram authorities got the surprise of their lives. The arrival of Ali's father was announced. In view of his partner's departure on the preceding day with a good impression and a promise to persuade him, he was at least not expected to turn up so soon. But as it was, they had crossed each other while journeying to and from Bombay, and thus unhappily Mr. Haji Muhammed missed the intended good opinion of his rational partner about the Meher-Ashram. However, the gentleman was at once conducted to the Ashram, and was shown round the new School premises, and given some unsolicited explanation about the alleged rumours. He did not seem to be in an agitated frame of mind like Muhammed Hussein's brother, but looked equally determined to carry away the hero. The authorities succeeded in persuading him to take some rest in view of the overnight journey before entering into the heart of the burning question of that day.

Thus, when he got refreshed with a few hours sleep and had some food, negotiations were opened with

him at noon. Mr. Afseri was the chief speaker on behalf of the Meher Ashram, and he argued the case well. The discussions went on for nearly four hours. The offer for a Mulla for the religious training of the Moghul boys in the Ashram was repeated with the additional liberty of the selection of a Mulla being made by the gentleman himself. He was also offered every help and compensation to shift the avenue of his business to or start a new one at Ahmednagar if he liked to do so, to facilitate his visiting the institution from time to time, to see that all went well with his son.

By four o'clock the devil was on the point of being defeated, as the gentleman seemed at last to have been brought round, and Mr. Afseri went to draft the bond for his signature. But what did he find when he returned? Another Moghul gentleman was present there with Ali's father! The former had perhaps come to Ahmednagar by the afternoon train, and just as Mr. Afseri had gone to fetch the fateful bond, he had joined Ali's father. The new comer, in the absence of the explanations from the authorities, was naturally very prejudiced, and no less determined in taking away his own boys from the Institution than Ali's father was in the morning. They had enough time to discuss the matter amongst themselves, and so no wonder that Mr. Afseri felt his heart missing some beats at this unexpected sight! And his fears proved only too true! Ali's father had fallen a victim to hearsay again! Taking his courage in both hands, Mr. Afseri, although he had already talked enough for four hours, once again tried to meet squarely the opponent who unfortunately seemed to have greatly prejudged the issues. The atmosphere had by now become very tense with excitement.

Many of the Master's disciples began to saunter about the room in which this fateful conference was going on, throwing sly glances at the occupants as if to read their intentions. Hopeless and hopeful were the only two words that played about the lips of almost all those who could manage to pick up a word or a sign now and then.

It was nearly sun-set, when negotiations with the stubborn Moghuls were broken off. The devil had triumphed! The boys, including the hero, were to be taken away! Of all the actors in this exciting drama, Mr. Afseri was the most deeply affected. How sincerely he had tried to knock sense into the prejudiced Moghuls could be seen from the fact that at the end of the parley, he went into a swoon, and remained unconscious for some time! His troubles were well rewarded with that expressive sentence that the Master later on conveyed "None has worked harder than him (Afseri) in the cause of Truth."

While describing his characteristics, I have said that Ali was not sentimental, and that he had the least element of show about him in all his words and actions. No better proof of this fine trait could be cited than the way he behaved himself on this troublesome day. Unlike other boys, who would cry and did cry, under such circumstances, Ali managed to hide his volcanic feelings behind his unruffled face, which all could see was as calm as a millpond. Lest one may ascribe this to despondency or lack of sufficient feelings, I will show how really desperate he was. In the afternoon, when Mr. Afseri had chanced to come to the Ashram office for the bond, he had encountered Ali on the way. He cannot say to this date what made him ask the boy

"What have you got in your pocket, Ali?", save that it was a silent command from the "all-watching" Master! Mr. Afseri, since he did not know why he asked the question, was of course unprepared for the startling reply and action of the boy. Ali simply dived his hand in one of his coat-pockets and brought out an innocent penknife! Afseri was on the point of walking off. But the question had gone directly home. Ali could not help blurting out, "This is the final argument that I have reserved to take recourse to while talking out the question of my stay with my father!" "O God! Am I dreaming!", thought the bewildered gentleman. What iron determination! And how keen a desperation this boy of fifteen summers had nurtured! The matter was at once reported to the Master, who in anticipation of the unfavourable decision then, strictly enjoined upon Ali, never even to think of violence of any kind against anyone, including his own self. Since implicit obedience to the Master's commands is his watchword, this order of the Master has proved more than enough to restrain Ali to this date from such extreme steps like the one he had under contemplation that afternoon. Besides the order, the Master also gave him this promise "If you are taken away, I will either come out of my confinement or break up the Institution."

It was dusk when Ali was conducted down to his father. The poor boy was dumb with grief, yet there was neither a tear nor a twinge about his apparently placid features; still those who had an inkling of his kindling heart could not miss the glassy look about his eyes. A surging storm was being bravely checked in them. Without creating a scene or offering a clumsy

and ineffective resistance, Ali silently obeyed his father's commands, and was soon whisked off in a tonga. Many pairs of glistening eyes remained glued to the gradually disappearing twinkle of the vehicle's rear light as long as it could be seen.

Gone! The leader of the little lovers was at last lifted away. There were many hearts that throbbed and many souls that sobbed that night at Meherabad. To say the atmosphere became dark and deserted or grim and gloomy is still like begging for a better description of the awful state of affairs at Meherabad.

After the hero's departure, it was for the first time that the Master enquired as to how many days had passed since He had confined himself and left off eating. True to His promise to Ali, the Master had already begun to think of coming out. Did it also mean the closing of the ideal Institution? There was no end to the conjectures made by many of the disciples, but none could foresee what was to happen the following day from the remarks conveyed by the Master. Here is a short gist of his silent signaling "I have gone very weak; I will come out and commence eating; the purpose has not been served; Ali is not in loss in the least, but I am. *It will all have to be done afresh!*" But the most significant words conveyed by the Master were "None should touch my person for ten days under any circumstances, unless specifically ordered otherwise."

Now let us turn to our hero for a while. Before reaching the railway station, Ali tried twice to effect an escape through the ingenious tricks of asking the tonga to be stopped on one pretext or the other. Once he actually managed to go in an adjoining field,

but his guardians were no less watchful, and the boy did not succeed in getting free from their grips. At the station just as the train was about to move, Ali tried again. Quite unconcernedly, he slipped out of the carriage, and as if to help his father's companion—who had remained behind—into the compartment, Ali tried to put him off his guard. But that shrewd gentleman was not to be caught napping. Perhaps, he guessed Ali's intentions, and just as the train began to move on, he was careful enough in gently pushing Ali into the carriage before he got in himself.

The railway line, at about the third mile from the Ahmednagar station towards Poona, passed through the very heart of Meherabad, where the colony was situated at the time. Perhaps, it was due to the near approach of the object of his heart, or that there was no longer any chance left him of an immediate escape, that as the train began to gather speed, Ali found the curbing of his emotions becoming too much for him. Yet to avoid an open outburst, the hero leaned out of the carriage window to give free vent to his sobs and throbs in order to drown them amidst the noise of the fast-moving train. And lo! In a brilliant halo of lustre, he began to behold the Master.

What far-reaching power! Without a touch, a glance or even close proximity, the Master was able to give this Sight to Ali as a parting gift of Love from Him! And this proved a very effective consolation to Ali in his hours of trial, since, in the boy's own words, which he conveyed later on, this Sight used to help him much in checking a complete breakdown whenever he felt like weeping out his heart during this painful separation!

CHAPTER X

SIX DAYS OF SEPARATION

The First Day

The overnight atmosphere of gloom and distraction continued throughout the day. The Master began conveying remarks about coming out of His long confinement, and commencing to take food, since the very morning. During one of the many discussions held between the Master and the disciples and amongst themselves about Ali, two of them made a bold offer to approach Ali's father in spite of all the happenings, and try again to bring him round. The Master gave in His consent, and allowed the pair seven days of grace in which to arrive at a final conclusion. Accordingly, the two gentlemen, left for Bombay in the afternoon.

In all the six years of my close contact with the Master, I have often marked a great peculiarity about His actions and words. But the one witnessed this day, I daresay, would beat them all. On the one hand, His Holiness continued instructing the authorities concerned in continuing all activities as usual, as if nothing untoward had happened nay, he even sanctioned many costly alterations and additions to be made to the existing premises of the Ashram and school, by way of improvements, and asked the authorities to make fresh purchases and involve themselves in various commitments in this connection. While in the same breath, on the other hand, He ordered another group of His disciples for the close-up of the Institution lock-stock and barrel! Thus the contrary workings of these two groups began

to come into operation simultaneously from this day to the great bewilderment of the rest. And this state of affairs continued for the following five days when both sides were ready for the fateful final command to be issued at the expiry of the seven days of grace!

It was exactly forty-five minutes past five that the Master at last stepped out of His confinement after one hundred and seven days of rigid self-imprisonment! But for the black clouds of Ali's going away, the Master's coming out amongst them no doubt could have been a direct outburst of glorious sun-shine for the boys and disciples. Still, there was no lack of enthusiasm. The Master was soon conducted down the hill on which the Meher Ashram was then situated, to Meherabad proper, in a gaily decorated rickshaw. One of the Master's seats at Meherabad, at Arangaon, is situated along the public road under a "Neem" tree in the shape of a huge box-like wooden room, near the sacred fireplace called "Dhuni", which is a small round pit generally maintained about the Seats of Hindu and Muslim Saints alike, though its maintenance alone does not imply of one being a genuine Saint. This particular Dhuni was always fed with round logs that generally smouldered and were never likely to give out a flame even when violently disturbed by a foreign agency. Just as the Master's rickshaw passed the Dhuni on this particular day, it suddenly burst out into a distinct flame! I remember having particularly witnessed this extraordinary phenomenon as I chanced to look at it just at the right moment. Many others also remember having seen it. There was no one close to it just then, and the moment the rickshaw passed onward, that peculiar outburst died down immediately, leaving no

traces of any chemical disturbance. It was found smouldering as usual giving out an almost imperceptible smoke. I have not gone into the details of this incident, merely for its being a rare phenomenon, but because it has a direct bearing on the main issue of this chapter, as will be seen from the following facts. After passing a few minutes here and there, enquiring of the various disciples as to how they were faring, the Master retraced His steps and for the first time going round the Dhuni sat down opposite to it quietly for about fifteen minutes. Just before getting up from there, He was pleased to enlighten the disciples with a very suggestive hint "The Dhuni has just conveyed to Me a message. "Continue and go on with the work!"

Although, as mentioned above, the dual workings of "making" and "unmaking" of the Institution had continued for five days, that hint was sufficient for many of the disciples to take it for granted that the Institution for the present had passed through the danger zone, and would be continued.

A telegram was received from the pair who had undertaken to achieve the impossible and had gone to Bombay the other day. It contained a single word: "Hopes", which gave a happy surprise to those who heard it.

The Second Day

The Master was indisposed throughout the day, but towards the evening, He was marked to be very restless. For a few minutes, He would retire into the lower crypt-like chamber only to come out again. Going down, coming up, standing, sitting, sleeping, reclining and in fact every minute changing His position and pose, the Master kept on conveying through feeble

signs that He was dying! His Holiness looked every inch a man breathing his last. By sunset there was a peculiar vacant look in His half-closed eyes, and His hands and feet were cold and almost limp and lifeless.

The Third Day

Another telegram was received from Bombay as follows: "Ali much distracted. Syed (his father) angry. Community against." The previous message of hope was thus shattered, and with it many castles in the air built by the enthusiastic disciples, tottered down. But in the case of the Master, it was quite the contrary. He was found to be in a very pleasant mood, and even went to the length of allowing His little lovers, to dress Him as Shree Krishna. Nay, the Master also conceded their request and sat for a snap-shot with the fantastic dress on.

The Fourth Day

Whatever little hope that still flickered in some of the most optimistic hearts about the return of the hero was extinguished on receipt of this telegram: "Seen Syed. Boy not sent. Starting tomorrow night."

The Fifth Day

The day's post brought a plainly-addressed envelope for Mr. Kaikhushru Afseri. It contained a few touching lines from the hero. It was written in Persian and is preserved to this date as a treasure by Mr. Afseri. The following is a free translation of the same.

"O Meher Baba!

In the service of Aga Kaikhushru Aspandiar;

I beg to tell you that since the day they carried me away, I am in a sad mood, and feeling desolate and dejected."

On the night that I sat in the train, I was seeing Baba amidst a halo of lustre! And throughout that night, whenever I felt like weeping, this Sight helped me to maintain my composure. In the morning, we arrived at Bombay. They carried me to a bath, and applied 'Hina' to my humble hands, which were always kissed by Baba. I wept at the time, but they applied the 'Hina' on my hands forcibly. Since then, to this date, I cannot eat my food. At night, too, I cannot sleep before twelve or two o'clock.

Tell Hazrat Baba I will come after four days. In *awake state*, I always see Baba, also while sleeping, I see *Baba in a Halo of Light*.

O Kaikhushru! May I give my life for you! Be enjoying the Meher Ashram atmosphere on my behalf! Come to the help of a poor soul, a wretched creature in the eyes of all in the world.

By God! If I had two rupees, I would have come to Poona, at least to be nearer to Baba.

Read these lines to Baba.

Kangora-e-arsh-e barin jai to'st
 Khana-e-Haq Manzil-o Mava-e to'st
 Alami-az noor-e-to roshan shudeh
 Sarv-e gulistan kad-e-bala-e to'st
 Dast be har murdeh zadi zindeh shud
 In hameh az ruhe-Masiha-e-to'st

i.e. The apex of the Highest Heaven is your abode;
 The home of Truth is your resting place;
 The world is illumined by your Divine light;
 Your erect and graceful stature is like the
 garden Cyprus;
 With a touch of your hand, the dead have been
 restored to Life;

This is because of the power of "Masihayi"—
Resuscitation you have;

Ze tab-e-atish-e-sauda-o-ishkat
Besan-e-deeg dayam mi zanam josh
Agar boosideh gardad oostu-khaunam
Na gardad Mehrat az janam faramush

i.e. From the heat of the fire of your Love
I am ever boiling like a pot of water;
Even if my bones decay,
Your Love will never be effaced from my soul;

The Sixth Day

The unsuccessful pair from Bombay returned to Meherbad this morning, dejected and defeated. In spite of their best attempts and persuasions, they reported that not only Ali's father, but many other prominent members of his community also opposed Ali's return, and that the boy's return was impossible. Throughout the day, the Master looked all absorbed in the thoughts of the hero, and even when the Principal of the school approached Him for certain instructions, the latter got a curt reply: "Do as you like!"

It was the last day of the seven days of grace. Ali must return on the following day, or the whole of the Institution would cease to exist. The group of workers in charge of the "un-making" department got the tools for the wholesale demolition ready. The majority of the disciples did not even dare think of the morrow. All had failed. Will the Master do it Himself?

But before I reply this question in the following two chapters, I would just give a fresh example of the Master's peculiar actions witnessed this evening, and perhaps some readers may make them out after reading

about that which happened the same moment in Bombay. To the great bewilderment of all, the Master instructed one of the two disciples that had just returned from Bombay to go there again, and in face of all the reported fierce antagonism, to try once more to bring round Ali's father. This was very peculiar, in as much as there was not a single individual who could see any possibility of success. Even the gentleman concerned could see no chance of any good coming out of this move. But merely for the sake of obeying the Master's command, he left Meherabad in the evening to catch the night train to Bombay. At about nine-thirty at night, quite contrary to His usual practice of retiring to His seat, the Master suddenly walked up to the school premises, went into the classroom which Ali used to attend, and sat over the very seat that the hero occupied when he was here. The Master remained seated there for about fifteen minutes in a very contemplative mood. Mr. Afseri, who was near the Master, says that he could not help feeling at the time that, although bodily the Master was there, internally He was elsewhere. A sort of vacancy about the Master's eyes during these few minutes was unmistakable!

CHAPTER XI

THE FIRST WONDERFUL ESCAPE!

The letter of Ali that I have reproduced in the last chapter speaks volumes about the pangs of separation that the hero suffered during the first few days of his forced stay in Bombay. Yet a few words about the subsequent sufferings of Ali will not be out of place here. The most noteworthy point in this connection was the boy's wonderful and horrible abstinence from food for six solid days! Of all the facts that I had gathered for this narrative, this was the only one that raised doubts in me, about its exact correctness. To leave no possibility of a doubt, with the Master's permission, I questioned Ali personally about it on the 11th of October, when the boy calmly and in an unconcerned matter-of-fact tone corroborated my notes. In all these six days, this enigma of a boy had taken only two cups of tea, one egg, and two slices of bread. But there is a little story about how he took even this much nourishment. The egg, he said, was actually forced down his throat, perhaps with the idea that once his vow of strict vegetarianism was broken, he might get free of the inexplicable "influence" of the Master, or perhaps it might have been administered as an antidote to cure him of the infidelity to his religion, since I know of orthodox Mussalmans who are prejudiced enough to hold that merely the abstinence from animal food is a violation of Islam. While the two slices of bread were taken by Ali on the night he escaped, in

the enthusiasm of the near prospect of reaching the Master again, and thus really speaking, Ali had remained only on two cups of tea during this memorable separation. To realize the full significance of these lines, one should at least remain without food just for twenty-four hours, and then read them to get an idea as to what it means for a fifteen years old healthy boy to go without food in such a way. In spite of my early age, I have had the misfortune, or good fortune, of losing many a dear one, some of whom live ever green in my memory, for the mutual regard that we had amongst us, and I have also tasted some bitter disappointments at the hands of fate, but for all these, I never remember ever having gone without food for more than a few hours at the most.

Ali's father was naturally so exasperated and nonplussed with this inexplicable abstinence of the boy, that once during these six days, in the presence of many people, he took a big knife in his hands, and with a threatening gesture, commanded Ali to partake of food, particularly meat and eggs. But besides his unusual mettle, Ali had the Divine Fire of love blazing merrily in his little bosom. What did he care for knives and swords? "Kill me, I won't!" was the only answer that this exceptionally brave boy gave out, unflinchingly to his angry father. At this, somebody was wise enough, and had sufficient presence of mind, to gently but firmly take away the knife in the mid-air from the angry man's clasp. But even this convincing proof of his son's great devotion and love for his "Ideal" failed to open the eyes of the father to facts. The gentleman tried another way. One of the prominent leaders of his community and some elder relatives

and friends were brought in, in the shape of an awe-inspiring deputation to Ali. Some were fat, some were red, and some had blood-shot eyes and thundering voices in this group. The finer element amongst them first tried to bring round Ali to their way of thinking with many soft words and tempting offers, but they failed. A few amongst them then used threats, but without success. Then the trump-card was played. One amongst them, who had remained at Meherabad for some time, but through selfish motives had to beat a sorry retreat, was brought forward to spit out his spiteful bluster against the Meher Ashram and its August Founder. Of course, considering Ali's education, age and the then mental agitation, the boy could not reply point-to-point, surrounded as he was by so many pairs of unsympathetic eyes, yet one of his replies "That fellow is a d . . . liar", uttered with the conviction of inborn Truth, simply took the breath out of all those present!

