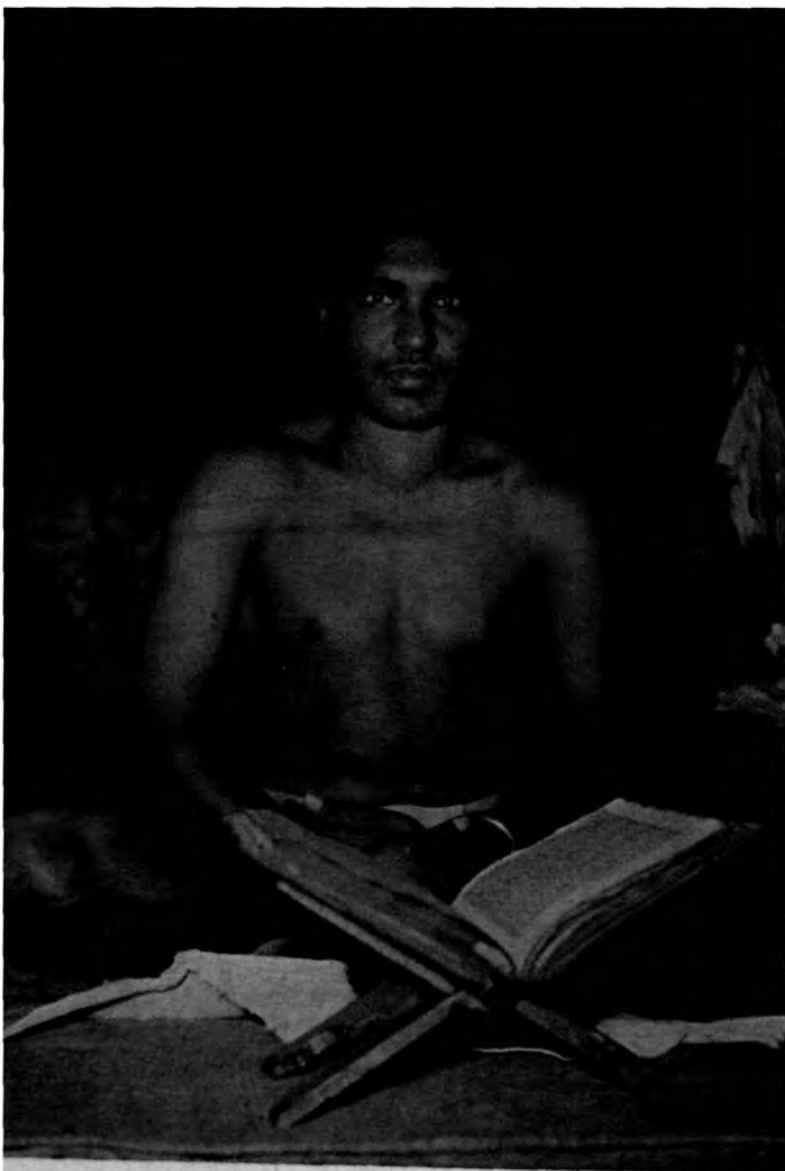


NAKED THEY PRAY

By the same author

SIERRA LEONE STORY

THIS IS KASHMIR



The cave sadhu. "His physique was magnificent; the pupils of his eyes reflected the colours around us."

Naked They Pray

by

PEARCE GERVIS

Author of *This is Kashmir*

*With 2 colour plates and 24 pages
of photographs by the author*



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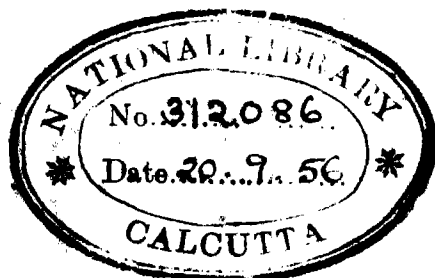
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To
DAVID
WHO SHARED WITH ME
THESE TRAVELS, SEARCHES,
DISCOVERIES AND EXPERIENCES

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INTRODUCTION

IN INDIA during the latter war years I had dabbled in Yoga asanas, treating them as physical training exercises, gymnastics; asanas are in actual fact postures of gymnastics. At that time I was just amused by the other aspects of Yoga teaching, meditation, breath-control, concentration, and so on, that I heard about. The sadhus I had seen, if not obvious rogues and vagabonds, I considered to be either cranks or completely mad. I had from time to time read books of the sort to be bought on any pavement bookstall in India, and it may be because of the poor production of these books or the odd people who presented the Yoga practices to me that I was not in the least impressed.

There were two incidents, though, which brought me into close contact with sadhus, or "holy men" as they are sometimes called, and which caused me to wonder. The first was during the last year of British rule over India. As the train was pulling out of Agra station for Delhi, the door of the air-conditioned compartment of which I was the sole occupant was pulled open and in scrambled a near-naked ash-covered sadhu. He carried a begging bowl, brass bucket, and iron fire tongs in one hand, while a tiger skin was slung over his shoulder. It was impossible to bundle him out of the by then fast-moving train as I would certainly have done in spite of the current anti-British "Quit India" cries, and I had no alternative but to suffer his presence. He squatted on his tiger skin at the other end of the compartment and after a long time spoke to me in English. It all ended in a discourse on Hindu religion, followed by a most interesting and amazing demonstration of the principal asanas, and looking back to that time I am now certain that there were few which

were not demonstrated, in many cases in slow motion, for my sole benefit.

The other occasion was since India's independence, when, having secured a window seat in a Madras to Delhi 'plane, among the last passengers to enter were a very learned and highly respected Government Minister and his secretary who took the two vacant seats in front of mine; then, while I looked out of the window as the 'plane's door was being closed, I realized that the last vacant seat, that next mine, was being occupied. A sadhu wearing a thin loincloth was spreading an antelope skin on the seat. When its position was to his liking, he sat down, drew his legs up tailor fashion, fixed his seat belt, and looked straight ahead as we took off. When the indicator request that belts should be fixed was extinguished, he removed the belt together with his simple loincloth, and sat there, his eyes open but unseeing—in meditation. A man in the twenties, his physique was superb, his countenance intelligent and handsome, his hair long, and on his body, though it was not ash-covered, there were smears of sandal paste here and there, with three lines of it drawn across his forehead. He was spotlessly clean. After a while the secretary turned round and spoke to him, then handed him a note pad, which he returned after writing something on it. In Delhi I afterwards discovered that he was the private priest and adviser—spiritually—of the devout Minister. An Oxford M.A., this sadhu had not spoken for many months, a penance he had undertaken for something he desired of the god. I afterwards saw him sitting as a model for the artist wife of a diplomat. I heard his exquisite playing of the sitar—a sweet and mellow-toned many-stringed Indian musical instrument. I heard him break his silence and sing lovely songs to his own accompaniment, then in silver and golden voices recite the poems of many English and Scottish poets. We talked, and I discovered that he was far from being a madman; now that he has given up his sadhu life and returned to the world, it would be difficult to declare that he was even a crank.

Just before meeting him I had come across other books, those written by Europeans and Americans who had "heard a voice", "sat at the feet of a guru", and so forth; they succeeded in putting me right off the subject. It was only when through him I discovered the writings of one or two authors who had searched, watched, and not actually become sadhus, that my interest in Yoga sprang to life. It became an interest which grew and, just as they had done, I started searching. I have never in my life sat at the feet of any guru—or teacher; I cannot offer the reader a frontispiece of myself dressed as a sadhu: I have talked to these people as man to man, listening and watching, frankly discussing, seeking out and probing. I have read the books they have offered me, argued with them as to the real meaning of that which was written, pointing out that no two translators are in agreement, and with them I have searched, sorted, and sifted. I now know that the few—and unfortunately there are so very few—of those who are really sincere and may be spoken of as Masters of Yoga, have discovered the secrets of a science which has been near lost, and of which so little is known in this incredible modern age when the impossible of one day becomes near commonplace the next.

I have little doubt that this science called Yoga was one which in the dim and ancient past was understood and practised by man who had advanced infinitely further than we have yet gone. Who knows but that by his previous scientific discoveries and the improper use of such destructive powers as have now become known to us man did not then almost obliterate himself from the face of this earth?

Man uses but a part of his brain; the Yogis say a third, but they believe that by their practices they make use of that part which is latent in the ordinary man.

I will admit that some of that which I heard them declare to be possible, I still need to be convinced is possible. My feet were always firmly on the ground; I did not wear saffron robes; I did not smear my body with ashes, nor allow my hair to grow long and become matted, and I am pretty certain that no one looks

twice at me in the street as a result of my searchings into, and experiences of, the Yoga practices.

I found among those saffron-clothed ones—yes, and naked ones also—who showed me the way, so many sincere friends, friends of a kind who ask nothing of one, and who are not offended if they do not hear from you for a year or so. But these men need to be sought out; most of them have deliberately found solitude; others—the gurus—only respond when they feel within themselves (and in this they believe they are guided by the god) that there is an affinity of a sort between themselves and the one they meet, that he has been sent to them for a special purpose. Only then, when they are certain beyond all possible doubt, do they speak, and I am very sure that by an intuition they are able to tell if the pupil, the seeker, is sincere in his quest or just another inquisitive tourist with a camera and a pad collecting pictures and notes with which to amuse his friends back home.

Only now, as those who translate their ancient books and those who seek out the sages and gurus return to the outside world to make their discoveries common knowledge, is it realized that the Yogis knew about the circulation of blood throughout the body many hundreds of years before Harvey discovered it; that they knew that the pulse beats were those of the heart, and had discovered that these could be made stronger or weaker by breath control, as well as exciting or slowing down the nerves through the mind. Meckel's discovery and Schuff's later experiments with the thyroid gland were not new knowledge to them; they were aware of its existence and also of the other glands responsible for the working and growth of the body; they gave them different names, but they are all there in the ancient books, the pituitary being called "The Nector Rayed Moon", the phineal "The Eye of Shiva", and so on.

Their *asanas* and other exercises were devised either to develop, strengthen, or retard certain organs, nerves, and parts of the body, to overcome certain deformities and the debilities

consequent upon advancing age, as well as ensuring vigour and vitality or enduring youth.

They knew of the nervous system, and of the spinal cord, and they gave them their own names and knew more about their uses than we have yet discovered. Self-hypnotism as well as the state of trance were known to the Yogis thousands of years ago, as also was their practice of "getting behind one's own mind".

They were well aware of the existence and functions of those organs which are responsible for supplying the body with air and with the many different fluids which are necessary for its existence and growth. They knew that by the development of those organs, by slowing down or stopping the flow of certain fluids, the life of man could be lengthened and rejuvenation become possible, and again they devised and practised physical, mental, and breath-control exercises or contortions in order to achieve that end. They had discovered a power latent in man and as yet only practised by the few, where by a combination of certain physical and concentrated mental practices, he is alone able to control the generally accepted purpose of an organ so that it is made to function in the reverse manner, and by so doing prevent the loss of that which is life; they maintain that by so doing he is able to extend his years upon this earth.

Eighty-four asanas, or postures, are now known. It is said by the Yogis that these are all that were passed down to them of the original eighty-four times ten thousand which the Lord Shiva had himself taken up "in the beginning" before he created the human species.

With the prevailing climatic, natural, and economical conditions contributing their forces in the various countries and among the many peoples of the world, their standards of honour, morals, and hygiene differ considerably: that which would be considered natural and as such acceptable to the one being thought indelicate, repulsive, or even obscene to others. So it is with the practice of Yoga; it is a science which has its home in India, and therefore contains the moral and hygienic

code of that country—but much of it is that code which prevailed many centuries ago, the Yogi sadhu following closely the teachings of his ancient books and those imparted to him by his guru as passed down from one to another unaltered through the ages. I therefore found myself faced with the task of writing a book describing certain postures, control, and purification acts in such a manner that they would not appear objectionable to the Westerner. I do not think that in doing so I have failed to describe them to the full. When this has not been possible I have quoted the translated text of the original ancient Hindu writings.

I do not pretend that this book is a complete treatise of the science of Yoga. It is just the story of one who sought to discover the wonders which without a doubt lie hidden deep within it. The material gathered together is here given as I discovered it, unravelled it, and at times even practised it: with me the reader will be able gradually to advance towards at least some understanding and enlightenment. If after going through these pages there is kindled a desire to know more, then there are some most excellent books written by Europeans as well as Indians explaining in detail step by step the Yoga physical practices and spiritual teachings, but I do most seriously pass on to the reader the same warning as was first given me, that the exercises, whether they be physical or mental, should only be performed under the guidance of an experienced teacher, and that very few such gurus are to be found outside India.

