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THE MAN, GANDHI



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**"To
The Memory
of
My noble Mother
Srimati Madhavi Thankachy
Who helped me to follow
Gandhiji"**

FOREWORD

This little book was first written in 1947. This first edition came out under "Gandhi Era Publications." Mahatma Gandhi was alive then and the world rang with the greatness of his name. His character and personality grew from year to year. He was one of those immortals who added to their stature by living dynamically every moment, taking from life and action all that they could give to complete their place in history. It was not therefore possible to write about Gandhi with any pretence to finality. Gandhi had already become immortal in history and yet his greatest achievement came later. That was why all those who wrote about him had to reckon with something imponderable and to go about their business in a spirit of humility. That was what I tried to do in this book-let in 1947.

Dr S. Radhakrishnan had written a fairly long introduction to the book-let at the time. Let me now quote only a few sentences from that introduction:-

"The common man resents war and does not wish to engage in the fiendish task of blowing up women and children into pulp. We require today the re-education of man. The goal of all true culture is to make men like and dislike rightly. National patriotisms and the rancorous partisanship of social and economic doctrine which can be as intolerant and perhaps more dangerous than even national egotism require to be superseded by a love for humanity. The outlawry of war should be taken out of the realm of ideal

dreams. In this great task, Gandhiji's doctrine of the beauty of truth and the power of love can be of immense assistance."

I have changed nothing in what I wrote in 1947. I would only point out a prophesy I indulged in towards the end of my booklet. Please remember Gandhi was alive then and in the fullness of his Karmayoga. And yet I had the temerity to write:-

"He has lived greatly and those who know him know also that he will someday die even more greatly. Such a man as Gandhi can never die an ordinary death. Like Christ he will some day die on his own Cross. The Cross in the world today is bound to be different from the one on which Christ gave up his earthly life. But Christ was not defeated on His Cross. Gandhi will also not be defeated on his Cross."

Eminent friends remembered with wonder my prophecy when Mahatma Gandhi fell dead before the bullets of an assassin and wrote to me expressing their fervent surprise.

Above everything else my intention was to make clear that Gandhi was just a man but the greatest man the world has ever known. He was not a God and never claimed to be a God. What he proved was that it was possible for man to become Godly.

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THE MAN, GANDHI

I

A woman's first impressions of a man will always be interesting. But when that woman is as keen-minded a person as Millie Graham Polak and when the man concerned is Gandhi then the impressions might well be illuminating. It was on the 30th of December 1905 that Mrs. Polak had her first impressions of Gandhiji at the Jeppe Railway station, Johannesburg, South Africa. In 1905 Gandhiji had not become the Mahatma. He was then a flourishing attorney, being a Barrister-at-Law in Johannesburg. Of that first meeting Mrs. Polak has written: "My first impression of Mr. Gandhi was of a medium-sized man, rather slenderly built, skin not very dark, mouth rather heavy lipped, a small dark moustache, and the kindest eyes in the world, that seemed to light up from within when he spoke. His eyes were his most remarkable features and were like the lamps of his soul; one could read so much from them. His voice was soft, musical and almost boyishly fresh." This was over forty years ago. Since then during these forty years and over Mr. Gandhi the Attorney of Johannesburg has walked a long way over interminable paths which have taken him from greatness to greatness. Today he is undoubtedly acclaimed as the greatest man in the modern world, one whose name is more familiar to the common man in all the countries of the world than that of any other living person.

It would be fascinating to compare the impressions of many of those keen minds who have met Gandhi in the present times with Mrs. Polak's impressions of forty years ago. There is for instance the impressions of the Rev. J. H. Holmes. Rev. Holmes crossed the Atlantic in 1931 from New York to London to meet Gandhiji during the second Round Table Conference which Gandhiji attended as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress. Earlier in his writings and speeches Rev. Holmes had painted Gandhiji as an ugly man with long ears and a sharp and drooping nose and with a mouth which extended too much across the face. He had himself gathered these impressions from other Europeans and Americans who had met Gandhiji and written or spoken about him. But after meeting Gandhiji personally in London in 1931 Rev. Holmes painted a different picture. He said that Gandhiji in his loin cloth looked more a king than many kings in their royal robes. There was, he said about Gandhiji, an unconscious air of royalty which was all the more significant because it was unconscious and because it came from some sense of profound dignity of calmness from the inner sources of his being. Looking at him the observer too became calm and a sense of quiet dignity took possession of him. Rev. Holmes added that as he listened to Gandhiji speaking to him the instant conviction came to him that every word came from the depth of truth. When Gandhiji spoke there was never any attempt to conceal himself or his meaning. On the contrary every word seemed to say, here I am, just as I am, without any reservation whatsoever. Rev. Holmes had long admired Gandhiji and studied his writings and interpreted them magnificently to the American public. In a sense therefore his first meeting with his hero in London

in 1931 was a crucial one for him. It is a great tribute to any hero in similar circumstances to say he survived such a meeting. Rev. Holmes made it absolutely clear that the Gandhi he met in the flesh and in the blood was greater than the Gandhi of his dreams. Curiously Shri C. Rajagopalachari writing about Gandhiji in October 1945 conveys the very same impression: "If there is any man with whom familiarity does not lessen but continually increases respect and love, it is Gandhiji. It may be true of all truly great men, but in my personal experience I have found it true of Gandhiji. The more you move and work with him, the more you love and admire him."

It was in June 1942 that Louis Fischer, the well-known American Journalist, met Gandhiji. He spent a week in Sevagram and had many talks with Gandhiji. His impressions of Gandhiji are those of another American eleven years after those of Rev. Holmes in London in 1931. Here is a paragraph from Louis Fischer*: "Part of the pleasure of intimate intellectual contact with Gandhiji is that he really opens his mind and allows the interviewer to see how the machine inside works. When most people talk they try to bring their ideas out in final perfect form so that they are least exposed to attack. Not so with Gandhi. He gives immediate expression to each step in his thinking. It is as though a writer were to publish the first draft of his story, and then the second draft and ultimately third and last draft. Readers might protest and claim that the plot had been changed, that the popular lover had been transformed into a villain and so forth. Gandhi would not listen to such protests. He would say, yes, I changed

* 'A Week with Gandhi'

my mind. Actually he thinks aloud and the entire processes is for the record. This confuses some people and impels others to say he contradicts himself or that he is a hypocrite. Gandhi does not care. Many Indians and Englishmen in India, when I interviewed them, cautioned me that their words were not for publication. Gandhi never worried about what I would write about him or how I would quote him. He did not talk *at* me; he talked *to* me. I spent many hours with Mohamad Ali Jinnah, the President of the Muslim League of India. He is a brilliant parliamentarian, a skilled debater, and an incorruptible politician. But he talked at me. He was trying to convince me. When I put a question to him I felt as though it had turned on a phonograph record. I had heard it all before or could have read it in the literature he gave me. But when I asked Gandhiji something, I felt that I had started a creative process. I could see and hear his mind work. With Jinnah I could only hear the needle scratch the phonograph record. Jinnah gave me nothing but his conclusions. But I could follow Gandhi as he moved to a conclusion. He is, therefore, much more exciting than Jinnah. If you strike right with Gandhi you open a new pocket of thought. An interview with him is a voyage of discovery, and he himself is sometimes surprised at the things he says."

