CHAPTER ONE

AHMADNAGAR FORT

Twenty Months

Ahmadnagar Fort, 13th April 1944

IT IS MORE THAN TWENTY MONTHS SINCE WE WERE BROUGHT HERE, more than twenty months of my ninth term of imprisonment. The new moon, a shimmering crescent in the darkening sky, greeted us on our arrival here. The bright fortnight of the waxing moon had begun. Ever since then each coming of the new moon has been a reminder to me that another month of my imprisonment is over. So it was with my last term of imprisonment which began with the new moon, just after the *Deepavali,* the festival of light. The moon, ever a companion to me in prison, has grown more friendly with closer acquaintance, a reminder of the loveliness of this world, of the waxing and waning of life, of light following darkness, of death and resurrection following each other in interminable succession. Ever changing, yet ever the same, I have watched it in its different phases and its many moods in the evening, as the shadows lengthen, in the still hours of the night, and when the breath and whisper of dawn bring promise of the coming day. How helpful is the moon in counting the days and the months, for the size and shape of the moon, when it is visible, indicate the day of the month with a fair measure of exactitude. It is an easy calendar (though it must be adjusted from time to time), and for the peasant in the field the most-convenient one to indicate the passage of the days and the gradual changing of the seasons.

Three weeks we spent here cut off completely from all news of the outside world. There were no contacts of any kind, no interviews, no letters, no newspapers, no radio. Even our presence here was supposed to be a state secret unknown to any except to the officials in charge of us, a poor secret, for all India knew where we were.

Then newspapers were allowed and, some weeks later, letters from near relatives dealing with domestic affairs. But no

interviews during these 20 months, no other contacts.

The newspapers contained heavily censored news. Yet they gave us some idea of the war that was consuming more than half the world, and of how it fared with our people in India. Little we knew about these people of ours except that scores of thousands lay in prison or internment camp without trial, that thousands had been shot to death, that tens of thousands had been driven out of schools and colleges, that something indistinguishable from martial law prevailed over the whole country, that terror and frightfulness darkened the land. They were worse off, far worse than us, those scores of thousands in prison, like us, without trial, for there were not only no interviews but also no letters or newspapers for them, and even books were seldom allowed. Many sickened for lack of healthy food, some of our dear ones died for lack of proper care and treatment.

There were many thousands of prisoners of war kept in India, mostly from Italy. We compared their lot with the lot of our own people. We were told that they were governed by the Geneva Convention. But there was no convention or law or rule to govern the conditions under which Indian prisoners and detenus had to exist, except such ordinances which it pleased our British rulers to issue from time to time.

Famine

Famine came, ghastly, staggering, horrible beyond words. In Malabar, in Bijapur, in Orissa, and, above all, in the rich and fertile province of Bengal, men and women and little children died in their thousands daily for lack of food. They dropped down dead before the palaces of Calcutta, their corpses lay in the mud-huts of Bengal's innumerable villages and covered the roads and fields of its rural areas. Men were dying all over the world and killing each other in battle; usually a quick death, often a brave death, death for a cause, death with a purpose, death which seemed in this mad world of ours an inexorable logic of events, a sudden end to the life we could not mould or control. Death was common enough everywhere.

But here death had no purpose, no logic, no necessity; it was the result of man's incompetence and callousness, man-made, a slow creeping thing of horror with nothing to redeem it, life merging and fading into death, with death looking out of the shrunken eyes and withered frame while life still lingered for a while. And so it was not considered right or proper to mention it; it was not good form to talk or write of unsavoury topics. To do so was to 'dramatize' an unfortunate situation. False reports

were issued by those in authority in India and in England. But corpses cannot easily be overlooked; they come in the way.

While the fires of hell were consuming the people of Bengal and elsewhere, we were first told by high authority that owing to wartime prosperity the peasantry in many parts of India had too much to eat. Then it was said that the fault lay with provincial autonomy, and that the British Government in India, or the India Office in London, sticklers for constitutional propriety, could not interfere with provincial affairs. That constitution was suspended, violated, ignored, or changed daily by hundreds of decrees and ordinances issued by the Viceroy under his sole and unlimited authority. That constitution meant ultimately the unchecked authoritarian rule of a single individual who was responsible to no one in India, and who had greater power than any dictator anywhere in the world. That constitution was worked by the permanent services, chiefly the Indian Civil Service and the police, who were mainly responsible to the Governor, who was the agent of the Viceroy, and who could well ignore the ministers when such existed. The ministers, good or bad, lived on sufferance and dared not disobey the orders from above or even interfere with the discretion of the services supposed to be subordinate to them.

Something was done at last. Some relief was given. But a million had died, or two millions, or three; no one knows how many starved to death or died of disease during those months of horror. No one knows of the many more millions of emaciated boys and girls and little children who just escaped death then, but are stunted and broken in body and spirit. And still the fear of widespread famine and disease hovers over the land.

President Roosevelt's Four Freedoms. The Freedom from Want. Yet rich England, and richer America, paid little heed to the hunger of the body that was killing millions in India, as they had paid little heed to the fiery thirst of the spirit that is consuming the people of India. Money was not needed it was said, and ships to carry food were scarce owing to war-time requirements. But in spite of governmental obstruction and desire to minimize the overwhelming tragedy of Bengal, sensitive and warm-hearted men and women in England and America and elsewhere came to our help. Above all, the Governments of China and Eire, poor in their own resources, full of their own difficulties, yet having had bitter experience themselves of famine and misery and sensing what ailed the body and spirit of India, gave generous help. India has a long memory, but whatever else she remembers or forgets, she will not forget these gracious and friendly acts.