PEARCE GERVIS

Rishikesh,
Himalayas,
India

CHAPTER ONE

A LITTLE over a hundred miles to the north-east of Delhi, the capital of India, lies the sacred town of Hardwar, sacred to the Hindus because it is here that the River Ganges—known to most of them as Mother Ganga—issues forth from the mighty Himalayas into the plains of India to gather to herself many tributaries as she moves down towards the sea past Calcutta, in her flow distributing her lifeblood to millions who are fortunate enough to dwell near her banks.

Standing in Hardwar, the Hindu pilgrim will recollect the oft-quoted words of an ancient sacred script, the Skanda Purana, "He who thinks of Himachal, though he should not behold him, is greater than he who performs all worship in Kashi (Benares). In a hundred ages of the gods I could not tell thee of the glories of Himachal. As the dew is dried up by the morning sun, so are the sins of mankind by the sight of Himachal." And now the pilgrim actually gazes at the distant sacred Himalayas as he stands on the banks of the holy Ganges, and does the precious book not say that his sins will be dried up? And the pilgrim bathes in the crystal, cool waters of Mother Ganga, for is it not known by all Hindus that to do so purifies even the most frightening and painful disease, besides washing away all a man's past sins, however terrible they may have been?

These same clear waters of the mighty river are used to wash and purify the lifeless bodies of the Hindus before they are cremated on the banks of the great river; from Hardwar gallons of the precious liquid are carried away in small brass pots which are to be bought in the bazaar, in bottles or in sealed cone-shaped containers which hold about half a cupful. We are assured that the waters of that sacred river will never go bad, and

that that which is taken on board in the tanks of liners in Calcutta is as sweet when weeks after it reaches distant ports as when it left India. These small containers are presented with great solemnity and received with sincere gratitude by friends and relations in the plains of India and in the far south, and carefully kept to be used for ceremonial occasions maybe years later, possibly to be opened in order that part might be sprinkled on the body of one who has passed on to another life, the remainder being poured into the mouth, so to ensure purification of both the outside and inside of that casket which was once man.

Here in Hardwar will be found one large bathing ghat surrounded by tall hotels with many small rooms overlooking it, and with white marble steps leading down to the fast-flowing air-clear shallow river. There are thick chains stretched across for the aged and the portly to cling to as they take their dip in the waters, and so prevent their bodies as well as their sins being washed away. The women bathe fully clad in their saris, garments which usually flatter, but when wet cling to the body to reveal the younger ones' lovely figures, the middle-aged ones' uncontrolled layers of fat, the old ones' skin and bones. The men bathe bare to the waist and wrap around them a dhoti, a long cloth which hangs over the legs, its winding depending upon the part of the country from which they come. All that they now wear above the waist is a length of cotton string—the sacred thread—and many of those who have come from afar especially to take the dip in the sacred waters, and always those who come at certain festival times, have had their heads shaven except for a short tail growing from the crown.

Many will be carrying small leaf boats filled with flowers to be placed with great reverence on the waters so that they may float away on the swift cool river while the giver holds palms together, with eyes closed in prayer. Others cast coins into the water, or feed the hundreds of great sacred fish, weighing up to thirty pounds each, which fight among themselves for any food thrown to them, possibly from the white bridge above.

Among the bathers may be seen an old man holding in one hand a sort of tin plate hanging on three chains rather like half a scale balance; this he skids along on the bed of the river. In his other hand he has a prod on the end of a long stick. He scoops up a plateful of stones, sorts them over with the prod, gradually casting them off the plate, and then pockets the coins which remain. I was assured that he makes quite a good living out of it.

At night the leaf boats will each be lit with a small candle to drift away so that there are as though hundreds of little twinkling golden stars on the river's surface. In the background and overlooking the whole site, vivid in their colours made brilliant with electric lights, are the spotlessly clean temples from which issue wailing music, and the low-pitched chanting of many priests. Occasionally there is a flash of reflected light from the highly polished brass tray on which the priest carries all the impedimenta required for his service—many little brass dishes, lighted oil wick lamps, flower petals, perhaps a garland. Bare-foot, he will be dressed in hand-spun saffron-dyed cloth, bare to the waist but wearing garlands of flowers, quite often marigolds for these are the sacred colour. The images or symbols of the gods will be garlanded with flowers many of which will be white jasmine with blotches of red rose petals, and the devotees will also have garlanded themselves to appear before the gods.

The inner portion of the temple is heavy with incense which is carried in the smoke-smoulder from scented joss-sticks, sandalwood powder, or finger-like sandalwood-sticks standing in their dozens before the idol. It was surprising to discover that these joss-sticks are mostly made in one of the fifty or more little Muslim family factories specializing in this trade and working in the city of Bangalore in Mysore State. The essence, which is mixed with a claylike substance rolled by hand round the thin sticks, comes from the root of the Kuth plant which grows wild on the mountains of Kashmir, and was at one time exported in great quantities to China for use in the Buddhist temples there.

The priest will move out from the inner sanctum, prostrate himself before the idol, then pass out of its presence to another

god, probably Ganesha the "Elephant God", and here he will wave a tray of flaming lights around the god to purify the air, after which he will move back to the sanctuary, there to wash the god with Ganges water, and scatter flowers over it, the whole time reciting passages from the holy books in a monotonous voice. Now and then there will be heard the clash of cymbals, the musical ring of temple bells as someone either awakens the god or sends his prayer to heaven. Among it all is the seething mass of people talking and even shouting. And there will be the great brass trays into which the pilgrims cast their offerings, sometimes notes, but usually small coins, for there are many gods; so that we are reminded that outside the confines of the temples we had seen among the cud-chewing cows and the many "holy men", others who are seated before great baskets piled high with small coins, mostly pice—of which there are four to the anna (the anna being about a penny).

Also outside the temple compound—one which has notices all round it warning visitors against taking photographs—are the numerous "hotels"—open-fronted feeding houses with their kitchens as the window piece, and dozens of sweetmeat shops with millions of flies buzzing from one sticky pile to another, some of these sweets being decorated with thin silver foil and mostly far from cheap to buy. The sweets will be bought, carried to the temples by the devotee as a gift to the gods, and later eaten by the priests or distributed to the poor. None of the priests I saw looked particularly thin, most were well covered, and one in particular was so portly that he puffed as he struggled up to his feet after lying prone on the ground before the god symbol.

At night the whole place, including the concrete artificial island which is tied to the main temple area by two wide-arched concrete footbridges and decorated by an ornate clocktower centrepiece, is brightly illuminated by great arc lamps which make the place look as though it were in brilliant moonlight. With the temples in the background it is all a most extraordinary conglomeration of ancient and modern, as mixed as are the

masses who congregate there either to worship or to look on, beggars and poor rubbing shoulders with the rich (although one does not see women parading overdressed or dripping with jewellery in the place which at that hour, together with the adjoining part of the waterfront, becomes an evening parade). The bathing continues, the more so when the moon is on the wane, and the temples come even more to life. The seething mass of people, most of them, especially the children, excitedly running round having great fun, remind the visitor of a country fair instead of a holy place.

And there are dozens of other people also, so many men and women practising the honourable profession of begging, accepting from those who give and departing without a word or sign of gratitude; but then why should they trouble, for have they not given someone the opportunity to clear away a little of their past sins by such a gift of alms to the poor and needy? These dozens of beggars are filthy, clad in rags and sometimes little enough of those, the uniform of their professions; there are also the cripples, the aged widows, the blind, and the lepers, who always touch the hardest heart; there are others who are well fed, mostly low-caste women, always with a baby in their arms, this being the main appeal with its pitiful cry just at the right moment when the "mother", then on the roster for begging, pleads for an anna; tragic, pathetic creatures, you feel they must be the most unhappy women in all India, yet look round the corner and there you will find their sisters, those "off duty", they will be crowded round a pot of odd scraps given by pilgrims or from the temple maybe, laughing and chaffing each other, seemingly the happiest of all the women in India. From their ranks could surely be lifted the world's finest dramatic actresses; they even use oil for "glycerine tears" on their cheeks. These beggars are most agile, darting in and out among the cars, the horse-drawn tongas, bicycles, and sauntering cows which seem to pack the narrow roadway passing down to the bathing ghat.

One watches an old woman refusing a beggar alms but

'carrying to one of the wandering white cows some food she has just purchased from the fruit stall nearby; she offers it to the cow, and delighted that the sacred animal has accepted it, bends down, touching first its forehoofs then her forehead, and placing the palms of her hands together in worship.

Suddenly a young girl darts from among the crowd, for she has been waiting for this very moment, and in a flash scoops up the droppings of the cow even as they reach the ground. These she flops into the basket balanced on her head, and, before others have a thought to gather up the dung of the sacred cow, clutching the swaying basket—still on her head—scampers away to mix it with a little straw and charcoal to dry in the sun, so making the most favoured cooking fuel of India—cow cakes.

One of the cows drags a broken leg. It will do so until it dies a natural death, for no Hindu will ever kill a cow, even though by doing so he will put it out of its agony; but all of them are well fed, and yet, with their long tongues acting like vacuums, they will lick up a fresh banana skin, or the leaf bag to which the remains of food still adhere. They completely ignore passing humans, never move for the toot-toots of the cycle rickshaws or the blast of lorry horns, and appear to like best of all to lie down and chew the cud in the middle of the all-too-narrow roadway.

I remember, on the first occasion when I went to Hardwar, standing and watching this scene, and wondering how I could contrive to get a photograph without being mobbed and having my camera snatched from my hands and dashed to the ground, or without bringing about the condemnation of the priests who in their turn would call down upon me the wrath of the gods. Then, from the direction of Roorkie, I saw passing through the crowd, which although making way strangely did not take the slightest notice of him, a stark naked, youngish man. His gingered long rope-like hair was coiled and piled high on his head and his body was completely covered with white ash, so that his eyes appeared to be deep set and black. He carried in one hand a black begging bowl, a brass drinking pot, and a pair of large

iron fire-tongs with a ring which clanked as he walked; over his shoulder was slung a moth-eaten antelope skin, and in his other hand he carried a long bamboo staff. His body was well covered, his physique good, his tread manly, and he looked neither to the right nor left as he went on towards the temple; then, upon reaching its entrance, at that part where the road turns off he followed it and proceeded higher up the River Ganges, towards the next town, Rishikesh, one not so often visited by pilgrims. His eyes were fixed upon the distant magnificent range of mountains, the Himalayas to which he was then proceeding. It may be that he had been weeks, perhaps months on the way there, and there was little doubt that he had come from one of the many other holy cities or temples, perhaps Benares, having from that great sacred city walked the whole distance, begging his bread and happily suffering the tortures of the blazing sun and dusty road, at times waterless, but happy because he had been given the opportunity to prove in that manner his devotion to his particular god. Unlike so many that were around me, including the priests, although lacking in covering for his fine body, his countenance was not odd or peculiar, there was an intelligent serenity about it; it was as though he was quite unaware that thousands of people were near him.

And as I stood there I saw others like him come along, some of them clad in orange-coloured cloths, some wearing sandals, most of them barefoot, but each carrying begging bowl, water-pot and staff, a few also had the iron tongs; some had shaven heads, others wore beards and a matted rope-like mass of hair, and had white and vermilion marks on their foreheads. All were sadhus, or "holy men" of the Hindus, ascetics and Yogis, and all of them passed the temple and went on, looking neither to right nor to left.

Hardwar appeared to have no attraction for these "holy men"; it seemed as though having become tired of the crowds and the multitudes they now sought the places of solitude. There was no need for them to stop at "the gateway to Heaven" to wash away their sins as had the others, for over the past years

they had by privation, suffering, and prayer, done this; all that they now desired was to enter and go forward alone.

Other than when in the vicinity of temples, at melas or great religious gatherings, these sadhus prefer to be alone, seldom does one see two of them walking the road together. I had, however, but a few days before this, come upon a whole party of them resting in Delhi. They were on the way to a great mela at Allahabad, and had pitched their camp near a temple on an open space between Old and New Delhi, attracting quite a crowd of gaping watchers, especially after one of the local newspapers had drawn attention to them.