Mrs. Polak, like the observant woman she was, wrote of Gandhiji's size and colour and mouth and eyes. Rev. Holmes has told us of the kingly dignity and the inner calm of Gandhiji. Louis Fischer was charmed with him as a rich subject for interview. Rev. Doak, a British clergyman, has also written that the soulful and kindly eyes of Gandhiji were the most striking features of his physical personality. No one knew Gandhiji better than the late

Mahadev Desai. Louis Fischer* once told him, "All these days I have been listening carefully to Gandhi and recording his words, reading them, thinking about them and trying to fathom the source of Gandhi's great influence. I have come to the conclusion, tentatively, that the chief reason for that influence is Gandhi's passion." Mahadev Desai looked startled and said to Louis Fischer that he was absolutely right. Fischer then shot a question at Desai, taking advantage of his concurrence, "But what is the root of his passion?" Desai's reply was full of meaning: "This passion in Gandhiji is the sublimation of all the passions that flesh is heir to." Fischer again asked, "Is it the sublimation of sex?" Desai answered, "Not only sex, but the power of anger and all personal ambition. Gandhiji can admit that he is wrong. He can chastise himself and take the blame for the mistakes of others, as when he called off a Civil Disobedience Movement because it became violent. Gandhiji is under his own complete control. That generates the tremendous energy and passion within him". So this man Gandhi, king-like in his dignity, calm with an inner serenity which never fails him, his words always gentle and kindly and his eyes shining with the soul of generosity has in him the volcano of passion according to Mahadev Desai and it is this power of passion in him which gives Gandhiji his tremendous energy and his incalculable hold on the minds and loyalty of millions of human beings. How is this possible? How can the power of passion and the strength of calmness co-exist in the same human personality? The present writer has on a previous occasion written that, "Gandhiji

* 'A Week with Gandhi'

possesses at once the softness of the rose petal and the hardness of steel." Perhaps this characterisation of his personality caught Gandhiji's eyes sometime, because a little later he himself wrote of the doctrine of Satyagraha as combining within itself "the softness of a rose petal and the hardness of steel." Evidently therefore Gandhiji himself did not disapprove of the above characterisation. Gandhiji is nothing if not the embodiment of Satyagraha. He can be tender as a mother or as a lover. He can also be hard like a saint or a dictator. The softness in him is his unflinching and deep humaneness. It is the sky of his mind and the horizon of all his acts. The hardness in him is not accidental, but is a deliberate creation of his own experience and understanding, and it is called into action every time the inexorable challenge of hard facts confronts him. Gandhiji while he is on the one hand full of the gentleness of thought, word and deed is on the other unbending, unyielding, terribly impatient of all evil and wrong doing and even relentless once the passion to launch into action against evil takes possession of him. It is this soul of Gandhi, meek and yet mighty, which has year by year, perhaps hour by hour, moulded the lines of his face making the eyes kindly like a mother's and the mouth firm and hard like a dictator's.

I have read a bit of all that has been written about Gandhiji. I have long lived in touch with him, knowing him personally from day to day. I have worked under him directly for now nearly twenty years. I wish therefore to state something from my own personal experiences with him. Obviously there are certain matters too sacred for public writing. These I shall keep apart. I shall only touch upon some of those things very necessary for the understanding of Gandhi the man.

Let me recall my own first meeting with him. The year was 1924. Gandhiji had started his fast of 21 days on behalf of Hindu-Muslim unity. The fast took place in Delhi in a house called "Dilkush". I was then a student in the Viswa Bharathi at Santiniketan. My professor Mr. C. F. Andrews had hurried to Delhi on hearing the news of Gandhiji's fast. In fact an urgent and very long telegram from Maulana Mohamad Ali had summoned him to Delhi to help him during the days of Gandhiji's fast. All of us in Santiniketan, students and teachers and Gurudev Tagore himself, were profoundly perturbed and anxious. The students held a meeting and resolved to depute me to go to Delhi to help Mr. C. F. Andrews in his work of looking after Gandhiji during his fast. I reached Delhi on the evening of the 3rd day of the fast. I had not till then met Gandhiji and I was only a lad of less than 20 years of age.

It was going to be my first meeting with Gandhiji who for years already had taken the place of the greatest of all heroes in my mind. I can never forget the scenes I witnessed at the Delhi Railway station and around "Dilkush". The station was full of Congress volunteers dressed in their white khadi jubbis and Gandhi caps. They were there to receive the stream of important men and women pouring into Delhi to attend the Hindu-Muslim Unity Conference. A crowd of several thousand silent men and women were sitting or standing in the open spaces round "Dilkush". Numerous cars were coming and going. Mr. Andrews, who knew of my coming was also silent as he received me and showed me the corner of his room where I was to stay. Mr. Andrews was the chief "chowkidar" at the foot of the stairs in "Dilkush" which led up to Gandhiji's room on the upper floor, carefully and vigilantly regulating the coming and going of visitors. It is not my purpose here to tell the story of the great fast. I wish to relate only the story of my first meeting with Gandhiji. Mr. C. F. Andrews took me up to the room in which Gandhiji lay fasting. It was a quiet afternoon. Several persons had gone up to Gandhiji's room before I entered it. I saw them all sitting on carpets on the floor around a cot. The Ali brothers were there. There was the tall and gaunt figure of the late Swami Shradhanandaji sitting erect near the bed. I remember also some Sikh faces with a tense expression on them. The late Desa Bandhu Chittaranjan Das and Pundit Motilal Nehru were talking in a quiet tone. But my eyes fastened on the central figure of Gandhiji. He was sitting propped up against a pile of cushions on the bed and he was spinning silently. He looked thin and emaciated, specially in the face. His whole body was wrap-

ped up in long white khadi. He was listening and even smiling occasionally. The contour of his head struck me. It was undoubtedly an intellectual head, looked at from the side. Looked at from the front his face suddenly ceased to be that of an intellectual; it was the face of a saint at once meek and mighty. I saw the kindly eyes of which I had read, and the firm-set mouth of which too I had been told. The upper lip was pressed tight on the lower one and the grimness of the closed mouth relaxed wonderfully when a smile came and went. The whole of Gandhiji's personality appeared well knit and yet somehow elastic. He was nodding continually as he listened carefully and quietly to what was being told him. He appeared to be a wonderful listener. Gandhiji struck me as an artist of nods and gestures. There was a rhythm and grace about his nods and gestures which gave him a unique distinction. I think it is in the family and I have come across these gestures and nods in his sons and grandsons. Gandhiji must have inherited it all from quite an aristocratic family background. I remained in the same room with him for only a quarter of an hour. I was startled by the reverence and love so abundantly shown him by all those present in the room and those in the room included the tallest and the greatest in India at the time. He received their reverence and love with a quiet and unconscious dignity which was a revelation to me. When he spoke he spoke so low as to be almost inaudible. But the clear resonance of his voice reached me and thrilled me. A little later Mr. Andrews led me up to him and introduced me to him, saying that I was one of his dearest students come to help him from Santiniketan. As I bowed to him, he stopped spinning for a moment and stroked me twice on my

bowed back and when I straightened myself I looked into a face wreathed in a broad and soulful smile. He asked me a question or two. His smile completely took away my sense of awe in his presence. His kindly eyes made me feel entirely at ease. I had read so much of the "Mahatma" and my head had been filled with visions and dreams about a great prophet. But as I stood in front of him I felt I was simply in the presence of a fellowman. He was simple with the simplicity of all true greatness in man. I knew at once why everyone called him "Bapu". He was simply a man and a father to you and the whole expression on his face seemed to say, "Don't you worry. I am just a man like you. Meet me as man to man. My heart is open, come in and take your place in it." I came away from that meeting with a simple and glorious lightness of heart as though I had met a kindly friend, meeting whom I felt deeply chastened and uplifted. I have met him again and again during the last 20 years. But this first impression of his essential humaneness has persisted without a break through all these many years of close contact with him.

Before I returned to Santiniketan a few days after the successful termination of the fast, I had a number of opportunities to see, hear and know Gandhiji. It is impossible here to cover all my experiences during those privileged days. But next to his humaneness the one quality in him that filled me with wonder was his capacity for the most unaffected and hilarious laughter. One could scarcely talk with him for a few minutes without his cracking some neat joke or other and his bursting into uproarious laughter. This capacity of his to laugh even in the midst of the most trying situations is, I think, one of the main secrets of his vitality and perpetual youthfulness. It is quite likely

that he will live up to 125 years, as he wants to, if only this quality of laughter remains with him unimpaired. I remember specially two occasions during the days in "Dilkush". One day, when the warm water for Gandhiji's bath was taken up to him, he suddenly discovered something in the water, and started laughing in his usual full-hearted manner. Mr. Andrews ran up to see what was the matter. I heard Gandhiji say something, laughing all the time, and the next I heard was Mr. Andrews joining in the laughter. I slipped upstairs too. Someone who used to make the morning tea for Mr. Andrews had by mistake dropped some tea leaves into Gandhiji's bath water. Since the water was quite hot it took on the red and yellow colour of the best Brook Bond brand of tea! Gandhiji's charming joke then was, "Someone is punishing me for giving up tea long ago! If I won't drink tea I must bathe in tea!" Ultimately the joke was traced to Ramdas Gandhi, Gandhiji's third son who was then with us. What laughter there was at his expense! Another day someone brought the usual morning tea tray to Mr. Andrews. After pouring out the milk and tea he dug out some sugar with the spoon and put it into the tea and what was his horror to see the sugar becoming a gummy paste inside the cup. He scrutinised the sugar pot and found in it a good supply of atta (Indian wheat flour). Mr. Andrews roared with laughter and ran up to Gandhiji's room and how uproariously Bapu too joined in the laughter, specially when it was found out that Ramdas Gandhi was again the unconscious culprit. Later on, as I knew Gandhiji more and more, I have sometimes wondered if Gandhiji could have survived many of the terrible ordeals through which he has passed, if he had not possessed this quality for laughter.

