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PAVHARI BAB



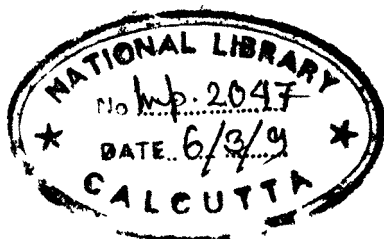
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA



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PAVHARI BABA.

(The celebrated saint of Gazipore).

INTRODUCTION.

TO HELP the suffering world was the gigantic task, which the Buddha gave prominence to, brushing aside for the time being almost all other phases of religion ; yet he had to spend years in self-searching, to realise the great truth of the utter hollowness of clinging unto a selfish individuality. A more unselfish and untiring worker is beyond our sanguinest imagination, yet who had harder struggles to realise the meaning of things than he ? It holds good in all times that the greater the work, the more must have been the power of realisation behind. Working out the details of an already laid

~~ent~~ masterly plan may not require much concentrated thought to back it, but the great impulses are only transformed great concentrations. The theory alone perhaps is sufficient for small exertions, but the push that creates the ripple is very different from the impulsions that raises the wave, and yet the ripple is only the embodiment of a bit of the power that generates the wave.

Facts, naked facts, gaunt and terrible may be ; truth, bare truth, though its vibrations may snap every chord of the heart : motive selfless and sincere, though to reach it limb after limb had to be lopped off ; such are to be arrived at, found, and gained, before on the lower plane of activity the mind can raise huge work-waves. The fine accumulates round itself the gross, as it rolls on through time and becomes manifest, the unseen crystallises into the seen, the possible becomes

the practical, the cause the effect, and thought muscular work.

The cause, held back by a thousand circumstances, will manifest itself sooner or later as the effect; and potent thought, however powerless at present, will have its glorious day on the plane of material activity. Nor is the standard correct which judges of everything by its power to contribute to our sense-enjoyment.

The lower the animal, the more is its enjoyment in the senses, the more it lives in the senses. Civilisation, true civilisation, should mean the power of taking the animal-man out of his sense-life—by giving him visions and tastes of planes much higher,—and not external comforts.

Man knows this instinctively. He may not formulate it to himself under all circumstances. He may form very divergent

opinions, about the life of thought. But it is there, pressing itself to the front, in spite of everything, making him pay reverence to the hoodoo-worker, the medicine-man, the magician, the priest, or the professor of science. The growth of man can only be gauged by his power of living in the higher atmosphere where the senses are left behind, the amount of the pure thought-oxygen his lungs can breathe in, and the amount of time he can spend in that height.

As it is, it is an obvious fact that, with the exception of what is taken up by the necessities of life, the man of culture is loth to spend his time on so-called comforts, and even necessary actions are performed with lessened zeal, as the process moves forward.

Even luxuries are arranged according to ideas and ideals, to make them reflect as

much of thought-life as possible,—and this is Art.

“—As the one fire coming into the universe is manifesting itself in every form, and yet is more beside,”—yes, infinitely more beside ! A bit, only a small bit, of Infinite Thought can be made to descend to the plane of matter, to minister to our comfort,—the rest will not allow itself to be rudely handled. The Superfine always eludes our view and laughs at our attempts to bring it down. In this case Mahomet must go to the mountain, and no ‘nay.’ Man must raise himself to that higher plane, if he wants to enjoy its beauties, to bathe in its light, to feel his life pulsating in unison with the Cause-Life of the Universe.

It is Knowledge that opens the door to regions of wonder ; Knowledge that makes a god of an animal : and that Knowledge

which brings us to That, "knowing which everything else is known" (the heart of all knowledge,—whose pulsation brings life to all sciences,—the Science of Religion) is certainly the highest, as it alone can make man live a complete and perfect life in thought. Blessed be the land which has styled it "Supreme Science !"