They were unusual in that they appeared to have considerable wealth; in their equipment they were a cross between a European circus and a wandering desert tribe. An extremely handsome elderly white-bearded man was at their head, another, obviously his son, being at his side when I went to see them. I sat down and they offered me fruit, and in answer to my question told me that the great elephant chained nearby was used to carry their holy books. I examined these great books and found them to be the Holy Granth—the book of the Sikhs, yet many of them were not of that particular sect. In the centre of the encampment was a large roped-off, striped, coloured tent roof—the sides being open—and under this stood a square silk-spread table with brilliantly coloured and silvered pictures of the founders and leader of their religion. Large bullock waggons with some of the finest animals I have seen outside a show ring were tied nearby—these carried the equipment, and there were a number of really excellent riding horses. A seething mass of people surged round the place, but none dared come near the dozens of sadhus and pilgrims resting against blanket rolls there. Some of these were, like their leader, wearing cloths which entirely covered them, their hair in scores of neat plaits; others who had attached themselves to the party for a while were of the sky-covered—by some referred to as the space-clad—order, that is they were as naked as on the day they were born, their bodies smeared with ashes, their hair unkempt; yet others

had small loin cloths around their waists and were ash smeared, one wore a coronet of flowers. This was a superb specimen of a young man, a vigorous, magnificent Hercules, and when I asked why he wore those flowers the others laughed and finally said something about a satisfied admirer having given them to him, whilst he sat with downcast eyes in mock modesty. I discovered that he and some of the other youths considered themselves as being under training—lay brothers would perhaps more suitably describe them. They had been living near to the temple, but had attached themselves to this party in order to travel with them to Allahabad. This particular young man afterwards told me that he eventually intended entering one of those temples like the famous Kamrup Kamaksha.*

Then I remembered having read in one of Sir George MacNunn's books about these temples, that "Hindu husbands with souls to save are not too particular as to son-getting if they fail themselves" (though I wonder what he would have to say of to-day's practice of human artificial insemination in the Western world) and that in these temples "the lusty young priest or temple male was regarded as deputizing for the god, the giver of life".

From their remark and his shame pretence I could only conclude that this young fellow had but recently passed through his initiation and earned his crown of blossoms. I cannot imagine that the husband of a wife whose son had been sired by him would be ashamed of its physical appearance anyway. But I discovered that he was not even a learner in so far as his knowledge of the most simple Yoga practices were concerned, for he could not take up the famous Lotus pose when I suggested he might sit in that posture for a picture.

Those others of his particular section of the party all seemed to be of about the same age, coming and going into the nearby

*This temple, situated about two miles from Gaubati in Assam, was one of the fertility temples to which barren wives went in order to pray for the gift of a son. "They remained there the night through, and during the dark hours the god descended upon them, opened their wombs and the hoped-for offspring frequently arrived in due season as a gift to the husband."

temple, some bathing at its entrance and others smearing themselves with the white ash, but somehow I felt that there was not one atom of religion in them, that to these youths it was all a big party, a make-believe. There appeared no spiritual expression on their faces like that which was upon those of the elder and his son, in fact one rather good looking youth—perhaps seventeen years of age—had a face full of mischief.

And there was one boy, he could not have been more than ten years of age, wearing a tight, thin, orange loin cloth, his body and face smeared with white, his head shaven, carrying in one hand a little brass bucket and in the other a small brass bell. With a blank expression on his face he moved from one member of the watching crowd to another, ringing his bell to draw their attention, for he could not speak. A hole had been bored right through his tongue about an inch from the tip, and through this was passed a brass rod about four inches long with an arrow head at one end and a red painted lyre-shaped trident at the other, thus forcing him to hold his tongue out an inch from his lips, the rod standing upright. His performance was to move this rod up and down, making the reddened tip of the tongue quiver as though to do so pained him—this he supposingly did either as a penance or to gain merit. I watched him resting his tongue by simply twisting it, so that he was able to draw it in, the arrow and trident one on each cheek, and little doubt remained in my mind, after I had made to examine it, that the arrow head screwed off to allow him to remove the rod and eat. But the simple trick most effectively drew coins out from the pockets of the gullible, and into the young “sadhū’s” little brass bucket.

It is surprising to find that the bathing ghat at Hardwar is not actually on the River Ganges, but on that part which is really the beginning of the Upper Ganges Canal. I was told that the reason for this was that Mother Ganga often changes her course, and to make certain that the part where the pilgrims bathe was not moved from the ornate and colourful ghat with its temples, this spot was chosen—water always being there for the

pilgrims. Anyway it is the holy Ganges water and in the distance can always be seen the river in all its natural beauty.

This great canal drawn from the river at Hardwar, is a superb piece of British engineering work, as one is reminded at places on its banks where great red-stone lions guard the entrances to bridges. Made and opened over one hundred years ago, it runs for five hundred and sixty-eight miles through Uttar Pradesh—previously known as the United Province—feeding nearly three thousand four hundred miles of distributary canals. At the Hardwar head it is two hundred feet wide, and when eleven feet deep carries from 6,760 to 8,000 cubic feet of water every second. In many places it either passes over or under rivers or torrent rivers. This huge irrigation channel runs equidistant between the two great holy rivers, Ganges and Jumna, thus feeding the dry land lying too far from either of them. Then, about three-quarters of the way along its length, it divides, one half flowing to the Jumna, and the other rejoining the Ganges south of Kanpur (Cawnpore). From there until Allahabad, where the rivers meet, the distance between them is about that which had been maintained between each and the canal.

On the actual bathing ghat known as Har-ki-Pauri at Hardwar, and also farther up river at similar ghats, will be seen numbers of small wooden platforms, each raised about eighteen inches from the ground and about four feet square. On these the pilgrims deposit their clothes and valuables whilst they take a morning or evening dip in the sacred water, and they are looked after for a few annas by men known as pandas—rather like lay priests; others will for a fee recite portions of the holy scriptures to the devotees as they stand waist high facing them in the river with hands clasped in prayer prior to dipping beneath the surface. Hardwar is full of pandas, there are said to be 2,500 of them in the town where they are deployed on many duties. At the station, for instance, will be found a number who specialize in searching the now enormous ancestral records maintained in the town of the lines of descent of practically every Hindu family in each district of Northern India—a kind

of College of Herald. A panda is allotted and responsible for the genealogical dossier of a certain district, and to him the pilgrim will be directed and then taken by him to his house, where for a fee certain ceremonies will be performed while the record is being searched and a copy made. The records are kept in long narrow books of handmade paper, and the Sanskrit writings are in ink which is made by burning rapeseed oil, an ink which shows no sign of fading even in entries well over a hundred years old. Pandas are all Brahmins, that is, of the highest caste. Wealth and possessions have no connection with caste—and many are poor.

These men will also meet the son of the Hindu house who bears the bones of the cremated body of his parent for immersion in the sacred Ganges. They will conduct him to Kankhal which is on the actual banks of the river, and with what is known as "the bone throwing ceremony", elaborate according to the fee—much as with funeral ceremonies in many Christian Churches—will perform the sacred rites. With the bones, a gold ornament or coin will sometimes be thrown into the water; the ornament usually being the contribution of the widow, maybe a relic of the days when, wearing some of her jewellery, she would have cast herself on the cremation fire of her husband; now, with suttie a thing of the past, she makes this her contribution to the gods. The amazing thing to the European is that you can watch a man doing much the same as the coin collector on the bathing ghat, but this one, waste deep in the water is prodding with his toes among the white bones for the gold resting there and, as with his brother beachcomber, no one seems to object.

Yet I am assured by more than one good Hindu that after the day's work is done, the pandas will travel by cycle rickshaw the few miles down the canal to Jawalapur, just outside the Hardwar area, there to forget the blast of conch shells, the clang of temple bells, and the dead flat voices of the priests, in the haunting, vibrating, light finger-tapping touch of the drums, the languid, sensitive wail of the zither, the alluring, amorous

call of the pipes, and the sensuous, high-pitched voices of the girls; there to erase for a while from their minds the flabby shapeless bodies of their own high-caste ladies they have seen taking a dip in the holy Ganges, by now intently watching every movement of a firm, seductive, writhing figure—one like that of a temple carving—that of a dancer, maybe of low caste, but very desirable; there to shudder for a fleeting moment as they remember the quarts of Ganges water and the milk of sacred cows they have that day swallowed, now being drowned in drinks alive and invigorating; there to eat the forbidden meat, fish, fowl, and eggs, for what matter if they do take life now that they are out of Hardwar? Here they can eat beet, forbidden on the banks of the holy river because it bleeds when cut, here they can enjoy carrots, forbidden by a certain sect because of their likeness to the symbol of the Lord Shiva. “Why when the day is done, should we not as do the shopkeepers, leave our wooden benches to enjoy the fruits of life? Ours is but a profession like the doctors and the lawyers. These pilgrims come for but a short time to undertake these privations, while we are expected to suffer them always!”

In Hardwar will be found dozens of “humbug sadhus”. Every morning, just as in many other cities of India, some who are dressed in sadhu-like cloth, usually decorated with strange pieces, maybe dozens of multicoloured silken strips tied to each elbow, or row upon row of coloured beads, will proceed at fast pace from one opening shop to another down the rows of those which line the little bazaar lane snaking its way between the main road and the canal, bearing something rather like a brass frying pan with a wooden handle, wafting it about and waiting for a moment before each. In this pan is a smouldering pile of sandalwood powder, a few flowers, some charm beads, and a small, framed, coloured picture of one of the Hindu gods, sometimes garlanded with Jasmin flowers, usually of Krishna or Ganesha. This practice is nothing less than a form of blackmail, for the superstitious shopkeeper, sitting cross-legged among his goods, believes that if he refuses to throw in a coin, however

small, in return for the "purification", he will have no luck that day, suffer maybe few customers, his fruits go bad, his wares break or some similar misfortune befall him. And so he gives, even knowing that the beggar is a rogue, while if he particularly desires some good business deal to be concluded, he will take one of the charms in exchange for notes, for which the "priest" will then throw in an extra blessing.

Occasionally will be seen, as is common in other parts, a priest leading a miniature white cow of a breed which comes from the south of India. These little animals are adorned with trappings decorated with cowrie shells. They are led from shop to shop, from one house to another while their owner collects the devotee's gifts to the god. They are in demand for many of the Hindu ceremonies; in the cities they will be seen night and morning close to the hospitals so that they may be at hand when the dying Hindu is carried out from the ward to die on Mother Earth, there to clutch the tail of the sacred cow and so ensure a safe and swift journey to Nirvana—mental heaven.

Among the usual type of shops to be seen in any Indian bazaar, there are to be found many which do a roaring trade in holy places like Hardwar, those selling the cheap paper-covered, poorly printed, and crudely illustrated books containing the stories of the gods, for there are hundreds of myths and legends attached to them, all varying with the different provinces, with even the names of the gods themselves changing. There are many shops with pictures not only of the gods, but the bathing ghat at Hardwar, the suspension bridge at Lakshman Jhula, and other famous places considered holy; on these and on the mountain tops are the gods in all their glory, gorgeously clothed and sparkling with lavishly painted tinsel, as are the stars above them even though the picture be of the daytime; the colours are powerful, and to the European eye clashing, the paintings to them being also crude, but to the Hindu they convey everything just as he or she has been taught to picture it from childhood. Then there are the shops with the multitudinous selections of rosaries and bangles, others with earthenware models—naturally

of the gods, usually of sun-dried clay painted over with white-wash and then garlanded with brilliant flowers, the figure in the traditional pose, Krishna with his flute and standing cross legged, Vishnu under his snake canopy, Ganesha, the elephant-headed god, sitting contentedly with his fat belly protruding and waiting for it to be rubbed for luck. There is more than one stall selling the elaborate little sets which are a cross between an artist's paint-box and a woman's make-up case, with a mirror in the lid, solid blocks of colours, tins and pots of sandalwood powder and such like with which to make the caste marks which are repainted on the foreheads of the devout after taking the sacred bath.

These shops flourish in the season, for every pilgrim must take back a present from Hardwar to each member of the family. Most of those who visit the place as pilgrims are Hindus practising the traditional life of the Hindu joint family, whereby all sons live together with their parents even after they are married, their earnings being pooled, whether they be great or small, and all share alike; an excellent arrangement for the non-wage earner, and one would imagine exasperating to those who contribute considerable salaries, but seldom is there much trouble or obvious bad feeling in actual practice. So old is this system that the Income Tax Act of the country has been framed to comply with the ancient custom.

One of the first things attracting the attention is a gigantic advertisement painted on the wall of a "doctor's shop"; this must be twenty feet high, directly facing the visitor entering the more sacred part of the town, and advertising cures for all ills—which it would seem the waters of the river cannot put right—including the various venereal diseases, all named without reticence. One of the doctors explained to me that it was necessary to remind pilgrims that they should cure their ills before they polluted the holy river with them, he seeming to have conveniently forgotten that the pilgrim has been taught from his earliest days that the river will do all that and more.

Hardwar—by some known as Haridwar, by others as Hurdwar, is often translated to mean “The gateway to Heaven”. By some Hindus it is said to mean “The gate of Hari or Vishnu”, Vishnu being one of the greater gods. Yet others call it Hari-Pari, meaning “The stairs of Vishnu” and refer to it as the source of the Ganges.

The myths and legends connected with Hinduism are so ancient that they have become confused in their transit over thousands of years, and are often the cause of heated arguments, but I found that there are two generally accepted stories upon which the sacredness of Hardwar is founded.