Another lasting impression of those days was Gandhiji's care for the sick. During the 21 days of Gandhiji's fast all those around him had very hard work to do. It was a time of great strain for those in charge of the arrangements. The result was quite a number of them fell ill. Though Gandhiji was fasting and his strength appeared to be slowly ebbing away, and he could hardly speak after the 7th day of the fast he insisted on being given detailed reports concerning the health of those who were sick. He would also give minute instructions about their care and diet. I heard him once say to Mr. Andrews, "Please keep an eye on.....'s food. I am afraid he over-eats. Please also see he takes every night a little ginger with salt."

I must now give what was to me the most illuminating experience during the days in "Dilkush" concerning Gandhiji. I think it was the 13th day of his fast. Apart from his ascending weakness due to starvation some serious complication had set in. Dr. M. A. Ansari and his medical colleagues who were in charge of Gandhiji's health were apparently greatly upset. I think they wanted Gandhiji to take some form of sugar and since his heart was growing very weak they insisted on his stopping his daily half hour of spinning. Gandhiji said he was under a vow to fast for 21 days and hence he could not take any form of sugar which was food. Regarding spinning he said he would rather die than give up what was to him his most sacred "yagna". The Doctors were angry and they all came downstairs and argued with Mr. Andrews and then they all went up again to argue with Gandhiji. Andrews did his best to effect a compromise and failed. Gandhiji, whose physical vitality had obviously reached the lowest

watermark before a complete breakdown, quietly but adamantly stuck to his guns. He told the doctors and Mr. Andrews to place their trust in God adding that if God needed him for His service He would see him through the ordeal. He chided his Muslim Doctor and his Christian "Chowkidar" for their little faith. He pleaded with them to bear with him for another day and to join their prayers to his that God might come to the rescue. The Doctors agreed to wait for another 24 hours before enforcing their remedies. The next 24 hours were the most anxious in "Dilkush." I don't think anybody slept that night. The Doctors arrived the next day in full strength. An examination followed. To everybody's utter astonishment the dangerous complication of the previous day had completely disappeared. But Gandhiji was still very weak and the Doctors insisted that he should not spin for the rest of the days of the fast. Gandhiji put up his back again and refused to obey. His half hour's spinning was a daily sacrament symbolising his personal identification with the toiling millions of India. He called Andrews near him and in a low voice explained his position. He ended by saying, "Let the Doctors take my pulse now and then let me have my charkha. I will do my spinning for the half hour and let them test my pulse afterwards. I promise you, spinning in the spirit in which I do it, will only improve my pulse." What could anyone say in reply to such a declaration of faith? The Doctors had to agree. Gandhiji who could hardly sit was propped up against the usual pile of pillows and the spinning wheel was put in front of him. Silent and with lowered eyes Gandhiji quietly spun for half an hour and then stopped. The anxious doctors laid him to rest on his back in his bed and then took his pulse and

his blood pressure. Both had improved. Mr. C. F. Andrews was deeply moved and repeated to me at least a dozen times that day, "Bapu is indeed a man of prayer. He is a man of God." I do not pretend to analyse or explain what happened. All I know is that I discovered even in 1924 during the days of the fast that Gandhiji could draw upon some hidden but sure sources of inner strength and no one will understand him who does not reckon with this inner power in him. It also came to me with an overwhelming sense of conviction that the charkha was for Gandhiji the centre of all his services to India and there through to humanity. One is free to accept or reject the Gandhian philosophy and method of the charkha, but to accept Gandhi and reject the charkha will be like accepting Christ and rejecting the Cross. The Cross varies from age to age. In this era in India Gandhiji presents the charkha as the uttermost symbol of the great atonement which the educated, the rich and the exploiting classes have to make to the dispossessed and exploited masses in the villages of India. Gandhiji and his charkha philosophy and method will stand or fall together. He knows this more than anyone else. That was why he sat up to spin when his pulse was sinking. He wanted to show that the charkha was dearer to him than life itself. By a supreme act of faith he showed that spinning improved his pulse. This further showed that the charkha was for him the symbol of the new life which should pour into the ruined and shattered villages of his country, numbering over seven hundred thousand.

The last privilege I had in "Dilkush" was a long discussion with Gandhiji on the place of machinery in life, the institution of marriage and the problem of beauty.

Coming from Santiniketan as I did, my mind was very full and critical concerning these subjects. Gandhiji must have given me nearly three hours to discuss these subjects with me. Shri Mahadev Desai took down all my questions and Gandhiji's answers with the discussion that followed and published them later in *Young India* under the title "A morning with Gandhiji". This discussion as it appeared under the above title has since then been included in various books dealing with the life and work of Gandhiji. It appears in four chapters at the beginning of a volume entitled "To the Students" by Gandhiji and published by Anand T. Hingorani at the *Kitabistan*, Allahabad. The curious might look into these chapters for a full study of the discussion. What I want to bring out here are some of the characteristics of Gandhiji as revealed in the discussion. Once he is convinced you are an earnest enquirer he never loses his gentle patience with any question he is asked. He never beats about the bush. He has the uncanny knack of putting his finger on the central issue in any discussion. While he will never offend any one in a discussion, he would state his point of view with a ruthlessness which is characteristic of his logic. While he will yield nothing in regard to a point on which he has a clear conviction, he will labour hard to find your point of view. He will even go out of his way to give his opponent in a discussion points to clarify and strengthen the other view. This he is able to do because he himself is crystal clear in regard to his own view and he is not at all perturbed at the thought that his position might be upset. He is hard as flint in regard to his own convictions but he freely allows you and even encourages you to hold the opposite view, if you have also sincere convictions about it. That is

why Louis Fischer* has testified, "He did not merely give his facts and his opinions. He revealed himself. He even supplied one with ammunition against himself." When I discussed the problem of beauty in this world with him I found that he could be extremely subtle and that his mind was as agile as it was profound. He could clothe the deepest thoughts in very simple phrases. He never took any wordy advantage over you in a discussion. All the time he wanted you to understand him, and even more, that he should understand you. The clarity of his mind is simply astonishing. I think this is so because he would never pass an opinion on anything that he did not fully know or understand. If he did not know a thing he would never pretend he knew it. He would just tell you he knew nothing about it and ask you to explain it to him. Did he not confess while he was in London for the Round Table Conference that he had never heard of such a person as Charlie Chaplin in all his life ! But, where he has clear experience and conviction, he can expound his position with matchless if also disarming logic. I discovered that in any discussion he treated the opposite party with superb respect. It did not matter whether you were poet Rabin-dranath Tagore or Jawaharlal Nehru or an unknown student or an ordinary Congress volunteer. Once he consented to discuss with anyone, he treated everyone with equal respect in an argument. Not only in a discussion but in every thing else I have never yet met a man who is more free from any trace of the thought of the high and the low among his fellowmen as Gandhiji. I have known Gandhiji giving time to talk with common and unknown