The War for Democracy

In Asia and Europe and Africa, and over the vast stretches of the Pacific and Atlantic and Indian Oceans, war has raged in all its dreadful aspects. Nearly seven years of war in China, over four and a half years of war in Europe and Africa, and two years and four months of World War. War against fascism and nazism and attempts to gain world dominion. Of these years of war I have so far spent nearly three years in prison, here and elsewhere in India.

I remember how I reacted to fascism and nazism in their early days, and not I only, but many in India. How Japanese agression in China had moved India deeply and revived the age-old friendship for China; how Italy's rape of Abyssinia had sickened us; how the betrayal of Czechoslovakia had hurt and embittered us; how the fall of Republican Spain, after a struggle full of heroic endurance, had been a tragedy and a personal sorrow for me and others.

It was not merely the physical acts of aggression in which fascism and nazism indulged, not only the vulgarity and brutality that accompanied them, terrible as they were, that affected us, but the principles on which they stood and which they proclaimed so loudly and blatantly, the theories of life on which they tried to fashion themselves; for these went counter to what we believed in the present, and what we had held from ages past. And even if our racial memory had forsaken us and we had lost our moorings, our own experiences, even though they came to us in different garb, and somewhat disguised for the sake of decency, were enough to teach us to what these nazi principles and theories of life and the state ultimately led. For our people had been the victims for long of those very principles and methods of government. So we reacted immediately and intensely against fascism and nazism.

I remember how I refused a pressing invitation from Signor Mussolini to see him in the early days of March, 1936. Many of Britain's leading statesmen, who spoke harshly of the fascist Duce in later years when Italy became a belligerent, referred to him tenderly and admiringly in those days, and praised his regime and methods.

Two years later, in the summer before Munich, I was invited on behalf of the Nazi government, to visit Germany, an invitation to which was added the remark that they knew my opposition to nazism and yet they wanted me to see Germany for myself. I could go as their guest or privately, in my own name or incognito, as I desired, and I would have perfect freedom to go

where I liked. Again I declined with thanks. Instead I went to Czechoslovakia, that 'far-away country' about which England's then Prime Minister knew so little.

Before Munich I met some of the members of the British Cabinet and other prominent politicians of England, and ventured to express my anti-fascist and anti-nazi views before them. I found that my views were not welcomed and I was told that there were many other considerations to be borne in mind.

During the Czechoslovak crisis, what I saw of Franco-British statesmanship in Prague and in the Sudetenland, in London and Paris, and in Geneva where the League Assembly was then sitting, amazed and disgusted me. Appeasement seemed to be a feeble word for it. There was behind it not only a fear of Hitler, but a sneaking admiration for him.

And now, it is a curious turn of fate's wheel that I, and people like me, should spend our days in prison while war against fascism and nazism is raging, and many of those who used to bow to Hitler and Mussolini, and approve of Japanese aggression in China, should hold aloft the banner of freedom and democracy and anti-fascism.

In India the change is equally remarkable. There are those here, as elsewhere, 'governmentarians', who hover round the skirts of government and echo the views which they think will be approved by those whose favour they continually seek. There was a time, not so long ago, when they praised Hitler and Mussolini, and held them up as models, and when they cursed the Soviet Union with bell, book, and candle. Not so now, for the weather has changed. They are high government and state officials, and loudly they proclaim their anti-fascism and anti-nazism and even talk of democracy, though with bated breath, as something desirable but distant. I often wonder what they would have done if events had taken a different turn, and yet there is little reason for conjecture, for they would welcome with garlands and addresses of welcome whoever happened to wield authority.

For long years before the war my mind was full of the war that was coming. I thought of it, and spoke of it, and wrote about it, and prepared myself mentally for it. I wanted India to take an eager and active part in the mighty conflict, for I felt that high principles would be at stake, and out of this conflict would come great and revolutionary changes in India and the world. At that time I did not envisage an immediate threat to India: any probability of actual invasion. Yet I wanted India to take her full share. But I was convinced that only as a free country and an equal could she function in this way.

That was the attitude of the National Congress, the one great organization in India which consistently for all these years had been anti-fascist and anti-nazi, as it had been anti-imperialist. It had stood for Republican Spain, for Czechoslovakia, and throughout for China.

And now for nearly two years the Congress has been declared illegal—outlawed and prevented from functioning in any way. The Congress is in prison. Its elected members of the provincial parliaments, its speakers of these parliaments, its ex-ministers, its mayors and presidents of municipal corporations, are in prison.

Meanwhile the war goes on for democracy and the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms.

Time in Prison : The Urge to Action

Time seems to change its nature in prison. The present hardly exists, for there is an absence of feeling and sensation which might separate it from the dead past. Even news of the active, living and dying world outside has a certain dream-like unreality, an immobility and an unchangeableness as of the past. The outer objective time ceases to be, the inner and subjective sense remains, but at a lower level, except when thought pulls it out of the present and experiences a kind of reality in the past or in the future. We live, as Auguste Comte said, dead men's lives, encased in our pasts, but this is especially so in prison where we try to find some sustenance for our starved and locked-up emotions in memory of the past or fancies of the future.

There is a stillness and everlastingness about the past; it changes not and has a touch of eternity, like a painted picture or a statue in bronze or marble. Unaffected by the storms and upheavals of the present, it maintains its dignity and repose and tempts the troubled spirit and the tortured mind to seek shelter in its vaulted catacombs. There is peace there and security, and one may even sense a spiritual quality.

But it is not life, unless we can find the vital links between it and the present with all its conflicts and problems. It is a kind of art for art's sake, without the passion and the urge to action which are the very stuff of life. Without that passion and urge, there is a gradual oozing out of hope and vitality, a settling down on lower levels of existence, a slow merging into non-existence. We become prisoners of the past and some part of its immobility sticks to us.

This passage of the mind is all the easier in prison where action

is denied and we become slaves to the routine of jail-life.