The first of these is that millions of years ago the Ramayana, the river, flowed only in the Celestial regions and issued from the toe of the god Vishnu. On earth a certain King of Ayodha named Sagara, greatly desiring a son, performed penance, as a result of which whilst one wife gave him a son, another presented him with sixty thousand sons. He made preparations to perform the horse sacrifice, but unfortunately the sacred animal was stolen, and he sent the sixty thousand sons each to dig a league into the earth in search of it. But they were all consumed by the fire of Kapila—a form of Vishnu—who did so to protect the earth goddess who was his bride. The King of Ayodha was then told that only when the great sacred river flowed down to earth would his sons come to life again and rise to Heaven. Although he performed many penances, as also did his remaining son Amusman, they were unsuccessful, and it was left to his grandson Bhagiratha, after making the most severe penance, to secure what his father and grandfather had failed to achieve. And when the waters reached the earth and the ashes of the sixty thousand princes, which they did by Shiva the Lord of the Himalayas permitting them to flow through his hair, so dividing them into seven streams, the princes’ sleeping spirits awoke and they rose to Heaven. All this is said to have happened at Hardwar.

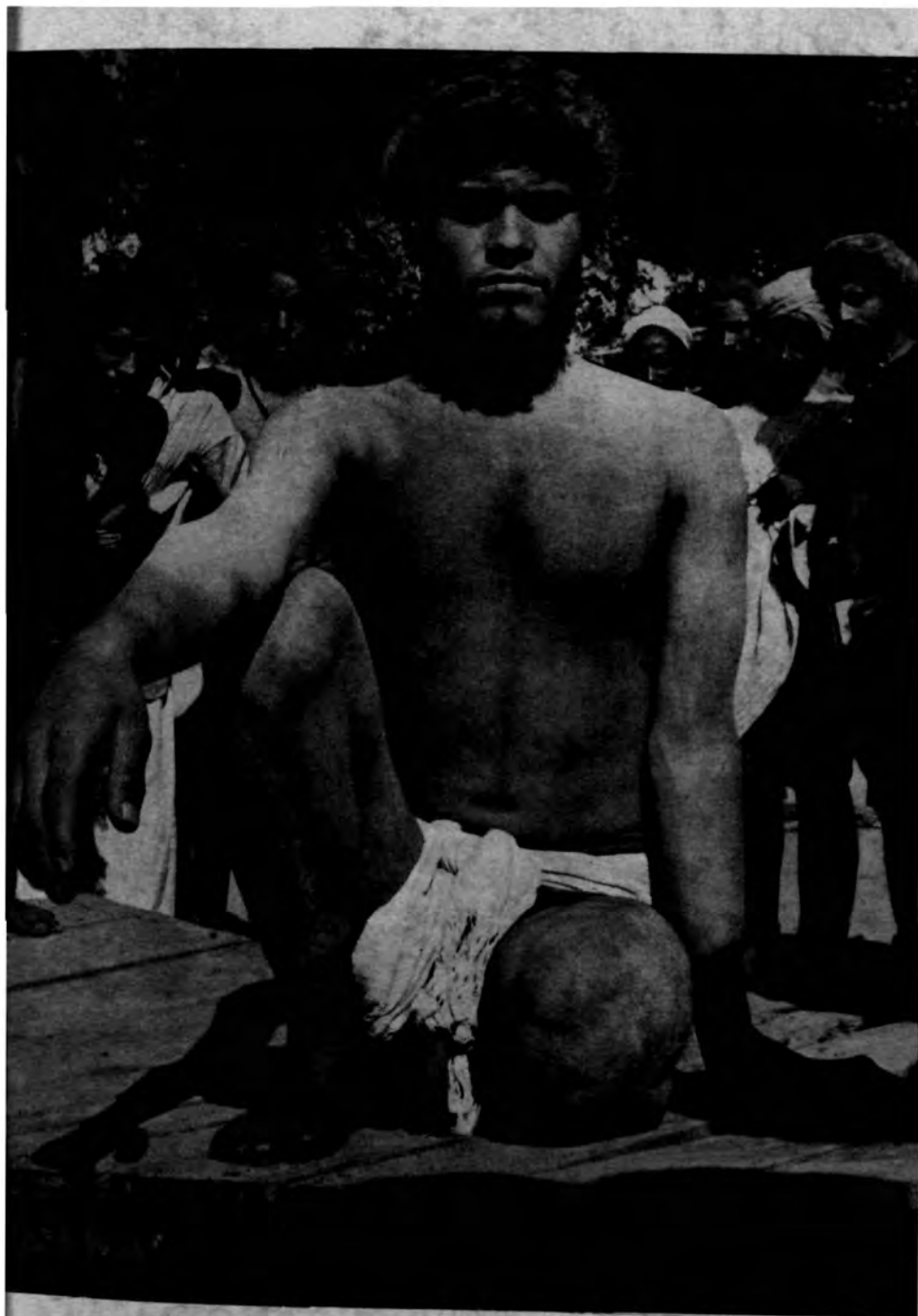
The other story of the river’s formation is that when the goddess Ganga in her pity for the parched country was unable

to pour her flood over India, she obtained the consent of Lord Shiva to pour herself over his head, "which she did in such an impetuous manner that he became angry and locked her struggling floods in his labyrinthine hair", thus explaining how seven streams were formed to join together eventually at Hardwar.

Just after entering the town from the plains, at that place where from the main road another road branches off to lead the pilgrim to Kankhal on the banks of the Ganges, a white stone fountain has been erected in the middle of the crossroads. The centre piece is a modern sculpture, some say of the Lord Shiva, but stone figures of this particular god are rare in this part of India, though pictures of him are sometimes to be seen. In stone he is here invariably worshipped in the symbol form of a phallus, or *linga* as it is referred to in India, and this idol set up in the Shiva temples is daily adorned with flowers and sprinkled with water by devotees. Doubtless the statue has been erected in the form of a figure on this particular spot so that those who visit Hardwar may be reminded of the legend attached to it, for the god is holding aloft in each hand a pot from which water pours over his coiled hair. It is a striking piece of modern art, but seldom taken notice of by the passing masses. Only the "foreigner" stops to admire it, and since it faces the north it almost defies the amateur photographer.

So it appeared to me that the beliefs, myths, legends, superstitions, and commonsense facts were all muddled up in Hardwar; it seemed as though the Hindu religion was here commercialized to the full. To me, it was not a town which was steeped in religion, even though as one of the centres for Hindu pilgrims it has been famed over the ages. I felt that it was a place which traded in religion, exploiting those believers who happily imagined that they had at long last, maybe in their remaining few years, discovered the perfect goal of their life upon this earth. I do not doubt, in fact I now know, that among those who live and minister there may be found men and women who are really sincere in their beliefs and practices; I just did not meet them. But it is not unusual for those who work for good to

hide their lights, shunning publicity or the public eye, and doing their service in the side streets and alleys, nor for the aged ones to find a quiet corner in which alone to practise their faith, interfering with no man in their last few years—and Hardwar like Benares is a city to which many Hindus repair in those latter days. I now know that the few religious organizations which operate either there or in the vicinity keep much within themselves, being almost “closed orders” with brothers, students, and devotees quietly taking their dip in the river, sometimes before the dawn, before the rush and scurry of the masses, and returning to their ashrams immediately afterwards.



"A vigorous, magnificent Hercules"

National Library.
Calcutta-27.



An old priest with his little
sacred cow



“Both legs had been cut
off below the knee”

CHAPTER TWO

FROM Hardwar, we went on, following the road the sadhus had trodden, up the River Ganges, passing up the steep slope where the road is cut deep into the grey-green rock face and in which are to be seen many sadhus in their caves; again most of them seemed to be show pieces, demanding money in return for pictures taken, one declaring that we had not given him enough. I saw one dishevelled, not too clean looking fellow sitting before his rag shack on a sack. He wore a tattered cloth around his waist, for what purpose I cannot imagine, for it hid none of his person, and he was talking, I suppose he would have called it preaching. I stood a while and listened to him and then asked the young Hindu who was with me "What is he saying? In what language is he speaking?"

"I have not the faintest idea. I do not think he knows himself!" came the answer.

"Do all those women sitting round understand him?" I asked.

"I do not suppose so. But they will be satisfied. They believe that he is speaking words of wisdom and that is quite sufficient for them!"

After all, there was little I could then say, for there are hundreds of thousands of Europeans who listen to prayers and benedictions in Latin, yet do not understand that language, but they continue to go to the church Sunday after Sunday.

Other so-called "holy men" just lay sleeping on their mats with a staff and a black begging bowl by their sides. What a wonderful life they appeared to enjoy—waking up to find the bowl half filled with coins!

Yet another, a little farther from the crowd and living in a rock cave which necessitated climbing up a narrow pathway

from the roadway, had rather an intelligent youngish face. His body was well covered and his clothes consisted of a thick brass chain round the waist and a strip of cloth passing between his legs from back to front. Then I saw that he sat in a different pose from the others I had so far seen, and I realized that both his legs had been cut off below the knees. He gave no answer when I asked him how this had happened, but I afterwards heard that some years before he had lain himself down on a rail track and deliberately done this as a punishment to his body for some sin he had committed. Friends dashed up too late to save his feet but able to save his life; now he had taken up the "religious way of life". The story may have been true, it could equally have been possible that his parents or foster parent had done this terrible thing to him when he was a child in order to draw the annas from sympathetic passers by. To me he did not appear to be a rogue, but without knowing more of him it would be difficult to say. Had he been living in a Western country, I should have wondered why, in spite of being so maimed, he had not taken up some useful work, for his countenance displayed much intelligence and happiness, and life to him seemed to be good and worth living in contrast to the other miserable fellows who existed in the many rock caves and sacking shacks.

A great image of the god Ganesha is cut out from the rock-face on the roadside and a sort of shop-front made around it, but this is on that side where there is no footpath and also on a blind bend of the road. We only just missed knocking down a worshipper who was crossing towards it, his one-track mind set upon his god, quite oblivious of the traffic passing up and down the main road.

Farther on, with its entrance under a railway viaduct, we came on the Bhimgoda, a great circular stone tank in which swim thousands of large grey holy fish. From a cave in the face of the perpendicular high rockface a temple has been built out almost to the great stone tank. Under this white-washed temple are arches which house priests selling rosaries and garlands. Pilgrims come here for the service, then buy bags of food for

the fish from the many small boys who frequent the place; this appears to be uncooked dough, each piece about the size of a pea; it must be good, for the fish fight over each other to get at it. We were pestered by one boy who wanted money for his school; well equipped, he had a book of printed receipts in one hand and a fountain pen in the other.

A studio assistant from a nearby wooden hut wanted to take our picture. Those who looked after the place asked no alms of us, though no doubt in the season they collect sufficient voluntary offerings from the pilgrims. We spent a few annas on fish food and took several photographs of them fighting over it, but with the poor light hardly expected any results worth looking at; to our surprise, when the films were developed, the fish could be seen in their hundreds.

As we left the place, I noticed through a gap between the shops and houses on the other side of the road, a wide stretch of the holy Ganges. Near to a great spreading tree which stood there, was a coarse saffron cloth spread out on four rough sticks, a fire smouldering before it, and under the crude canopy sat a very ancient scraggy sadhu; before him stood a brass water pot and nearby were the usual begging bowl and staff. He was seated on the dirty grey leather of what was either an antelope or a tiger skin, but it was so old and worn that it was now impossible to tell which. He looked straight ahead in meditation, his steady gaze upon that place called Satdhara, a spot most sacred because it is there that the seven streams meet.

The shopkeepers nearby who carried food to him told me that he had sat in that manner for months, throughout the coldest days and nights with only the slight loin-cloth which now covered the nakedness of his frail old body, each morning taking his bath in the great river, at one season when it was low walking the near half-mile to its waters, at others, when the mountain snows melted and filled the river to its furthest banks, taking his dip in the backwater near the brick ruins close by, eating but a morsel of the food they brought him, muttering what they took to be mantras, though no recognizable

words came from his lips, and speaking to none. I had seldom before seen a living body so thin and emaciated yet containing a beating heart.

“And we know that one morning we shall awaken to find that he has gone!” they said.

“You mean dead?”

“Oh no, not dead, but he will have moved on, just as our grandfathers, who are now feeble with age, remember him doing when they were boys, and he looked just as old then. He is no doubt as old as Hardwar!”

I smiled at the absurd suggestion, thinking that no doubt one such as he would remain a while in this place when they too are old, and they, like their grandfathers, will imagine that it is the same old sadhu.