* 'A Week with Gandhi'

people, quietly and unhurriedly, while the so-called mighty men of the world have had to wait outside his door till their time came. When I left "Dilkush" a few days after the fast was over, I went away with such an understanding of the life and mission of Gandhiji that, ever since I have given my life to the service of my people along lines laid down by him. I went to him a humble and unknown student full of worship and idealism. Such a state of mind is apt to lead one very often to folly. He lifted me from the rut of personal worship and gave me a vision of what he stood for. The better one knows Gandhiji the more fully one is apt to transfer his loyalty from personality to the cause. Within a few days I realised that the cause was greater than the man; also that the greatness of the man was he incarnated in himself the cause. If he could do this with me within the space of a few days, pouring himself, so to say, into the life of another as humble as myself, I wondered into how many thousands of such lives in India he has poured himself, thus recreating himself in the lives of others, so that the cause for which he stands has found myriad minds and limbs for its furtherance. Was it not Gokhale who said that Gandhi knew how to mould heroes out of clay? This he is able to do, because he himself is a hero in the highest sense of the word. But there is nothing mystic or mysterious in the heroism he embodies. It is a heroism every line and feature of which the least of us can see and understand. His life, his thoughts, emotions and achievements are like the pages of an open book which, all who care to, can read. He thus becomes a challenge not only in himself but for others. No one can plead he is a god and that therefore what he does others cannot. His essential greatness is

THE MAN, GANDHI

that he not merely walks on the high and adventurous ways but he shows every moment how others can walk with him on the same exalted path.

III

There is a startling question that can be asked about Gandhiji. Is he of the East or of the West? Ordinarily no one will think of asking such a question. Because ordinarily the idea will undoubtedly be that Gandhiji is of the East. Most people will say, who can doubt Gandhiji is of the East. Look at him, his thin, emaciated and ascetic figure dressed only in a loin cloth. Look at the food he eats, milk and honey, green leaves and fruits. For nearly forty years now, has he not lived under a vow of celibacy? Is he not an incorrigible opponent of every method of artificial birth control, holding fast to the idea that the only form of birth control permissible is through self-control? And then look at his fasts and prayers. Listen to his talk of spiritualising politics, in the present modern setting in which you see on every side the never-ending struggles of power politics. He is against modern machinery in industry and he has put all his weight on the side of handicrafts in the villages. He will have no textile mills for he would, if he could, replace them by the "primitive" spinning wheel in every cottage home in India. The whole of his life and work are dedicated to promote non-violence in a world seething with violence of every kind. He applies non-violence as a solution not only in private and individual life but has sought to apply it in national and international affairs. How can such a man ever be anything but the

ever-lasting and unmistakable human type of the East? And so the judgement is passed that Gandhi is of the East, drawing all the nourishment for his personality from the soil of the East, growing fully into the stature of the man which the East alone can produce aspiring and struggling towards those ends which the East alone has cherished and contributing more than any other man to the building up of a world which the East alone can understand. Such a judgement will easily appear to be correct and final. Such a judgement has thus become widely accepted. But it will be greatly worth while to look into this matter more closely, to study the facts more carefully and to arrive at a deeper understanding of all that constitutes Gandhi, the Man. Such an analysis will not be easy. Such an analysis will not only include a study of Gandhiji's life and personality but also of the background, cultural and spiritual of the East and the West. It might be said also that there is no such thing as the East and the West, but only one common humanity throughout the world and therefore Gandhi is in no sense specially of the East or the West but that he is simply the type of the superman arising from the background of the universal man. Therefore to arrive at a full understanding of Gandhi, the Man is a most difficult and even tantalising task.

When we generally speak of the East and the West we always accept as fundamental certain characteristics pertaining to each. These characteristics of the East and the West can ultimately be made to melt into a common crucible of universal humanity. Nevertheless looking at the differences in terms of measurable time and history they will possess a certain validity which will be undeniable. It will be impossible to consider here all the different

characteristics in their historical perspective. We can only touch upon some of them in the present study.

The East has never completely lost the quality of faith. When something deep moves in the heart of the East, it will inevitably be inspired by a profound faith as opposed to what might be called calculable reasoning. That is why all great religions have come out of the East. Faith need not and should not be equated to any process of contemplation only or to potential quietism. On the contrary it is faith that can move mountains. The West on the other hand seems always to be uncertain of faith. It has throughout many centuries sought for and obtained a life of unceasing change and motion. It has striven more after reason than faith. Reason divorced from faith has led the West to mighty triumphs in the field of material discovery and acquisition. This is not to say that the East is either wholly dedicated to faith without knowing the meaning of reason or that the West is wholly dedicated to reason without some faint glimmerings of the meaning of faith. The emphasis in the East has however been on faith and the emphasis in the West has however been on scientific reason. Reason without the depth of faith has produced a material civilisation which has spread its power over the earth giving it the wonderful dynamics of motion and growth and change. The Western world thus continually presents the spectacle of ceaseless activity, struggle and strife. On the other hand faith without the ever-present corrective of reason has often led the East to an other-worldliness weakening its grip on the earth.

Ultimately all the apparent differences, which are in no sense final or unalterable, arise from this main differ-

ence. If the West is scientific, the East is religious. One is generally analytical and the other often synthetical. One is continually making new discoveries and the other clings steadfastly to certain eternal values. One struggles for power and possession and the other strives for peace and harmony. But the spirit of discovery and the meaning of eternal values need not necessarily be contradictory. The dynamics of activism and the peace of harmony are also not eternally opposed to each other. The world is perhaps marching towards values which are dynamic and therefore growing and at the same time eternal in their validity. We are also realising that peace cannot be a dead peace but a living one and that harmony is not achieved by all-round compromise but only through the organic reconciliation of what appears to be opposites.

As against Gandhiji's asceticism in food and clothes, his opposition to large-scale centralised industrial production of material goods, etc., it is necessary to discover the deeper traits in him. He is certainly not a man of faith alone. There are in the whole world few more convinced votaries of reason than he. He has always called himself a Sanathani Hindu and yet he has repeated times without number that whatever in the Vedas or in the other Hindu scriptures conflicts with reason should be summarily rejected. He has also always objected to others looking up to him as to a god in absolute faith. He has always challenged not only his critics but his admirers and followers not to accept anything he has said or done without questioning. Like the Buddha he has said, "Take nothing from me because I have said so or done so. Reason with me and accept only what is acceptable to your reason. Reject nothing from me because you do not like me. Equally accept

nothing from me because you love me. Your reason alone should be the judge." While he is thus a convinced votary of reason no man has understood as he has the power that faith can give. That is why so often in his life, when after much reasoning with himself and others he has failed to see the light in the midst of terrible difficulties, he has always been ready to take what he has himself called "a plunge into the dark". Gandhiji as a votary of reason has always walked with reason all the way it can go, but at the point where reason stops he has taken up the staff of faith and rushed ahead. No man of reason alone would have done many of the things that Gandhiji has done. His fast for Hindu-Muslim unity and his fast for altering the Communal Award of Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, the British Premier, are instances to show how faith can carry him forward long after reason has stopped behind. Gandhi thus combines in himself the glory of reason and the power of faith. To Gandhi reason is a friend and guide up to a point: beyond that point however faith is his everlasting and unfailing comrade. In this matter therefore Gandhi is a synthesis of the East and the West.

The East despises time. It tends to live in timelessness in things big and small. This life itself is only a tiny link in an endless chain of lives. There is no hurry therefore for anything. What one fails to achieve in the life here and now, can be achieved in the lives to come. Whatever happens here and now the soul marches eternally through all defeats and triumphs to the final victory of absorption into the everlasting God. The saints of the East have seldom regulated their lives by clocks and watches. The sun-rise and the sun-set were watches enough. The minutes and the hours never mattered. Gandhi too is undoubt-

edly a saint born in the East. But the watch is his inseparable companion. Even his false teeth he uses only when he eats, he puts them away after his food; but his watch is with him night and day. It was Lord Lothian who has left on record the fact that Gandhi was the only man he met in Asia who courteously showed him the watch to indicate that the interview with him as per the time fixed was over. Gandhi's punctuality and time sense are famous. He will arrive at a meeting as the clock strikes the very hour or indicates the very minute at which he is expected. There have been occasions when the motor-cars in which Gandhiji was travelling to keep up his appointments have broken down on the way and he has jumped out and run the remaining distance to keep to time. His watch, tied to a thin white chord of home-spun thread which is all the time round his neck like a chain, is tucked into a little pocket at the waist in his loin cloth. Every item of his day's work is strictly regulated by his watch. And yet this very same Gandhi has once said, "The Satyagrahi has eternity in front of him or her." He meant that the seeker after truth need never feel defeated for want of time. Provided one was really seeking the truth, time can never run against one ultimately. Here too we thus see the East and the West mingling in Gandhi. Gandhi's is a life superbly regulated by the time sense and yet in his quest after truth he is unhurried with an innate sense of eternity.