In spite of these threats and temptations, not speak of the various other allurements that the city like Bombay is full of, Ali remained firm and unshaken and proved to the hilt his Divine Love for the Master. Besides being despised, laughed at, and subjected to much petty harassment by his relations, the six days of his life in Bombay during this period were no better than those of a prisoner. He was never left alone. Wherever he went or sat, there was somebody to watch over him. Even at night, the father kept a vigilant watch over the boy, and kept awake when Ali slept. Or if he felt himself very sleepy, he used to lock the door of the room carefully from inside before retiring.

On the night of the 1st of March, Ali had a very wonderful dream. In this dream, Ali found himself on one of the platforms of the Victoria Terminus, the terminal station of the G.I.P. Railway, at Bombay. A train was ready there to steam out of the station, and the sign of "Madras Mail" was prominently displayed about it. "At last! The right moment has arrived!" thought the boy in the dream, and he began to run to board the train. But it was too late. Before he could get in, the train left the platform. Horrified at this failure, he simply dashed into a person, that he dreamed as standing by, and then turned to see who he was. To his great surprise, Ali saw it was none other than Master Himself! Stupified, Ali stood like a statue, and began to stare at the Master, who told him: "Don't you know the Madras Mail leaves at ten o'clock?" and with this short but very suggestive sentence, the Master disappeared! This time, Ali's horror in the dream knew no bounds. With a half-stifled scream, he sat up on his bed, only to realise that it was but a dream! His ever-watchful father was at once by his side, and enquired as to what the matter was, adding, "You have been very noisy and restless just now in sleep." But in spite of the great excitement that his realistic dream had caused to him, Ali did not lose his presence of mind, and was wise enough not to make his father the wiser for the dream, and shook off the inquisitive old man with some suitable answer.

Of course he could not sleep after that dream. The Master had clearly given him a hint in it, as if to say: "It's time for you to think of the return." Nay, even

had shown him from which station, by what train and at what time to start! From this moment, Ali became all the more restless and distracted in the dark hours of his separation. "How to escape?" was the uppermost thought with him now. It was as if the Master had added fuel to the fire of separation by conveying him hints to come back without providing an opportunity to do so. "How am I to escape from the constant watch over me, not to speak of want of money. I haven't a single pie on me? Such and the like thoughts began to race through his already reeling head. But "the darkest hour is nearest the dawn has often been proved to be too true. The very evening, Ali got what he wanted. The Master had also provided a practical opportunity.

It so happened that on this particular evening, the 2nd of March, Ali's father found it necessary to go out on some business, and he left the boy in charge of his partner at one of his tea-shops. Now, as luck would have it, this partner, after some time, felt like going for necessities. "Who to leave in charge of the counter?" was the only question that affected him. Of course there could be none better than the son of his partner for this purpose. Not knowing as to what was going on in Ali's mind since that morning, the gentleman asked the hero to take charge of the counter in his absence. "Collect the money carefully", he shouted over his shoulder, and was off! To think Ali would let go this God-sent chance is to forget or underrate the terrible restlessness of his heart. The moment the poor unsuspecting partner was out of sight, Ali dived his hand in the cash-box, and slipped all the loose coins that he could gather in his small fist into his coat pocket

pocket, snatched a book lying there with the other hand, and shot out of the shop like an arrow. He only took breath again when he had reached a fairly safe distance and then counted what he had been able to take from the cash-box. It was about rupees three and annas ten. "Not much, but enough for my purpose", said Ali to himself. But he could not account for the book that he had in his hand, and still holding the same, he proceeded.

Did he come straight to the station? No. It was unlike Ali, and his moral characteristics, as described in the earlier chapters. The reader might have forgotten, but Ali did not. He remembered his lost comrade Muhammed Hussein! Ali knew he was running a grave risk, but the brave boy faced it! He went straight to Muhammed Hussein's place near the Crawford Market, and found him. Alas! Like Ali, the former was also under a strict watch. Consequently, Muhammed Hussein's brother would not leave the two chums alone. Ali began to think rapidly and got an ingenious idea. Talking at random, as if killing time, although for Ali every moment meant freedom or bondage, the boy took hold of a matchbox and as if "fidgetting foolishly", he scribbled out these words: "I an escaping, coming?" Then through another successful ruse, Ali managed to pass on the match-box to Muhammed Hussein. The latter did not require to be told further. He had already guessed Ali's intentions, and so glanced at the dramatic message at the first opportunity. But "No", came the answer, through a half-suppressed signal. Poor boy! He did not find it possible, or perhaps, who knows, he might not have liked to endanger Ali's own prospects of escape

through delay! By this time, Muhammed Hussein's brother's suspicion was aroused a bit, and just as Ali was on the point of walking away, he asked: "Where are you off to, Ali?" and fixed a searching stare on the latter's face. But Ali again proved that he had plenty of pluck about him. He at once assumed an unconcerned look, and blurted out: "I am going to my cousin's shop near Victoria Terminus, and see, here is the book that I want to show him!" Even that book had served some purpose! But instead of going to the cousin's shop, Ali came to the booking office at the Victoria Terminus Station, and booked himself for Ahmednagar. Inexperienced as he was, Ali found it difficult to locate the platform from which the Madras Mail left, and were it not for the dream, he would have certainly missed the train. However, enquiring about it, Ali reached the train. Lest it might happen, as it did in the dream last night, Ali was cautious not to lose a moment in getting into the train, although there was plenty of time on hand. Feeling insecure, he managed to enlist the sympathy of a fellow passenger, and kept himself well under cover of the latter's luggage 'till the train had passed Kalyan, the first halt. Throughout that night—the night on which the Master occupied Ali's seat in school as described in the last chapter—Ali remained wide awake, looking through the open window of the on-rushing train, heedless of the cold and cutting winds. It was as if his eager and longing eyes were trying to shoot through the yawning space to drop down on the lotus feet of the Master!

CHAPTER XII

TRUTH TELLS

The dawn of the third of March smiled on Meherabad as usual. But there was hardly a face that was smiling that morning! It was the last day of the seven days of grace! There were many who thought it was the last day of the Meher-Ashram's brilliant but short life. None cared to look at the figure of a boy, hastening up the hill in all earnest at about seven-thirty in the morning. The figure went straight to the Master's seat, without even exchanging a single word or glance with anybody. Needless to say, it was the hero! For all the violent beats of his heart, Ali was considerate enough to remain quiet and collected by the main front window of the Master's upper room, taking every care to avoid disturbance to the Master, who had not yet come out of His retirement. It did not take long for Mr. Afseri to find out Ali's presence there, since he was one of the attendants over the love-lorn boys, and was generally required to be present near the Master's seat early every morning. To say he was pleased is a poor compliment to him. I would like to say Afseri simply went mad with joy at this unexpected sight of the hero, whom he succeeded in persuading to accompany him to the dining hall. "Let me see Baba first" was the gist of all that Ali could say then. The boy looked the very picture of a fish out of water for the sight of the Master. "You will see Him presently" Afseri assured him, "but take a little refreshment."

There was no need for the boy to say he had been fasting all these days. His sunken eyes and haggard looks were enough to disclose the fact. Ali obeyed his teacher's word and partook of a little from the bowl of cream offered to him, evidently to please his very kind teacher rather than enjoy it himself. The news of the hero's return spread in the whole of the colony faster than the wind, and caused many a heart to take a sigh of relief. At about eight o'clock, the Master came out of His retirement. But here my pen is simply powerless to keep pace with my thoughts in describing the touching scene that followed. Rather it is the work of a poet or a painter! I would say this much that for about half an hour, the "Master of Divinity" and the "Slave of Love" were one in each other's arms!

However when it was generally known that Ali's appearance at Meherabad was due to his having taken "French leave" and not as the result of his father's common sense and fidelity to his word of honour, the presence of the hero was not considered as quite a very happy one. He could not yet be considered as having returned to the Meher Ashram, but was taken simply an uninvited but very welcome guest of the Master. The main question was still in the balance, and the Master too continued conveying the threat that "If Ali remains, all remain; if he goes, everything goes." Yet, for the time being, the immediate black clouds over the colony were dispelled as no time limit now remained fixed for the dismantling of the noble Institution.

The Master went beyond the expectation of and all at Meherabad, in according a rousing reception

to Ali on this memorable day. First of all, the boy was presented with a fine and rich embroidered shawl to be put on his shabby dress, since the Ashram uniform could not be given to him in the absence of his father's consent. Then Ali was garlanded and taken round the school by the Master, who kept him all the time by His side. At dinner time, the Master made Ali and some of His other little lovers sit around Him, and fed them all with His own august hands, just as a proud mother would feed her happy children. Ali of course got the lion's share of the Master's attention. Morsels of food made specially rich with the addition of fresh butter were shovelled into the hero's mouth by the Master to the point of almost over-feeding him.

By this time the only sombre point that marred the happy situation, faded away in the bright ray of hope that reached Meherabad in the shape of a yellow envelope. It contained a telegraphic message from the gentleman whom the Master had sent to Bombay only the other day, and as mentioned in the last chapter by way of an example of the Master's peculiar workings, the message said: "Ali's father willing to sign", i.e. sign a fresh bond of agreement to let Ali remain in the Meher Ashram for a fixed period. The peculiar action had proved a prophetic work. The boy had arrived here, and the Ashram emissary had reached there just in time to strike the iron when it was hot! After the receipt of this telegram, the atmosphere became all the more cheerful and bright. The Master, too seemed to have become quite free of his concerned looks, regarding the future. And when one of the disciples suggested the possibility of an eleventh hour failure, the Master only smiled, and made that "It's

alright now."

In the evening, the Master once again allowed Himself to be dressed phantastically in the guise of that picturesque but no less Perfect Hindu Master Krishna, by His little lovers, just as He had done on the 28th February, the third day of separation, (as if by way of rehearsal for this very occasion) and went round the colony keeping Ali prominently by His side. The Master even went to the length of taking out the "Crown" and placing the same on Ali's head for sometime. Then again, for an hour or so, Ali transformed into a fairy-tale picture by the Master, who made him put on some multi-coloured brocades, and led him round the playground, where the rest of the Ashramites were enjoying their daily recreation. In short, throughout that day, the Master and Ali were found together side-by-side, and the latter was constantly eulogised by the Master in the presence of all.

The next day, the question of Mr. R.K. Irani's proposed visit to Europe, which had been shelved during these few tumultuous days, was put up for discussion, and the gentleman was finally instructed to finish up the arrangements for setting out on this memorable mission.

"All's well that ends well" is no doubt true, but the disastrous results that emanate from "all" before it "ends well" are not always easily blotted out. In writing about Ali's return to Meherabad, I have so far been trying to make the best of a bad bargain. But I can no longer help turning the other side of the coin. Although Ali had returned, and once again there were prospects of the revival of the Divine Blaze of Love, yet that something had seriously gone amiss in the

Master's internal workings could not be denied. One of the Master's earlier remarks in this connection, "It will all have to be done afresh" led us to think that the mishap caused in His workings through the untimely forced exit of Ali from the Institution almost amounted to a complete disruption of them. Hence no wonder that along with the holiday atmosphere on this day,—4th of March, the 2nd day of Ali's return—the boys and disciples were greatly pained at the sight of the Master's inexplicable yet very prominent fits of agonies. Now and then, the Master looked as if suffering from some terrible shocks internally, since otherwise there was no sign of any physical illness about His person. The two most prominent and the most terrible of such peculiar "fits" were witnessed at about three-thirty in the afternoon, and at nine o'clock at night, respectively. Each of these shocks lasted for about forty-five minutes and during these periods, the Master seemed to be almost in the grips of death, and was seen simply writhing in pain all the time from an unseen malady.

That same evening, when almost all had retired for the night, the long expected gentleman, Ali's father, at last turned up. There are very few who know as to what transpired on that fateful night. In spite of all that had happened and all that he had heard, Mr. Syed Haji Muhammed proved no less unreasonable than he was on the day on which he snatched away Ali from Ashram. It was Mr. Afseri again who had to grapple with this personification of silly prejudices for six solid hours that night. From eleven o'clock at night 'till the early hours of the dawn, the duel of words continued between the two. This time, Ali's father's

main complaint was that it was owing to the Ashram authorities' tutoring and underhand tricks that Ali had run away from him. But he could not prove that simply because it was a pure falsehood and imagination, based on rumours and prejudiced conclusions. In the end, the stubborn unreasonableness of the gentleman was too much even for the patient Afseri. He gave up further reasoning and persuasions with a final remark: "For God's sake, take away your son. We have had enough trouble about him. Neither the Master nor the Institution, nor anyone amongst us—the workers—are out to gain anything in the least from the boy's presence here; on the contrary, it is for his own benefit that we have been trying so strenuously. No good will come out of his forced stay here". And concluding this last sentence, he actually walked away from the place to report the break-up of the negotiations to the Master. However, these simple but true words hit the mark. This time it was Ali's father who had to play the part of a pleader. He at once sent somebody in the wake of the exasperated Afseri who was already half-way to the Master's seat. The latter came back, but was now on the war-path. "What do you want? Why did you call me back?" were the two curt enquiries with which he greeted Ali's father in place of his polite pleadings and persuasions that he had almost exhausted during the last sitting.

Ali's father seemed to be struggling between two opposite emotions, and in this excitement, it did not take long for him to blurt out one of the real causes underlying his insistence in taking away Ali from the Ashram. "I believe" said he, "there is nothing wrong here, and that you mean good for my boy, but you don't

know how that....of....taunts me and talks about this Institution". "What a pity?" cried out Afseri, "that just because a good-for-nothing busy-body talks nonsense, you forget to use your own common sense?"

It was now nearly five o'clock in the morning, the time for the Ashramites, including the hero, who had been sleeping all the while quite unaware of the trouble going on for his sake, to get up, that his father at last signed the stamped bond, agreeing not to remove Ali from the Meher Ashram for one year under any circumstances. After this happy ending of the all-night conference, Mr. Afseri went to report the same to the Master, and, as expected, found Him waiting patiently in the upper room. The Master had remained seated the whole night and only retired to the lower chamber after having heard Mr. Afseri's final report!

Truth tells! But has to suffer too!

As soon as the first morning bell made the Ashramite boys come out of their beds, Ali was given the good news. But still it was a task to persuade him to see his father. However, he was conducted down the hill and presented to his father. At first, the latter tried to bluff him and said some harsh words, but Ali remained calm and collected and in no uncertain terms denied any tutoring and trick on the part of the Ashram authorities. "Father, I like to stay here" was the main burden of his song. With the departure of Ali's father that same morning, the atmosphere became once again normal, and preparations for a picnic party in celebration of the happy occasion were begun in right earnest.

The following day, the sixth of March according to the fine pre-arrangements, the Master, boys, teachers

and disciples, all drove in specially engaged motor buses to the HappyValley, the most scenic spot about Ahmednagar, at a distance of about 15 miles from Meherabad.

It is rightly remembered as the "Aga Ali day;" and a great holiday it was, especially for the boys. They were allowed the freedom of playing and strolling all over the beautiful valley throughout that day. Besides a special dinner and supper, the boys were also treated with tea and dainty eatables in the afternoon. But the particularly delightful events were, when the Master personally led the boys for a ramble through the hills, twice that day. He sprinted and scampered here and there with the boys as if He were actually one of them, and sent many a thrill of boyish glee into their little hearts, and thus proved His Perfection from yet another point of view which is so pithily conveyed by Swami Vivekanand in these fine words "The true Teacher, (Sadguru-Kutub) is He who brings Himself (from the height of God-realization) down to the level of the student. Sees through the students' eyes, hears through the students' ears..." But this delight was greatly marred by the apparent mishap in the evening, when the Master set out for the second ramble. After going for about a mile right through the heart of the valley, He suddenly became very indisposed. Before anyone could even guess as to what had happened, the Master was all limp and almost superconscious.*

*When Hazrat Babajan of Poona was pleased to bless the Master with Her glance of grace in the year 1914, He became all at once superconscious, but it was in the year 1921 that His second Guru, Shri Sadguru Upasni Maharaj restored to Him the consciousness of the mental, subtle and gross planes. Since then His Holiness has always been in the *superconscious plus complete, gross conscious* state, which is called Sahaj Smadhi and which the Holy Quran calls the state of Kamilah, i.e., Perfected (XC. 1.7). And such a fit of losing *only* the Gross Consciousness implies no change or difference in that ever continuous state of "Sahaj Samadhi."

It appeared to be one of the Divine 'fits' with which the Master seemed to have been affected now and then since Ali was snatched away. But the present one was far greater in severity than the previous ones in as much as the Master had actually to be carried back to the Dak-Bungalow on the disciples' shoulders, and came to normal state long after sun-set.

From the seventh of March 1928, the atmosphere once again became quite normal at Meher Ashram. Mr. R.K. Irani left Meherabad that evening for Bombay, whence he proceeded to England on the tenth of that month. But with all this, quite a lull came over the place in the matter of Divine conflagration, which no longer was there. Not that the hearts already affected were cooled down, but the spectacular conflagration gave place to silent smouldering which again remained restricted to a particular few without affecting others, as it did in the month of January last.