Some weeks later when I passed the spot, I saw that he had moved on and another and younger one had taken his place for a while, one who placed himself in the Yoga Siddhasana posture (generally known as “The Adept Seat”) on a bright new tiger skin, and who had before him many coins supposedly given by those who came to gaze upon this holy man. He now talked to those gathered around, but watched me from the corner of his eye, his expression betraying his hope that I was impressed by his holiness as evidenced by the numbers of pilgrims who had gathered to listen so intently to him and later to seek his advice. He was at that moment listing the many holy places he had visited and worshipped in; untying a piece of orange coloured silken cloth and displaying for their eager eyes to feast upon the stones, pebbles, and berries which he declared he had brought from these places. Then just at the right moment of ecstasy he presented one to a pilgrim—one who I noticed was not ill clad and later saw enter a nearby large car with a Bombay number plate—and in exchange did not refuse, nor acknowledge, the pilgrim’s ten-rupee note placed on the ground before him. I at once realized that here was yet another of the mass who cash in on the emotional and credulous public, yet it seemed that from among the many gathered there, it was only I who thought that

way; the Bombay business man—who looked the type who would drive the hardest bargain—went away obviously delighted with the sadhu's all too readily offered gift, "one the holy man had suffered so much to obtain and bring for him".

These holy men—and there are five millions of them in India, "toil not neither do they spin". After many years of study I am certain that but a small fraction of them are sincere, the rest live well on ignorance, emotions, or superstition, taking advantage of an age-old way of life—which to many is their religion—the basis of which, as laid down in the old Hindu scripts, together with a part of them carried and passed down through the ages by memory of the great sages, is that which is called "holiness" by men of all creeds, religions, and beliefs the world over.

Hardwar has flourished as one of the great centres of the Hindu faith for centuries, pilgrims travelling to it from thousands of miles just to take a dip in the clear, cool waters of the holy Ganges; yet on that first visit, search though I did, I failed to sense any atmosphere such as I had felt in Westminster Abbey, St. Peter's, Rome, the Jumma Musjid in Delhi, or the Shwedagon in Rangoon. There seemed to be missing that solemnity and tranquility, those moments when one can be drawn so easily into oneself, to meditate undisturbed, to ponder upon something other than the mass of humanity round about. It may be that I was at once disillusioned when I discovered that the bathing ghat was not really on the banks of the River Ganges. It was certainly not the beggars, for they are everywhere near churches, mosques, shrines, and temples in India, nor was it the shops, for they are scattered round the Jumma Musjid Mosque; it could not have been the mechanical procedure of the temple priests, for I have seen and heard much the same in churches where the vicar has buried one he has never known, christened another, or married others who have never before come to his church, and who he well knows will never enter it again—until they are brought for burial.

As I dwell on this thought, I realize that it might have been the sadhus who did not even look nor stop there, but passed on.

It was as though they also felt that the spirit which must at one time have pervaded the town, had moved on, as they now did, farther up the holy River Ganges to the Himalayas.

One sadhu I later met went to great pains to explain that those who dwell in a place create the atmosphere which draws the gods and the good spirits; but that atmosphere must be maintained in order to hold them there. The real sadhus had gone forward to Rishikesh. It was as though to them Hardwar had never been; they did not even stop to beg food as they did in the smallest village they passed through on their way there, whilst the only one I saw who had remained for a while had been he who lived under the saffron canopy on the banks of his beloved Ganges almost outside the town, a town which had probably not stretched as far as that when first he discovered it.

The road continues towards the north, and widens out so that the rows of shops and houses are far back, and the dusty dirt space between is spread with cows, goats, dogs, children, and all the clutter that the house or shop cannot conveniently hold. Here and there are stacks of wood for firing, and down the road comes more of it, carried in great high bundles on the backs of hillmen who are bent near double under enormous loads, taking much of the weight on their forehead by means of a strap which passes under the bundle. There passes a herd of lean-looking small cows, many heavy in calf but still showing gaunt narrow frames, their coats dull, yet there would appear to be no reason for their poor condition since there is plenty of good feed even by the wayside. The only conclusion to which I could come to account for their poorness—apart from their being a hill breed of cow—was that in the desire to get their milk, however poor the yield, they were allowed to mate when they were still half grown. Another factor which may have accounted for their leanness was that the small boys who looked after them never allowed them to graze contentedly for five minutes, they were forever driving them on, as though the heavy stick in hand was itching to be used to flay the poor creatures with; yet oddly enough the religion which their parents claim as their own,

sanctifies the cow. I do know that whenever I occasionally came across a small herd of well-covered cows, they were being looked after by a ragged old man or woman who sat under a hedge happily watching the animals munching away at the luscious grass and driving them from off the crops by throwing a well-placed stone just ahead of them whilst they still remained sitting under the hedge.

The roadway passes through a wide concrete nullah with sand at either end and great smooth stones on each side telling how wide the flood of water must be when the mountain snows melt, but their spate goes on for only a few weeks, and then all is dried up again, without even a trickle of a stream. There are patches of ground on each side of the road with walls built round them, probably gardens used by the merchants in the town whose houses are there packed close to each other; then come the occasional buildings with great entrance arches leading to central courtways with rooms round them, the windows which overlook the road being protected with iron bars; these are ashrams or rest-houses, in which pilgrims who are unable to obtain entrance to the hotels during the rush season, or who cannot afford to go there, may live for a few days, cooking their own food and generally looking after themselves, the organization—usually a charitable one—that owns the place providing caretaker and sweeper, but nothing more; the pilgrim must draw his water from the well which is to be found in the court, and provide his own light. They are bare uninviting places with cell-like rooms which remind one of those in a house which has remained unoccupied for years; most of them are in a state of dilapidation, though swept clean; the walls have not been colour-washed for years, and, where the cement covering has fallen or been knocked away, the bricks show through. Hardly any pilgrims seem to have cause to remain in them for long in these days, yet I was told that in the past it was always most difficult to find accommodation there because of the large number of permanent residents, “but they have now deserted Hardwar and gone farther up the Ganges”, and so it was the same story.

Out of the season, when the caretakers and sweepers seem to go into hibernation, they are like haunted houses which have become deserted, the courtyards are empty, the rooms are cold, silent, and tomb-like, the only signs of life being a bucket with the rope attached to it standing on the cement well platform, or a caretaker's charpoy (string bed) standing outside his room. Only when great festivals or melas are held in the town and thousands of pilgrims congregate there, do they fill to overflowing, and the weeds and grass which now fringe the outer walls disappear for a while.

We had found that the Dak bungalow, to which foreigners naturally turn when no European-style hotel is available, was also reflecting the mood of the place, being dilapidated and containing furniture only fit for the wood pile.

The narrow road runs alongside the single-track railway and after a few miles enters the forest, passing a small station with most excellent rest-rooms for the passengers, and with a well-kept compound so that one wonders why it should be there. The trees are tall and thick, the undergrowth close, the ground moist, the air dank. It is not unusual to pass an elephant hereabouts on the road, in daytime moving timber, in the evening returning to its stable and carrying its own truss of fodder, at holiday times, with a howdah tied to its back, on its way with two or three "officers" out for a day's shikar, hoping to get a leopard at least. There are many of these in the forest besides much other game like spotted deer, and in the jungle plenty of wild boar, hare, black partridge, peacock, and jungle fowl, whilst in the wild fig, the banyan, and other trees with berries, little green pigeons are to be found.

Here and there, places have been cleared of trees and undergrowth and most excellent rest-houses built for the Forestry Officers. In other open patches there are the odd little bunches of houses with a tiny general shop and then the wayside rest-house, mostly old and sometimes fit to be classified as ancient, for the weary travellers. These are usually sadhus who remain the night and move on before daylight breaks, the only sign of

their having passed the dark hours under the rest-house roof being the ashes from the fire they had made.

The winding, wandering road is so delightfully refreshing after the dead straight monotonous ones of the plains where the trees are set far back from the hard road and afford little shade since, apart from their distance from it, the lower branches have usually been hacked off and dropped by the goat-boys to their herds, or been eaten off by camels, so that many have died and stand like gaunt grey skeletons planted in the dust. But now the road passes over two rivers. These again being fed from the mountain snows, are exceeding wide when in spate, but at other times shrink to but a tenth of the size, though almost milk-white with foam as they hasten on to join Mother Ganges, the great river which now cannot be seen from the road, for she too wanders in her course and here takes a wide curve. The two long bridges which cross these tributaries are so narrow that only the smallest buses can use them, and at places in their span small verandas have been built out to accommodate those who, trudging the road, are overtaken by a car when in the middle.

At times a rider is passed, one wearing dark heavy clothes of coarse material, patched and darned, the mount a narrow little brown hill pony with long head and thin spindly legs; the saddle at best a home-made affair, but usually a folded piece of sacking. Invariably the rider carries a bundle of something before him; the reins are of rope, the whip rather like a dog lash. A farmer.

More porters are seen trudging the road, clad in patched rags, tight fitting trousers with grey shirts hanging out over them and falling below loose heavy jackets, their head covering a skull cap, their feet oftentimes bare. They move forward with silent lumbering tread, bent under heavy loads; as a "third leg" they carry a stick, tee shaped so that it can be used as a rest when they stop by the way-side, since they could never lift the load to their backs unaided. Their hair is long and greasy, they smell of sweat and dirt. They are some of the men of those parts who when young are quite good-looking, of slightly mongolian appearance, but when old shrivel up. Few porters grow old

though. They earn precious little and work terribly hard; they cannot afford ever to retire.

Occasionally a band of hill people on the move will be overtaken, with loaded pack ponies—narrow-gutted beasts—, the odd loaded bullock or cow, masses of women and children, and always with big shaggy cream or brown dogs; the babies are tied to their mothers' backs, and the women without babies have loads to carry as big as those being humped along by their menfolk. You can hear them a mile off the road, for they are always shouting at each other; the stragglers will probably be singing to themselves, always in a high pitched note like a child, whether they be man or woman. Their colourful clothes are patched and dull with dirt and grease. They laugh to each other, and might mildly chide the passing naked sadhu; they are themselves of the Buddhist faith but being highly superstitious would never dare to jeer or make fun of him for fear of his casting a curse upon them. Again comes the musty stink of sweat and dirt and unwashed bodies, yet the children they carry and those which run among them look sturdy and healthy enough.

The occasional sadhus seen on the road make no sign that they have noticed the car or lorry, make no attempt to beg a lift, and if offered one will refuse, for by walking the whole way they gain great merit from their god. And by the time some of them have reached this part of the journey they may have travelled a thousand miles or more—for India is a vast country. It can be that among them will be some who well know that this will be their last journey to the holy Himalayas, they being old and frail in body and, leaning heavily upon their staffs, but the spirit is still strong with a determination to go on and on until they finally leave behind all signs of human habitation.

Without our realizing it, the road had been slowly climbing, and suddenly, as the forest opens for a mile or so, we arrived on the hill-crest with a gradual decline to a small stream. Down in the valley are fields ploughed and planted, cattle, sheep, and goats grazing on the rougher ground, a few little houses with farmyards round them, house, buildings, and yard being the

colour of the earth from which they are made. In the far distance can be seen a haze of smoke rising from the town, and farther in the background the glorious Himalayas with tree-covered green hills in their foreground, while on their summits float clouds, or is it snow that caps them?

The sight of the mountains is magnificent and breathtaking, one can picture the sadhu who has come that far standing awe-inspired as he gazes up at them for the first time—The Abode of Snow—The Holy Himalayas—The Abode of the Gods—, at dawn appearing so distant, at dusk so near, and one can understand how he will then move as though drawn forward with increased and lighter step, his eyes always upon the distance and never realizing that the decline in the road was helping his previously flagging footsteps. When he reaches the foot of the hill, before crossing the little bridge, he doubtless drinks deep and probably bathes in the clear stream which flows from the sacred mountains. Then after going on for a mile or so he will again enter the edge of the forest, and if by that time he has become too weary to go farther and the night is close, he will find there an ashram in which to rest his tired body for a few hours, to ponder on the wondrous sacred sight his eyes have gazed upon but a short while before, knowing that on the morrow he will go forward until he eventually reaches the mountains.

And it is hereabouts that the verges of the road, the bushes and the trees, start to bloom. Among the grass are the yellows, blues, and reds of wild flowers only found at the foot of the hill slopes, masses of tall foxgloves, a variety of mimosa, sharp-thorned bushes which seem to have no leaf, throwing as from their bare branches a wax-like peach-coloured butterfly flower, the wild roses pink and large, the thick grass contributing with feather-like purple and white flowers, and the trees crowning all, one in particular with chocolate-coloured branches and twigs a mass of peach and brown velvet flowers. Within what once were gardens, the ruins of the houses now beautified by Mother Nature with mosses and convolvulus, are trees like

jacaranda and the "flame of the forest", and even apple, pear, and fig.