It is now well recognised that Gandhiji's greatness is that he has uplifted great masses of the common people from the rut of helplessness, inaction and humiliation under foreign rule in India. He has uplifted them and made them fight as they have never fought before against injustice and exploitation. He has made them fight not in

the old violent way but in the new non-violent way. In such a fight the fighter ennobles not only himself but his opponent. Satyagraha is a method of fight by the oppressed and exploited against the oppressor and exploiter in which both sides emerge from the struggle equally purified and uplifted. It is thus a fight in which there is no waste of the human spirit. It would have been impossible for Gandhiji to have trained millions of people for such a fight spread now over a quarter of a century if he had not mastered some supreme technique of mass organisation and mass action. And yet in a certain sense Gandhiji is a supreme individualist who has declared that his aim of creating a new world social order can be furthered more by one perfect satyagrahi than by an army of those whose understanding of Satyagraha is imperfect. He has thus raised quality far above quantity. The question then arises, how has Gandhi the supreme individualist become the undisputed leader of millions of common people in one of the biggest and most long drawn battles known in the history of the struggle for human freedom? Here again Gandhi combines in himself the search for perfection of the individual soul, which is so Eastern, with the striving to organise the masses for collective action which has so conspicuously distinguished the history of the West. In this there is no contradiction for Gandhi. It is only by directing the whole of the human mind towards an ideal of perfection that the masses are trained to acquire a measure of those qualities which can knit them together for collective non-violent action. Equally it is only when the masses are knit together for non-violent action that the stage is set for the evolution of those who can become perfect Satyagrahies. If an

ideal of perfection is necessary to set the tone and the pace for the masses, a non-violent mass atmosphere is the imperative condition for the development of the perfect Satyagrahi. It is thus that Gandhi the saint becomes also Gandhi the leader of a whole people. Gandhi thus once again appears as a point of unity between the East and the West.

In this connection it will be profitable to compare Gandhi with some of the other great personalities in modern India. The first name that occurs to the student of contemporary events in India is that of the great poet Rabindranath Tagore. He too, like Gandhi, had broken through the shell of his national environment and impressed his personality upon the thought and imagination of the whole world. Gandhi and Tagore are the two names in India which are known throughout the world. Tagore had travelled widely in his life time visiting almost every country in Asia and in Europe and crossing the Atlantic more than once to North and South Americas. Tagore was no ascetic. He was a supreme artist. His contact with the world was more on the artistic than on the ethical plane. He was perhaps more honoured in Europe and in America than in Asia. Westerners found themselves entirely at home with him personally and with his outlook and philosophy. Externally Tagore's own life conformed more to the Western pattern than to the Eastern. If one met Tagore it was easy to get the impression of some great European philosopher or poet or prophet, though Tagore always expressed his inmost soul only in the Bengalee language and was best at home in the world of Sanskrit literature. His physical presence and his clothes also gave him the appearance of some great

European. But at heart he was more an Easterner than Gandhi with all his asceticism. Every fibre of Tagore's being was Eastern. In spite of every external factor to the contrary Tagore remained till the end more an Easterner than Gandhi. Gandhi is not wholly or even fundamentally an Easterner. In England and even more in South Africa he came up against the West and absorbed so much of the West into his personality that he has never since been wholly an Easterner. The substance of the East in him has been transmuted into a new alloy, not only by his personal contact with the West but also by his mental allegiance to Tolstoy and Ruskin and to some of the Western interpreters of Christianity. Christ was an Easterner but much of Christianity is Western. If you watch Gandhi carefully you cannot fail to detect in him many traits of character which are quite Western. If you watch him eating, and if you are not deceived by his ascetic fare and simple pots and pans from which he eats his food with his wooden spoon, the careful eye can at once detect how, like a Westerner scrupulously used to his fork and spoon, he eats his food. If you watch him in company, specially of women, you can at once detect how like a cultured Westerner is his deportment. Gandhiji's ideas of cleanliness are also those of the scientific West and yet not wholly so. Here too he is a rare synthesis of Eastern and Western traditions. He scrupulously observes the principles of "Jhoota" in which the Hindus specialise. He will not touch food which other lips have touched nor will he allow others to take the food which his lips have touched. In his individual cleanliness he is quite Eastern, but where collective cleanliness is concerned he is absolutely Western. His passion for individual and group

cleanliness is tireless and exacting. This passion he must have absorbed mostly from the West.

All personality is an integrated unity. Gandhiji's personality looked at from the point of view of such an integration will appear more and more as a synthesis of Eastern and Western qualities. That is why he is an ascetic and yet so much a man of the world, dealing with every kind of earthly matter affecting the well-being of his people. That is why he is a saint dedicated to the search of the uttermost truth and yet the leader of millions in their struggle for freedom and self-expression. His eyes are undoubtedly fixed on the far-away vision of a perfected humanity but his feet can pick their way with extraordinary care through the facts and data of every-day life. He has called himself, and justly, a "practical idealist". He has also said that he has met many religious men, in India particularly, who were politicians in disguise, but he himself though a politician was in reality and in heart a religious man. This verdict of his upon himself is a true one. Behind and beneath all his political and social endeavour to uplift mankind is his unwavering search for the ultimate truth, his quest for self-perfection and his burning passion to see God face to face. No one, who fails to grasp the truly religious incentive at the centre of his life, will ever be able to understand fully the personality of Gandhi, his thoughts or his work. There is no doubt Gandhi's personality is a many-sided one with some apparent contradictions. Luckily for us however, Gandhi personally reconciles in himself all these contradictions, rising high above them and giving us the resplendent vision of the man in him.

There is another comparison which can enrich the understanding of Gandhi which is a comparison between Gandhi and Nehru. Nehru is essentially Western. Even the Kashmiri stock from which he comes belongs to the same Aryan group to which many Europeans belong. Nehru's education also was Western. In fact he has himself testified that when he returned from Cambridge he was more an Englishman than an Indian. Nehru's politics and outlook are Western and the Westerner understands him immediately. But Gandhi is a challenge and enigma to the Western politicians. For Nehru, politics itself has become a religion with him. But Gandhi has stood for the spiritualisation of politics. While Gandhi has astonishing shrewdness and no one can beat him in political negotiation, he is really not technically a politician. One wonders whether he has ever read a treatise on politics or on social economy. Nehru is very well read. Gandhi's strength in politics is derived alike from his character and from his profound experience of human nature, specially of the common man in India. Character combined with understanding makes Gandhi irresistible even as a political force. He understands India as no other man does and India understands him as it understands no other man. Such a mutual understanding is the foundation upon which Gandhi's matchless hold on the mind of the masses in India rests. But understanding alone could not have made him such a dynamic leader. That leadership is derived from the power accruing from his character. His character is not simply a personal factor with him. It is a tremendous phenomenon which links him organically with the masses of the people. It is no joke to say Gandhi has practically no private life as that term is generally understood. His

life has become the symbol and the token of the life of his people. His character therefore furnishes the true key to his leadership. Before he calls any man or woman to do a thing he does it himself. In every work for his people he is the first worker. He leads because he has laid it down as an unalterable law for himself that he should call others to follow him only where he has actually led. This is not any kind of tactics with him. This he does not do in order to enhance his chances of success. It is the law of his being, the texture of his character. Both Gandhi and Nehru can burn for a cause. But when Nehru burns he burns himself up. That is why he today looks older than Gandhi though he is less than sixty and Gandhi nearing eighty. Looking at Gandhi and Nehru sitting together Gandhi still looks latent with the perpetual energy of youth while Nehru looks worn out, haggard and older. Gandhi conserves his energy, letting it flow out like lava only when he deliberately chooses to do so. Nehru is continually burning up his energy in a life of high tension of body and mind. Gandhi's strength comes from the conquest of calmness. Nehru's is derived from the dynamic moods of agitation and motion. Nehru himself has confessed to a sense of amazement looking at Gandhi and wondering from what hidden springs the man draws his incalculable strength of personality and character. No two people can differ more in most things than Gandhi and Nehru. Gandhi is truly a man of religion. Nehru has no need for religion. His outlook is scientific and modern. Gandhi can draw from the power of faith the strength to go on in the face of every conceivable difficulty and opposition. Nehru is also one of the bravest of men but where he finds himself checkmated he often looks to