Yet the past is ever with us and all that we are and that we have comes from the past. We are its products and we live immersed in it. Not to understand it and feel it as something living within us is not to understand the present. To combine it with the present and extend it to the future, to break from it where it cannot be so united, to make of all this the pulsating and vibrating material for thought and action—that is life.

Any vital action springs from the depths of the being. All the long past of the individual and even of the race has prepared the background for that psychological moment of action. All the racial memories, influences of heredity and environment and training, subconscious urges, thoughts and dreams and actions from infancy and childhood onwards, in their curious and tremendous mix-up, inevitably drive to that new action, which again becomes yet another factor influencing the future. Influencing the future, partly determining it, possibly even largely determining it, and yet, surely, it is not all determinism.

Aurobindo Ghose writes somewhere of the present as 'the pure and virgin moment,' that razor's edge of time and existence which divides the past from the future, and is, and yet, instantaneously is not. The phrase is attractive and yet what does it mean? The virgin moment emerging from the veil of the future in all its naked purity, coming into contact with us, and immediately becoming the soiled and stale past. Is it we that soil it and violate it? Or is the moment not so virgin after all, for it is bound up with all the harlotry of the past?

Whether there is any such thing as human freedom in the philosophic sense or whether there is only an automatic determinism, I do not know. A very great deal appears certainly to be determined by the past complex of events which bear down and often overwhelm the individual. Possibly even the inner urge that he experiences, that apparent exercise of free will, is itself conditioned. As Schopenhauer says, 'a man can do what he will, but not will as he will.' A belief in an absolute determinism seems to me to lead inevitably to complete inaction, to death in life. All my sense of life rebels against it, though of course that very rebellion may itself have been conditioned by previous events.

I do not usually burden my mind with such philosophical or metaphysical problems, which escape solution. Sometimes they come to me almost unawares in the long silences of prison, or even in the midst of an intensity of action, bringing with them a sense of detachment or consolation in the face of some painful experience. But usually it is action and the thought of action

vhat fill me, and when action is denied, I imagine that I am preparing for action.

The call of action has long been witn me; not action divorced from thought, but rather flowing from it in one continuous sequence. And when, rarely, there has been full harmony between the two, thought leading to action and finding its fulfilment in it, action leading back to thought and a fuller understanding—then I have sensed a certain fullness of life and a vivid intensity in that moment of existence. But such moments are rare, very rare, and usually one outstrips the other and there is a lack of harmony, and vain effort to bring the two in line. There was a time, many years ago, when I lived for considerable periods in a state of emotional exaltation, wrapped up in the action which absorbed me. Those days of my youth seem far away now, not merely because of the passage of years but far more so because of the ocean of experience and painful thought that separates them from to-day. The old exuberance is much less now, the almost uncontrollable impulses have toned down, and passion and feeling are more in check. The burden of thought is often a hindrance, and in the mind where there was once certainty, doubt creeps in. Perhaps it is just age, or the common temper of our day.

And yet, even now, the call of action stirs strange depths within me, and often a brief tussle with thought. I want to experience again 'that lonely impulse of delight' which turns to risk and danger and faces and mocks at death. I am not enamoured of death, though I do not think it frightens me. I do not believe in the negation of or abstention from life. I have loved life and it attracts me still and, in my own way, I seek to experience it, though many invisible barriers have grown up which surround me; but that very desire leads me to play with life, to peep over its edges, not to be a slave to it, so that we may value each other all the more. Perhaps I ought to have been an aviator, so that when the slowness and dullness of life overcame me I could have rushed into the tumult of the clouds and said to myself:

'/ balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind,
In balance with this life, this death."

The Past in its Relation to the Present

This urge to action, this desire to experience life through action, has influenced all my thought and activity. Even sustained think-

ing, apart from being itself a kind of action, becomes part of the action to come. It is not something entirely abstract, in the void, unrelated to action and life. The past becomes something that leads up to the present, the moment of action, the future something that flows from it; and all three are inextricably intertwined and interrelated.

Even my seemingly actionless life in prison is tacked on somehow, by some process of thought and feeling, to coming or imagined action, and so it gains for me a certain content without which it would be a vacuum in which existence would become intolerable. When actual action has been denied me I have sought some such approach to the past and to history. Because my own personal experiences have often touched historic events and sometimes I have even had something to do with the influencing of such events in my own sphere, it has not been difficult for me to envisage history as a living process with which I could identify myself to some extent.

I came late to history and, even then, not through the usual direct road of learning a mass of facts and dates and drawing conclusions and inferences from them, unrelated to my life's course. So long as I did this, history had little significance for me. I was still less interested in the supernatural or problems of a future life. Science and the problems of to-day and of our present life attracted me far more.

Some mixture of thought and emotion and urges, of which I was only dimly conscious, led me to action, and action, in its turn, sent me back to thought and a desire to understand the present.

The roots of that present lay in the past and so I made voyages of discovery into the past, ever seeking a clue in it, if any such existed, to the understanding of the present. The domination of the present never left me even when I lost myself in musings of past, events and of persons far away and long ago, forgetting where or what I was. If I felt occasionally that I belonged to the past. I felt also that the whole of the past belonged to me in the present. Past history merged into contemporary history: it became a living reality tied up with sensations of pain and pleasure.

If the past had a tendency to become the present, the present also sometimes receded into the distant past and assumed its immobile, statuesque appearance. In the midst of an intensity of action itself, there would suddenly come a feeling as if it was some past event and one was looking at it, as it were, in retrospect.