So the road winds through the lowlands and snakes its way through the forest until it comes out into the open and passes between fields of corn, then, some thirteen miles after leaving Hardwar, there comes the familiar black and white bar across the road with the little toll house, the veranda of which is barred with iron from floor to ceiling like a lion's cage but which only houses two docile-looking clerks.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM the moment that you pass through the road barrier into Rishikesh you are conscious that you have found a place different to all others you have ever known. Whereas in other towns and cities, even Benares, the saffron robe is in the minority, here in Rishikesh it appears that almost all humanity—men and women—wear the holy colour; there must be hundreds, at times thousands, of sadhus in the area.

Each side of the wide, tree-shaded road is lined with vast walled-in ashrams containing dozens of small rooms. They are as much alive as those in Hardwar were dead, all are in a good state of repair, many colour-washed, and most of them with a great arch over the entrance and the name of the institute inscribed round it. The courtyards mostly have their wells, but all of them are green with spreading trees and bushes. Except for vultures, crows, and minas I saw no birds in the Hardwar ashrams, but here so many varieties were seen. The whole place appeared to be bright and fresh with colour, yet really it was mostly the green of the trees and bushes and the orange shade of the sadhus' clothes.

Whereas those sadhus I had before seen on the road took no notice of the passerby, now there was a greeting on their faces; it was as though they said, "This is our home, this is where we belong; you are welcome."

Farther on, behind a high wall, is a magnificent Lotus Temple built of white marble, and so named because the base of the big dome which forms the entire roof is surrounded by large red sandstones shaped like lotus petals. It is unusual for a Hindu temple, in that it has four entrances, one on each side. Set in the middle of a laid-out garden, at night an amethyst

light is kept burning on the tip of the dome. It was built in recent years, the gift of an Indian industrial magnate. When I was there, the great iron gates were closed and locked, but entrance was to be gained through a doorway set in one of these; yet, although I stayed for a while nearby, seldom did I see it used. To me it looked more like a mausoleum, and after I had "discovered" the sacred little town and the many places round it I felt, as possibly did the sadhus who passed it by without a glance, that it was misplaced. Fortunately, being tucked away almost from sight behind those high walls, it does not dominate and so spoil the charm and simplicity of Rishikesh.

It seems rather a pity that the little town has recently had electric light installed, for apart from the railway with its very occasional train stopping at the station, it had lain undisturbed by the "civilization" of this modern age for so long; it seemed right and in keeping that the little shops, shrines and houses should be lighted by night with candles or oil lamps, the kind of lamp which consists of an earthenware bowl filled with oil and with a cotton wick hanging over the spout—rather like the Virgin's lamp as depicted in Biblical times. Yet water is still drawn from the many wells—that which is not daily carried up to the houses from the holy Ganges, a practice which the majority of householders insist on having done. Many—one could say most—of the people bath in the river. I imagine that a sewage system lies in the very dim and distant future. Even now there is but one telephone in the town—that which goes to the Post Office. Yet the road which passes through has a tarmac surface; the narrow one through the market and also the one that goes to the bathing ghat are of concrete. In all, it is still a town which sleeps comfortably as in the past; tourists have not as yet ruined it by their visits, only the pilgrims quietly come, stay a while, and then leave.

I often felt that it would be sacrilege to shout, and thought twice before daring to hoot to warn a sadhu or a cow from off the road. But there is one cry—and an incessant one—that you

will hear as you walk down to the bathing ghats. This is "Ram! Ram!—Ram! Ram!" which means "God! God!—God! God!" and sounds like the rasping "Kaw! Kaw!" of the crow. It is the cry of the lepers and the blind who line the way down to the holy Ganges, for even in this quiet spot you cannot avoid such as these. They lie or sit hunched up, the blind knowing by your footstep if you happen to be a stranger, the lepers holding out their maimed bodies for you to gaze upon, the sight so sickening, yet dramatically pathetic. What can these poor unfortunates do for a living, many without toes, unable to walk, many without fingers, others exposing to view the most ghastly decay of their features? Few have had any education; they have been cast out as unclean from their homes, and must now wander the face of India begging their food until the final happy release comes. So they search out these holy places in the hope that here the pilgrim will soften his heart or seek to gain merit by giving generously, though seldom is the coin they receive more than an anna—"there are so many of them there". Their pathetic "Ram! Ram!" sounds like a cry from the heart for release, or at least a plea that He also might not desert them; it is like the voice of a child whose parent is racing ahead and away from it. The healthy well-covered beggars that haunt such places receive little sympathy, but these with their plaintive wail cause one to think, to wonder why they have not long ago been forced by law to enter colonies where they could be looked after; why there are not more schools for the blind. The sight of them at the entrance to some holy place lingers in the mind for hours, so that the foreigner who is unused to seeing such as they, spiritually profits nothing by his visit there.

Closer to the water is a fairly large area concreted over and with hotels (eating houses) and tea shops on one side; tucked away almost behind these is a small temple serving the ghat. Right in the middle of the area is a large banyan tree, under which, in the very best position, in a home-made wooden construction sits a sadhu whited all over with ashes, his dull

grey hair piled high on top and usually decorated with a wreath of flowers; hanging over a small loin-cloth is his fat stomach, part of which—that round the navel—has become malformed and extended almost to the shape of a trunk; for that reason he is considered by the illiterate to be either a spark of, or even a reincarnation of, the god Ganesha. “And the white ash with which he is smeared is the holiest to be found, being that which remains from the burnt dung of the sacred white cows mixed with the ashes of the sandalwood burnt before the god in the temple while the name of the god Ganesha is repeated a thousand times.”

The sight of him reminded me how I once gazed unhappily upon a defrocked vicar, who to earn sufficient to exist upon, spent his later years in a barrel as a side-show in one of England's most popular seaside resorts.

When I was there, with this Ganesha sadhu lived two other sadhus, both young men; one the most effeminate type I have ever seen, with the softest-looking skin, and standing with bent knees held together and hands clasped low with the palms downwards, fluttering his eyes and looking up under his eyebrows, while he rocked slowly from side to side like a shy “bathing beauty” of bygone films. The other was a handsome, husky, hairy type, more suited to the wrestling ring than a sadhu's shelter. That this was a paying proposition there remained not the slightest doubt when I had to bargain with the old man to take his photograph, he stubbornly declaring “not enough” each time I went up in price. Then when I wanted to take the others who lived there with him I had to bargain again; we settled for eight annas for a separate picture, but the listening girl-like one misunderstood my poor Hindi and quietly came out and looking back at me went off way behind the shack, I concluded to titivate himself up, but there being no sign of his return after ten minutes, by which time it was quite dark, we started the car and as I turned to leave I saw him going back into the shack with a most hurt expression on his face.

The god Ganesha cut in the rockface
at Hardwar



“A very ancient, scraggy sadhu
seated under a cloth canopy”

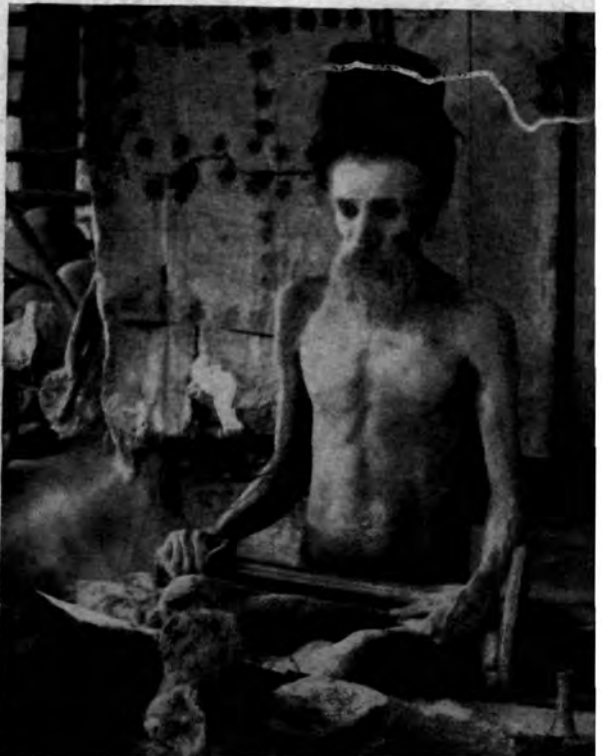




“. . . believed by some to be
an incarnation of the god
Ganesha”

“He had not moved from
that position for years”

National Library,
Calcutta-27.



At night this place in which they lived—one framed with signboards—was heavily curtained with sacking like a purdah room.

It would seem that money flowed in upon them, for I was told that in the search for illicit liquor, the police, on raiding the place, grabbed at two or three great Ali Baba earthenware jars, only to discover that they were filled to the brim with coins.

The other "side-show", and adjoining their shack but facing the temple, was an open space covered with an iron roof beneath which was a naked old sadhu sitting before a smouldering log. Gingered hair piled high, cow-dung ash-smearred body, his deep set eyes looking straight ahead as though he was in trance. He was, but not the sort of trance one would imagine, for I was assured that he was under the influence of bhang, a drug made from hemp, which is smoked in order to bring about that condition. I was assured that he had not moved from that same position for years; no one saw him feed, and from his condition I can believe he took very little food. His limbs certainly looked as though they had become set, while there was only the very slightest swaying of the body as he breathed with mouth half open, and the faintest sound like "Ram! Ram!"

Nearby were the gods, a white stone Ganesha, a white Shiva symbol, a splash of red on another rock. Across his knees lay an arm rest, a T-shaped affair which sadhus such as he use to hold their limbs in a set position when they sleep sitting. As I peered closer I saw that the whites of his eyes were yellow and bloodshot, the black pupils dilated; the rims looked raw red. And there was a pile of small coins on the sacking spread at his side, while a faithful disciple "who washed and cleaned him daily with water from the sacred Mother Ganga" sat at hand to explain the virtues of his beloved master, who he confidently assured me was doing all this particularly to save MY soul! He was in fact most modest, for I found others who were suffering thus "for the whole of humanity", or if not them, at least to stop a war.

The purpose of the crutch-like arm rest is interesting. Yogis maintain that the breath which flows in the right nostril is hot, and the Nadi—nerve channel—of the right is therefore called the Sun breath or Pingala, and produces heat in the body, quickens and is afferent to the body organs. That which flows in the left nostril is cooling, so that the left Nadi is called the Moon breath or Ida, and is efferent, having a cooling effect, increasing strength and nutrition.

When the flow is alternating, thus correct and balanced according to the conditions prevailing, the body remains healthy; if for some reason the flow is incorrect, then disease results. If one finds that he is breathing through only the one nostril for a day, then he is warned that illness is on the way; if this goes on for more than a day, then it is a warning of a most serious illness.

The Yogi keeps himself healthy by simply stopping the incorrect flow. He can do this by plugging the offending nostril; he can also do it by exerting pressure under the armpit on the side of the nostril he wishes to close, by holding his arm tight over the back of a chair. But since there are no chairs in the jungle, he carries this crutch for convenience. The breath can also be controlled by manipulation, at the ankle, the ~~main nerve~~ of the large toe on the side on which it is desired that the breath should flow; yet another "without mechanical aid" method is to sit on the floor, draw the knee up until it is possible to place it under the arm pit, and by leaning on it cause the breath to flow in the opposite nostril.

These two side-shows were all that I saw resembling those in Hardwar. In the nearby bazaar I found but one shop selling pictures and clay models of the gods, joss-sticks, and the like; the temple, as with so many in India, was just a little shabby, needed sweeping, and had but one priest in attendance. I saw no money-changers, no balloon or toy hawkers, but there were lots of sacred cows and here were to be found dozens of "holy" monkeys, so unholy though that they lay in wait to leap on an old man bearing sweets to the temple, snatched from him the

dish he carried, and then sat at a safe distance gorging themselves; next, having cleared the dish they grabbed the shoes an aged woman had laid aside as she entered the temple, carrying them high into the great tree, clutching them to their breasts like babies, knowing full well that food would eventually be brought with which to entice them to drop the shoes and come down. They were a menace about the place but none would hear of killing them off.

A flight of wide steps lead down to a sloping concreted path, one which has feet-polished rounded pebbles set in it, I suspect to discourage the wearer of leather shoes, for those pilgrims who go there are barefoot, since this is the bathing ghat. Women sit on the slope selling the small leaf boats of flowers; with their gay shawls and the coloured flowers, they make a pretty picture. I took a photograph of one, then gave her four annas, upon which she at once offered me one of her little boats of flowers and could not understand that the money was for the service she had rendered; so very unspoiled by tourists are they here.

Unlike the ghat at Hardwar, this one is unpretentious. The concrete ends, and all is then smooth rounded stones. A side-stream of water from the river flows close by, great fish venture there, safe in the knowledge that none will harm them, that the devotees will just smooth their backs and by so doing believe they receive their blessing. A crude wooden plankway leads over this stream to the island, a natural island many times the size of the other lower down river and again of smooth white and grey stones. On the far side are the familiar little wooden stands with pandas in attendance. Each season crude breakwaters of boulders are built out into the main stream to be later washed away with the rising rushing river, and against these the older people carefully and tremulously find their way out to where the water is deep enough to take a dip, the younger ones going farther, but not venturing too far, for the deep channel is narrow and the current swift. Again there are hundreds of great fish coming almost up on to the stones to snap at the food brought them.