In the course of the discussion on the 19th of March 1928, (already mentioned in chapter I), the Master had also conveyed: "These sparks of Love that have been sprinkled can never be put out. Some kindling through personal efforts is necessary....Once kindled sufficiently instead of dying out, it will go on increasing automatically without even thinking about it, and to such a pitch that one affected with it will desire nothing save the cooling down of its heat....Just see Ali Akbar.... Now you will understand what he means by often repeating: 'I don't want God. I don't want anything. Only cool down this all-consuming fire in my heart.'... to cool this heat or fire means to render the person unconscious; and this is the intermediate state between 'heat' and 'light'. But

I am not going to cool it down just yet. . . The last stage 'light' means, after becoming unconscious, they (those who are burning with the heat of Love) will see the Light of Love, and when they become conscious again (after gaining the final Sight or Experience), the 'Light' (of Love) will remain, but the 'Heat' (of Love) of the first stage will vanish away automatically....No more sufferings and agonies then.... That is what is going to be done in due course of time....Let us see what comes out of the 'Message to the West'....Of course, no more spark-sprinkling now....Another wayTurning the eyes of the new-comers (giving them the 'Light (of Love)' without making them pass through the 'Heat of (Love)' simultaneously with the old ones at the time of giving the final touch through the link of a boy amongst these little lovers. Ali is the link through whom new-comers will also get the 'Light (of Love).'"

Then again, some time in the same month, I remember once having heard the Master conveying these words: "....Now at least for two months, all will go on as usual as it was in the beginning of the Ashram....Play, school studies, etc.,....No spiritual demonstration. ...I will not let an outburst happen in the meantime."

I know these words of the Master are hard to be understood fully by the average reader, and their true significance would go home to those only who are deeply interested in spirituality. But this much is clear from them, if we also remember the twice-quoted remarks of the Master,—"It will all have to be done afresh"—that the "final touch" towards giving the lovers the Light (of Love) is withheld for *certain reasons*

including the "Devil's Work" and also the other of awaiting the result of the invitation to the West. That although no new Love-sparks-sprinkling will be done, yet since the final outburst was untimely checked, the final process will have to be done all over again as had been done in the month of December 1927.

Yet at the time, none could catch the significance of the remark "doing it afresh" in the deep sense in which it was meant, as the following chapters will show.

CHAPTER XIII

THE INEVITABLE REACTION

After the seventh of March 1928, we know the spectacular Demonstration of Love had ceased at Meherabad. Hence the atmosphere naturally became very dull, and Meher Ashram looked what a worldly institution of its kind would do to a spiritually-minded person, for all its fine surroundings, tip-top arrangements and comforting facilities. Besides, the occasional sidelights and glimpses of that which is unfelt and unseen through the external medium of the body, that the select few got now and then from the Master during the full blaze of the Love season, had also ceased, although in their little hearts the fire of Love went on smouldering silently but surely. Of course, these boys were often explained to the point of almost satisfactory conviction the reasons as to why a gap for a certain period was quite necessary pending the arrival of the "right moment". Yet the agony in their hearts often, during this gap, used to prove too much for them to bear! Hence, impatience and distraction ruled supreme. Many of them at times used to go to the length of biting themselves, tearing their clothes, crying loudly, running away, refusing to come near the Master and even directly disobeying Him. The writer remembers witnessing a touching incident in this connection.

Once during this period, one of the most intelligent and at the same time deeply affected, a Hindu boy of about sixteen named Lobhaji, was brought before the Master by his attendant after getting him

back from a random escapade. The Master patted him and once again tried to convey to him to wait for some time for getting his internal thirst quenched. After lengthy explanations, Lobhaji could blurt out but one word, in reply to the Master, and it was a very powerful "No." Not only did he utter this negation, but gave such a shake to his head at the time, as if he meant to make every part of his body to produce an echo of his emphatic "no." "Alright, don't wait so long; I will give you....next week", conveyed the Master. But again Lobhaji's head shook sideways, without even bringing out that piquant "No!" "Well, if you are so very keen, be sure to get the Sight tomorrow. Never fear. I will give it to you for a certainty", again conveyed the Master through His fast moving fingers on the alphabet card. And this time Lobhaji's sphinx-like silence was broken. "I want the Sight *to-day, now, at this moment*" were the simple but emotional words that came from his twitching lips!

Even the Ideal of the Institution, the Hero, could not keep his fine record of obedience untarnished during this reactionary period, and was marked disobeying and behaving rudely with the Master on more than one occasion. But still even in his disobedience, Ali proved himself quite unlike the rest of the crowd. Of course all repented their disobedience to the Master as soon as they regained their composes, but Ali's remorse used to be very singular. One evening, at the impulse of the moment, Ali openly rebelled against the Master, but the following morning, his pillow was found actually drenched with tears of repentance and remorse. Nay, the night-watchman reported that Ali did not at all sleep that night!

But the Master had to suffer no less than His little lovers through this disheartening gap in the workings. Besides hours of botheration in explaining and bringing round these boys, He also had to put up patiently with their rough behaviour, with the result that His well-worn black coat—made out of a rough blanket called 'Kamli'—which is the only one that His Holiness is pleased to use since 1922, was torn to shreds, and had to be repatched at so many places since He did not, and does not think it necessary to change it to this day. While once these crack-lovers, in their enthusiasm, accidentally over-turned the Master's rickshaw when giving Him a ride to their hearts' delight whereby causing many a scratch and abrasion to the Master's already weak and frail Person, due to the prolonged fasting.

This reaction itself, besides whatever other reasons the Master might have, justifies the necessity of splitting the Meher Ashram into two separate sections, as was done on the twenty-fifth of March 1928. The Love-sick and the other promising boys were isolated from the rest, and since form the new division aptly named the "Prem Ashram" or the Abode of Love." The only difference between these two sections of the Meher Ashram is in certain details only. For example, the quarters of the "Prem Ashram" is next to the Master's seat, whereas the Meher Ashram proper is some distance away from it. Again the "Prem Ashramites" are governed by special rules which allow them to occupy themselves in Divine Contemplation most of the time. But all the same, they are made to pay the necessary attention to their physical well-being and secular education. While a certain period in the evening

is fixed for their daily recreation, when they, like the rest of the Ashramites, enjoy outdoor games, or whenever circumstances allow, go for a walk with the Master Himself.

In spite of these special privileges and close contact of the Master, on the twenty-fifth of April 1928, the reaction amongst the boys went so high that the Master had actually to threaten the "Premi" (loving) boys with a close-up of the "Prem Ashram" and even some actual steps were taken towards merging the same into the Meher Ashram proper. But eventually, they were pardoned by the Master with a serious warning, after one and all of them had bitterly wept, regretting their unruly conduct.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TWO MASTERS MEET!

This and the following two chapters may perhaps appear irrelevant to the reader. But since we are trying to read the mysteries of the heart through the intellect alone, there is no help for it. To explain the so-called irrelevancies to the highest reach of the intellect is a work of volumes, but to avoid them totally is like presenting a body without a soul. The soul, or that mysterious something in man, whose presence or absence makes him appear as alive or dead, is a thing of mere theistical conjecture for the most of us. But just because we cannot understand, as we ought to and as we all shall have to, this essential side of human existence, we do not eschew the rest as irrelevant. There are thousands who think they know or understand Shakespeare thoroughly while in fact they only talk of the material or intellectual side of Shakespeare, barring the few that know what Shakespeare really was. Even Shakespeare did not know himself fully, and through one of the Master's stray hints I can say, does not know it to this day, wherever he may be. The world at large is trying to read the Book of Life from the wrong end, but this is quite a separate subject by itself. To cut it short, the reader would do well to form his own sequence for this strange narrative as it suits his fancy and faculty, leaving out the irrelevencies to be enjoyed by those who understand them. With these introductory words, I would commence narrating the event that forms the heading of this chapter.

Just at the right moment when the reactionary feelings were wildly rampant, as if to comfort the impatient little lovers like Ali, the Master of the Master Herself turned up at Meherabad.

Her Holiness Hazarat Babajan of Poona, Who holds India-wide reputation and prominence and Who is one of the two Masters of the Master, paid a visit to Meherabad on the first of April 1928. It is rightly remembered as a "Red-Letter" day at Meherabad.

Hazarat Babajan has been staying at Poona for the last twenty-five years, and but for the frequent drives round the City Cantonment, and the suburbs of Poona, She has never been reported to have left that place during all these years. And the first time that Her Holiness was pleased to go out was to visit, to quote Her own words, "The place of My Child."

A week prior to this all important event, the Master had received a letter from one of His disciples at Poona to the effect that "Her Holiness was constantly remembering Ahmednagar, and referring to 'Her Child' and perhaps may come down one of these days." Yet no one was prepared for this great, pleasant and inspiring surprise! It had never before happened in the Master's short but already eventful history that either of His GREAT GURUS had ever condescended to pay Him the unique distinction and privilege of a visit in Person! To the best of my information, a God-realised Master, coming all the way to His or Her Perfect Pupil's place is perhaps unparalleled in the Spiritual history of the world.

At about eleven-thirty, that morning, a car came sweeping along the road, and stopped just by the Hazarat Babajan High School. Hazarat Babajan graced

that car! "Send a chit to my Child soon" were the simple words that Hazarat Babajan let out on arrival, but they were enough to send a thrill of miracle into those who knew the circumstances prevailing then at Meherabad. Since the Master had imprisoned Himself over the hill, near the Meher Ashram, a practice had come into vogue to announce visitors before allowing them direct to the Master's presence. And this used to be done through printed slips specially got ready for this purpose, according to the following specimen:

MEHERABAD	
	Date.....
	Visitor.....
Name.....	
Address.....	
.....	

On this slip, the name of the visitor, the place he or she hailed from, the duration of the proposed stay and the purpose of the visit used to be scribbled in short and forwarded to the Master for further instructions by the Meherabad Superintendent, or the one acting for him at the time. Mr. F.N. Driver, better known as PADRI, of the Master's earliest and trusted disciples, happened to be the Acting Superintendent on this occasion. His keen sense of humour caused him to act quite literally to the Great Master's command, and he just noted down "Hazarat Babajan from Poona" on one of these slips, and at once forwarded the same, to the Master.

The effect that this slip, when it reached the Master caused among those present there, was dramatic.

Many were speechless with mixed feelings of pleasure and wonder, and some looked staring blankly, as if trying to make sure whether it was only a dream or an actual reality.

But none forgot to remember the peculiar action of the Master that very morning, which now showed that at least He was quite prepared for this happy event. Probably the same moment that Hazarat Babajan left Poona at about fifteen minutes past eight that morning, the Master here at Meherabad left using His sandals for the first time, and began to go about bare-footed. On receipt of the message, the Master at once hurried down the hill, without using the then inevitable rickshaw, but stopped on the other side of the railway line, which divided the boundaries of the Meher Ashram and Meherabad proper, about fifty yards from the spot where Babajan's car was stopping, and ordered all the boys and disciples to pay their long due Respects and Love to His Own Master. The Master kept standing all the time that Hazarat Babajan was pleased to stop there. In the course of many remarks and discussions that the Master had with the disciples after the departure of Hazarat Babajan, He also conveyed: "This is the most eventful day of my career, and I would like to add, 'eventful career.'" I would remark here that by way of paying a return visit, the Master went to Poona the very next day, when those who accompanied Him had not to go a long way for paying their respects to Hazarat Babajan as She was already present near Her usual Bund Garden seat that morning. Thus after a very long time, the Master had left Meherabad bodily for an outstation, a move that proved a

fore-runner to His contemplated change from Ahmednagar described in Chapter XV.

Just a fortnight after this memorable visit of Hazarat Babajan, the Fasting that the Master had continued without a break from the tenth of November 1927, just before setting the MeherAshram all aflame with Love, was now tightened and heightened with additional self imposed restrictions from the fifteenth of April 1928. However, this intensifying of His apparent asceticism soon proved to be the last flickering of the dying lamp that goes out with a bold flame. Within a few days, the Master began to let out hints that if a certain number of persons offered to remain on fast for a certain period, He might reconsider His decision of remaining without food. This was enough to set the disciples and specially those attached to Him through inborn Love, to bestir themselves into action. Mr. K.J. Dastur took the lead, and soon succeeded in making Him come to definite terms. "Two hundred persons should observe a fast for twenty-four hours, and then I will take food," dictated the Master.

Accordingly on the twenty-fifth of April, two hundred persons remained completely without food, save water and tea without milk, for twenty-four hours. The Master too followed suit, and only took a few sips of the same tea that day. The fast terminated on the morning of the twenty-fifth, but the Master would not take food. "Let Me serve you all first with the food and then I will partake of it Myself," were the noble words that His Holiness conveyed in an unconcerned matter of fact tone. It was about nine in the morning that for the first time, after five months and fifteen days, He took a few morsels of solid food (curry and rice).

CHAPTER XV

THE TRANSFERENCE TO TOKA

Those often quoted and most significant words of the Master: "It will all have to be done afresh" did convey some very drastic change of affairs to many of His disciples, yet no one amongst them thought at the time that even the surroundings will have to be changed, and that a fresh site for the Meher Ashram was necessary until the Master took them by surprise one fine morning, on the seventh of May 1928.

Amongst the visitors to the Master that day was one Mr. Abdulla Haroon Jaffer, a furniture merchant and estate agent of Poona. In the course of his stray talk with the Master, the gentleman suggested the chance of a bargain of a fine site at Poona, in a certain locality, which he said, would make an ideal site for the Meher Ashram. It was a bolt from the blue for those present, when the Master readily fell in with the suggestion and conveyed: "Yes, I would like to change the site now....."

Those who have come sufficiently in contact with the Master know what His mere word means against costs and consequences. One would even think twice before changing one's residence in the same city, but for the Master, His apparently off-hand remark in connection with the changing of the whole colony of about four hundred souls from one station to another tended to make it a certain fact.

Preparations to enable the Master to have a personal look at the suggested site were immediately set

on foot. As if the spell of a fixed stay was broken with the recent visit of Hazarat Babajan, the following day (eighth of May), His Holiness set out for Poona at about four-thirty in the morning. Besides the apparent reason of looking up the proposed site, the visit proved a very significant one. Hazarat Abdulla, the Chhota Baba, who was so far kept all aloof and isolated since he became Enlightened was for the first time taken out on this trip to Poona. While that very morning, Hazarat Babajan started from the other end and re-inspired Meherabad with Her August Presence for the second time. It was as if the two Masters had exchanged their respective positions for a few hours!

During the time the Master inspected the site at Poona, Hazarat Babajan blessed the boys and disciples at Meherabad with pats and caresses, specially to those love-afflicted ones who were feeling ill at ease through the Master's short absence.

On their respective return journeys, both Masters started almost simultaneously from the two opposite ends since the two cars crossed each other just half way between Poona and Ahmednagar.

The site at Poona did not appeal to the Master, yet "Shifting the Meher Ashram from its present surroundings" He conveyed, "is imperative now after the Old Man's (Babajan's) second visit."

Navsari in Gujarat, Daman in Portuguese India, and Sinhghadh the famous fort of Shivaji near Poona, were the three spots that came under discussion as the probable places whereto the institution may be shifted.

On the fifteenth of May at 4-30 A.M., the Master left Meherabad to visit the proposed sites in a motor

car driven by Mr. R.K. Irani, who had since returned from England. (The next chapter contains the result of Mr. Irani's visit to England.) The party went straight to Sinhgadh fort, and inspected the site there that its owner Khan Bahadur B.D. Padamji had recently been generous enough in placing at the Master's entire disposal. But it did not meet with His Holiness's fancy mainly for these two reasons: the very heavy rainfall at the place and the inconvenience of climbing the great height for the parents and guardians of the boys who may come to see them. "Otherwise," conveyed the Master with a wistful look round the beautiful surroundings, "this is an ideal site. It is my old place."

From Sinhgadh, the party went straight to Bombay to catch the Gujarat Mail, but they arrived there three hours too late. "We won't go now," conveyed the Master. "Let Chanji (F.H. Dadachanji) proceed to Gujarat in the morning and report. We shall return to Meherabad tomorrow." And accordingly, the Master set out for the return journey the following noon.

By the time the party began to ascend the famous Bhor Ghaut between Campoli and Khandala, it was nearing sunset, and the fine scenery of the towering hills was at its best. The sturdy car—Hudson Super-Six —had so far stood the strain of so many miles well, save for a slight relaxation in the pulling power of her six-cylinder engine, since the beginning of the return journey from Bombay. But as it was still going on merrily, Mr. R.K. Irani did not care to look up the slightly spluttering engine and let it go on at top speed over the ghauts, when unexpectedly he soon had to

put it in second speed. Even this was found insufficient after some time, and the engine had to be put in the first speed. The powerful six-seater car, with an over-load of about ten persons with their bag and baggages, somehow managed to climb the ghauts almost halfway, but here it suddenly slackened, then stopped for a moment, and before anybody could think what to do, it began to roll back! The situation was one of touch-and-go! Just a few yards, and there was a yawning chasm below. The car continued rolling back for all the attempts of Mr. Irani to stop it by pressing the foot-brake, which also was found in disorder! Of course there was the hand-brake, but in the excitement of the moment, Mr. Irani forgot to use it; and I very much doubt if it could have averted the impending calamity at that critical stage considering the heavy load of the vehicle even if it had been brought into use. The situation became simply hopeless, and the difference between life and a horrible death was by mere inches. Two or three of the party managed to jump out but the rest including the Master had to remain in the car to face the situation! However, at the right moment, the Master simply leaned on one side of the car, pressed it down with His hand, and lo! It stopped dead there and then!

There are certain people who think the sign of the miracle as imperative in a Perfect Master, and it is simply for such of them that I have gone out of my way in giving prominence to this incident, as well as to others of the kind. Otherwise, my constant company with the Master has confirmed me in that school of thought to which Qushayri belonged: "A Saint would be none the less a Saint" says Qushayri "if no miracles

were wrought by Him in this world." To come to the point again, the party climbed the remaining ghaut partly on foot and partly in the car, in small numbers by turns. But between Talegaon and Shelarwadi, about twenty miles from Poona, the car went through another ordeal. This time it was due to a huge tree that was lying across the road invisible in the dim headlights of the car. But with a crash and a lurch, and the splintering noise of the glass screen that went into small bits, the car came out safe and sound. It was only when they had safely come out of this death-trap that the party realised what a close-shave it was. On the contrary none of the occupants got as much as a scratch, while the engine went on humming and spinning merrily, enabling the car to cover the remaining miles with a vengeance. But when the party reached the railway station at Poona they saw in the bright light of the station lamps, to what extent the car had been damaged. Besides the broken glass screen, the mud-guards and radiator-bonnet were badly twisted, while the fine radiator crest had disappeared completely. Immediately after the radiator was re-filled and the party had some refreshments, the Master ordered the journey to be resumed in the dead of the night.