It was this attempt to -discover the past in its relation to the present that led me twelve years ago to write *Glimpses of World History* in the form of letters to my daughter. I wrote rather superficially and as simply as I could, for I was writing for a girl

in her early teens, but behind that writing lay that quest and voyage of discovery. A sense of adventure filled me and I lived successively different ages and periods and had for companions men and women who had lived long ago. I had leisure in jail, there was no sense of hurry or of completing a task within an allotted period of time, so I let my mind wander or take root for a while, keeping in tune with my mood, allowing impression to sink in and fill the dry bones of the past with flesh and blood.

It was a similar quest, though limited to recent and more intimate times and persons, that led me later to write my auto-biography.

I suppose I have changed a good deal during these twelve years. I have grown more contemplative. There is perhaps a little more poise and equilibrium, some sense of detachment, a greater calmness of spirit. I am not overcome now to the same extent as I used to be by tragedy or what I conceived to be tragedy. The turmoil and disturbance are less and are more temporary, even though the tragedies have been on a far greater scale.

Is this, I have wondered, the growth of a spirit of resignation, or is it a toughening of the texture? Is it just age and a lessening of vitality and of the passion of life? Or is it due to long periods in prison and life slowly ebbing away, and the thoughts that fill the mind passing through, after a brief stay, leaving only ripples behind? The tortured mind seeks some mechanism of escape, the senses get dulled from repeated shocks, and a feeling comes over one that so much evil and misfortune shadow the world that a little more or less does not make much difference. There is only one thing that remains to us that cannot be taken awa/: to act with courage and dignity and to stick to the ideals that have given meaning to life; but that is not the politician's way.

Someone said the other day: death is the birthright of every person born—a curious way of putting an obvious thing. It is a birthright which nobody has denied or can deny, and which all of us seek to forget and escape so long as we may. And yet there was something novel and attractive about the phrase. Those who complain so bitterly of life have always a way out of it, if they so choose. That is always in our power to achieve. If we cannot master life we can at least master death. A pleasing thought lessening the feeling of helplessness.

Life's Philosophy

Six or seven years ago an American publisher asked me to write an essay on my philosophy of life for a symposium he was prepar-ing. I was attracted to the idea but I hesitated, and the more

I thought over it, the more reluctant I grew. Ultimately, I did not write that essay.

What was my philosophy of life? I did not know. Some years earlier I would not have been so hesitant. There was a definiteness about my thinking and objectives then which has faded away since. The events of the past few years in India, China, Europe, and all over the world have been confusing, upsetting and distressing, and the future has become vague and shadowy and has lost that clearness of outline which it once possessed in my mind.

This doubt and difficulty about fundamental matters did not come in my way in regard to immediate action, except that it blunted somewhat the sharp edge of that activity. No longer could I function, as I did in my younger days, as an arrow flying automatically to the target of my choice ignoring all else but that target. Yet I functioned, for the urge to action was there and a real or imagined co-ordination of that action with the ideals I held. But a growing distaste for politics as I saw them seized me and gradually my whole attitude to life seemed to undergo a transformation.

The ideals and objectives of yesterday were still the ideals of to-day, but they had lost some of their lustre and, even as one seemed to go towards them, they lost the shining beauty which had warmed the heart and vitalized the body. Evil triumphed often enough, but what was far worse was the coarsening and distortion of what had seemed so right. Was human nature so essentially bad that it would take ages of training, through suffering and misfortune, before it could behave reasonably and raise man above that creature of lust and violence and deceit that he now was? And, meanwhile, was every effort to change it radically in the present or the near future doomed to failure?

Ends and means: were they tied up inseparably, acting and reacting on each other, the wrong means distorting and sometimes even destroying the end in view? But the right means might well be beyond the capacity of infirm and selfish human nature.

What then was one to do? Not to act was a complete confession of failure and a submission to evil; to act meant often enough a compromise with some form of that evil, with all the untoward consequences that such compromises result in.

My early approach to life's problems had been more or less scientific, with something of the easy optimism of the science of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. A secure and comfortable existence and the energy and self-confidence I possessed increased that feeling of optimism. A kind of vague humanism appealed to me.

Religion, as I saw it practised, and accepted even by thinking minds, whether it was Hinduism or Islam or Buddhism or Christianity, did not attract me. It seemed to be closely associated with superstitious practices and dogmatic beliefs, and behind it lay a method of approach to life's problems which was certainly not that of science. There was an element of magic about it, an uncritical credulousness, a reliance on the supernatural.

Yet it was obvious that religion had supplied some deeply felt inner need of human nature, and that the vast majority of people all over the world could not do without some form of religious belief. It had produced many fine types of men and women, as well as bigoted, narrow-minded, cruel tyrants. It had given a set of values to humar life, and though some of these values had no application to-day, or were even harmful, others were still the foundation of morality and ethics.

In the wider sense of the word, religion dealt with the uncharted regions of human experience, uncharted, that is, by the scientific positive knowledge of the day. In a sense it might be considered an extension of the known and charted region, though the methods of science and religion were utterly unlike each other, and to a large extent they had to deal with different kinds of media. It was obvious that there was a vast unknown region all around us, and sciencc, with its magnificent achievements, knew Httlc enough about it, though it was making tentative approaches in that direction. Probably also, the normal methods of sciencc, its dealings with the visible world and the processes of life, were not wholly adapted to the physical, the artistic, the spiritual, and other elements of the invisible world. Life does not consist entirely of what we see and hear and feel, the visible world which is undergoing change in time and space; it is continually touching an invisible world of other, and possibly more stable or equally changeable elements, and no thinking person can ignore this invisible world.

Science does not tell us much, or for the matter of that anything about the purpose of life. It is now widening its boundaries and it may invade the so-called invisible world before long and help us to understand this purpose of life in its widest sense, or at least give us some glimpses which illumine the problem of human existence. The old controversy between science and religion takes a new form—the application of the scientific method to emotional and religious experiences.