From our bungalow garden on the top of the hundred foot high cliff which overlooks the place, I saw pilgrims lighting candles and placing them in leaf boats to float downstream on the night of the great Hindu Divali—the Festival of lights, Divali being a corruption of Deepavali meaning “cluster of lights”—when I knew that so many houses in the villages, towns, and cities of India would be outlined with candles or lamps in celebration of the victory of light over darkness, and good over evil. I had expected to see the whole Rishikesh district lighted up, having been told that among the trees of the nearby hills many sadhus lived, but I saw not a flicker there, the only lights were those in the fast-moving little leaf boats as they dashed past below the cliff garden and sped on towards Hardwar as though determined to get there before they died away. In the town itself, a few—very few—shops and houses had displayed perhaps half a dozen small wick lamps, and when we returned to the bungalow we found the chowkidar (caretaker night-guard) had stuck four candles on our doorstep, so that in shame we cut up the dozen “for emergency” ones we had brought with us and made a goodly show for half an hour.

Coming away from the bathing ghat I saw another and smaller temple. The principal one had been erected to Shiva, the Lord of the Himalayas, and rightly so, for Rishikesh can be described as in the lap of the Himalayas, but there are also followers of the other Hindu gods who go there. This little temple, perhaps six feet square, contained an image of the god Ganesha. It was dripping with garlands of flowers, the tiny sanctuary a blaze of light, the few devotees on their knees before it were outside the building, there being only sufficient room within for the picturesque white-bearded priest. Floor, walls, and ceiling were covered with shiny, coloured, flower-decorated tiles; a brilliantly polished tray with all the impedimenta with which to perform puja (ceremonial adoration) spread out upon it lay to one side, to the other was a smaller tray with a candelabrum standing in the middle like a leafless tree and bright with cleansing flames; a brass bell hung on a thick chain in the doorway.

On more than one occasion when I passed I saw no devotees, only the priest in attendance, sitting there in meditation, sometimes reading a holy book, and I hated to disturb him, so that it was some time before we spoke, and then from him I heard and learned "the true story as to how the god Ganesha acquired an elephant's head".

And this is how he gave it me:

One day the Goddess Parvati, the consort of the Lord Shiva, wished to take her bath in a lake which, except for the valley entrance, was surrounded by high mountains on all sides. She created a boy from her flesh and told him to guard this entrance whilst she was in the water, her instructions to him being that he was to admit no one, no matter how high-placed he might be. It so happened that the Lord Shiva came to that place in search of Parvati and wished to enter, but the boy stopped him, and when the Lord Shiva demanded to know who he was, he introduced himself as the son of the goddess Parvati. The Lord Shiva was so furious when he heard this apparent nonsense, that with great force he slashed off the boy's head. Just at that moment the goddess Parvati came out and seeing the headless boy, burst into tears. She explained the whole of the circumstances to Lord Shiva, and implored him to re-create her son. He then sent his bodyguards to search for the boy's head; three times they went round the universe, but were unable to find it anywhere. The Lord Shiva was by now most concerned, for of what use was a son to him without a head? and he pondered deeply as to how he could provide him with a replacement of that so useful and most necessary part of his person.

Then he decided upon a solution, and ordered his men to go out again, this time to cut off the head of the very first living creature they came upon sleeping with his face towards the north, and bring it to him. It so happened that a baby elephant was the first that they found sleeping in that position, and they forthwith cut off its head and hurried back to their master with it. Taking it from them the Lord Shiva placed it upon his son's

neck and ever since that day Ganesha has preserved the shape of a child's body with the elephant's head.

But the Goddess Parvati was not completely satisfied and declared that her son would become the laughing stock of the world. To overcome that possibility and to satisfy her the Lord Shiva then ordained that at all religious ceremonies, her son Ganesha must be the first to be worshipped, and so it is to this day.

I had previously heard a rather different story from a learned sage, this being that when the evil planet Saturn (known as Sani and painted by Hindus as a lame, lean, ugly old man riding on a vulture) out of curiosity looked upon the beautiful newborn son of the goddess Parvati, the child's head flew off from its body and was irretrievably lost, for no god could regain it. From there on the two stories tallied.

"And he is the god of what?" I asked.

The old priest smiled benevolently; here was a European who showed some interest in his particular god.

"He is the god who can remove all obstacles, however great they might be. Now can you desire, seek more from any god?" he asked.

"No, I suppose not. But tell me, what do you know about his life? What were his sons like, did they also have elephant heads?"

"Of his life we know little as compared with the other gods. You see, his life was given up entirely to meditation. He had no sons. He did not marry."

"And the day or days of the year on which you celebrate your god?"

"That we do on Ganesha Chaturthi, a day which comes on the fourth of the month of Bhadrapad, the anniversary of the day on which he was born. In Bombay, the city from which I come, families make in clay an image of Ganesha, worship it for seven days and then, carried on the head of one of their members and preceded by musicians and drums, it is cleansed on the seashore by having fire waved around it, and finally

taken out and immersed in the sea. But on that day of the year it is most unlucky to look at the moon—always take great care to remember that!”

“Why? What is the story tied to that belief? There must be a legend connected with it, there always is!”

“Yes, my son, you are right. There is. Once when the god Ganesha was riding along on his mouse, the one he always used as a charger, he fell off, and Chandra—that is the real name of the moon—saw him and laughed at his misfortune. Ganesha was furious and immediately cursed the moon, causing him to become an object of evil. Even the gods shunned Chandra, and he became frightened and hid himself in a lotus, so that the world was without moonlight. The gods, by then quite naturally most concerned, went to see Ganesha and asked him to lift the curse. Chandra, repenting, also begged his forgiveness, worshipped Ganesha, and the great god listened to this penitent sinner, and forgave him—at least almost forgave him—but declared that Chandra’s insolence must for all time be perpetuated by the curse having its effect on the anniversary of the god’s birthday—that is on Ganesha Chaturthi. This curse remains until these times, and those who look upon the moon on that day are fearful of the slander they will bring down upon themselves. Do you know, even the Lord Krishna was spoken ill of because of the fearful sin he had committed by looking at the moon on Ganesha Chaturthi?”

“And if by some chance you happen to see the moon that day, isn’t there any possibility of lifting the curse?” I asked, having in mind the belief of some of the people of the West that the bad luck which will befall them after seeing the moon through glass can be lifted by going outside and turning to face it seven times; and I went on, “Can’t the unfortunate sinner come to this temple and offer sacrifices or make a gift of some kind to the god?”

“Oh no. That is not the way out!” he exclaimed. “But there is one, and it is really quite simple. To allay the ill effects of the curse, you just use bad language at your friends and so give

them reason to pour abuse upon you. Immediately they do so you are freed of the age-old curse of the god Ganesha.”

The little town appears to be overflowing with ashrams. There are those which are set aside for the sadhus who remain there for a while in what is much like a monastery and known as a Math, a word taken from the Sanskrit, with a presiding Abbot referred to as a Mahant; it is a place which is their own, the one they may return to time after time. Then there are the ashrams which have been especially built for those pilgrims who come, remain a while, and then go. Finally there are those for women only—women sadhus are called Sadhvi, and they are but a fraction in number as compared to the men.

In the ashram I saw which had been set aside for women, a very large percentage of the inmates were novices, that is, they were still wearing their own clothes, not yet having turned their backs upon the cruel world. It was in the charge of an elderly man, the only male I saw there, his rooms being within the entrance gateway, the great wooden doors being set on the inner side, so that those who dwelt within were shut off even from him. The construction of the ashram was as I had before seen, a large open-to-the-sky central courtyard with its well and many flowering bushes shaded by great trees; on three sides at ground level were doors set close to each other as were those on the balconied first floor—all of them being the single rooms or cells of the women inmates; on the remaining side of the ground floor was a long dismal looking room, with its floor, walls, and ceiling all the same earth colour, they being dis-tempered with cow dung. It was then filled with women sitting like school children in rows, each on her own small square of carpet, and being led or conducted by one elderly woman sitting before them, each clashing together a small pair of brass cymbals in accompaniment to the song or hymn they were all singing, mostly without a sign of any expression upon their faces.

I was a little surprised to see that quite a number of them were mere girls and not unattractive to look at; their clothes

were of good quality, and they were certainly not of peasant stock. I commented on this to the "manager" who explained, "Most of them are Bengal widows who come here, one could almost say have fled here, rather than face the difficulties, the humiliations they would have had forced upon them by their late husband's families if they remained in their in-law's household, as they are bound to do by custom after the husband has died."

"So that some of them have been here for quite a while, others but a few days?" I asked.

"That is so; but you cannot tell by their expression how long they have been within the protection of the ashram. They all arrive looking most unhappy, wondering whether they have taken the right and wise step; for that reason they are permitted to remain if necessary many months before they decide whether they will leave the ashram and return to the world, or go on and renounce it." Much, I thought, as are the nuns of the Christian faiths.

"And how many remain?" I asked.

"Eventually take Sanyas—that is 'make their vows' as you would call it?—Perhaps a quarter of them" was what he told me.

I afterwards heard from a woman who should know, that it was far less than that. A number change their minds after relatives have searched them out and come to talk to them; others decide to face the hard world rather than go on and on until they become like the shrivelled-up saffron robed unromantic-looking women they now see wandering the roads, for the widow's lot in most parts of India is in these days not as bad as it was, say, fifty years ago, or before that when she was expected to show such deep respect for her departed husband that she committed suttee—permitting herself to be burned alive on his funeral pyre. But now she may have to remain in his parent's home and work under the tyrannical eye—yes and hand also—of her mother-in-law, and having experienced that life in an orthodox Hindu home as the wife of the old woman's

son, she flees from it to the protection of an ashram, rather than suffer for the whole of her life as an unwanted and at times detested widow there. So that the majority of sadhvis have really by the age-old Hindu customs of the land been driven to wear the saffron robe.

At the time when I was engaged upon writing this chapter I was discussing it with an Indian doctor friend and his wife, and then went on to talk about a recent case of suttee—or sati as it is sometimes spelt—in which the Thakurana of Bira, widow of a brigadier, had thrown herself on the funeral pyre of her late husband in the presence of five hundred people*. I commented that such cases must no doubt be rare, although it seemed odd to me that an educated woman of thirty-five years of age should do such a ghastly thing in these days of enlightenment.

To my surprise the doctor's wife declared with some emotion, "They may not be as rare as you imagine. India is a very vast country. Old religious customs die hard. This may not really have been done at the desire of the widow you must know!" Then she went on, "Now I will tell you a story, each word of which I can vouch for, and it happened only fifteen years ago. It is one which will no doubt interest you because in a way it concerns the very ashram you have been telling us about.

"In Benares there lived a very orthodox Hindu family. The father was severe, a martinet; the mother not quite so strict. The two elder children, a boy and a girl, were twins, they took after their mother—they were happy. The younger child, a boy who was born some years later, was just like his father. As they grew up, the eldest son found it impossible to continue to fit in with the stern religious discipline demanded by his father; one day there was a terrible row and he ran away from home. Then nineteen years of age, he took a job with an Insurance Company in Calcutta and in his spare time studied to become a homeopathic doctor, which he eventually succeeded in doing. The only one of his family with whom he communicated was

*This happened in Jodhpur on October 19th, 1954.

his twin sister, to whom he wrote through a trusted friend, and later on from time to time he sent her presents of money, which she saved, being frightened to spend it in case it might be noticed by her father. The son's name was never mentioned in the home and so far as the family were concerned he was no more.

"Then one day the father was taken ill at his office, and whilst waiting for a bus to return home, he dropped dead from heat stroke. He left little money that they could find; they never did discover where he had hidden the rest of his savings which they knew must be considerable, although they took up all the floorboards and searched behind the rafters. The younger son took over the family, permitting his sister to continue at college for two months since she was then to sit for her B.A. This she passed. The son was also fortunate in being accepted for his father's post; and in the household he continued to follow the strict Hindu code.

"He fell in love with the daughter of a wealthy landowner in a small town. His mother made the preliminary approach and proposals, and in the end found that the head of the wealthy family was also wanting to remarry his widower son, a man of about fifty who had two sons nearing manhood. The proposal was that there should be a double wedding, the son marrying the girl he wanted, and his sister—an extremely plain though fair-skinned girl—being married off to the old widower. She, of course, according to the prevailing custom, was never consulted as to her desires; this in spite of her being an educated and high-caste girl.