Thus within forty-eight hours of the start, at day-break on the seventeenth of May, the Master was back at Meherabad. Still He would think of no rest 'till the question of the new site was decided. Discussions about the same continued, when some one suggested the name of Toka. The moment He heard about the possibility of an ideal site there, without any consideration for the physical fatigue of the last exertion, the Master left Meherabad again the same

evening for Toka, a village at a distance of about fifty miles from Meherabad.

Simply at a cursory glance of the site, the Master not only approved Toka, but the very next day set all the external machinery at His command into motion, in acquiring the necessary land for the whole of the colony of Meherabad which was to be shifted there. "Arrange the details soon," was one of His commands to the Meherabad authorities, "so that we can shift there before the monsoon sets in." The way the Master and disciples worked day and night, and the speed with which the whole of the Meherabad encampment was removed is a story by itself. Suffice it to say here that simultaneously with the un-making of the camp at Arangaon, the new Meherabad was in the making at Toka. So there was no wonder that within fifteen days of the approval, on the third of June 1928, not only the whole colony was completely transferred to Toka, but almost from the very day the normal life and daily routine was also resumed there. And very soon the one time thorny, uneven and barren jungle-like place was transformed into a fine and ideal colony. Whatever vital reasons He might have for this dramatic and costly transference, the hurried selection of the site by the Master appears significant from many view-points.

The half sleeping village of Toka, situated midway between the historical and mystical cities of the Deccan viz. Ahmednagar and Aurangabad, is very poor in material progress. The only sign of modern civilization about its rustic surroundings is the solitary little red post box that hangs by one of the half-broken village gates. But on the other hand, the place is exceptionally rich in its picturesque and charming scenery, situated as it

is on the junction of the two rivers, Godavari and Pravara. The grand bathing ghauts along the Godavari, with numerous flights of stairs and bath-seats, arcades and balustrades, whisper history to one in a contemplative mood. Toka and the junction of Godavari and Pravara, owing to their unique situation, are recognised by the Hindus as the Allahabad and the Ganges of the Deccan respectively, but since the railways have shortened the distance to the original Ganges, and brought within reach of all many other places of pilgrimage, Toka has lost its one time popularity. It is worthwhile remembering here that Swami Ramdas and Hazrat Sai Baba of Sherdi, both of whom bear a close spiritual connection with the Master, passed a good time of their lives in the vicinity of Toka.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MISSION TO THE WEST

We already know that Mr. R.K. Irani left Bombay for England on the tenth of March, 1928. One of his letters received from London on the fourteenth of April conveyed a very disappointing picture. He had found that even amongst the poorer classes in England, the careers of the youngsters were pre-settled by their parents unlike that of an Indian boy, who is generally educated without any pre-arranged plan in the early stages of his education, and thus is easily available for any kind of training. Then naturally he found that it was a country where Maya ruled supreme and materialistic ideas held sway. And those, who talked of spirituality, generally meant psychic phenomena or discussed the subjects of Divine Illumination, God-Realization, Truth, Experience, as lightly as one would do geometry and geography, without knowing that those terms were not only possible to be talked over but the spirit underlying them could actually be realised, experienced, seen, heard and felt. In short, for all its brilliant streets, well-decorated shops and vast and magnificent net-work of railways etc., Mr. Irani found it through experience, what he so far used to hear, that Europe was comparatively very poor in the matter of spirituality in its real sense, and consequently no wonder he found the disseminating of Truth a spade work there!

The cable received from him on the sixteenth of April at Meherabad said, "Some success, task difficult;"

while a subsequent letter contained a reference to a certain inconvenience. It was, therefore, finally decided to recall Mr. Irani without going to other countries on the Continent as was originally arranged, and the following cable was despatched: "Don't bring boys. Return." In the meantime, Mr. Irani had met with an eleventh-hour success, and had almost arranged to bring some boys, but in face of this order, he postponed his scheme, and leaving instructions to local agents returned to India. After his return, he succeeded in getting the Master's sanction to call those boys, and even arranged for their passage, but eventually they were not allowed to come. The West had failed to respond to the Divine call, so far as it concerned the sending of the boys to the Meher Ashram! Since bringing the boys for the Meher Ashram was *apparently* the all-important purpose of the mission, it can be said to have proved a failure!

But the following incident shows that it is not so. On the contrary, when political India was shouting itself hoarse with "Simmon go back" and "Simmon welcome", when many political representatives of India had found it necessary 'in the interest of their health' to stay in England, the solitary representative of Spiritual India was silently doing his work, though himself unconscious of its real significance at the time, and even often being ridiculed for the peculiar life he led, since throughout the voyage and his stay in England, Mr. Irani had been ordered to remain only on bread, butter and tea!

In the darkest hour of his disappointment in England, Mr. Irani one day received a peculiar message. On the face of it, it was an ordinary letter, under the

signature of a certain Mr. X, coming from Portsmouth. But the peculiarity was about its contents. The writer mysteriously acknowledged the receipt of Mr. Irani's message, and invited him for an interview. With all his wits about him, he could not remember even having seen or heard of any Mr. X, not to speak of sending a message to him, during his short stay in England. He naturally thought it to be a postal mistake, and went to all the Iranis that he knew of in London at that time, but none came forward to own the mysterious message. He therefore went to Portsmouth, according to the address given in the letter, at the appointed time. It was Mrs. X who greeted him at the place, and assured him that he was expected, and said that Mr. X had gone to the station for the purpose of receiving him. Nay, she even left him all to himself and went out to call back her husband so that Mr. Irani might not have to wait long. And he had not to remain in suspense for long, as Mr. X soon walked in and introduced himself.

After the usual formalities were over, the gentleman dimmed the light and began to talk as if he were exchanging messages on a wireless apparatus although he had nothing of the sort about him. In a low and impressive tone, Mr. X began to thrill his already stupified listener with the following words: "I SEE THE MASTER. It's two o'clock in the morning in India now. (Here he exactly described the Master's seat near the Meher Ashram). Other Eastern Masters of His (Meher Baba's) stage are not easily accessible and don't like to be disturbed at such an hour, but He seems to be of a very LOVING nature. I have just told the Master that will not allow the boys to

be taken to India. But the Master replies, there is no power on earth that can come in His way; He is not very keen about getting the boys. He wants to lay the Spiritual cable between the East and the West. Up to now, the East is looked after by the Eastern Masters, and the West by Western Masters. He wants to join both these sections; and that is the reason why He sent you (Irani) here. You are carrying with you without your knowledge, a sort of wireless connection, and it affects all those whom you meet."

(Mr. X and the Master have not seen each other in the ordinary way to this day.)

CHAPTER XVII

HISTORY REPEATED

Within ten days of the transference to Toka, the Master commenced conveying hints about reverting to fasting and self-imprisonment as before. While pending the erection of new premises for Prem Ashram, the inmates of this section used to be lodged in a separate hall, adjoining the Meher Ashram proper, some distance away from the Master's seat.

However, it was on the first of July that refanning of the flame of love began, as on that day, the Spiritual Classes, that had during the past two months been postponed *sine die*, were reopened for the Meher Ashram boys.

On the fifth of July, the Master actually remained confined to His box like seat by the Dhuni, and partook of nothing save water for the next twenty-four hours, but the very next day He came out and began taking food as usual, conveying, "....This particular spot is not suitable for the purpose." Of course, the Love-sick boys who were greatly reassured with the near approach of the moment for the 'Final Touch' showed great concern at the unexpected coming out of retirement of the Master, who however, restored their confidence with the following words: "....Don't be impatient. You won't be able to '*digest*' it so soon....I will surely make you the envy of all!" But within the next twenty-four hours, He proved, that besides the spot being unsuitable, there were other reasons for His unexpected exit.

On the seventh of July 1928, quite suddenly, as a jack-in-the-box, none other than Ali's father once again cropped up at Meherabad with a pretty fine yarn. He said he had recently heard in Bombay that the Master had absconded, and all the Ashram boys had gone raving mad. But the very sight of the progressive state of affairs at Toka was enough to set his fears at rest, and it did not take long for the Ashram authorities to give him complete satisfaction, and he returned to Bombay at ease the following day, after seeing his son quite sane and safe.

From this time onward, the Master once again began to get all absorbed in the affairs of the little ones. Not only the Prem Ashram boys, but all the rest were begun to be impressed with Spirituality in various ways.

The beginning of August witnessed almost a craze for Divine contemplation amongst them. Leaving aside the Love-lorn boys, many in the Meher Ashram too were reported to be getting-up voluntarily hours before the morning bell and sitting for meditation. Some of them even rose as early as one o'clock in the morning, and sat unmoved and quite engrossed in contemplation of the Master.

Just in the thick of the revival of this spiritual atmosphere, Ali's father, all of a sudden, presented himself at Toka for the second time. Nay, he was once again on the war-path! "I want to take Ali with me", was the same old song on his lips. Since he had already caused enough trouble to the Meher Ashram and its authorities, and had on more than one occasion gone back on his word of honour, he naturally felt ashamed to ask for Ali's withdrawal directly. "I want

to take the boy home for a few days....and will bring him back soon," he said. But the authorities compelled him through logical objections to come to the point, and leave off the tricks. While thus disposed, he could make no secret of his having been influenced by a certain "gentleman," whom I call here Mr. "J."

This "J" had stayed at Meherabad before this for nearly a year, and enjoyed the Master's hospitality and taken full advantage of the H.B.H. School during this long period when he used to behave like a great devotee of the Master. I remember clearly, as early as the month of April, 1928, in the course of some discussion, the Master had conveyed, "This 'J' is not what he appearshe will prove a traitor." Then why did the Master not dismiss him that very moment? It's a question that would naturally crop up in the mind of a critic. But there are many more of it kind, for instance, "Why the Master, who is possessed of powers super-natural, did not stop the 'Devil's Work' itself? or, "Why, for all His wisdom and fore-sight, the Almighty did not nip the Satan in the bud instead of creating the sorry business of continuing an eternal duel with the Devil through Saints and Prophets? Then again, "Was Christ, the all-knowing Master, really unaware of the serpent in the grass, Judas, when He kept him near as one of His special disciples?" I am sure the "COMING MAN,"—be it Imám Mehdi, the Second Christ, Son of Zoroaster, Kalanki Avatar, Last Buddha, Super-man of Science and Evolution or the Combination of them all — will explain all this soon to the world in words as well as in deeds; in the meantime, I will continue the narrative as it is without haggling over mere intellectual arguments.

Through certain selfish motives, Mr."J" suddenly began to appear in his true colours after shifting to Toka, and found fault with everything at Meherabad. The Master, when He got an open charge of faithlessness proved against him, summarily dismissed "J" from Meherabad on the twenty-first of July. And naturally since then, the young man began to poison the minds of the Moghul community against the institution and its authorities with unfounded falsehoods, which resulted in the present appearance of Ali's father at Toka.

The authorities still tried their best in bringing round Ali's prejudiced father to the right point for two whole days and nights. But the man remained adamant and would listen to no rhyme or reason. The authorities therefore, on the strength of the stamped bond, simply refused to allow the boy back unless the gentleman made good the costs of the boy's education and maintainance to date. Of course this demand was not made with the object of really getting the just compensation from the gentleman, but rather to strike home to him the consequences of his hasty conclusions. Ali's father went away from Meherabad, but not to Bombay. On the fourteenth of August, he was reported of complaining to the local police who referred him to higher authorities, and then for the following few days, Mr. Haji Muhammed remained very busy in trying to bestir the machinery of law into motion in support of his case.

Thus once again devil and Divinity were at loggerheads with a vengeance! On the one hand, Ali's father was trying to call the law to his aid, on the other, the Master was busy instructing the boys in the Law of Love. The short period of five days during which all

this happened was very remarkable. The revival of the spiritual atmosphere was again almost at its height. But unlike the last violent manifestation, the present outburst was singularly silent, although no less strong and decided. Instead of the weeping and wailing, the majority of the boys of both the sections of the Meher Ashram developed a peculiar Divine Insomnia, which was at the same time quite harmless. Some of the Prem Ashram boys hardly slept at night or during the day, even for an hour; yet for all that they looked no less active, bright and cheerful than those few that slept normally. From this time onward, for several days, the Master had made it a rule to call at the school, and, during the recess periods, interview each of the boys reported as keeping awake for meditation, inquiring as to how he fared for the loss of sleep; and after conveying an encouraging word, a pat, or an embrace would let him go. Besides the inmates of the Prem Ashram, no less than twenty-seven boys in the Meher Ashram were noticed getting up as early as two o'clock one morning. In spite of this serious insomnia, through the Master's Grace, every one of them was able in defiance of the law of nature, to discharge his daily duties without a flaw in the school, the dining hall and on the play-ground.

But the history was to repeat itself on the nineteenth of August. Just in the midst of a prize-distribution gathering, in connection with the previous day Holiday-Sports at five in the evening, the Ashram authorities were served with a legal writ by Ali's father, demanding the boy back. This gave rise to a keen discussion between the Master and the disciples for nearly two hours. The latter were divided into

two groups, the one advocated the law to take its own course, and the other thought it advisable not to proceed further and hand over the boy at once. Strange enough, the Master sided with the last group, and it was finally decided to give up the hero!

Consequently, besides Ali, some other Moghul boys were also handed over to their respective guardians, who were accompanying Mr. Syed Haji Muhammed, at about 7:30 that same evening. I would avoid the repetition of the touching scene, and the gloom that overshadowed Meherabad at the time, when the Master conveyed the following words: "Ali is the best amongst those given up today. The poor boy will suffer much. However, these sufferings for My sake will bring him nearer to Me. If he is still allowed to stay, so much the better. If he goes mad with the suffering, they themselves (Ali's father and relations) will bring him back to Me. Even if he dies through these shocks that his relations are persisting in causing to him, he will come unto Me. He has one thing—LOVE—and very intense *Love, that none can rob him of.*"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SECOND BID FOR FREEDOM

After this second forced exit of Ali from the Ashram, to all appearances, no hitch was perceptible in the atmosphere. On the contrary, the Divine outburst of feelings and enthusiasm amongst the boys was gaining ground by leaps and bounds. Besides, the Master ceased to show the great concern that He had displayed on the last occasion, and no attempt therefore was made to get Ali back from his father as before. But the Master never seemed to have forgotten the hero, and his position as the leader amongst the little lovers. He continued inspiring the rest of the boys, and within three days of Ali's going away, on the twenty-second of August, He got all the rules and regulations of the Meher Ashram suspended for about a month, in respect of all the boys who might be near Him or His seat. None of the boys were, according to this order, ever called away from Him, or restricted from going to Him whenever they liked. Consequently, the Person of the Master, when He happened to be out and about, was a sight for the Gods to see! It was like a Christmas tree surrounded by a crowd of little ones, each trying frantically to reach it and grasp at its inviting branches, full of sparkling toys and novelties! But since this "Tree of Knowledge"—the Master's Person—had but only four branches and twenty twigs in the shape of hands, feet, and fingers, the strain and pulls it had to bear against scores of hands grasping and pulling at it may well be imagined than written! Of course, there were no toys and novelties about the

Master's Person, but in their place, His sparkling brown eyes, His rosy lips parted in a loving smile disclosing some of the pearly teeth, and His golden and shining ringlets, and above all His genial temper were enough to madden them with joy! And such onslaughts on His Person by the boys were so frequent that the Master was often seen playing a sort of a game of hide-and-seek with them, while going from one place to the other in the surroundings of the Meher Ashram.

How seriously the Master looked bent upon making some fresh additions to the Prem Ashram will be seen from the fact, that on the twenty-eighth of August, His Holiness came out of His retirement as early as three o'clock in the morning, and personally inspected the many little ones, who were sitting in meditation at the cost of sweet sleep, which can only be judged by one, who has had the experience of being disturbed from it at such an hour! By this time, some of the Meher Ashram boys can fairly be said to have gone mad after the Master, and His photos, which were now in great demand. They were not satisfied with the large variety of the Master's photos that were already in stock, and copies of which had been freely distributed amongst them, but insisted upon the Master appearing in many fantastic garbs and get photographed. The Master, too, went much out of His way during this period, and condescended to fulfil the peculiar fancies of these enthusiasts and let Himself be photographed in many postures and dresses, as He had never done before.

The unprecedented extent to which the enthusiasm went will be judged from such surprising event, that on the fifth of September, as early as eleven o'clock at night, some of the boys tumbled out of their respective

beddings, and ran straight to the Master's seat. The night-watchman and those of the disciples that were still about, were simply held spell-bound with surprise, but in face of the recent suspension of rules, none could stop the boys from going there, and calling out loudly for the Master to come out. Those who believe can alone derive the significance of disturbing a "Kutub" or "Sadguru" of the Age in this way and at such an hour.

The Master not only came out, but instead of taking the boys to task as was expected by some, He patted them, and conveyed some reassuring and encouraging words, though of course from that moment, He enjoined upon them certain rules, which also forbade them to disturb Him again in this way.

From the tenth of September, the Master once again resumed the much expected fasting programme, and began to remain on a quarter of a cup of milk twice a day only.

It is time we turn our attention to Ali. Although I am not sure about the date of Ali's second bid for freedom, as, when I asked him about it later on, he said, "I remember it was about twenty days after they took me away," which nearly coincided with the day on which the Master recommenced fasting as stated above. On that particular day, Ali was sitting sadly outside his father's tea-shop near Khetwadi, Bombay, resting his head on his seething bosom, contemplating his painful situation. It was nearly sun-set. Although his father was not there, one of the partners was keeping a watchful eye on the boy, and since Ali had already given a slip last time, this partner was very careful and so far had proved a man not to be easily caught napping, as for all his constant thoughts of an escape

the boy had failed to get an opportunity. A friend of the gentleman, who kept watch over Ali, happened to call upon him at the moment, and began to talk with him. The latter had first proved himself alive to the possibility of his missing Ali in the interesting tete-a-tete, as he asked Ali to come in. But without any particular scheme in view, the boy quite innocently said that he preferred to remain where he was, and the gentleman was good enough to let the boy have his way but continued to call out his name at regular intervals. For some time, the situation became very comical. Every few minutes the watchful Moghul would cry out, "Ali, where are you?" "Are you there Ali?" and so on, and the boy also used to shout back as being there, 'till, at last, Ali was tired with this humbug, which was the last thing he could put up with at that moment, and so the last reply he shouted back was also a mild protest: "Of course I am here; why do you call me again and again?"