Religion merges into mysticism and metaphysics and philosophy. There have been great mystics, attractive figures, who cannot easily be disposed of as self-deluded fools. Yet mysticism (in the narrow sense of the word) irritates me; it appears to be

vague and soft and flabby, not a **rigorous** discipline of **the** mind but a surrender of mental faculties and a living in **a sea of** emotional experience. • The experience may lead occasionally to some insight into inner and less obvious processes, but it is also likely to lead to self-delusion.

Metaphysics and philosophy, or a metaphysical philosophy, have a greater appeal to the mind. They require hard thinking and the application of logic and reasoning, though all this is necessarily based on some premises, which are presumed to be self-evident, and yet which may or may not be true. All thinking persons, to a greater or less degree, dabble in metaphysics and philosophy, for not to do so is to ignore many of the aspects of this universe of ours. Some may feel more attracted to them than others, and the emphasis on them may vary in different ages. In the ancient world, both in Asia and Europe, all the emphasis was laid on the supremacy of the inward life over things external, and this inevitably led to metaphysics and philosophy. The modern man is wrapped up much more in these things external, and yet even be, in moments of crisis and mental trouble often turn.[0] to philosophy and metaphysical speculations.

Some vague or more precise philosophy of life we all **have,** though most of us accept unthinkingly the general attitude **which** is characteristic of our generation and environment. Most **of** us accept also certain metaphysical conceptions as part **of the** faith in which we have grown up. I have not been attracted towards metaphysics; in fact, I have had a certain distaste **for** vague speculation. And yet I have sometimes found a certain intellectual fascination in trying to follow the rigid lines **of** metaphysical and philosophic thought of the ancients **or the** moderns. But I have never felt at case there and have escaped from their spell with a feeling of relief.

Essentially, I am interested in this world, in this life, not in some other world or a future life. Whether there is such a thing as a soul, or whether there is a survival after death or not, I **do** not know; and, important as these questions are, they do not trouble me in the least. The environment in which I have grown up takes the soul (or rather the *alma)* and a future life, the *Karma* theory of cause and effect, and reincarnation for granted. I have been affected by this and so, in a sense, I am favourably disposed towards these assumptions. There might be a soul which survives the physical death of the body, and a theory of cause and effect governing life's actions seems reasonable, though it leads to obvious difficulties when one thinks of the ultimate cause. Presuming a soul, there appears to be some logic also in the theory of reincarnation.

But I do not believe in any of these or other theories and assumptions as a matter of religious faith. They are just intellectual speculations in an unknown region about which we know next to nothing. They do not affect my life, and whether they were proved right or wrong subsequently, they would make little difference to me.

Spiritualism with its seances and its so-called manifestations of spirits and the like has always seemed to me a rather absurd and impertinent way of investigating psychic phenomena and the mysteries of the after-life. Usually it is something worse, and is an exploitation of the emotions of some over-credulous people who seek relief or escape from mental trouble. I do not deny the possibility of some of these psychic phenomena having a basis of truth, but the approach appears to me to be all wrong and the conclusions drawn from scraps and odd bits of evidence to be unjustified.

Often, as I look at this world, I have a sense of mysteries, of unknown depths. The urge to understand it, in so far as I can, comes to me: to be in tune with it and to experience it in its fullness. But the way to that understanding seems to me essentially the way of science, the way of objective approach, though I realise that there can be no such thing as true objectiveness. If the subjective element is unavoidable and inevitable, it should be conditioned as far as possible by the scientific method.

What the mysterious is I do not know. I do not call it God because God has come to mean much that I do not believe in. I find myself incapable of thinking of a deity or of any unknown supreme power in anthropomorphic terms, and the fact that many people think so is continually a source of surprise to me. Any idea of a personal God seems very odd to me. Intellectually, I can appreciate to some extent the conception of monism, and I have been attracted towards the *Advaita* (non-dualist) philosophy of the Vedanta, though I do not presume to understand it in all its depth and intricacy, and I realise that merely an intellectual appreciation of such matters does not carry one far. At the same time the Vedanta, as well as other similar approaches, rather frighten me with their vague, formless incursions into infinity. The diversity and fullness of nature stir me and produce a harmony of the spirit, and I can imagine myself feeling at home in the old Indian or Greek pagan and pantheis tic atmosphere, but minus the conception of God or Gods that was attached to it.

Some kind of ethical approach to life has a strong appeal for me, though it would be difficult for me to justify it logically. I have been attracted by Gandhiji's stress on right means and I think one of his greatest contributions to our public life has

been, this emphasis. The idea is by no means new, but this application of an ethical doctrine to large-scale public activity was certainly novel. It is full of difficulty, and perhaps ends and means are not really separable but form together one organic whole. In a world which thinks almost exclusively of ends and ignores means, this emphasis on means seems odd and remarkable. How far it has succeeded in India I cannot say. But there is no doubt that it has created a deep and abiding impression on the minds of large numbers of people.

A study of Marx and Lenin produced a powerful effect on my mind and helped me to see history and current affairs in a new light. The long chain of history and of social development appeared to have some meaning, some sequence, and the future lost some of its obscurity. The practical achievements of the Soviet Union were also tremendously impressive. Often I disliked or did not understand some development there and it seemed to me to be too closely concerned with the opportunism of the moment or the power politics of the day. But despite all these developments and possible distortions of the original passion for human betterment, I had no doubt that the Soviet Revolution had advanced human society by a great leap and had lit a bright flame which could not be smothered, and that it had laid the foundations for that new civilization towards which the world could advance. I am too much of an individualist and believer in personal freedom to like overmuch regimentation. Yet it seemed to me obvious that in a complex social structure individual freedom had to be limited, and perhaps the only way to read personal freedom was through some such limitation in the social sphere. The lesser liberties may often need limitation in the interest of the larger freedom.