The principle is seldom found perfectly expressed in the practical, yet the ideal is never lost. On the one hand it is our duty never to lose sight of the ideal. Whether we can approach it with sensible steps, or crawl towards it with imperceptible motion : on the other hand, the truth is, it is always looming in front of us,—though we try our best to cover its light with our hands before our eyes.

The life of the practical is in the ideal ; it is the ideal that has penetrated the whole

of our lives, whether we philosophise, or perform the hard, everyday duties of life. The rays of the ideal, reflected and refracted in various straight or tortuous lines, are pouring in through every aperture and windhole, and consciously or unconsciously, every function has to be performed in its light, every object has to be seen transformed, heightened, or deformed, by it. It is the ideal that has made us what we are, and will make us what we are going to be. It is the power of the ideal that has enshrouded us, and is felt in our joys or sorrows, in our great acts or mean doings, in our virtues and vices.

If such is the power of the ideal over the practical, the practical is no less potent in forming the ideal. The truth of the ideal is in the practical. The fruition of the ideal has been through the sensing of the practical.

That the ideal is there is a proof of the existence of the practical somehow, somewhere. The ideal may be vaster, yet it is the multiplication of little bits of the practical. The ideal mostly is the summed-up, generalised, practical units.

The power of the ideal is in the practical. Its work on us is in and through the practical. Through the practical, the ideal is brought down to our sense-perception, changed into a form fit for our assimilation. Of the practical we make the steps to rise to the ideal ; on that we build our hopes : it gives us courage to work.

One man who manifests the ideal in his life is more powerful than legions, whose words can paint it in most beautiful colours, and spin out the finest principles.

Systems of philosophy mean nothing to mankind, or at best only intellectual

gymnastics unless they are joined to Religion and can get a body of men struggling to bring them down to practical life with more or less success. Even systems having not one positive hope, when taken up by groups and made somewhat practical need always a multitude, and the most elaborate positive systems of thought withered away without it.

Most of us cannot keep our activities on a par with our thought-lives. Some blessed ones can. Most of us seem to lose the power of work as we think deeper, and the power of deep thought if we work more. That is why most great thinkers have to leave unto time the practical realisation of their great ideals. Their thoughts must wait for more active brains to work them out and spread. Yet as we write comes before us a vision of him, the charioteer of Arjuna, standing on his chariot

between the contending hosts, his left hand curbing the fiery steeds,—a mail-clad warrior, whose eagle-glance sweeps over the vast army, and as if by instinct weighs every detail of the battle array of both parties, at the same time that, as it were,—we hear falling from his lips, and thrilling the awe-struck Arjuna, that most marvellous secret of work, “He who finds rest in the midst of activity, and activity in rest, he is the wise amidst men, he the Yogi, he is the doer of all work.”

This is the IDEAL complete. But few ever reach it. We must take things as they are, therefore, and be contented to piece together different aspects of human perfection, developed in different individuals.

In Religion, we have the man of intense thought, of great activity in bringing help to others, the man of boldness and daring self-realisation, and the man of meekness and humility

CHAPTER II.

THE subject of this sketch was a man of wonderful humility and intense self-realisation.

Born of Brahman parents in a village near Guzi, Benares, Pavhari Baba, as he was called in after life, came to study and live with his uncle in Gazipore when a mere boy.

At present, Hindu ascetics are split up into the main divisions of Sannyasins, Yogins, Vairagins, and Panthis. The Sannyasins are the followers of advaitism after Sankaracharya ; the Yogins, though following the advaita system, are specialised as practising the different systems of Yoga ; the Vairagins are the dualistic disciples of Ramanujacharya and others ; the Panthis, professing either philosophy, are orders founded during

the Mohammedan rule. The uncle of Pavhari Baba belonged to the Ramanuja or Sri sect, and was a naisthik Brahmacharin, *i.e.*, one who takes the vow of life-long celibacy. He had a piece of land on the banks of the Ganges, about two miles to the north of Gazipur, and had established himself there. Having several nephews, he took Pavhari Baba into his home, and adopted him to succeed to his property and position.