THE MAN, GANDHI

Gandhi for inspiration and guidance. Nehru is quick and impatient and Gandhi calm and swift when they take up the challenge of action. It is one of the miracles in the India of today that Gandhi and Nehru are the best of comrades fighting the same great battle for the freedom of India and the world with the same weapons even while they differ so much. It is generally thought that Gandhi has greatly influenced Nehru. This is no doubt true. But what is equally true is that Nehru too has influenced Gandhi. That is how truly great men influence each other. If it is a privilege to influence another, it is equally so to be influenced by another, when both are great personalities. The weak and the futile neither influence nor are influenced. Some day some careful historian of the present times in India will record that the comradeship between Gandhi and Nehru was one of the cardinal factors in the shaping of India's destiny.

IV

A few snap-shots of Gandhiji in his daily life and work might at this stage help to reveal the man in him a little more.

When I went to live in the Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmathi in 1926 I had great good luck in that Gandhiji had decided to stay in the Ashram uninterruptedly for the whole year. Usually this never happened. Though the Satyagraha Ashram was Gandhij's home he was seldom in it, as most of the time he would be touring the country. He is a great traveller and perhaps no Indian has ever travelled so often, so long and so much up and down India as Gandhiji. There is not a district in any of the various provinces of India which he has not visited. 1926 was therefore a lucky year for all those who were resident in the Satyagraha Ashram.

There is one unforgettable picture that comes to me from those days. Every morning and evening Gandhiji went out for fairly long walks. Some of the Ashram inmates and many of the Ashram children used to accompany him in these walks. Indeed it was one of their greatest delights to do so, specially for the children. These children used to keep pace with Gandhiji by running with him most of the time as he walked with his usual long strides. While the elder people used to keep behind Gandhiji during

these walks, the little ones scampered about his legs like so many kittens or puppies. The children took the greatest liberties with him and he used to thoroughly enjoy it. He would shout and laugh with them and as they made faces at him he would do the same thing in return. He would crack endless jokes with them and so right through the walk it was all fun and frolic. One day as I was looking for the party returning from a walk, I heard a great shouting in the distance and a good bit of dust arose from the road as Gandhiji and the children came on at a quicker pace than usual. At first I could not make out what was happening. As the party came nearer I saw before me nothing less than a human idyll of laughter and happiness. All the children in the company were divided into two parties, one on each side of Gandhiji and they were holding in their hands his long bamboo walking stick. Gandhiji himself was seated precariously on the middle of the stick with each of his arms thrown round the necks of the nearest children. They were carrying him and filling the air with their laughter and Gandhiji himself was laughing away for all he was worth, and shouting "Quicker, Quicker". At the time Gandhiji was fifty-seven or fifty-eight years of age and he had already become the world-famous Mahatma.

Even today when Gandhiji goes for his walks he likes nothing like the company of little girls and boys. I think he chooses this company deliberately. His daily walks are among the best of his few relaxations and during such times the little ones give him that fresh touch of life which can rejuvenate a man. One of the secrets of Gandhiji's perpetual youthfulness is that he surrounds himself wherever possible with little girls and boys with whom he him-

self is free with the freedom of childhood. Gandhiji has many little "sweet-hearts" throughout India and even when he is most busy he would answer their little innocent letters, giving them fun for fun and happiness for happiness. Some of these girls and boys who have grown up have treasured these letters of Gandhiji and if someone would collect and publish them they would prove to be a veritable treasure of his humaneness.

I recall another incident in the Satyagraha Ashram which reveals Gandhiji in a different light, showing how hard he can be. A District Congress Secretary from a distant province had come to Sabarmathi to solicit Gandhiji's help in a peculiar difficulty which had overtaken him. This young person had resigned his place as a teacher in a school to take up the work of District Congress Secretary. In his new capacity he was responsible for a good bit of money which came to him as the funds of the Committee. He was an energetic Secretary and had spent during the year of his Secretaryship most of the money lying with him in doing hard Congress work in his district. He was quite an honest man in the eyes of those who worked with him, because he never took a pie for himself. There was only one little flaw in the whole business. He did not keep proper accounts with vouchers and receipts, with the result that at the end of the year the Committee found that nearly a thousand rupees remained unaccounted for in the books. The Committee met and decided that the Secretary should either find a thousand rupees or produce vouchers and receipts for the amount. The Secretary told the Committee that they knew very well how he had spent the money and the Committee retorted that while they would not question his honesty he should either

produce the proper accounts or put down rupees one thousand on the table. After a lot of discussion the Secretary said he would appeal to Gandhiji for protection and so he had come to the Satyagraha Ashram. Gandhiji who listened to the story carefully shook his head vigorously and a hard look came into his face. He said the Committee was perfectly right and that the Secretary should either produce the proper accounts or the money in question. The Secretary said he had no money and that he was a poor man. But Gandhi was unrelenting. He said that every pie of a public fund was a sacred trust and that every pie of it unaccounted for was as good as a pie stolen. With a few sharp questions Gandhiji found out that the man possessed some trifling bit of property and he fastened on it and said that the property should be sold at once and the missing money replaced. The Secretary looked dazed and he could only murmur, "Is it to such a Mahatma as this that I came for protection?" But the matter did not end there. The young man broke down completely and said that he had not even the money to buy the railway ticket to get back to his place. Would not Gandhiji give him at least that help? "No" came again the hard denial. "You are already indebted to the tune of a thousand rupees to your Committee. I have absolutely no money of my own. What funds I have are public funds. If you take money from me now to go home it will only add to your indebtedness." The Secretary asked once again pathetically, "But how am I to get home, even if I have to sell my property to pay the debt?" Quick came, what appeared to be nothing less than, the heartless reply, "You must walk home even if it is a thousand miles by slow stages." As the Secretary came out of Gandhiji's presence he looked

as though he had learnt a lesson which he would never forget in all his life again. It is one of the principles which every one associated with Gandhiji in national work has to learn, that proper accounting of public funds is not merely a matter of efficiency but an inescapable ingredient of character itself. Where a principle is concerned Gandhiji is unyielding like rock and personal sufferings however great will not melt his heart. No price is too great to pay on the part of the wrong doer to correct the wrong done and every wrong which remains uncorrected is a slur on character which is worse than death. All the great saints have had this kind of ruthlessness in dealing with moral turpitude. But perhaps Gandhi is first among the saints to whom insufficient accounting on the part of a man of undoubted honesty is equivalent to thieving and hence something which involves nothing less than moral turpitude.

The next is a story which shows how Gandhiji despises superstitions of every kind even while he is so much a man of faith and a man of religion. If one watches Gandhiji at his congregational prayers one is apt to be carried away by the thought that he cannot altogether be free from superstitions. During these latter days specially several thousands of people attend his congregational prayers under the open sky. Gandhiji will stand up and keeping both his hands lifted above his head clap them together keeping tune with the Kirtans that are sung inviting the people also to join in the clapping. This picture reminds one of the ecstasies of a Chaitanya or a Ramdas. How can a man, who can plunge himself into such emotions, be free altogether from superstitions? But here too Gandhi, as in many other things, rises high above

what is merely apparent about him. The greatest tribute to Gandhiji in this connection is to say that he has never permitted any superstition to grow up around himself in the minds of the people. India is a prolific soil where every kind of superstition can grow around a saint even if that saint is Mahatma Gandhi. But Gandhiji has always put his foot down on any attempt to make him into a god. Recently when in one of the temples in Bengal someone attempted to set up an image of Gandhi and worship it, he would not rest till he had stopped the nonsense. Now this is the best test about a man's attitude to superstitions, whether, he even remotely encourages superstitions about himself. Gandhiji stands this test as no other saint or leader can. Even in modern Europe the great dictators, who have so ruthlessly destroyed many other superstitions have not hesitated to build up superstitions about themselves to achieve personal political credit.