Much in the Marxist philosophical outlook I could accept without difficulty: its monism and non-duality of mind and matter, the dynamics of matter and the dialectic of continuous change by evolution as well as leap, through action and interaction, cause and effect, thesis, antithesis and synthesis. It did not satisfy me completely, nor did it answer all the questions in my mind, and, almost unawares, a vague idealist approach would creep into my mind, something rather akin to the Vedanta approach. It was not a difference between mind and matter, but rather of something that lay beyond the mind. Also there was the background of ethics. I realised that the moral approach is a changing one and depends upon the growing mind and an advancing civilization; it is conditioned by the mental climate of the age. Yet there was something more to it than that, certain basic urges which had greater permanence. I did not like the frequent divorce in communist, as in other, practice between

action and these basic urges or principles. So there was an odd mixture in my mind which I could not rationally explain or resolve. There was a general tendency not to think too much of those fundamental questions which appear to be beyond reach, but rather to concentrate on the problems of life—to understand in the narrower and more immediate sense what should be done and how. Whatever ultimate reality may be, and whether we can ever grasp it in whole or in part, there certainly appear to be vast possibilities of increasing human knowledge, even though this may be partly or largely subjective, and of applying this to the advancement and betterment of human living and social organization.

There has been in the past, and there is to a lesser extent even to-day among some people, an absorption in finding an answer to the riddle of the universe. This leads them away from the individual and social problems of the day, and when they are unable to solve that riddle they despair and turn to inaction and triviality, or find comfort in some dogmatic creed. Social evils, most of which are certainly capable of removal, are attributed to original sin, to the unalterableness of human natu-e, or the social structure, or (in India) to the inevitable legacy of previous births. Thus one drifts away from even the attempt to think rationally and scientifically and takes refuge in irrationalism, superstition, and unreasonable and inequitable social prejudices and practices. It is true that even rational and scientific thought does not always take us as far as we would like to go. There is an infinite number of factors and relations all of which influence and determine events in varying degrees. It is impossible to grasp all of them, but we can try to pick out the dominating forces at work and by observing external material reality, and by experiment and practice, trial and error, grope our way to ever-widening knowledge and truth.

For this purpose, and within these limitations, the general Marxist approach, fitting in as it more or less does with the present state of scientific knowledge, seemed to me to offer considerable help. But even accepting that approach, the consequences that flow from it and the interpretation on past and present happenings were by no means always clear. Marx's general analysis of social development seems to have been remarkably correct, and yet many developments took place later which did not fit in with his outlook for the immediate future. Lenin successfully adapted the Marxian thesis to some of these subsequent developments, and again since then further remarkable changes have taken place—the rise of fascism and nazism and all that lay behind them. The very rapid growth of technology and the practical application of vast developments in

scientific knowledge are now changing the world picture with an amazing rapidity, leading to new problems.

And so while I accepted the fundamentals of the socialist theory, I did not trouble myself about its numerous inner controversies. I had little patience with leftist groups in India, spending much of their energy in mutual conflict and recrimination over fine points of doctrine which did not interest me at all. Life is too complicated and, as far as we can understand it in our present state of knowledge, too illogical, for it to be confined within the four corners of a fixed doctrine.

The real problems for me remain problems of individual and social life, of harmonious living, of a proper balancing of an individual's inner and outer life, of an adjustment of the relations between individuals and between groups, of a continuous becoming something better and higher of social development, of the ceaseless adventure of man. In the solution of these problems the way of observation and precise knowledge and deliberate reasoning, according to the method of science, must be followed. This method may not always be applicable in our quest of truth, for art and poetry and certain psychic experiences seem to belong to a different order of things and to elude the objective methods of science. Let us, therefore, not rule out intuition and other methods of sensing truth and reality. They are necessary even for the purposes of science. But always we must hold to our anchor of precise objective knowledge tested by reason, and even more so by experiment and practice, and always we must beware of losing ourselves in a sea of speculation unconnected with the day-to-day problems of life and the needs of men and women. A living philosophy must answer the problems of to-day.

It may be that we of this modern age, who so pride ourselves on the achievements of our times, are prisoners of our age, just as the ancients and the men and women of medieval times were prisoners of their respective ages. We may delude ourselves, as others have done before us, that our way of looking at things is the only right way, leading to truth. We cannot escape from that prison or get rid entirely of that illusion, if illusion it is.

Yet I am convinced that the methods and approach of science have revolutionized human life more than anything else in the long course of history, and have opened doors and avenues of further and even more radical change, leading up to the very portals of what has long been considered the unknown. The technical achievements of science are obvious enough: its capacity to transform an economy of scarcity into one of abundance is evident, its invasion of many problems which have so far been the monopoly of philosophy is becoming more pronounced.

Space-time and the quantum theory utterly changed the picture of the physical world. More recent researches into the nature of matter, the structure of the atom, the transmutation of the elements, and the transformation of electricity and light, either into the other, have carried human knowledge much further. Man no longer sees nature as something apart and distinct from himself. Human destiny appears to become a part of nature's rhythmic energy.

All this upheaval of thought, due to the advance of science, has led scientists into a new region, verging on the metaphysical. They draw different and often contradictory conclusions. Some see in it a new unity, the antithesis of chance. Others, like Bertrand Russell, say, 'Academic philosophers ever since the time of Parmenides have believed the world is unity. The most fundamental of my beliefs is that this is rubbish.' Or again, 'Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms.' And yet the latest developments in physics have gone a long way to demonstrate a fundamental unity in nature. 'The belief that all things are made of a single substance is as old as thought itself; but ours is the generation which, first of all in history, is able to receive the unity of nature, not as a baseless dogma or a hopeless aspiration, but a principle of science based on proof as sharp and clear as anything which is known.'*

Old as this belief is in Asia and Europe, it is interesting to compare some of the latest conclusions of science with the fundamental ideas underlying the Advaita Vedantic theory. These ideas were that the universe is made of one substance whose form is perpetually changing, and further that the sum-total of energies remains always the same. Also that 'the explanations of things are to be found within their own nature, and that no external beings or existences are required to explain what is going on in the universe,' with its corollary of a self-evolving universe.