Not much is known of the life of Pavhari Baba at this period. Neither does there seem to have been any indication of those peculiarities which made him so well-known in after years. He is remembered merely as a diligent student of Vyakarana and Nyaya, and the theology of his sect, and as an active lively boy, whose jollity at times found vent in hard practical jokes at the expense of his fellow students.

Thus the future saint passed his young days, going through the routine duties of Indian students of the old school ; and except that he showed more than ordinary application to his studies, and a remarkable aptitude for learning languages, there was scarcely anything in that open, cheerful, playful student life to foreshadow the tremendous seriousness which was to culminate in a most curious and awful sacrifice, when it had become to everybody only a rumour of the past.

At this time something happened which made the young scholar feel, perhaps for the first time, the serious import of life, and made him raise his eyes, so long rivetted on books, to scan his mental horizon critically, and crave for something in religion which was a fact, and not mere book-doxa. His uncle passed away. One face, on which all the love

of that young heart was concentrated, had gone, and the ardent boy, struck to the core with grief, determined to supply the gap with a vision that can never change.

In India, for everything we want a Guru. Books, we Hindus are persuaded, are only outlines. The living secrets, must be handed down from Guru to disciple, in every art, in every science, much more so in religion.

From time immemorial earnest souls in India have always retired to secluded spots to carry on uninterrupted their study of the mysteries of the inner life, and even today there is scarcely a forest, a hill, or a sacred spot which rumour does not consecrate as the abode of a great sage.

Then again the saying is well-known—

“The water is pure that flows,

The monk is pure that goes.”

As a rule, those who take to the celibate

religious life in India spend a good deal of it in journeying through various countries of the Indian continent, visiting different shrines,—thus keeping themselves from rust as it were, and at the same time bringing religion to the door of everyone. A visit to the four great places, situated in the four corners of India, is considered almost necessary to all who renounce the world.

All these considerations may have had weight with our young Brahmacharin, but we are sure that the chief among them was the thirst for knowledge. Of his travels we know but little, except that, from his knowledge of Dravidian languages, in which a good deal of the literature of his sect is written, and his thorough acquaintance with the old Bengali of the Vaishnavas of Sri Chaitanya's order, we infer that his stay in Southern India and Bengal could not have been very short.

But on his visit to one place, the friends of his youth lay great stress. It was on the top of mount Girnar in Kathiawad, they say, that he was first initiated into the mysteries of practical Yoga.

It was this mountain which was so holy to the Buddhists. At its foot is the huge rock on which is inscribed the first-deciphered edict of the "divinest of monarchs," Asoka. Beneath it, through centuries of oblivion, lay the conclave of gigantic stupas, forest-covered, and long taken for hillocks of the Girnar range. No less sacred is it still held by the sect of which Buddhism is now thought to be a revised edition, and which strangely enough did not venture into the field of architectural triumphs till its world conquering descendant had melted away into modern Hinduism.

CHAPTER III.

GIRNAR is celebrated amongst Hindu as having been sanctified by the stay of the great Avadhuta Guru Dattatreya, and rumour has it that great and perfected Yogis are still to be met with by the fortunate on its top.

The next turning-point in the career of our youthful Brahmacharin we trace on the banks of the Ganges somewhere near Benares, as the disciple of a Sannyasin who practised Yoga, and lived in a hole dug into the high bank of the river. To this Yogi can be traced the after-practice of our saint, of living inside a deep tunnel, dug out of a piece of ground on the bank of the Ganges near Gazipore.

Yogis have always inculcated the

advisability of living in caves or other spots where the temperature is even, and where sounds do not disturb the mind.

We also learn that he was about the same time studying the Advaita system under a Sannyasin in Benares.