But Ali was not in the least prepared for the result that his protest brought about! Four, five, eight and even ten minutes passed, and there was no more call! Ali suddenly felt an impulse, he shot a sly glance into the interior of the shop; the two men were busy in their conversation, perhaps engrossed in their favourite topic of the glories of Persia! Quick as lightening, Ali came to a decision, and with equal swiftness, put the same into action. With a bound, he was off and began to spring from house to house, and corner to corner, keeping himself under cover through the -- owing to rain -- muddy lanes and bye-lanes of Khetwadi. This time, the boy was well prepared in the matter of funds, and already had a ten rupee note neatly tucked in somewhere

about his clothes. Being instinctively aware of a chase, he came straight to the Victoria Terminus station, booked himself for Ahmednagar, and at the first opportunity, jumped into the same old Madras Mail!

Preoccupied with the thoughts of picking out his pursuers, Ali forgot to keep himself under cover, and was sitting prominently by the window of a carriage. In the fever heat of the moment, he missed spotting the person that he dreaded most, and thus failed in the very purpose of his look-out. Somehow, his father happened to come unnoticed by the carriage in which Ali was sitting.

Ali saw his father just in the nick of the time, but it was too late. Their eyes had met! But within that fraction of a second, Ali's heart called out for the Master and asked for protection! Since the call was from the very depths of a highly strung soul, the Omnipresent Power was equally swift in responding! With a great sigh of relief, Ali found out that in spite of *seeing* him, his father had *not seen* him. The gentleman passed on looking for Ali in other carriages!

With a few minutes of this miraculous event, with a sharp whistle that sounded as the sweetest music to Ali at the moment, the train began to move out of the great terminus. From the moving train, keeping himself well under cover, Ali tried to locate his father, and found him with some other Moghuls talking excitedly along the receding platform. "Wire-telegram" were the only words that reached Ali's ears. He thought that perhaps they still suspected his presence in the train, and were thinking of sending telegrams to the authorities for his arrest. Naturally, he expected

trouble at the next halt, and so the poor soul remained under cover until the train had passed out of Kalyan. At the junction of Dhond, to his great horror, Ali found a confounded policeman much interested in him, yet somehow the hero succeeded in easing the suspicions of the representative of law, and managed to proceed further. Lest the station master at Ahmednagar might have been telegraphed too, the boy took great pains in slipping out of the platform as far as possible unseen and unnoticed, and succeeded in arriving unchallenged at the city motor stand to get a lift in one of the public motor buses that run daily between Ahmednagar and Toka.

Forgetting that there are many a slip betwixt the cup and the lip, Ali thought that he was at last out of the wood when he took his seat in one of the buses, and lost himself in the thoughts of the Master.

However, the driver of the bus became suspicious about him, and, on the pretence of taking tea, quietly entered a Moghul tea-shop near the motor stand, and informed the proprietor who happened to be a friend of Ali's father, and knew the situation well. The latter at once hurried to the spot, where Ali was quietly seated, all engrossed in the thoughts of the Master! Ali became dumb-founded, motionless, and lost the balance of his mind for some seconds at the sudden sight of the Moghul! The gentleman, of course, gently but firmly caught hold of Ali's sleeve, and led him to his shop where soon after Mr. Haji Muhammed's telegram was received, authorising the very gentleman to detain Ali until he came over there himself. True to this telegram, Ali's father shortly turned up at Ahmednagar and took away the poor boy back to Bombay!

In the course of a lengthy discussion with a European police officer that the writer had on the day following the one on which Ali was given up, twentieth August, as one of the arguments against the hesitation of the Meher Ashram authorities in giving up the boys the gentleman had said, "Were it not for this section of the Indian Penal Code (about illegal confinement), it would have been possible to revive slavery." He was right in a general sense, but little did he know that this "civilized freedom" at times proves worse than slavery itself, as it has done in the case of Ali.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CHAPTER OF MANY EVENTS

Before I describe Ali's further adventures, it would not be a bad plan to narrate some of the important events that took place about the Master in the mean time.

On the fourteenth of September His Holiness seemed to be very indisposed, when out of the new candidates, a Hindu lad named Tukaram insisted upon the Master to transfer His sufferings to him. It was only when the Master gave a solemn promise to get well in two days, that Tukaram got pacified! It was due to this promise, as well as to the great insistence of the other boys that the Master took a little milk on the sixteenth of September after remaining five days on tea without milk.

As a further example of how deeply the new candidates were affected during the latest outburst of spirituality amongst them, I would like to narrate the following incident. While passing along the Master's seat—the Meher Manzil—one morning, somewhere during this time, I chanced to find Him seated there, surrounded by the boys, and so I went in to pay my usual respects. The first question that the Master put to me was, "How does my face look?"

"Quite as usual", I replied.

"Still", He conveyed, "last night was a terrible one for Me. Throughout the night My temperature was about 105°. . . . My limbs have gone limp . . . The back is all sore . . . I could not rest even for a

second last night....Had you been in My place, you would have dropped your physical coat (body) through this suffering and pain . . . !"

Then abruptly changing the subject, the Master turned to one of the youngest boys there, named Pundit, and conveyed, "Tell Me what you want. God, freedom, paradise, motorcar, toys or anything else that you like the best! This is the right moment. Ask and it will be given to you, instantly!" Much I have become used to hear lofty sentiments from little lips; I was not prepared for the startling reply that this boy on the right side of eight gave!

"I want *your sufferings to cease!*" was all that the little Pundit could speak very modestly!

Another peculiar incident about the Master with which Ali was apprised of through a dream in Bombay, as will be seen later on, was that He remained without His daily baths and change of linen for a period of eighteen days, ending twenty-first of September, 1928.

Although the opening ceremony had been gone through as early as the first of September, it was the twenty-third of that month that the Master and the selected boys occupied the second New Seat, named Meher Manzil, and the new premises of the Prem Ashram adjoining the same respectively, after fresh ceremonies and celebrations. But there is quite a story intermingled with miracles about this occupation!

It so happened that about this time, a great scarcity of rainfall was felt all round Toka, to such an extent that, according to the prevailing customs amongst the Hindus, the local villagers in general and the farmers in particular indulged in all sorts of ceremonies and rituals which also included a whole night procession

round the town, with all the tom-toms that it could command! But all to no purpose! The atmosphere continued to remain as dry as dust, threatening the farmers with famine.

The Superintendent of the Meher Ashram—Mr. Behram Faridun Irani—one of the chief disciples of the Master, in the course of a conversation with the village Police Patel, on this very question, happened to advise him to approach the Master with their prayers for rain. The gentleman at first paid no heed to Mr. Behram's casual remarks, but probably when all the possible avenues of hope had been fruitlessly exhausted, that he thought the better of it.

On the morning of the sixteenth of September the village Police Patel at last approached the Master in company of some of the other villagers, and humbly solicited His blessings for a good shower. Possibly because the prayer had originated through the suggestion of one of His beloved disciples, the Master readily granted the boon and conveyed, "It will soon begin to rain now!"

Within less than an hour of this reply of the Master, clouds began to gather over Toka, and the bright and hot morning suddenly went cold and dark! Nay, a few minutes more and it began to rain!

And it was not a passing shower! Almost for the whole week, it rained cats and dogs at Toka, greatly inconveniencing all the inhabitants of Meherabad, housed as they were in temporary structures, which were not constructed in view of such an extraordinary downpour. But the peculiar and rather humorous point about it was that although the Master conveyed that He wanted Himself and the boys to shift into

the new premises of the Meher Manzil and the Prem Ashram, He would not do so until it stopped raining!

Twice it was decided on such of the evenings as promised a dry day on the morrow to bring about the occupation of the premises, and both times the matter was shelved, as it did not stop raining. At last, the Master gave the following final decision about this occupation on the twenty-second of September in these words: "If there is no rain tomorrow from dawn till two o'clock in the afternoon, the boys and Myself will shift into the new quarters; otherwise, the question will be put off for a month or two."

The "Premi" boys and many amongst the disciples could not help getting greatly disheartened at His strange declaration, and particularly with the prospect of another gap of a month or two that it held. "But" then the Master added, "if all of you feel so much about it, pray with heart and soul and it will not rain to-morrow!"

The fateful dawn of the twenty-third of September came, and there was no rain. Yet the stray black patches of threatening clouds hovering over Toka reminded Mr. Behram of the Patel's part in the matter which made him send for Patel. The excessively wet weather had already played havoc with the old Patel's failing health, and although he was laid up with fever and cold, he obeyed the call: "Have you had enough water now?" was naturally the first question with which Mr. Behram greeted the sick man, who acknowledged in no uncertain terms the bountiful blessing of the Master, and added, "But to take full advantage of this blessing in our fields, the rain must stop now." "This is just what we want," said Mr. Behram,

"and so I suggest that you should again present yourself for the Master's service and appeal to Him to get the rains stopped."

The Patel readily fell in with this advice, but while requesting the Master for the stoppage, he was found to be very hesitating lest the monsoon may completely terminate there and then, and so was careful enough in asking, "We would please like to have a dry atmosphere now, but of course it must rain again after a week or so for some days." The Master smiled, probably at his guarded prayer, and was pleased to convey, "It will stop raining now, and you will also get some more showers after a week as desired by you."

And just according to these words, not a single drop fell that day till two o'clock with the result of the occupation of the Meher Manzil and the new Prem Ashram already mentioned. From that afternoon the atmosphere remained dry save for an occasional stray shower till about a week, when it again rained sufficiently to satisfy the inhabitants of Toka.

Now let us have a look at these mysterious new premises, as, since the day they were occupied, none save certain disciples and workers used to be allowed access thereto. No sooner one would enter the colony from the river side at a stone's throw from the banks of the ever sparkling Godavari, than a compound enclosed with bamboo railings about thirty yards in length was prominently visible amidst the cluster of green trees and bushes. About ten feet away from the bamboo railings, there was another one, made of bamboo mattings fixed against rafters, six feet high, which enclosed the rest of the inner compound from all the four sides, giving an inner space of about 30 x 30 yards shut out from onlookers.

One of the two peculiar structures that jutted out from the inner compound was the original "Box-Seat" of the Master, but which, since its removal here, was occupied by Chhota Baba. The other, right in the middle, was, (and probably will remain for a long time), the Master's new seat, the Meher-Manzil. It is solidly built in lime and bricks, with a peculiar dome as a roof, having three windows on three sides and a door facing the river-side. It is 7' x 7' in space. In the inner compound on the eastern boundary, was the Prem Ashram quarter divided into thirty-two rooms, each 7' x 4 with three feet passage in the middle. On the western side, was the Master's inner seat, made of bamboo matting, adjoining a special Dhuni. The rest of the well-paved space used to provide the play ground and open air meeting place for the inmates.

Six days after the occupation of the Prem Ashram, a letter was received from Ali in Persian, a translation of which is reproduced here:

Bombay, 24th September, 1928.

Respected Kaikhushru,

I will be coming in the next three or four weeks, but will not take the Nagar line as the people there as well as the Police know me. But if I come within two weeks, will take the Aurangabad line (i.e. via Manmad and not Dhond). But I will never take the Nagar route, or I may go to Upper India. By God, the Love of Baba would not lessen a whit in my heart even if my head be cut off. If opportunity presents itself, I would surely come as you will see. Either I will take poison or will come to Baba.

Oh God! I do not know what to do all these days and how to escape, as my father and three other persons are on constant watch upon me, which Baba already knows.

Please speak to Baba on my behalf.

He, who deprived me of union with my Beloved, may his heart be the target of thousands of sword slashes.

I have kissed this letter as it is to reach your hands.

If Baba so ordains, I may come soon.

At present, this humble servant is staying near Pydownie, behind the Chowki.

The letter speaks for itself, and needs no comments. One more was received from Ali previous to his second bid for freedom, but is untraceable. The main gist of it was a pathetic appeal to the Master, inviting a swift death either for himself or his father as the only way out of his sufferings!

Just to provide a fresh example of how on flimsy grounds, though in good faith, these Moghuls have been causing so much pain and privations to their own kith-and-kin, another little hero of the Meher Ashram is introduced here. It will be remembered that on the day Ali was taken away, on the strength of a legal writ, some others had also been given up. One of them, Abdul Waháb, aged about twelve, had returned long since to Toka after passing through many painful privations for his small age.

The same day that the letter from Ali was received—twenty-ninth of September—the brother of the boy turned up once again, and took poor little Abdul Waháb away the second time. However, he could not help remarking, "Personally I like the boy to remain

here, but I cannot bear the taunts and remarks of my co-religionists against me on that account."

Within two or three days, Abdul Waháb's brother again came to Toka to the great surprise of the Ashram authorities, and began to demand him. It transpired then, that the plucky little boy had once again given the slip to his brother the very day they had reached Bombay, but he—the boy—had so far not returned to Toka. In order to convince the gentleman the truth of the situation, the authorities suggested to him to stay 'till such time that the boy returned, when he could take him back, but perseverance of the boy was too much for his brother's prejudices, and he went away saying, "You keep the boy now when he returns, and inform me about it." And lo! The very next day Master Abdul Waháb returned to Toka all smiles. A telegram was at once sent to his brother apprising him of the boy's return, when in reply the authorities received this letter in broken English from him:

Bombay, 9th October, 1928.

Dear Sir,

I am in receipt of your telegram. I became very glad when I knew that my brother is there with you. At present keep him with you and teach some education. Kindly inform me about his knowledge, health and how he is getting on now, at your earliest convenience. I will send his clothes by parcel which please tell him. Give my best compliments to Mr. Kaikhushru Sahib, to my brother and all.

I am, dear sir,
your most obedient servant,
(Sd.) ALI AKBAR.

Now that Abdul Waháb has prominently crept into this story, it is but meet that I should describe at least some adventures regarding his latest bid for freedom. But in doing so, I will restrict myself to the description I had from his own lips (less comments) to make it as brief as possible. He said, "After we reached Bombay, perhaps in order to tempt me in forgetting all about Baba, my brother bought me a fountain pen, a pair of fancy eye-glasses, a tooth-brush, a belt, a pencil-sharpener and other odds and ends. In the evening, while going home, my brother suddenly remembered to buy some salt. Leaving me standing opposite a "pan-shop," he went to a grocer's shop nearby. Shouting behind my back that I was going to get a whistle, I began to run from one lane to the other with which the Nail Bazaar locality is so full of, with my brother's vain protest ringing in my ears asking me not to go. In the excitement of the moment, I came face to face with some members of my community who knew me well, but I managed to give them the slip by hiding myself in a gutter. Then I came to Victoria Terminus, but through fear of being traced out, I could not think clearly as what to do next. However I slipped into a local train and came to Byculla. From there I again went to the Terminus. Then from there once again I came to Byculla. This time I went to the third class booking office, and unintentionally the word Nasik escaped my lips in reply to the clerk's enquiry as to what ticket I wanted. Quite automatically I was hustled on to a platform where someone told me in reply to my enquiry, "This is the train for Nasik." I got into this train and really found it was bound for Nasik and beyond.

I got down at Nasik, and began to walk about in a certain direction without any idea of going to Toka, but simply to avoid being traced by brother. After walking some miles, I came across a motor bus, and requested for a lift to the next village. The driver asked eight annas, but eventually I settled with him for six annas, and thus came to the village. (Name not remembered). There was a hill with some buildings on the top near this village. I thought I was near Ahmednagar, and that perhaps this may be the site of the old Meherabad. So I began to climb it. However, I soon found out my mistake. The hill proved very steep and full of holes and cavities that frightened me, while the building at the top turned out to be only a Hindu temple. I retraced my steps, but while coming down, it began to rain heavily. I got drenched to the skin, and in the hurry to get under cover, I began to run towards that same village. But I soon found myself in a bush full of thorns. In spite of my best attempts, my soles got pierced by many of the thorns there, until I encountered a farmer who was good enough to lead me to the main road. After reaching the village, I took stock of my cash, and found that I had only ten annas left. Out of these, I bought parched rice and gram worth two pice, and thus appeasing my hunger a bit, I came to Nasik in a motorbus paying eight annas for the lift. Here I made enquiries as to how to reach Ahmednagar, and was informed to go via Manmad. I managed to get into a train unobserved, without a ticket, for Manmad. On the way, a policeman caught hold of me, and began to threaten me with arrest, on suspicion. I succeeded in shaking him off by offering him the pencil sharpener that my brother had recently bought for me.

From Manmad, I began to walk along the railway line towards Ahmednagar and reached the station of Ankai on foot. Here I was puzzled as to which line to follow, since one is also going towards Aurangabad from this station. Somehow, after making myself sure that I was on the right track, I proceeded from Ankai and walked a distance of about three miles. Here my physique failed me. The two pice worth of rice and gram that I had taken during these twenty-four hours were not enough to stop me from feeling very hungry and run down. I could not help dropping down there and then and going to sleep along the railway lines. The rush and rumble of a passing train however awakened me soon, and food was the only thing I began to yearn for now. So I retraced my steps once again towards the station of Ankai. On the way I met a man; I offered him the anna and a half I had, in exchange for something to eat. That man insisted on seeing what else I had upon my person, and selected the fountain pen in the lot, and offered a piece of bread and a promise to smuggle me in the train for Nagar in exchange for that. Of course I struck the bargain, and in return for that blessed pen got bread and a little Chutni, which I devoured greedily. In the mean time another man turned up and offered to give me some more bread, and when I fell in with his suggestion, the first man again joined us, and advised me to present the eye-glasses I still had with me to the former. Thus in exchange for the eye-glasses I got a fresh piece of bread. By this time the train for Ahmednagar came into the station of Ankai, and, true to their promise, those men smuggled me into a third class compartment. I arrived at Ahmednagar, where I managed to get

shelter and food for a day or two before coming over here."

What a tremendous attraction the Master's Loving Personality holds for these little ones to make them go through such dare-devil situations!

Now to pick up the narrative proper. On the morning of the third of October, the Master suddenly set out from Toka for an apparently aimless spin in a motor car. This trip, besides ending in the meeting of the hero with the Master, has since proved memorable in many other ways. The Master particularly included Ali Akbar, (another Moghul boy who is deep in love with the Master, hence nick-named 'Majnoon' by Him), in the party accompanying Him.