It does not very much matter to science what these vague speculations lead to, for meanwhile it forges ahead in a hundred directions, in its own precise experimental way of observation, widening the bounds of the charted region of knowledge, and changing human life in the process. Science may be on the verge of discovering vital mysteries, which yet may elude it. Still it will go on along its appointed path, for there is no end to its journeying. Ignoring for the moment the 'why?' of philosophy, science will go on asking 'how?', and as it finds this oul it gives greater content and meaning to life, and perhaps takes us some way to answering the 'why?'.

**Karl K. Darrow. 'The Renaissance of Physics' (New York, 1936), p. 301.*

Or, perhaps, we cannot cross that barrier, and the mysterious will continue to remain the mysterious, and life with all its changes will still remain a bundle of good and evil, a succession of conflicts, a curious combination of incompatible and mutually hostile urges.

Or again, perhaps, the very progress of science, unconnected with and isolated from moral discipline and ethical considerations, will lead to the concentration of power and the terrible instruments of destruction which it has made, in the hands of evil and selfish men, seeking the domination of others—and thus to the destruction of its own great achievements. Something of this kind we see happening now, and behind this war there lies this internal conflict of the spirit of man.

How amazing is this spirit of man! In spite of innumerable failings, man, throughout the ages, has sacrificed his life and all he held dear for an ideal, for truth, for faith, for country and honour. That ideal may change, but that capacity for self-sacrifice continues, and, because of that, much may be forgiven to man, and it is impossible to lose hope for him. In the midst of disaster, he has not lost his dignity or his faith in the values he cherished. Plaything of nature's mighty forces, less than a speck of dust in this vast universe, he has hurled defiance at the elemental powers, and with his mind, cradle of revolution, sought to master them. Whatever gods there be, there is something godlike in man, as there is also something of the devil in him.

The future is dark, uncertain. But we can see part of the way leading to it and can tread it with firm steps, remembering that nothing that can happen is likely to overcome the spirit of man which has survived so many perils; remembering also that life, for all its ills, has joy and beauty, and that we can always wander; if we know how to, in the enchanted woods of nature.

'What else is wisdom? What of man's endeavour
Or God's high grace, so lovely and so great?
To stand from fear set free, to breathe and wait;
To hold a hand uplifted over Hate;
*And shall not Loveliness be loved for ever?**

The Burden of the Past

The twenty-first month of my imprisonment is well on its way; the moon waxes and wanes and soon two years will have been completed. Another birthday will come round to remind me that I am getting older; my last four birthdays I have spent in prison, here and in Dehra Dun Jail, and many others in the

* *Chorus from 'The Bacchae of Euripides. Gilbert Murray's translation.*

course of my previous terms of imprisonment. I have lost count of their number.

During all these months I have often thought of writing, **felt** the urge to it and at the same time a reluctance. My friends **took** it for granted that I would write and produce another book, as I had done during previous terms of imprisonment. It had almost become a habit.

Yet I did not write. There was a certain distaste for just throwing out a book which had no particular significance. It was easy enough to write, but to write something that was worth while was another matter, something that would not grow stale while I sat in prison with my manuscript and the world went on changing. I would not be writing for to-day or to-morrow but for an unknown and possibly distant future. For -whom would I write? and for when? Perhaps what I wrote would never be published, for the years **1** would spend in prison **were** likely to witness even greater convulsions and conflicts than the years of war that are already over. India herself might be a battle-ground or there might be civil commotion.

And, even if we escaped all these possible developments, it was a risky adventure to write now for a future date, when the problems of to-day might be dead and buried and new problems arisen in their place. I could not think of this World War as just another war, only bigger and greater. From the day it broke out, and even earlier, I was full of premonitions of vast and cataclysmic changes, of a new world arising for better or for worse. What would my poor writing of a past and vanished age be worth then?

All these thoughts troubled and restrained me, and behind them lay deeper questions in the recesses of my mind, to which I could find no easy answer.

Similar thoughts and difficulties came to me during my last term of imprisonment, from October, 1940, to December, 1941, mostly spent in my old cell of Dehra Dun Jail, where six years earlier I had begun writing my autobiography. For ten months there I could not develop the mood for writing, and, I spent" my time in reading or in digging and playing about with soil and flowers. Ultimately I did write: it was meant to be a continuation of my autobiography. For a few weeks I wrote rapidly and continuously, but before my task was finished I was suddenly discharged, long before the end of my four-year term of imprisonment.

It was fortunate that I had not finished what I had undertaken, for if I had done so I might have been induced to send it to a publisher. Looking at it now, I realise its little worth;

how stale and uninteresting much of it seems. The incidents it deals with have lost all importance and have become the debris of a half-forgotten past, covered over by the lava of subsequent volcanic eruptions. I have lost interest in them. What stand out in my mind are personal experiences which had left their impress upon me; contacts with certain individuals and certain events; contacts with the crowd—the mass of the Indian people, in their infinite diversity and yet their amazing unity; some adventures of the mind; waves of unhappiness and the relief and joy that came from overcoming them; the exhilaration of the moment of action. About much of this one may not write. There is an intimacy about one's inner life, one's feelings and thoughts, which may not and cannot be conveyed to others. Yet those contacts, personal and impersonal, mean much; they affect the individual and mould him and change his reactions to life, to his own country, to other nations.