After years of travel, study, and discipline, the young Brahmacharin came back, to the place where he had been brought up. Perhaps his uncle, if alive, would have found in the face of the boy, the same light which of yore a greater sage saw in that of his son, and exclaimed, "Child, thy face today shines with the glory of Brahman !" But those that welcomed him to his home were only the companions of his boyhood,—most of them gone into, and claimed for ever by, the world of small thoughts and eternal toil.

Yet there was a change, a mysterious,—to them an awe-inspiring change—in the

whole character and demeanour of that schoolday friend and playmate whom they had been wont to understand. But it did not arouse in them emulation, or the same research. It was the mystery of a man who has gone beyond this world of trouble and materialism, and this was enough. they instinctively respected it, and asked no questions.

Mean while the peculiarities of the saint began to grow more and more pronounced. He had a cave dug into the ground, like his friend near Benares, and began to go into it and remain there for hours. Then began a process of the most awful dietary discipline. The whole day he worked in his little ashrama, conducted the worship of his beloved Ram Chandra, cooked good dinners,—in which art he is said to have been extraordinarily proficient,—distributed the whole

of the offered food amongst his friends and the poor, looked after their comforts till night came and when, they were in their beds, the young man stole out, crossed the Ganges by swimming, and reached the other shore. There he would spend the whole night in the midst of his practices and prayers, come back before day-break and wake up his friends, and then begin once more the routine business of "worshipping others," as we say in India.

His own diet, in the meanwhile, was being attenuated every day, till it came down, we are told to a handful of bitter nim leaves, or a few podes of red pepper daily. Then he gave up going nightly to the woods on the other bank of the river, and took more and more to his cave. For days and months, we are told, he would be in the hole, wrapped up in meditation, and then come out. Nobody

knows what he subsisted on during these long intervals, so the people called him Pava-ahari, or air-eater, Baba or father.

He would never during his life leave this place,—once however he was so long inside the cave that people gave him up as dead, when, after a long time, the Baba emerged, and gave a Bhandara to a large number of Sadhus.

When not absorbed in his meditations, he would be living in a room above the mouth of his cave, and during this time he would receive visitors. His fame began to spread, and to Rai Gagan Chandra Rai Bahadoor of the Opium Department, Gazipore,—a gentleman whose innate nobility and spirituality have endeared him to all,—we owe our introduction to the saint.

Like many others in India, there was no striking or stirring external activity in this

life. It was one more example of that Indian ideal of teaching through life and not through words, and that truth bears fruit in those lives only which have become ready to receive. Persons of this type are entirely averse to preaching what they know, for they are convinced for ever that it is internal discipline alone that leads to truth, and not words. Religion to them is no motive to social conduct, but an intense search after, and realization of, *Truth* in this life.

They deny the greater potentiality of one moment over another, and, every moment in eternity being equal to every other, they insist on seeing the truths of Religion face to face now and here, not waiting for death.

The present writer had occasion to ask the saint the reason of his not coming out of his cave to help the world. At first, with

his native humility and humour, he gave the following strong reply :--

“A certain wicked person was caught in some criminal act by somebody, and had his nose cut off as a punishment. Ashamed to show his noseless features to the world, and disgusted with himself he fled into a forest, and there spreading a tiger-skin on the ground, he would feign deep meditation, whenever he thought any body was about. This conduct instead of keeping people off, drew them in crowds to pay their respects to this wonderful saint, and he found that his forest-life had brought him once again an easy living. Thus years went by. At last the people around became very eager to listen to some instruction from the lips of the silent meditative saint, and one young man was specially anxious to be initiated into the order. It came to such a pass that anymore delay in

that line would undermine the reputation of the saint. So one day he broke his silence, and asked the enthusiastic young man to bring on the morrow a sharp razor with him. The young man, glad at the prospect of the great desire of his life being speedily fulfilled, came early the next morning with the razor. The noseless saint led him to a very retired spot in the forest, took the razor in his hand, opened it, and with one stroke cut off his nose, repeating in a solemn voice, 'Young man ! this has been my initiation into the order. The same I give to you. Do you transmit it diligently to others when the opportunity comes !' The young man could not divulge the secret of this wonderful initiation for shame, and carried out to the best of his ability the injunctions of his master. Thus a whole sect of nose-cut saints spread over the country. Do

you want me to be the founder of another such ?”