Once when Gandhiji was undertaking one of his great fasts a couple of peasants came to him from a distant village. A child was lying seriously ill in their village home and they suddenly in their despair conceived the idea of taking a pot of water from their well and going to Gandhiji to wash his feet with it and take it back as a miraculous medicine for their ailing child! When these peasants were taken to Gandhiji's presence and he knew of their mission he turned on them with such indignation that they were utterly non-plussed. Even though he was extremely weak from fasting and the Doctors had strictly ordered that he should neither sit up nor talk he did sit up and talk to the two peasants. He poured out his mind to them, telling them that they were degrading themselves and him and God by thinking that their child could be

cured by being made to drink the water with which they intended to wash his feet. Were they so utterly ignorant of the elementary laws of sanitation and health? What they needed was a Doctor's help and not a mouthful of dirtied water. God alone was great and even the so-called greatest of men were like dust before Him. To trust in God implicitly was one thing and to believe in washing a man's feet and using the water as a miraculous cure was an unpardonable superstition in any human being however ignorant. He talked to them in this strain at length. He made them empty their pot of water. When they ultimately were persuaded to leave without executing their design they were no longer in the grip of their old superstition. They went out as enlightened human beings.

Gandhiji has throughout his life shown the way towards a religious outlook in which reason reigns supreme but without putting faith out of court. The only thing taboo in it is superstition of any kind. The highest religious teaching must stand the test of reason and experience, though neither reason nor experience can throw away the strength and the vision that faith can give. With Gandhi faith is neither blind nor the prop of the weak. Faith for him takes a man further than reason and only the strongest can lift it up as the staff with which they can walk along the most difficult of life's pathways. The more one studies Gandhi the more one is apt to wonder how he can reconcile in himself some of those human characteristics which appear so utterly contradictory. But it is of the essence of the man in him that he does effect such an astonishing reconciliation within himself. It might even be said that these contradictions appear as such only when you know him at one exclusive point or other. But when

THE MAN, GANDHI

you know him at all points and understand him in the totality of his personality and character, these contradictions completely disappear and there emerges before our view a great human person in no way cut off from the commonality of mankind nor set apart as some understandable or fantastic creature, but full of the warm and rich emotions of life, capable of reacting vitally to all the varied tones and shades of this earthly life.

V

It was one evening in the Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmathi. The evening prayer was over and as was then usual with him, Gandhiji went stright to his bed. He slept then as always now in the open except in the rains. His cot was in the court-yard in front of his cottage and from it one could see the Sabarmati river with its glittering sandbanks in the moonlight. I was asking Gandhiji some of my questions regarding the technique of non-violence. He was reclining on his pillows but suddenly he sat up to say, "I am not infallible. I have made many mistakes. I still might make many mistakes. But one thing I have never done consciously; of that I am absolutely certain. I have never consciously told a lie or acted a lie. Everything about me might be wrong in the critic's eye but even my worst enemy dare not question that I am a man of truth." When I today remember the context in which Gandhiji said this and the manner in which he said it, I recapture once again the picture of an imperishable memory. His voice was vibrant with emotion and his eyes were full of a clear light. And this ultimately is the truth about Gandhiji, that whatever he is or is not, he is beyond every question a truthful man. Rationalists, so called, have often mocked at him whenever he has said that he was acting in accordance with the dictates of an inner voice. That voice is nothing less nor anything more than the voice of his conscience. The greatest tribute that can be paid to

Gandhiji is that he has never consciously betrayed his own conscience. Of how many leaders in the world today, whose names fill the world with their renown, can it be said that they too never betray their conscience? Some months ago Mr. Stewart Gelder of the *News Chronicle* stayed for a few days in Sevagram. We were once having an animated discussion on the practicability of non-violence. We were sitting on a verandah of the Guest House in Sevagram from where we could see Gandhiji through the open window of his cottage room. Mr. Gelder suddenly got up, walked up and down a little excitedly and pointing his finger at the figure of Gandhi said to me, "You in India can talk of non-violence and truth thanks to that old man sitting there. We in Europe dare not today talk of truth or non-violence. We can only talk of diplomacy and violence. That man there is the only man who has lived through the war without giving up his principles. I sometimes think he would let even his country perish rather than forego his principles of truth and non-violence." I then told him what Gandhiji had said to me years ago on the banks of the Sabarmathi. Mr. Gelder's comment was again characteristic, "I tell you Ramachandran what the old boy said to you about himself was the absolute truth."

The conscience of Gandhi today stands out as verily the conscience of mankind. As in everything else what Gandhi stands for is nothing personal. He either symbolises the finest aspirations of man or nothing. Truth is for him the ultimate goal, and non-violence the only way to it. It is on these two eternal verities that the whole of Gandhi's life, thought and work are founded. Truth is for Gandhi not an abstraction but the living and dynamic sub-

stance of all vital life. Truth is what the highest conscience of man seeks for in order that the life of man on earth is lifted on to a level of exalted honour, integrity and gentleness. Non-violence is no negative virtue but a positive one challenging every man and woman to regulate his or her conduct by principles of mutual love, trust and freedom. Viewed in this manner, truth and non-violence encompass all the great virtues that the saints have dreamt of, as well as the high modern urge to go out into the very midst of life and to accomplish, not individually but collectively, great and revolutionary tasks to remould the whole of life on a new and a more glorious pattern. If Gandhi's conscience stands today for the conscience of mankind it is because Gandhi has made himself more one with mankind than any leader in any country or at any time in human history. It is a constant phrase on Gandhiji's lips that any one who aspires to lead or serve mankind truly must identify himself or herself completely with the life of the common man of the world. If a world-wide vote were taken today as to which leader in all the world represents more truly than any other the common man of the earth, there would undoubtedly be an overwhelming vote for Gandhi.

For Gandhi, his personal identification, in everything that matters, with the life of the common man is not a matter of politics, as with Socialists and Communists, but one of conscience. That is why he never waits for others to do a thing or for the conditions around him to change before he would change. Every change for which he stands for remoulding the social order he brings on himself as the first step in his programme. If he wants to change the whole of the caste system in India, then the first step

is that he himself completely gives up caste and adopts an "untouchable" girl as his own daughter, who grows up along with his children and grand-children without the slightest idea of a caste distinction anywhere in his own household. If he wants to change the whole of the present economic order in India, which has led to the ruination of over seven lacs of villages by going back to village industries in preference to large-scale and capitalistic machine industry, then the first step is that he himself becomes a spinner and weaver using only village-made articles. If he wants to launch out on a nation-wide struggle for freedom against British Imperialism on non-violent lines then the primary step is that he offers himself voluntarily as the first innocent victim to the brute force of the British. It is only after he has plunged into the struggle and after inviting upon himself the utmost suffering that the call will go out to the millions of his countrymen to follow in his wake. If he wants the fullest economic justice to be given to all men and women by the abolition of capitalism and private property, the inevitable first step is once again that he himself before all others must divest himself of all that pertains to capitalism and private property. It is this supreme characteristic of Gandhiji that mirrors his absolute sense of truthfulness. For any man or woman to go to Gandhiji without fully realising that he is a very hard and unbending man of truth will be like someone going up against a wall of granite taking it to be of soft earth or sand.