From Toka, the party went straight to one of the Master's sincere disciples, Mr. Satha, at Ahmednagar, where they halted for some time and took refreshment. About noon they left for Nasik. On the out-skirts of Ahmednagar, near the tomb of the well-known Saint Bapu Saheb, the car crossed another one. Her Holiness Hazarat Babajan of Poona graced this car! Probably, the Master, had come to Ahmednagar for meeting his own Master. And the words of Count Hermann Keyserling, "the significance of an event must not be judged by those professed intentions that accompany it, but rather by its results," quite fit in with this event!

On the fifth of October, the Master returned once again to Ahmednagar at 1:30 in the afternoon, and again graced Mr. Satha's place near the Cotton Market, where it was already decided to halt for the rest of the day and then proceed to Aurangabad the following morning.

A Special seat was found to be gracefully prearranged

for the Master in the house, but mysteriously, the moment He sat upon it, He got up and betook Himself to the little garden in front of the house where He took His seat on a chair. In a second, the mystery got automatically unravelled. A car came dashing along the road adjoining this garden, and stopped at a little distance away from where the Master was seated. Again Hazarat Babajan was occupying this car! Thus the two Masters had crossed each other twice within forty-eight hours at Ahmednagar, each coming from a long distance for some purpose best known to themselves. However, the Master conveyed this much: "Babajan has come again, and I have now become free," and cancelled the original programme of staying there the whole day. Accordingly, the party once again started that same after-noon for Aurangabad. It was nearly dusk when they crossed the river Godavari, and entered H.E.H., the Nizam's dominion and stopped there within a distance of a mile from Meherabad. Here the Master instructed Ali Akbar, the Majnoon, to retire, and then sent for Chhota Baba and Mr. S. A. Abbas Khak, one of His deeply devoted Muslim disciples. But accompanying this pair, there came the least thought of the most welcome person. It was none else but Ali, the hero!

CHAPTER XX

LOVE TRIUMPHS AGAIN!

Love had triumphed again! Almost the same hour that the Master had conveyed the words, ". . . I have now become free," at Ahmednagar, that Ali had suddenly turned up at Toka!

After taking him to Bombay at the end of the dramatic and unsuccessful second bid for freedom, his father had put Ali in a night school in Bombay near the J.J. Hospital, so that he could personally keep watch over the slippery customer of a son during his schooling. As was likely to happen, in view of the boy's love, distractions and pangs of separations, he could make no headway in this school where his class teacher could not help taking him for a regular dunce, and often used to threaten him with reports to his father regarding his great disregard and carelessness for the lessons.

Although Ali now did not remain without food completely as he did during the first short separation of six days, a slice or two of bread, a little butter and tea every day were the only things that kept him going during this prolonged separation.

The only enjoyment that the boy now used to indulge in daily was to buy some flowers, worth six to eight annas and lovingly put them over the "gulla" of Imam Hussein in his father's shop. A cash-box is called "gulla" and many Mohamedan houses and shops have such special "boxes" in which spare money is collected from time to time in the name of

a Saint, and then disbursed after ceremonies on this Saint's Birthday, or Death Anniversary. Although Ali has not ceased to revere the Great Muslim Imam, on the contrary, unlike the majority of his community, he also recognises the illustrious Imam as one of the Perfect Masters of His age, but as a worthy spiritual aspirant that he is, he used to put these flowers on the "box" with the only thoughts of Hazarat Meher Baba! He knew well that his hostile surroundings would never allow him to remember the object of his heart in any other way, and so the Love-lost yet very intelligent little boy devised this fine and at the same time most significant way out for his feelings!

Besides various other attempts that his father made in bringing round Ali to his own orthodox point of view, he once again tried to over-awe Ali with pompous dignitaries and awe-inspiring officials, when he took him forcibly into the presence of the President of the Community and the Persian Consul at Bombay. Even that traitor "J" was timely arranged to appear on the scene, but all their arguments, threats and temptings once again proved fruitless. The inborn Love in Ali made him face all of them bravely and unflinchingly. I wish the lad had hurled these handsome lines of the Great Muslim mystic philosopher and poet Amir Khusrav against his too many interlocutors:

Kafir-e-Ishkam Musulmani marâ darkâr nist,

Har rag-e-man tar gasht-e-Hâjat-e-Zunnar nist,

i.e., I am the infidel begotten of Love, who does not care for religion, every vein in my body having become a sacred thread, I am not in need of one.

The last eleventh hour failure had, in spite of all desires for an escape, made Ali pessimistic in that

connection. The exact date is not remembered by the boy, but from his surmises, it comes to twenty-first of September, the day on which the Master took a bath and had a change of linen after eighteen days, that Ali saw a brief but very significant dream! He dreamt that night, that the Master was dressed in dirty and torn clothes, (during this peculiar non-bathing period, the Master's apparently unclean white robe was also torn a bit), and looked at Him very eagerly and invitingly!

This little vision was enough to thrill the hero with fresh energy and hope for the third attempt, and the letter, dated twenty-fourth of September, already reproduced in the last chapter, speaks the rest of his plans and feelings in this connection.

The very day that the Master left Toka, Ali finally decided also upon an escape which he effected the next day. Thus on the fourth of October, according to the deliberate plan which also included a good sleep, the boy, for the first time during this second separation, went to sleep soundly at ten o'clock that morning in his father's shop near Pydowni, Bombay, after carefully instructing a servant to wake him up at twelve. Punctual to the instruction, the servant roused him up. The next item of this peculiar programme of the boy was to take a bath, change his clothes and do full justice to bread and butter! And Ali, after refreshing his strained nerves, with a long last sound sleep, went through all the other details, as above, to the last particulars.

Those concerned were very pleased with this remarkable return of Ali to normal life, unsuspecting the venturesome intentions underlying this light activity.

"I want to go to the Carnac Bunder shop," said he to the guards, placed upon him by his relentless father, who, finding the boy so sweetly reasonable that day, readily consented, but were careful enough to accompany him. Thus the boy, whom a certain section of the Indian Penal Code had reduced into an abject slave, began to walk under the strict surveillance of his constant guards towards Carnac Bunder.

In spite of an inborn optimism, the boy now suddenly felt a shock of doubt regarding his success, and so he went straight to a book-seller's shop, and bought a copy of the works of Khwaja HAFIZ!

In order that the reader may appreciate this strange act of Ali, I think it necessary to introduce Khwaja Shums-ud-din Hafiz Shirazi, that Perfect Master and Great Poet of Persia in His true colours, and briefly touch upon the facts that concern the subject in question. The name Hafiz needs no introduction in the world of literature as a Poet, but He is also popularly believed to be a Saint in the Mohamedan countries. However, there are very few who know Him as one of the "Kutubs" or "Sadgurus" of His age. There are many who have tried to attribute spiritual significance and mystical meanings to His rich poetry, but according to the Master, Hafiz had laid bare all the Seven Spiritual Planes in his Odes for those, who, again in the words of the Master, as well as Shums-e-Tabriz, Jalal-ud-din Rumi, and Hugo of St. Victor, have got the "Third Eye", "Eye of the Heart", "Inward Sense" and the "Eye of the Soul", respectively!

The commonest miracle attributed to this Great Master in many countries of the East is the accurate power of predicting events, and unravelling

mysteries that are believed to be possessed by the Book of His Divine Poem, "The Divan-e-Hafiz."

According to one of His life-sketches written by Mirza Faizulla Khan of Rehlu, when the dispute arose over the performance of religious rituals in connection with Khwaja Hafiz's own funeral, the contending parties agreed to abide by the answer that His own Divan would give out. And when the book was opened at random, lo! it contained two lines which appeared as if Khwaja Saheb had pre-written for this very occasion! Since that time, He came to be known as Lisanul-Ghaib, i.e. the "Tongue of the Unknown."

Amongst the Moghul Emperors of India, Humayun and Jehangir were great believers in Hafiz and the predictions conveyed by His "Divan." The copy of the "Divan" which they used to refer to for this purpose is still preserved in a library at Bankipur, and bears some references as to certain fore-tellings, together with the dates in their own royal handwritings.

To give a fresh example of this peculiar power of Hafiz's poetry is to pick up the last point of this narrative itself. After purchasing the book, Ali sincerely invoked the help of Khwaja Saheb and opened the book to set his sudden shock of doubt at rest. The "Divan" foretold success! All his misgivings disappeared at this Divine prediction into thin air, and the hero resumed his pre-arranged tactics.

He had already created a great confidence in his guards, and the purchase had added another good impression upon them. Thus the more reasonably he behaved with them, the greater freedom the guards allowed to Ali. They perhaps thought the "black

magic had at last outrun its course, since it is on record that even these orthodox Moghuls are fully alive to the great effect of Love on the boys, but their age-long prejudices have made them attribute it to "black magic," and consequently many queer tales have penetrated into Meherabad about the funny antidotes experimented upon the poor souls making their sufferings more piquant. Abiding his time carefully, Ali somehow managed to get ten minutes of freedom from surveillance, and in the space of this short time, at last, he managed to reach the Victoria Terminus!

He had timed well his escape, and so had not to wait long in suspense, as soon after he boarded the Nagpur Mail. The fast train dashed out of Bombay. Ali still held the "Divan-Hafiz" tightly clasped against his heart, as if it were a charm against unexpected accidents. But within a few minutes run of the fast-going train, just as it passed the new Sandhurst Bridge station, Ali got a shock. It was, however, a very pleasant one.

All of a sudden, the Master had restored him the Sight! To go into the technique of the varying degrees of this inner faculty of Sight, which is called "Taur" in "Tasawaff" is to start quite a new subject altogether. Suffice it to say, that this time Ali began to EXPERIENCE THE STATE OF UNITY IN DIVERSITY. "In every object," the boy later on told the writer, "I saw the Master!" For instance, if he looked at a tree, in every leaf of it, he beheld none but his Beloved Baba. No wonder that in this state of bliss and ecstasy, he found no longer any use for the book he had so long in his hands, and without meaning

any disrespect, the boy soon hurled it clean out of the on-rushing train!

Ali left the Nagpur Mail at Manmad Junction and took the train for Dhond. He got down at Bellapur, the nearest but out-of-the-way station to Toka, and managed to get a lift in a motor-bus for Nevasa, which is the chief town of this part of the district, and is only a few miles from Toka. So far all went well with him, and the Sight too remained unchanged, but as soon as he arrived at Nevasa, a local Pathan recognised him and began to accuse him of having absconded again. "No, I have not absconded, my brother is with me," replied Ali to the threatening Pathan, contriving to gain time and avoiding an immediate arrest.

"Where is your brother?" persistently enquired the very suspicious Pathan. For a moment the boy was nonplussed. But he quickly thought of a plan, and said, "My brother is coming via Ahmednagar, and you will presently see him."

At least, till the buses arrived at Nevasa on their way to Toka from Ahmednagar, Ali thought he had succeeded in avoiding an arrest. Perhaps he had thought of giving the slip to the Pathan at the right moment. But now another nightmare loomed large before Ali. What if his father were to come by one of those buses?

So when the buses came, Ali slipped away in the surrounding bushes on one pretext or the other, and began to watch for the dreadful advent of his father. But instead of his father, the boy saw, with a sigh of relief, that one of the passengers was Mr. K.J. Dastur. As luck would have it, the gentleman happened

to be returning to Toka that very day after a short private visit to Bombay, and thus provided the "brother" for Ali to point out to the inquisitive Pathan.

The rest is already known to the readers, but I would add that there was no demonstration on the return of the hero this time, just as no attempts were made to bring round his father. After seeing Ali the Master proceeded towards Aurangabad, sending the hero back to the colony, but the party did not actually reach the destination. For certain reasons, the Master returned to Toka the following morning, sixth October, after passing a night under a wayside shelter.

CHAPTER XXI

FRESH FLOW OF SPIRITUALITY

We have seen that unlike the disturbance caused in the Meher Ashram at the first forced removal of Ali, in the course of the second separation, neither the Master looked worried, nor the great revival of the spirit of Love and devotion amongst the boys suffered in any way. On the contrary, the last three chapters show that the second blaze of the spirit of spirituality, particularly in the original section of the Institution, went on soaring higher and higher, and produced many a new candidate for the Prem Ashram section.

But it was the return of the hero that proved that even the second period of his absence was not without consequences, since from the very next day of Ali's arrival, the Master adopted quite an unprecedented course of working. He became lost to all save the Prem Ashram.

For ten days and nights, from the fourth day of Ali's return, the Master did not even step out of the Prem Ashram boundary! From dawn till dusk, save the hours of twelve to two, throughout the dark cold nights, His Holiness was seen working with a vengeance for the Prem Ashram inmates, and at the same time continuing the fasting system that he had adopted since the tenth of September. Thus, without taking food Himself, His Holiness served out all meals to the inmates every day. He would be annoyed to discuss, even for a few minutes, on subjects other than the

Prem Ashram, whenever the different workers approached Him for advice on some urgent question concerning other affairs of the colony. But He used to give lengthy discourses on Love, on God, on the Spiritual Path for hours together to the Prem Ashram boys, twice, thrice and even four times a day. Besides He used to instruct them on various methods of meditation and concentration suitable to individual tendencies.

A God-realized personality never sleeps. There is nothing like sleep for Him, as He sleeps soundly in the ordinary working state too. But a Perfect Master takes rest all the same, that is, goes into the 'Resting State,' which is a point just between the sixth and the seventh spiritual planes. But during the period mentioned above, the Master seldom took rest. He would keep moving amongst the boys all throughout the night, seeing for Himself how they followed the instructions, and helping them whenever necessary. Again, when the boys engaged themselves in the daily recreations or secular studies during the day, He would constantly remain in their presence, and take an equally keen and lively interest in all their games and studies; while, during the short intervals, His Holiness would make the boys sit around Him, and enjoy with them divine songs through Urdu, Persian, Marathi and English records of famous singers on the gramophone. In short, His Holiness used to remain all absorbed in the affairs of the little ones for every second of their time, and thus always gave His physical presence before one or the other or all of the Prem Ashram boys.

It was a novel atmosphere, as it was only in the

evening that the rest of the Meher Ashram boys and other disciples and devotees could see His Holiness, when they were allowed to come to Him to pay their usual daily respects. Even then none of them would be allowed to stay after 8:30 p.m. Thus the hitherto unchallenged privilege of every disciple to call at the Master's seat and sit beside Him whenever he liked to do so, provided he was off duty, was for the time being suspended. Consequently the half an hour or so at their disposal every evening, was hardly sufficient to enable the large number of the disciples and devotees to go through the formalities of paying their respects, and so none felt having enjoyed the inspiring company of His Holiness. Nay, even this half an hour's grace to the disciples did not appear to have been allowed by the Master quite freely, as He generally seemed to be preoccupied and at times unconscious of the surroundings in the gross sense.

But the bodily seclusion of the Master within a fixed limit was not a new experience for the disciples. Even whilst remaining in a small room for a hundred and eight days last year, His Holiness however was accessible to anyone at any time, and thus continued making His presence felt amongst all and also kept on taking interest in the rest of the affairs. But this time the Master seemed to have secluded Himself in the spirit too. And, therefore, when His Holiness came out of the Prem Ashram boundary and partook of food after forty-two days on the twenty-third of October, it made no difference in the atmosphere.

Although now he once began to move about freely, he might be said to have maintained his retreat all the more rigidly, because two days prior to His coming out

His Holiness had entrusted sole powers of administration of the colony and all its affairs to Mr. R. K. Irani. All the inhabitants of Meherabad were ordered to obey Mr. Irani in all matters, and forbidden to approach the Master under any circumstances. Even the new administrator, Mr. Irani, himself was forbidden to speak on any affairs of the colony with the Master, and was ordered to manage affairs according to his own discretion.

Thus divesting Himself completely of the administration of Meherabad and getting absolutely free from all engagements from the twenty-third of October, the Master continued working exclusively for the Prem Ashram for one month. Consequently, it was no wonder to hear great changes towards spiritual advancement having come over the lucky inmates. One meal a day and three hours of sleep at night proved to be sufficient for most of them for maintaining their physiques in a prime condition, without feeling that they were undergoing any privations.

It must not be supposed that they devoted their entire time solely to meditation and thus kept themselves drugged with concentration so as to forget or lose the normal craving for food and sleep, or that they created any unnatural stupor within them.

If the Master inspired them to meditate with all the seriousness at His command, if He delivered before them the spiritual lectures with serene solemnity, His Holiness was no less cheerful and convivial in encouraging them to enjoy their daily recreations. With beaming eyes and smiling expressions, He used to take the boys every morning to the fine bathing ghauts along the river Godaveri, where they were taught to swim.

He did not only encourage, but would insist upon them all to have a go at a dive and enjoy the dip. Even Chhota Baba, a fine swimmer himself, played no small part in training the boys to swim. With a will and vim of His own, it did not take Him long to make them all swim gracefully in the Godaveri. Consequently when ripples were seen in the river, ripples of boyish joy and glee were also heard freely in the air about the spot, where the Prem Ashram boys enjoyed themselves.

In November, the Master again struck a new note. His Holiness began to complain constantly about the climate of Toka for a number of times a day. It was a fact that with the advent of the winter, the climate began to get decidedly nasty. The majority of the boys of both the sections of the Ashram and a good many disciples were attacked with cold and cough, which would yield to no treatment successfully. The remarks repeated by the Master now and then in this connection forewarned most of the disciples about some still more drastic changes. And so, when the Master openly announced, on the eighteenth of November, His decision to remove back to the original site of Meherabad near the village of Arangaon, only a few were surprised at it. But the fact, that, except the selected boys, all the rest were to be sent away to their respective places on vacation, appeared very strange. However strange be the command, the disciples have had enough experience and are convinced of the selfless motives of His Holiness to obey Him first, and ask questions afterwards. Accordingly steps were at once taken to comply with the Master's wish. All the boys except the Prem Ashram inmates were offered to betake

themselves home, pending the completion of the new arrangement at Arangaon. Under normal circumstances, it is doubtful whether even a few of them would have preferred a holiday at home to the Master's company, but the recent withdrawal of His Holiness for a month from amongst them had also prepared them for the separation, and the majority readily fell in with the suggestion. The same day a batch of seven boys went away. The following morning eighteen more followed suit, but it was in the evening that the real reason of this upheaval came to light.