As in other prisons, here also in Ahmadnager Fort, I took to gardening and spent many hours daily, even when the sun was hot, in digging and preparing beds for flowers. The soil was very bad, stony, full of debris and remains of previous building operations, and even the ruins of ancient monuments. For this is a place of history, of many a battle and palace intrigue in the past. That history is not very old, as Indian history goes, nor is it very important in the larger scheme of things. But one incident stands out and is still remembered: the courage of a beautiful woman, Chand Bibi, who defended this fort and led her forces, sword in hand, against the imperial armies of Akbar. She was murdered by one of her own men.

Digging in this unfortunate soil, we have come across parts of ancient walls and the tops of domes and buildings buried far underneath the surface of the ground. We could not go far, as deep digging and archaeological explorations were not approved by authority, nor did we have the wherewithal to carry this on. Once we came across a lovely lotus carved in stone on the side of a wall, probably over a doorway.

I remembered another and a less happy discovery in Dehra Dun Jail. In the course of digging in my little yard, three years ago, I came across a curious relic of past days. Deep under the surface of the ground, the remains of two ancient piles were uncovered and we viewed them with some excitement. They were part of the old gallows that had functioned there thirty or forty years earlier. The jail had long ceased to be a place of execution and all visible signs of the old gallows-tree had been removed. We had discovered and uprooted its foundations, and all my fellow-prisoners, who had helped in this process, rejoiced that we had put away at last this thing of ill omen.

Now I have put away my spade and taken to the pen instead. Possibly what I write now will meet the same fate as my unfinished manuscript of Dehra Dun Jail. I cannot write about the present so long as I am not free to experience it through action. It is the need for action in the present that brings it vividly to me, and then I can write about it with ease and a certain facility. In prison it is something vague, shadowy, something I cannot come to grips with, or experience as the sensation of the moment. It ceases to be the present for me in any real sense of the word, and yet it is not the past either, with the past's immobility and statuesque calm.

Nor can I assume the role of a prophet and write about the future. My mind often thinks of it and tries to pierce its veil and clothe it in the garments of my choice. But these are vain imaginings and the future remains uncertain, unknown, and there is no assurance that it will not betray again our hopes and prove false to humanity's dreams.

The past remains; but I cannot write academically of past events in the manner of a historian or scholar. I have not that knowledge or equipment or training; nor do I possess the mood for that kind of work. The past oppresses me or fills me sometimes with its warmth when it touches on the present, and becomes, as it were, an aspect of that living present. If it does not do so, then it is cold, barren, lifeless, uninteresting. I can only write about it, as I have previously done, by bringing it in some relation to my present-day thoughts and activities, and then this writing of history, as Goethe once said, brings some relief from the weight and burden of the past. It is, I suppose, a process similar to that of psychoanalysis, but applied to a race or to humanity itself instead of to an individual.

The burden of the past, the burden of both good and ill, is over-powering, and sometimes suffocating, more especially for those of us who belong to ve.ry ancient civilizations like those of India and China. As Nietzsche says: 'Not only the wisdom of centuries—also their madness breaketh out in us. Dangerous is it to be an heir.'

What is my inheritance? To what am I an heir? To all that humanity has achieved during tens of thousands of years, to all that it has thought and felt and suffered and taken pleasure in, to its cries of triumph and its bitter agony of defeat, to that astonishing adventure of man which began so long ago and yet continues and beckons to us. To all this and more, in common with all men. But there is a special heritage for those of us of India, not an exclusive one, for none is exclusive and all are common to the race of man, one more especially applicable to

us, something that is in our flesh and blood and bones, that has gone to make us what we are and what we are likely to be.

It is the thought of this particular heritage and its application to the present that has long filled my mind, and it is about this that I should like to write, though the difficulty and complexity of the subject appal me and I can only touch the surface of it. I cannot do justice to it, but in attempting it I might be able to do some justice to myself by clearing my own mind and preparing it for the next stages of thought and action.

Inevitably, my approach will often be a personal one; how the idea grew in my mind, what shapes it took, how it influenced me and affected my action. There will also be some entirely personal experiences which have nothing to do with the subject in its wider aspects, but which coloured my mind and influenced my approach to the whole problem. Our judgments of countries and peoples are based on many factors; among them our personal contacts, if there have been any, have a marked influence. If we do not personally know the people of a country we are apt to misjudge them even more than otherwise, and to consider them entirely alien and different.

In the case of our own country our personal contacts are innumerable, and through such contacts many pictures or some kind of composite picture of our countrymen form in our mind. So I have filled the picture gallery of my mind. There are some portraits, vivid, life-like, looking down upon me and reminding me of some of life's high points—and yet it all seems so long ago and like some story I have read. There are many other pictures round which are wrapped memories of old comradeship and the friendship that sweetens life. And there are innumerable pictures of the mass— Indian men and women and children, all crowded together, looking up at me, and I trying to fathom what lie behind those thousands of eyes of theirs.

I shall begin this story with an entirely personal chapter, for this gives the clue to my mood in the month immediately following the period I have written about towards the end of my autobiography. But this is not going to be another autobiography, though I am afraid the personal element will often be present.

The World War goes on. Sitting here in Ahmadnagar Fort, a prisoner perforce inactive when a fierce activity consumes the world, I fret a little sometimes and I think of the big things and brave ventures which have filled my mind these many years. I try to view the war impersonally as one would look at some elemental phenomenon, some catastrophe of nature, a great earthquake or a flood. I do not succeed of course. But there seems no other way if I am to protect myself from too much hurt and hatred and excitement. And in this mighty manifestation of

savage and destructive nature my own troubles and self sink into insignificance.

I remember the words that Gandhiji said on that fateful evening of August 8th, 1942: 'We must look the world in the face with calm and clear eyes even though the eyes of the world are blood-shot to-day.'