Gandhi's conception of truth is not however that of the fanatic or of the man who will not see the other point of view. It is here that his non-violence comes into play. But for his non-violence Gandhiji might easily have been

a fanatic or a dictator. But non-violence excludes every idea of fanaticism or dictatorship. This does not mean non-violence has no substance of strength in it. Non-violence as preached and practised by Gandhiji has no trace of weakness anywhere about it. Non-violence is not non-resistance, on the contrary non-violence is a challenge to resist every evil and every injustice; only, the resistance should be wholly on non-violent line. Again, non-violence is not to be equated to a personal or individual virtue. Its application has to be universal. Social, national and even international conflicts have to be raised to a non-violent level before all such conflicts can ultimately cease. The whole of Gandhiji's life and work is the constant practice of such non-violence. He has himself defined non-violence as love in action. Therefore when it is said, as it can truthfully be said of Gandhiji, that the whole of his life and work is one continuous and deliberate practice of non-violence, then the meaning can only be this, that the whole of his life and work is dedicated to the task of making the dynamics of love act and re-act interminably among all men and women. Gandhiji thus rises far above the pre-occupations of a politician or even of a statesman however great. He thus becomes not merely the arch liberator of the Indian people but the path finder of a better life for all. His place is thus among the prophets of humanity, with this difference perhaps, that even as a prophet he has never deserted this earthly life in favour of Paradise but has sought to convert the life here and now into a godly pattern.

Is not Gandhi a great visionary? Many of his critics have called him a visionary. Most of them have meant that he lives with his head in the clouds. Every fact of Gandhi's

life and work however is contrary to such a cheap judgement. And yet Gandhi is undoubtedly a great visionary, but not in the sense that he keeps his head in the clouds. No, very definitely and emphatically not in that sense. Gandhiji has not only vitalised the Indian National Congress, making it into a mighty instrument of battle against British Imperialism, he has also built up great national organisations working among millions of the common people in India. The All India Spinners' Association, The All India Village Industries Association, The Harijan Sevak Sangh, The Hindustani Talimi Sangh, The Hindustani Prachara Sabha and The Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust are mighty national institutions, which he has organised and built up for the service of the common man in India. If any other individual had built up even one of these, he would be entitled to an immortal place in Indian History. There are thousands of whole-time workers who labour day in and day out to organise the Indian masses for a better, happier and more prosperous existence. Among these are many of the finest servants of mankind. Behind the political power of the Indian National Congress is the combined strength of all these organisations with their innumerable branches in rural India. It is these organisations that have built up true mass contact between the people and Congress leadership. All this work has come to be compendiously known as Constructive Work. It is Gandhiji who personally guides these organisations and the extraordinary care with which he often sits over every detail of their work including their accounts will convince any sane critic that, Gandhiji is most certainly not a man who lives merely with his head in the clouds. His feet are firmly planted on the earth and there

are few shrewder men in India than he. At the political table he is a matchless negotiator. One British Prime Minister at least has testified that "Gandhi knows the trick of making the most extraordinary demands in the quietest voice." In every-day affairs also Gandhiji is an uncommonly shrewd person and it is almost impossible for anyone to impose upon him or hoodwink him. In this respect he is the typical "Bania". Indeed if Gandhiji had not inherited the Bania tradition in his blood he might simply have been a pious saint. If he had turned his attention and conviction to business Gandhiji might easily have built up enterprises bigger than those of the Tatas and the Birlas. Thank God he turned his life in the direction of the service of mankind and the liberation of the common man. It is too late in the day for any one to call Gandhi merely a visionary. Here too Gandhiji has given us a truthful judgement upon himself. He has called himself "a practical idealist." The history of India of the last quarter of a century is the history of the achievements of his practical idealism. He has put courage and heart into millions in India. He has made them get up from their knees and look the world in the face. He has inspired confidence and self-reliance even among the "poorest, the lowliest and the lost" in India. Not only that, he has shown the downright way to canalise their new aspirations and energies. He has created a new mind and trained that new mind to realise itself in practical action in every sphere of our national resurgence. He has raised the level of human character in India as only the Buddha could twenty-five centuries ago. More than that, he has set the pattern and the mould for such uplifted human character to pour itself into, compelling by the sweetness and

majesty of his own personal example millions of human beings to put themselves into the stream of such a process. The whole of this achievement has become possible because of the character and personality of Gandhi, in other words because of the "man" Gandhi. That is why the world has to salute one who is more than a saint, more than a leader of his people's liberation, more than even the Mahatma or the Superman of this century. What the world has to salute more than all is Gandhi the man, because it is the man Gandhi who has put the impress of his character and personality in the mind and in the life of myriads of men and women.

VI

Gandhiji is in many ways a simple man. He is unique only in this that he fearlessly lives the truth as he knows the truth. More, he enables countless men and women, often totally unknown, to live according to his own high pattern. This he does without any earthly authority or power. He is not the head of any State nor will he ever consent to be one. He has become a mighty moral force behind the new State in India and is increasingly becoming such a force in international affairs. He has not set up a new religion nor will he ever do so. He has gathered into himself the finest contributions of all religious thought and striving, thus producing a new spiritual synthesis of the utmost significance for the future of a universal human culture. He is not an ascetic who has turned away from life. On the contrary he has drawn the utmost strength from the best in asceticism to bind himself more fully with the life of the common people. Moreover he has kept alive in himself deathlessly and in the midst of the most terrible trials and difficulties the ineffable spirit of laughter. Few people can laugh as he can and few people can infect others with laughter as he can. He is not a narrow-minded and cheerless saint. His tolerance is wide as the sky and deep as the ocean. No saint has ever taken care of his bodily health as this saint of India. To him all ill-health of the body is fatal to the growth of the

spirit. That is why he has nurtured his body on such food as can give the utmost vitality. If such food has been simple it is in consonance with the latest and most scientific discoveries in the realm of dietetics. His daily walks and massages, his careful timings of food and rest, etc., will astonish anyone of the old-world type of ascetics. He has shut out nothing from his physical life except what will weaken it or make it ill. He has shut out nothing from his mental life except what would take away from it the undying strength to battle for the freedom of India and of the common man throughout the world. And his life is like an open book. There are in it no hidden chapters. He has kept it deliberately open, as the only way of truthful life and in order that all those who care to can read it and profit by it. He is today nearing his eightieth year and yet the simple and pure discipline of his life has been so real that, those who see him today at his work can only marvel at the abundant vitality of his body and mind. He has looked after his body and he has looked after his spirit in such a way that each seems to lend unending strength to the other. If his actual achievements till now in the regeneration of his people along manifold lines fills the mind with wonder, it can safely be prophesied that his greatest achievement is yet to come. He has lived greatly and those who know him know that he will some day die even more greatly. Such a man as Gandhi can never die an ordinary death. Like Christ he will some day die on his own Cross. The cross in the world today is bound to be a different cross to the one on which Christ gave up his earthly life. Even as these lines are being written Gandhi has turned away from all politics. He is treading the path of a unique pilgrimage, so unique that none dare prophesy

today where it will lead him and India. In one of the inaccessible villages of East Bengal ravaged by the fires of human hatred and anger he has pitched his humble tent. While political leaders are finding out ways and means of strengthening their respective positions, he has taken upon himself the burden of rebuilding the foundation upon which alone every party and every group in this country must ultimately depend for strength and succour. Many great calls have come to Gandhiji to which he has responded fearlessly and nobly. Perhaps the greatest of all calls has come to him now, to test the power of non-violence for cementing the unity between the Hindu and the Muslim, who are today locked in an inextricable embrace of hate and violence. This problem of Hindu-Muslim unity, as it has developed in India, has a significance for the whole world. He who will or can solve this problem will be able to solve every problem of religious or racial conflict in the world. And what stares the world in the face today is the spectre of a colossal racial war which might burn up the whole of mankind in its insatiable fire. If Gandhi wins in East Bengal he will win throughout the world. Will Gandhi win or perish in East Bengal? Whether he wins or perishes one thing is certain, he will have blazed a trail which will stand as an everlasting monument of the triumph of good over evil. In one sense he can only win and he must win. In a cause like the present in East Bengal there can be no defeat for a man like Gandhi. Christ was not defeated on the Cross. Gandhi will not be defeated in East Bengal.

Let us be grateful that, Gandhi the man is still with us, breathing this earthly air that we too breathe, striving with us to achieve those ends which are dear to us, trea-

THE MAN, GANDHI

ding the path which all of us can tread, even the least amongst us, if only we care to, and above all, giving us the example of a life in which our past and our future stand reconciled, as also many of those claims of the present which appear so contradictory and conflicting.