Ali's father appeared again at Toka to claim him! That he did not come earlier, he said, was due to ill health, and so his silence for a month and a half was no consent. On the contrary he declared his firm resolve to take Ali away. There was no longer any legal or moral binding, still the authorities tried to induce the gentleman to leave Ali alone, but it goes without saying that no persuasions could succeed, and the gentleman took him away for the third time, on the twentieth of November.

It now becomes as clear as daylight that the unprecedented fast workings of the Master in the Prem Ashram were really a race with time to achieve certain internal results before Ali was again taken away, and that the Master was prepared in advance for this third exit of Ali.

As it has been mentioned in chapter II, the Institution began with ten Hindoo boys. It would not be inappropriate to mention at this juncture that the number of boys on the eighteenth of November, 1928, was 102, as follows:—

Hindus	Mussulmans	Zoroastrians	Christians
11 Brahmins	5 Deccanies	6 Parsees	1 Indian
1 Jain Marwadi	6 Moghuls	26 Iranis	
1 Sonar	2 Bhoris		
15 Marathas	2 Cutchhies		
2 Shimpies	5 Foreigners		
1 Purdeshi			
15 Mahar-Mangs			
3 Chambars			
_____	_____	_____	_____
49	20	32	1
TOTAL.....102			

CHAPTER XXII

THE PULSATING IMPULSE

In twenty days after Ali's third exit, as if by a magic wand, the Meher Ashram was completely re-established at its original site near the village of Arangaon, and the general situation was restored to its previous condition in every detail. The only important change brought about the Institution was with regard to the secular education imparted therein, viz. instead of the Matriculation examination course, English alone was decided to be taught to the Ashramites, the spiritual side being of course maintained without any change. The parents and guardians of the boys who had been sent home on leave were communicated with and asked to send in their boys, provided they had no objection whatever to this change.

The popularity of the Meher Ashram in general, and the attraction it possessed for its inmates in particular, may well be judged from the circumstances that in spite of being left completely free from the direct influence of the Master and enjoying a holiday at home without any disciplinary restraints, the majority of the boys literally began to rush back to the Institution at the first opportunity. And their parents and guardians showed no less confidence towards it, as in view of the great change effected in the material side of the training in the Meher Ashram, they nevertheless willingly allowed their boys to rejoin it.

It was therefore no wonder that each day in the second week of December saw a number of youngsters

returning to Meherabad with their guardians or their written consents.

But instead of the boy whose presence and absence meant so much to the Meher Ashram, it was his father who came rushing to Meherabad on the thirteenth of December in search of Ali, who, he said, had again slipped away!

After being taken away for the third time, Ali was put into a school near Sandhurst Bridge at Bombay under a constant and careful watch and ward. In spite of it, he managed to slip away, in the afternoon of the twelfth of December during a recess period, and the site of the school helped him to make short work of his dash for the Victoria Terminus. Not knowing at what moment he might get an opportunity for an escape, Ali had well studied the railway time-tables, and so finding the Poona Express ready by the platform, he at once decided upon a plan. In order to get as many miles as possible between himself and Bombay, he came by this train to Lonavla, which is a hill station eighty miles from Bombay. Passing a few pleasant hours as a welcome guest of one of the local disciples of the Master, he came to the station to board the Madras Mail which leaves Lonavla at about 12:45 A.M. But for a single carriage all the other third class compartments in the train were found to be overcrowded, and so he jumped into the former. He was naturally in the best of spirits at this juncture, and when a fellow passenger enquired as to what station it was, Ali literally shouted out that it was Lonavla. But at the same moment, he happened to see to his horror his own father in the very compartment, trying to locate the direction from whence came the familiar voice!

Of course Ali was out of the carriage with a bound through the opposite door, landing on the other side of the train, and under cover of darkness made good his escape.

It was, therefore no mystery that Mr. Haji Muhammed did not find Ali at Meherabad that day. Probably it was due to sheer exasperation that the gentleman, before beating a retreat, asked the Ashram authorities to readmit Ali in the Institution when he returned, and also gave a fresh promise not to disturb him again.

Having escaped from the grasp of his father in the nick of time, Ali preferred to remain at Lonavla for another twenty-four hours, and arrived at Meherabad on the following day to hear the good news that once again his father had consented to let him remain in the Ashram. His father was duly informed about his arrival and re-admission to the Meher Ashram.

But the most remarkable return to the Institution at this juncture was that of AHMED MUHAMMED, one of those boys who had been taken away with Ali on the nineteenth of August from Toka. In spite of their best attempts during four months, his relatives could not succeed in making him forget his Baba. To the contrary, on Sunday, the twenty-third of December, Ahmed had suddenly a great *impulse* to return to the Master. And since the way in which he put this impulse into action provides a fresh tangible interpretation of the "Sobs and Throbs," I would describe it fully.

Without providing himself with a bedding, food, or money, he simply started off for Ahmednagar on foot on that very day. He began by selling the three silver buttons in his shirt for three annas to a stranger, and

came to Dadar by tram paying one anna as the fare. With just those remaining two annas and the clothes on his body, he set out on the tramp in the scorching sun of that Sunday afternoon. He had walked about twelve to fourteen miles, when it became quite dark. Being quite inexperienced, he did not think of stopping in a village in time, and had thus no other alternative but that of passing the night where he was. Thinking a tree to be safer, he climbed one along the road and made himself as comfortable under the circumstances as possible. It goes without saying that he did not at all sleep soundly throughout the night, since a branch of a tree to lie on, the clouds in the sky as the only covering and the lone spot on the highway in the wintry night, is not quite a comfortable situation to induce sound sleep. On the contrary the very fact that the boy could somehow pass the night under such circumstances speaks for the motive force behind this apparently off-hand venture on his part.

The bullock-carts, as is well-known, generally begin to move about very early in the morning, and are, as a rule, the first to rumble on a road. Hence it was still very dark when some passing carts announced the dawn of a new day to Ahmed. He climbed down from his perch and began to follow the carts. By sunrise master Ahmed reached Thana. Having only two annas about him, he dared not spend more than two pice for the breakfast, and so had to satisfy himself with a few cold crisp biscuits and a handful of water. Thus refreshed, this little lover of Baba continued his tramp. Nearing Panvel, a Mussulman inn-keeper, taking pity on the lonely and haggard looking boy, offered to help him by getting him a lift in one of the passing motor buses.

But as he still had sufficient energy to carry on, he politely but in no uncertain terms, refused the offer. At noon, he reached Panvel. Feeling very hungry as needs he must have been after walking for so long, and having had no food save those few biscuits during the last twenty-four hours, but viewing the contents of the poor purse, he had to remain content with two pice worth of sweets. A little rest under the shade of a tree however made him take to the road again.

When to the lack of food, want of sleep, and absence of many more comforts which a human being requires in the ordinary course of his life, the scorching sun was added, Ahmed found it too much for his great determination after having walked some eight or nine miles more. His soul still wanted to strive on, but after all that soul was caged in a small little body that could stand the strain no longer. He began to appeal for a lift to every motorist that passed, though it was all a cry in the wilderness. But perseverance succeeds. The tenth car, that stopped in response to his hoarse shout, belonged to a European gentleman going to Poona. Grasping the helplessness of the boy and his apparently hopeless task of covering the rest of the sixty-three miles to Poona on foot, the gentleman was kind enough to bring Ahmed in his car to Poona. This was something beyond the wildest dreams for Ahmed to reach Poona so soon. And this God-sent encouragement infused new energy into him to face another cold night on a starvation diet consisting of a handful of nuts which he bought for one pice. First he tried to sleep on a bench along a public road, but the cold winds sent shivers through his poorly protected body, and so he made himself as snug as possible in the corner of a

building, and somehow passed the second night, half dozing and half sleeping.

At daybreak on Tuesday, Ahmed picked up his courage to start again on the tramp. It was now nearly forty hours that he had not partaken of any food worth the name, still his first thought was to pay his respects to the Master of his Master, Her Holiness Hazarat BABAJAN of Poona. He also knew the grave risk he was running by going to Hazarat Baba Jan's place, as there are a number of Moghul tea-shops in that vicinity; still he wound his way as cautiously as possible, and came near the seat of Hazarat Babajan. Her Holiness was to all appearances 'sleeping' at that time, with the coverings well-wrapped all round Her person. But the moment Ahmed quietly bowed towards Her from a distance, She gave him a look of love by suddenly taking Her august head out of the coverings, and no sooner Ahmed had experienced a wonderful thrill of a miracle, Her Holiness put Herself under cover, and to a casual observer went to 'sleep' again! Here was another encouragement for the little lover to go on with his labour of love. Now he bought a little bread for two pice, and started from Poona, eating the 'breakfast' while walking on towards Dhond along the railway lines.

About the twelfth mile, probably to avoid the monotonous atmosphere of the railway lines, Ahmed again took to the public road. But the impulse that brought him on this public road seems more to have been a subtle inspiration from the Master, who wanted to provide him with food, as Ahmed very soon overtook an old man on the road going along the same direction. He was an old Hindu, and Ahmed was a little Moghul, but

the psychology of human affinity under circumstances of common suffering and hardships knows no man-made laws. The two became friends. The old man, being experienced, soon decided to halt for the hottest hours under the shade of a tree. He not only induced Ahmed to follow suit, but also made him share his bread and 'Chutney' freely, and thus after forty-eight hours, Ahmed got something substantial to eat. In the afternoon, this queer pair started again. By dusk, they reached a village where the old Hindu, after advising Ahmed to take shelter in the village mosque, went away to some other place. Ahmed was allowed by the mosque people to sleep in the premises, and thus he got a good shelter on the third night. Still through lack of covering and bedding in the cold of the night, he could not sleep well, and it did not require an effort on his part to get up long before the sun rose over the village.

With a number of dogs barking after him and fumbling here and there in the dark, Ahmed somehow reached the main road, and began his tramp again on that Wednesday morning. He felt very hungry that day, as he had a spare meal since he started on Sunday, and consequently found the tramp very trying. He tried to get a lift once again in the passing motor vehicles but none helped him. And perforce the poor boy had to take recourse to the tamrind trees along the road. Eating the leaves and the tamarinds, he somehow walked about sixteen miles, and reached the railway station of Patas. He found himself dog-tired and as hungry as a wolf. Still after a little rest, through sheer force of will, he walked six more miles along the railway lines and reached the station of Dhond.

He tried to sleep on the platform benches of the station, and forget the great fire of hunger raging within him. But as was likely to happen, he could not rest, far short of getting a nap. For the first time he could think of begging, and approached a Mussalman gentleman with a request for some food. The latter at once conducted him to the refreshment room, and ordered rice and curry for him. In order to avoid meat, he surprised his benefactor by preferring to partake of only tea and bread. Thus refreshed, Ahmed fell for the first time into a sound sleep in the warm atmosphere of the station premises. But he was not destined to enjoy it for long. Soon a policeman came along, and drove him out of the station. Ahmed passed the rest of the night under a staircase near the station, where the Master comforted him with His Holy presence in a dream.

On the following morning, Thursday, while enquiring for the road to Ahmednagar, someone suggested to him to go by train, without a ticket. But he evaded the suggestion and continued the tramp along the railway lines. He kept on walking for the whole of that day in the sun without food, and halted at a wayside station, which he reached by sunset. Hence no wonder that he felt very hungry. However, he had no need to beg again for food. An old lady on the platform, probably a passenger waiting for the train, provided him with an unsolicited square meal.

Having been driven from the platform in the dead of the night at Dhond, Ahmed again thought of a tree to sleep on. But he soon had to climb down on account of a nightmare, which made him think that a black snake was about the tree. It was then nearly midnight,

and the cold screeching winds were too much to bear in the open air. So he tried to make a fire. He gathered up some straw and dried leaves about the place, but to his great disappointment found that the matches he had bought at Thana would not ignite through wear and tear. In such a situation, he dared to take refuge again on the station, where happily he was allowed to pass the remainder of the night.

On Friday, the sixth day, Ahmed re-started on his sacred journey at daybreak. Eating the Jawari plants from the adjoining fields whenever he felt a great pinch of hunger, he kept on walking briskly till he came in sight of the Meher Ashram, which was still some miles ahead. He once more begged—not for food—but for some flowers from a gardner. The Master is not only well-known, but is held in great reverence by the surrounding village people, and thus when the gardner came to know for whom the boy wanted the flowers, he presented Ahmed with handfuls of wild roses. The love-lorn lad forgot all about his great fatigue and hunger in the joy of preparing a 'Crown' out of those flowers for the 'King of his heart.'

And thus it was nearly sunset, and the Master was seated amongst some disciples near the very crypt of a room in which His Holiness had confined Himself last year, that a boy suddenly crept in unannounced, and before anyone could even recognise him, had fixed a wreath of roses on the golden ringlets of His Holiness! I for one could not place the haggard and hollow-eyed face in my memory at the moment, until I was actually told that it was Master Ahmed!

CHAPTER XXIII

MESSENGERS OF LOVE

With the re-establishment at its original site once again, all began to go on well with the Meher Ashram. Be it said to the credit of the Meherabad authorities, that in spite of such a drastic change from one place to another, the school remained closed only for a single week. Although on account of the change brought in the curriculum, it no longer remained a "High School" yet the Hazarat Babajan English School could boast now of a debating club, which enabled many of its little members to give expression to their thoughts, though not quite in correct English, unflinchingly before their teachers and fellow-students.

The Master also resumed taking interest in all affairs as usual, and brought his 'retreat' to an end. He began moving about freely all over the colony, and through his usual gestures, 'spoke' with the disciples and visitors whenever they approached Him. The boys of the original section also got the pleasure and benefit of His august presence amongst them every evening. Yet for all that, His Holiness continued paying the lion's share of His attention to the Prem Ashram inmates.

The most remarkable point about the Master's working for the Prem Ashram boys during this period of one month was that His Holiness began to cleanse their latrines from the seventeenth of December! The only person that His Holiness allowed to assist Him in this task was His younger brother, Mr. Jal Sheheriyar, who is not only one of the chief supervisors of the Prem Ashram

but also as keen about and interested in it as to be next to the Master

Thus to the future saints in the Prem Ashram, who were taught humility in words, this so-called menial but by no means pleasant work of a sweeper that the Master did, also taught humility in deeds, besides serving whatever other spiritual purpose His Holiness might have had in view. It might be added that such kind of work on the part of a God-realized Personality is rare but not unparalleled, and to give a recent example, Shri Ramkrishna Paramhansa is also said to have worked as a sweeper.

The reader might have marked the peculiarity that since its inception the Institution went through a complete new phase almost every month or forty days. Hence when the Master began to let out hints at the beginning of the new year, 1929, about going on a walking tour, and closing the Meher Ashram completely but temporarily for some time, it did not seem so very strange to most of the disciples. Yet it can fairly be said that none were prepared to see the hints turned into actions so soon as the 12th of January. Not only did the Master announce His final decision to act upon His hints, but actual preparations were completed the same day to send away all the boys of both the sections of the Ashram, including those who had come from Persia, to their guardians' places on the following day!

Being in possession of all the facts about the Institution in their correct sequence, I was naturally very much puzzled about the question of Ali. That after all the trouble, when his father had at last allowed Ali to remain in the Ashram, and given a fresh promise

not to disturb him again, he should be sent back to his father's place, appeared to me quite unthinkable. Hence my surprise may well be imagined when I went up to the Ashram the following morning—the morning of the fateful thirteenth of January—it was the Master Himself who conveyed to me, "Aga Ali's father has again taken him away only a little while ago. You can see now that the closing of the Ashram has some connection with Ali!"

The first thought that crossed my mind was to remember the ringing words of the Master, "These Moghuls are word-breakers and not to be trusted." What better example could one cite as to how irreligion is practised by many in the name of religion! Some of the orthodox Moghuls think it irreligious to allow their little ones to enjoy the grace of a God-realized personality who is above all religions. But alas! They conveniently forget the injunction of the Holy Quran, "The believers are . . . those who are keepers . . . of their Covenants," (XQ I.II.8.), "and fulfil the promise." (Ibid. V.1.)

Now in the light of this episode, there was no mystery surrounding the end of the Meher Ashram in its original conception from the view-point of this narrative. It rather reminded us of the words of the Master, conveyed some eleven months ago, viz., "If Ali goes, all go!" And it really so happened that Ali was really the first to go out of the Meher Ashram on the morning of the thirteenth January, while all the rest followed him later on the same day!

A word as to the sorrow and pain the little but real lovers of the Master felt at the thought of the separation will not be out of place here. It has been truly said that:

Qudsinyara ishq hasto durd neest;

i.e., angels have all love but no pain.

And what is this pain about the divine love that is only destined for the human beings? It is the pain of separation, or in other words the restlessness for union, which even the angels do not possess! It is unbearable and beyond description, yet a loving soul can bear it. Hence I would only say this much, that some of the boys did feel this 'pain' whilst bidding a touching good-bye to the Master that day, but they exhibited sublime submission to His divine command, instead of the spirit of reactionary revolt that they used to display in the primal state of their love.

Some of them were perhaps separated to enhance the stage that no longer needed the physical contact of the Master; some have since been re-called; but all the Meher Ashram boys of both its sections as a matter of fact were that day let loose over the country with a 'Silent Message' of divine love that will sooner or later speak for itself.

By way of a farewell meeting, I am sure the reader would like to be introduced to some of the leading 'messengers of love', besides those already acquainted with him in the course of this narrative.

We shall begin with Master VASANT B. KIMBHAVNE, a Brahmin lad aged fourteen years. He was the first boy in the Meher Ashram to begin weeping for love, and the last boy who has remained weeping to this day! Of course, it is thereby never meant that he is weeping all the time throughout the twenty-four hours. Rather the moment he comes before the Master, tears begin to roll down his cheeks. So silent are the throbs of his heart that not the least

sign of a sob is perceptible about him when he cries. It is a wonderful sight to see him crying! Standing like a statue, without any sign of emotion on his face or a mark of restlessness about his body, he seems to be looking towards the Master with dreamy and moist eyes, that go on shedding pearls, one after the other, until the Master goes away from him. And this peculiar manifestation of divine love about him is not an occasional affair. It has almost become his second nature. Be he walking, sitting, eating or engaged in any other way, he has only to cast his eyes on the Master, and they begin to fill with tears instantly.