Later on, in a more serious mood, another query brought the answer,—“Do you think that physical help is the only help possible ? Is it not possible that one mind can help other minds, even without the activity of the body ?”

When asked on another occasion why he, a great Yogi, should perform Karma, as pouring oblations into the sacrificial fire, and worshipping the image of Sri Raghunathji, which are only meant for beginners, the reply came, “why do you take for granted that everybody makes Karma for his own good ? Can one not perform Karma for others ?”

Then again, everyone has heard of the thief who had come to steal, in his ashrama and who at the sight of the saint got frightened

and ran away, leaving the goods he had stolen in a bundle behind ; how the saint took the bundle up, ran after the thief, and came up to him after miles of hard running ; how the saint laid the bundle at the feet of the thief, and with folded hands and tears in his eyes asked his pardon for his own intrusion and begged hard for his acceptance of the goods, since they belonged to him, and not to himself.

We are also told, on reliable authority, how once he was bitten by a cobra and though he was given up for hours as dead, revived, and when his friends asked him about it only replied that the cobra "was a messenger from the Beloved."

And well may we believe this, knowing as we do the extreme gentleness, humility, and love of his nature. All sorts of physical illness were to him only "Messengers from

the Beloved," and he could not even bear to hear them called by any other name, while himself almost under tortures from them.

This silent love and gentleness had conveyed themselves to the people around, and those who have travelled through the surrounding villages can testify to the unspoken influence of this wonderful man.

Of late he did not show himself to anyone. When out of his underground retiring-place, he would speak to people with a closed door between. His presence above ground was always indicated by the rising smoke of oblations in the sacrificial fire, or the noise of getting things ready for worship.

One of his great peculiarities was his entire absorption at the time in the task in hand, however trivial. The same amount of care and attention were bestowed in clearing a copper pot as in the worship of Sri

Raghunathji, he himself being the best example of the secret he once told us of work, "The means should be loved and cared for as if it were the end itself."

Neither was his humility any kindred of that which means pain and anguish or self-abasement. It sprang naturally from the realisation of that which he once so beautifully explained to us, "O King ! the Lord is the wealth of those who have nothing,—yes, of those," he continued, "who have thrown away all desires of possession, even that of one's own soul."

He could never directly teach, as that would be assuming the role of a teacher, and placing himself in a higher position than another. But once the spring was touched, the fountain welled up infinite wisdom, yet always the replies were indirect.

In appearance he was tall and rather

fleshy, had but one eye and looked much younger than his real age. His voice was the sweetest we have ever heard. For the last ten years or more of his life he had withdrawn himself entirely from the gaze of mankind. A few potatoes and a little butter were placed behind the door of his room, and sometimes during the night this was taken in when he was not in samadhi, and living above ground. When inside his cave, he did not require even these.

Thus this silent life went on, witnessing to the science of Yoga, and a living example of purity, humility, and love.

The smoke which, as we have said already, indicated his coming out of samadhi, one day smelled of burning flesh. The people around could not surmise anything, till the smell became overpowering, and the smoke was seen to rise up in volumes. Then they

broke open the door, and found that the great yogi had offered himself as the last oblation of his sacrificial fire, and very soon a heap of ashes was all that remained of his body.

Let us remember the words of Kalidas,—
“Fools blame the actions of the great, because they are extraordinary, and their reasons past the finding-out of ordinary mortals.”

Yet, knowing him as we do, we can only venture to suggest that the saint saw his last moments come, and not wishing to cause trouble to any, even after death, performed this last sacrifice of an Arya in full possession of body and mind.

The present writer owes a deep debt of gratitude to the departed saint and dedicates these lines, however unworthy, to the memory of one of the greatest masters he has loved and served.