It has been said that Ali once cried because others did not obey the Master, but Master Vasant surpasses him in this respect, as once he was found smacking himself vigorously till he was actually forced to stop it. And the reason for this self-imposed punishment was this that the weeping Vasant could not bear the sight of one of the boys behaving rudely with the Master! Of all the things he likes best is to be allowed to remain with his head pressed against the lotus feet of the Master for hours together. When once he was asked about the most cherished desire of his heart, this great lover replied, "I want nothing. I want to *give*, and I want to give my life to Baba. When that is done, I shall desire for another life to be laid at His feet again..." This is all the more wonderful, since he is not of a docile nature. He is as fiery as a tiger. During the period of the 'inevitable reaction,' he had once made a grownup overseer in the Prem Ashram roll in the dust with a single push. He is no less intelligent, and has a passion for poetry which he can remember after hearing but once

or twice; nay, he is a poet himself, and at times can compose fine lines in the style of Tukaram Baba and Gnyaneshwari Maharaj. His profound consideration for the Master may well be judged by the fact that once when he got dysentery, he did not disclose the fact in order not to cause any trouble to the Master, who, he knew too well, would personally involve Himself in the matter of treatment and nursing. In spite of passing thirty stools, Vasant managed to conceal his malady, till his condition was actually detected by one of the overseers.

His love-restlessness is matchless, and none of the others can surpass him in this respect. But in spite of having the greatest restlessness, in appearance he looks exceptionally calm and composed. Generally he looks the very picture of seriousness, as he is continuously deeply engrossed in meditation about the Master. He remained thus even when sent home, where he used to look as if he were almost dumb, since he would generally speak in monosyllables with his parents and relatives. In short, in the words of the Master, "He is almost a saint already!"

Master ASPANDIAR SAROSH IRANI may well be congratulated on having advanced on the *Path* that directly leads to God-Realization. Generally, the different religious practices are believed to be the paths that lead to Truth. But, in fact, these various ways only lead one to the real *Path* which is only one and the same, whether it is reached by this or that means. It is only when one reaches this real Path that one is supposed to have really taken a birth from the spiritual view-point. In the case of this lucky boy it happened all of a sudden.

On the New Year Day (1929), Master Aspandiar

became unconscious. But it was not an ordinary unconsciousness, since he lost consciousness of the gross plane, he became conscious of the subtle plane. This came to be known generally when shortly the Master restored him to gross consciousness to a certain extent and since then, to quote his own words, he sees unimaginable light, hears wonderful sounds, smells indescribably sweet odour, and experiences different phenomena including that of floating in space and so on. There are but poor terms to bring within imagination that which is beyond intellect. To give another illustration of his state, when he was asked to describe as to what happened to him when he became unconscious, he replied, "Baba broke my skull, and the light began to manifest out of it!" He did not look in any way concerned when he was told that he was to be sent back to Persia. Not a single tear was found in his eyes when he departed from Meherabad. On the contrary, he looked much amused and smiling while looking here and there through his half-closed eyes.

Master SURYABHAN, belonging to the so-called "depressed" class, is another lucky lad to have achieved almost permanent concentration on the Master. He is neither seen smiling nor weeping, but is conspicuous for his great silence and indifference towards his surroundings. He is the least talkative in the lot, and continued to manifest this silent aspect of Love even when he was at home, which often provoked the mischievous boys of his village to go to the length of stoning him for the sheer fun of it! Once he actually remained indoors for six days to avoid being disturbed by such mischief-makers and other grown-up villagers, including the Patel of the village, for whom,

naturally enough, the spiritual state of the boy was a sealed book, and who also caused no small annoyance to the boy in trying to bring him round to his own vulgar way of thinking. The great control Master Suryabhan has achieved over his mind can be easily gauged from the fact that when, on the seventh day, he came out of the house, he was again stoned, but instead of protesting or retaliating in the least, he calmly withdrew. Silent submission seems to be his watch-word.

Then, DUTTOO MEHENDERGI, a Brahmin youngster, provides yet a new phase of the divine feelings. He was the last to leave the Ashram at the time of the temporary close-up. On coming to know of the separation, he began to weep and wail, and continued crying for three successive days without being able to check himself in spite of his best attempts to do so. "If you don't return soon," he said to the Master amidst soul-stirring sobs, "I would start wandering all over the world crying out Your name. I don't mind if I am not elevated on the Path. Only keep me with You." Formerly, he was very fond of studies and sports, but now he is so very full of feeling for the Master, that he simply abhors all studies and games. The depth of his feelings may well be imagined from the fact that all thoughts of home and relatives are now foreign to his mind.

Master SHAHU MAHAR and HORMUZD provide the finest pair of meditators in the Meher Ashram. The former once asserted, "If there is happiness in the world, it is only found in meditation." And true to his words, when sent home, Master Shahu had set up a little hut for himself in a quiet, little corner outside the house, wherein he used to remain absorbed

in meditation for nearly eighteen hours every day!

The name of ALI AKBAR, the "Majnoon" of the Meher Ashram, has already been mentioned in previous chapters. The intensity of his love towards the Master is unique. None can come to the level of his highly active love which always keeps him on the stir. He is seldom seen in one place or sitting calmly. When he first joined the Meher Ashram, he used to feel quite disinterested in discussions about Love and Spirituality. He would not only show open disinclination for Divinity, but used to fight shy of all such subjects, and would remain as aloof as possible from meditation and concentration. But all the same, at the first exit of Ali, the hero, Ali Akabar became all of a sudden surcharged with the Divine Grace of the Master. He began to roll and reel in the dust, quite literally, as a fish just out of water, till he would come into the Master's contact, whom he would try to enfold in his little arms as furiously as a moth tries to devour the lamp. After some months he became a little cooler, but to this day he remains as active as a top. Even a stranger would not fail to notice the great twinges on his face and twitches about his limbs, when he is in the presence of the Master. The moment His Holiness shows an inclination to receive him, Ali Akbar literally takes a bound towards the Master, and begins to fondle with Him in a very violent way. It is not enough for him to embrace or kiss the Person of the Master a number of times, but invariably he would bite and scratch His Holiness all over the body. It is always with an effort that the Master can free himself from Ali Akbar's hugging caresses, once He allows this

intense lover to clasp Him. The violent throbs of his heart are too thrilling to allow master Ali Akbar to meditate. He never meditates, and has never meditated. All that he does is hard labour that demands intense activity. He generally passes his time in wrestling with the mother earth, with the help of spades and pick-axes in trying to grow flowers, fruits, and vegetables for his Baba, and consequently both at Toka and Arangaon small patches of shrubberies have come to be a part and parcel of the Meher Ashram.

There is yet one more little lover of the Master of this violent type, although not so very intense as Ali Akbar. Master KHUDA BUX can be said to be next to Ali Akbar in all the other details of his feelings for His Holiness.

Quite in contrast to the above two is Master MARUTI KAMBLE. He is almost an automaton. He carries out the Master's instructions with mechanical precision, and knows no restlessness, no emotion, save that of enjoying the proximity of His Holiness.

Master JAMES TITUS is another sincere aspirant, and one who meditates from the bottom of his heart. His one longing is to see the Master internally, so that he can always have His Holiness before his eyes even when he is separated. He is so sincere that he has frequently followed the Master's instructions to the letter. For instance, once in the course of a lecture, the Master conveyed that they all should know themselves to be 'spirits,' and should forget that they were 'bodies.' And the next day Master James was marked to be silently but actually arguing with himself the same point through frequent gestures towards his own body.

Master TUKARAM is very emotional, and the reader would remember how keen he had once been at Toka in insisting upon the Master to transfer His sufferings to his own little shoulders. He is also very resolute and decisive.

Master CHHABOO SONA is no less remarkable, inasmuch as he can be called without the least fear of exaggeration the personification of humility, submission, and surrender.

Masters JAMSHED and BABU SONA, although keen meditators, are rather of a desperate type. Their impatience for quick results knows no limit, and keeps them wavering like the waves, which never get separated from the ocean in spite of all their tossings and struggle.

To sum up, all the above attributes, more or less, is to introduce Master DAULAT PADIR, who well represents an admixture of all the above feelings, emotions and tendencies in his character and conduct.

There are many more who are equally warm in their feelings for the Master, but I will close the chapter with a few lines about Master PUNDIT, the eight-year old lover of the Master, whose feelings have also a humour about them. Perchance the day the Master would not embrace or pat him, the mischievous little Pundit was sure to commit a breach of some discipline. Why? Simply because thereby he was sure to be conducted into the presence of the Master for punishment, and thus attract the attention of His Holiness for himself. Whenever he is threatened by the Master with expulsion from the Prem Ashram, or some other punishment for his innocent but mischievous conduct, Master Pundit is ready with an appeal for "a last chance"

which is never really meant to be the last. At such moments, he would begin crying as loudly as his little lungs would allow him and go on yelling out his pet phrases, "Please give me the last, last chance. You are a 'Deva', and I am but a little boy. Oh, why do you become so harsh with me? 'Ari Deva' ! I will never do it again..... !" and so on. The result of course would be a free pardon and an embrace from the Master.

CHAPTER XXV

THE STRANGE END OF A STRANGE STORY

When Ali was taken away for the fourth time, one of the Master's disciples rightly remarked, "His father now ought to take a season-ticket between Bombay and Ahmednagar." It spoke for the certainty of Ali's return. But he came back rather too soon, that is, on the seventeenth of January, the day on which the Master started on His tour. Having slipped away so many times, it was but natural on the part of Ali's relatives to arrange a plan of packing him off to Persia. But this was also responsible for Ali to act quickly.

This time Ali was kept under such a strict surveillance that he saw no hope of an escape during daytime. The only chance lay in a dash for freedom at night. Being alert, Ali woke up one night through the loud snoring of his guards, who were sleeping on either side of his bed. He stealthily crept out of his bed, and silently unlatched the door, but found that his guards were too sharp for him—they had the door bolted from the other side too. However, a little hard thinking suggested to him a way out of his difficulty. He opened the tap of a small water-tank in the bath-room, and when it became empty, he managed to shift it against the frame of the door. Then taking a stand upon that tank, he broke one of the ventilation glasses against the frame of the door, and putting out his hand through the opening, he managed to unfasten the other catch. The guards were sleeping too soundly

to hear the splinter of the glass, and thus Ali began to breathe the air of freedom once again. He was careful enough to lock his guards in the room before he set out for the railway station, and eventually found himself once again at Meherabad.

After His return from the tour, the Master began to get busy in re-opening the Prem Ashram, or it may now also be called the Meher Ashram, since the original section, so far, seems to have been closed for good. Eighteen of the selected boys have been recalled, and after the celebration of His thirty-fifth birthday, which falls on the seventeenth of February, His holiness is expected once again to resume exclusive workings for the Institution. So much so, that from the twenty-first of February, the Master is going to cease giving an audience or an interview to visitors. And in the course of a year, He intends to establish the select boys firmly in the divine Path. Although English will be taught to the boys by way of secular education, yet most of the time throughout this period is intended to be devoted to their spiritual training only.

It is never easy and pleasant to write history, but to comment upon it when it is in the melting pot is not so very comfortable, because invariably it is the subsequent events that prove in the long run the true significance, meaning, and necessity of an action or fact of the day, and where it concerns the words and actions of the Master this is true to the letter. However, since I have shaped the subject-matter of this book in the form of a story, which from that view-point, remains unfinished, I think I owe some explanations to the reader.

It was a very trivial incident, yet to-day, it suddenly

strikes me as the most suitable simile and the handiest peg on which to hang my explanations. Many years ago, I happened to call at a friend's place, and while killing time in fishing out nick-nacks there, I came across a very artistic golden picture frame. But the picture it contained appeared to me nothing short of an ink-splashed page, torn off a mischievous school boy's rough drawing-book.

"What a pity?" I could not help calling out to my friend, "that you have spoiled this fine frame with such a rubbish." It was in fact a master-piece in water-colours, but I had so far seen none before. "You mean to say that. . . .", the friend tried to explain; but I felt so sure of the poor show the picture gave in my hands, that I did not let him finish the sentence, and chipped in, "I mean what I actually see."

"Then you don't see at all, my friend!" replied the gentleman, without in the least being affected by my wholesale condemnation of his choice. "Come, I will make you see it!" And with that he snatched the frame from my hands, jumped on a side-board, and fixed it at a certain height. Then holding my sleeves in an authoritative manner, he dragged me to a certain distance and simply spoke the single word, "See." There was no need of an argument. All I could do was to scratch my head in silent submission to the triumph of my friend! That picture now looked very life-like for all the red, white and black scratches on it. It was a realistic depiction of the X'mas morn, the title that it bore; but to-day, when I remember the fine painting in imagination, I clearly see how the very crudest blots of red and white in it were transformed into the features

of the two musicians in the snow-clad street, that the master-piece depicted when it was placed at a right distance.

Hence, if the question of a slight difference in distance and position had made me so sweepingly underrate that piece of art, I am sure that my ignorance of art would have forced me to take the artist—had I seen him in the course of painting it—as one having gone stark mad!

Similarly this book, whatever it may be called, is really a sidelight on the Master's eventful career, and as such, in the absence of the past and certain future links, is sure to appear an incomplete "picture" with many inexplicable "scratches and splashes" on it.

But it is not only to give relief and expression to this meaning alone, that I have given so much prominence to this trivial but telling incident of my life. I rather mean, that since the year 1922, nine years after becoming super-conscious by the grace of *Hazarat Babajan*, the time He became a conscious "Sadguru" or a "Kutub," i.e. in simple words "the completely super-conscious plus completely gross conscious" personality through the grace of His second Guru *Shree Sadguru Upasani Maharaj*, the Master is busy with a certain working and I want to call this working as the picture in the course of these explanations.

The Silence, Fasts, Confinements, the Mission to the West, and various other activities and movements of the Master have been described in the foregoing pages as to appear the motive power that brought about the general subject-matter of this book, the origination of the Meher Ashram and the existence

of Prem Ashram. And to the best of my knowledge and belief, this is nothing but the gospel truth. Although these actions and movements of the Master alone created the above monumental facts and institutions, they were not solely indulged in and acted upon for these results only. They rather were and are some stray brush-work of the great divine painter in connection with the picture that He has been painting since the last seven years, and which will surely be presented to the world one of these fine days.

As an illustration to my contentions about the picture, I would quote a recent explanation that the Master was pleased to give when asked as to the reasons of His observing a fast after attaining Perfection. His Holiness conveyed, "When I observe a fast, it amounts to all the people of the world having observed it, since it is none but I in all."

This incidentally explains the reason as to why, in spite of being the Sijda, Sájid, and Musjood, that is, praying, prayer, and prayed-to, all Himself, the Arabian Prophet still prayed, five times every day. That means all the people of the age in which the Prophet lived, got the "impressions" of having prayed themselves! Similarly, when Christ condescended to be crucified—although He had powers to raise the dead—it meant the whole world being crucified in the path of truth, at the cost of the few who took part in that ghastly deed; since the few were not one with Truth, the consequences of their foul deed remained restricted to themselves, while the "impressions" of being sacrificed in the cause of the Truth were shared by the rest of the world, through the omnipresent link—

the Christ—whose own words, (My blood will wash the sins of all!)" corroborates this great fact.

In spite of all the explanations that I have understood, and the close contact for years that I have had the privilege and good fortune of enjoying of Him, the Master remains a mystery to me so far as His words and actions are concerned! Hence, as regards the hero, I can say no more than repeat once again that Ali will surely become as full of Divine Love as the real Ali of Arabia one day in the near future, though perhaps, he may yet have to pass through some more *purifying* ordeals on one pretext or the other. But from the real point of view, it will make no difference in his heart, which is already full to the brim with Spirituality and lacks but a complete manifestation pending the final touch.

From the spiritual aspect of religion, I am quite one with the disciple of Hazarat Bayazid Bistami who, when once questioned whether God was great or His Master, replied, "I only know my Teacher, I know no other than Him, and He is greater than all beside." And although I may differ considerably in the interpretation of the Spirit of Islam from the majority of the orthodox Mussalmans, yet where the temporal side of religion is concerned, I still owe my allegiance to the mighty music of the heart—Muhammed—and as such, I feel I have a right to appeal to my co-religionists including the father of the hero to desist from playing into the hands of the devil.

May saner counsels prevail!!

Amen!!!

FINIS

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Register of Editorial Alterations

Page:	Paragraph:	Line:	Changed from:	To:
VIII	2	9	synonimous	synonymous
IX	2	1	well-written	well written
XII	3	4/5	;" is none but He!	;is none but He!"
XIII	3	14	by me,	by me.
1	1	2/3	well-know	well known
2	4	2	North pole	North Pole
3	2	2	guilt-edged	gilt-edged
3	3	7	beloved	Beloved
5	2	5	stimulants	stimulant
6	1	14	continueously	continuously
10	2	1	re-consideration	reconsideration
13	1	11	Jeweller	Jeweler
19	1	13	this	these
21	3	2	fifty second	fifty-second
25	1	17	persuasions	persuasions
30	1	5	him, with his	him with His
34	2	13	works	work
35	1	1	alas! how	alas! How
46	1	17	Holinesse's	Holiness's
54	1	11	voilence	violence
54	2	3	features.	features;
77	5	2	march	March
78	2	12	apparant	apparent
85	2	3	threat	threaten
87	4	8	unparalleled	unparalleled
90	3	4	me	Me
92	4	2	imparative	imperative
99	1	9+10	Meher-Ashram	Meher Ashram
104	2	4	April 1928	April, 1928
105	3	4	as	was
107	2	3	7-30	7:30
109	3	3	there	their
109	2	2	eigth	eighth
111	1	5	perferred	preferred
113	1	2	to	too
116	2	2	me	Me
118	3	2	his	His
121	9	1	nineth	ninth
123	1	16	Bazar	Bazaar
124	1	3	viallage	village

125	1	3	towards	towards
126	1	1	far	for
126	4	1	1-30	1:30
127	1	3	unrevelled	unravelled
132	3	3	liabrary	library
132	4	5	pre-aranged	pre-arranged
133	2	4	minutes'	minutes
138	1	3	8-30	8:30
139	2	6	Prim	prime
141	1	3	compay	company
143	3	6	maintained.	maintained
144	3	10	12-45 a. m.	12:45 A.M.
148	2	5	wounded	wound
154	2	6	Holi	Holy
157	3	6	veiw-point	view-point
159	1	3	watch-ward	watch-word
160	2	7	consentration	concentration
164	2	9	ventillation	ventilation
168	1	5	pictur	picture