"Life for that girl in a household which was if anything far more orthodox than her own had ever been, since it contained so many old people nearing death, who as always turn to their religion, was really a living hell. As is usual she had moved away from the protection of her mother so could not turn to her, and her mother-in-law spent the whole day nagging and bullying her, at times even striking her, never allowing her to be with her husband, other than when she carried him his food

or went to their room at night. Added to this, the two stepsons took an instant dislike to her; although their own mother had died years before they never ceased to talk about her beauty and her admirable qualities—doubtless imaginary, but all built up and confirmed by the old grandmother. Although a wife and not a widow, the girl's life was terrible, gradually she lost her willpower, she never laughed, she was always fearful for what would happen next, and the husband was one she could not turn to. Soon the mother-in-law was saying that she must have something wrong with her as there was still no sign of a child coming. And when the daughter of the house returned for a holiday, this daughter-in-law had to wait upon her, was upbraided by the old woman in front of her, told what a wonderful cook and wife the daughter of the house had proved herself to be, one who had presented her husband with a healthy son within a year of marriage.

“The husband was then taken ill; there is little doubt that his sickness was cancer, and the wife had to attend to him and watch him die, at times she feared that they would even accuse her of causing his sickness. But that was not all; the two sons started whispering to her that if their father died, she would have to commit suttee on his funeral pyre as all the women of their family had done in spite of the British-made law; they tortured her with it day and night, never letting her rest. She knew that their father—her husband—heard what they were saying and yet he did not remonstrate with them; it seemed to her that by not doing so he agreed, might even have put the idea into their heads. And on that day when the doctor told them that the soul of the dying man would within a few hours leave them for that state of blessedness we call Nirvana, the fanatical old mother-in-law clutched her arm to drag her to her husband's side, whispering that it was now her duty to assure him that he would not leave this world alone, that she would follow with him. But although by that time in her agony she had become almost a nervous wreck, she still retained sufficient willpower to refuse.

“Late that night he died; at once the old woman snatched away the girl’s family jewellery—part of the dowry she had brought her husband—and all the clothes but those she wore. Although the word ‘suttee’ was never again uttered by them in her presence she was conscious that they were watching her closely. She heard the arrangements being made for the cremation to take place on the morrow, heard the creaking bullock carts passing the house on their way to the burning ghat with sandalwood and great tins of ghee; she pictured the spluttering, roaring flames which would at first dance, and then as the ghee was thrown on spurt high up into the sky, the mourners standing farther and farther back from the intense heat; and she could only realize that she was now so very weak, that the two sons were strong young men who hated the very sight of her. With it all, half demented, she could not stop herself from shaking in terror, she tried at first to hide herself away in a dark corner of the room for a while, then under the poor cot, but finally knowing that it was all quite useless, she gave herself up to uncontrolled weeping. Why must she now die in this terrifying manner? She had never once hurt or even killed a living creature, she had never once eaten meat, an egg had never passed her lips, she had even stopped other children from hurting animals, those two boys from cruelly torturing a kitten.

“Then of a sudden she remembered the money she had saved from her brother’s letters which had ceased from the time of her marriage—she well knew they had been stopped by her husband’s family. Of the money she had divided up and hidden in several places about the house, there were fifty rupees hidden in the room she was as good as confined to. She found them, and within a few minutes was gently pushing open the door of the room, then she dashed madly past the now sleeping family into the road. It was about three in the morning, no one was astir, and she rushed wildly on and on out into the open country where she hid herself as soon as the first sign of daybreak showed itself. She hid there for the next day and night, until

she knew that her husband's cremation must have taken place, and then she made her way, not to the nearest railway station, but to one farther on, trudging the whole distance like a peasant woman.

"From there she went to Rishikesh, to the ashram you have seen, one which had been mentioned to her by a fellow student who swore that she would go there if she shamed her family by failing to pass her B.A. And they took her in, they listened to her story, they soothed her nerves and fed her; they did not write to her husband's family nor to her mother for fear that the old lady might innocently inform her young brother. Instead they got into communication with her elder brother who at once came to fetch her to live with him in Calcutta, where she became a medical student, and where she fell in love with another student and married him."

She ceased speaking for a while, then said, "That my friend is a true story" and so saying she looked across at the doctor and they smiled at each other. I knew the reason, but still find it difficult to believe that she really imagined herself to be "an extremely plain girl".

Her story caused me to wonder what others were hidden behind the high mud and stone walls of that ashram. For instance, the newly-arrived, rather shy and quite good-looking young girl who, with two others I had asked, came out from the long dismal room so that I might take their photographs, the three of them standing before a ballustrade round a flower bed, she quietly seeking the centre position as though wanting the protection of the other women. What might her story be? Young, quite good-looking, and also well dressed.

And what was the story which could be told by the older woman who, with her glasses on the tip of her nose, came and sat down to chant a hymn as she accompanied herself with those tiny brass cymbals, her voice remarkably sweet, her expression saintly? She was not wearing the saffron robes of a sadhvi, although they told me she had been in the ashram for many weeks. Her complete quiet confidence and perfect composure I

shall never forget; until that time she had not spoken a word, but as I closed my camera case and thanked her in Hindi for allowing me to take her picture, I was amazed to hear her say in the most beautiful English, "I do hope that you will be satisfied with my picture, and that I posed as you wished!" And when I afterwards showed that picture to an Indian film fan who had known each star almost from the time that they started to shine in India, holding his hand over the spectacles she wore, he exclaimed, "Of course. I thought I recognized her, but it is some time since I have seen her on the screen. I cannot for the moment remember who it is." Then after a little, "Yes, I have it; she's . . . but no! Had she not wanted the world to forget her she would have told you. But this I will tell you; she was a famous singer who was in more than one film." I wonder what story lies behind all this; a lovely liquid voice suddenly lifted from the studios just at a time when it is most needed? Instead of a bouquet of flowers, I that evening sent along to the ashram a tube of Lotus-scented joss-sticks. That I had done this, I was so glad after I almost discovered who she was.

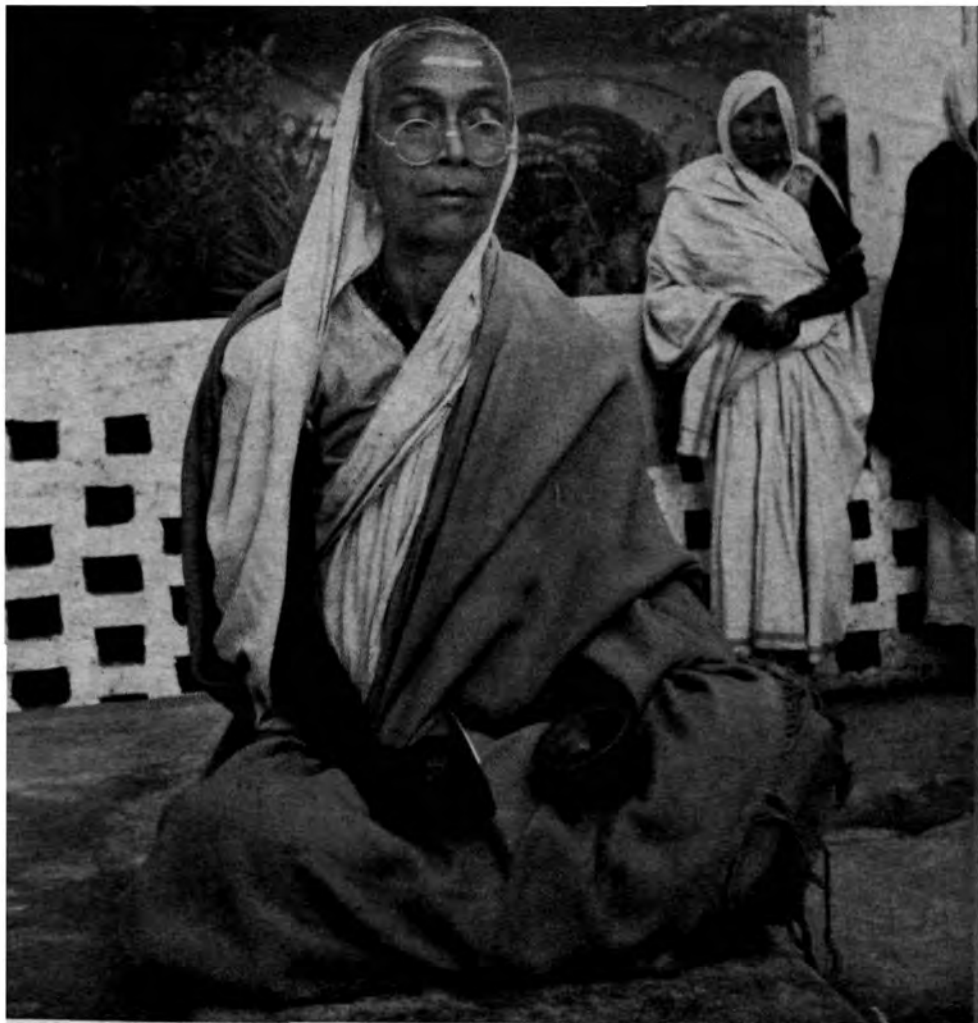
Going back the few hundred yards to the bungalow, we passed many sadhvis, for it was the hour at which they took their small brass buckets to the feeding centre in the town, there to either eat a meal or carry it back each to her own cell. They walked alone as the sadhus had done. The only two I saw together were moving slowly, one ahead of the other and joined by a staff, an end of which each held. The one behind was completely blind, the one who was leading had almost lost her sight. It may be that they had worshipped the sun for too many hours at a stretch, or it could have been as the result of some disease contracted from their departed husbands.

All of them lived within the protection of the ashram walls, each in her separate tiny room, a single building, one of many standing like hives in an apiary. Oddly enough, although they walked alone, once they were in the feeding centre it was difficult to hear yourself speak for their chatter. Before partaking of the meal they all sang a sort of hymn of thanks, this going on

as the servers passed from one to another while they sat in rows, the hymn fading away to nothingness as the last sadhvi was served and started to eat the simple yet sufficient meal provided.

In the very centre of the little town is a large building three stories high; from the outside—so frequently deceptive with Indian houses—it might be a brewery or a tannery, the high walls being broken here and there with tiny windows which seem to have been set at random on their face. Only on the front side is there any sign of life, for on the ground floor on each side of the archway entrance, have been made a number of shops, the open type with wide wood steps leading up to them; of these, two were then open, a food shop and one selling kitchen utensils; the others were shuttered up.

But once inside that archway the picture changed completely; the large central courtyard was a mass of colour, in the middle was a creeper-clad summer house, there were large shady flowering trees and bushes with seats set here and there among them, and the building itself was in three balconied, cloistered tiers, all with their little rooms looking down on the bright central picture. At one end they differed in construction; pot plants stood about—a great favourite in India—here lived the “proprietor” as they introduced her to me, a sweet, rather frail, old lady dressed in the plain crisp white sari of a widow. She was probably in her seventies, her skin soft and pale, yet very fresh, her eyes bright, her nose delicately chiselled; she must have been very beautiful when she was young, and it was in those days that she first came to live in Rishikesh. By her secretary, a white-bearded and learned sadhu, I had been asked into her private suite of this almost palace, into the great reception room on the ground floor, a room handsomely furnished with Indian-style overmantle, a large round table, beautifully carved armed chairs, the windows glazed with coloured glass, the floor high polished. Here, as though we had been expected instead of just dropping in, servants brought us a delightful tea, the service silver but not ostentatious, the

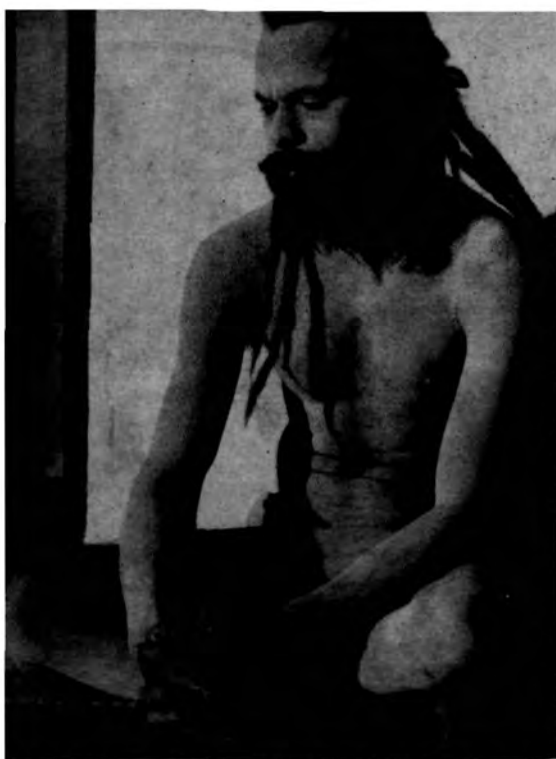


"I hope that you will be satisfied with my picture"

A blind sadhvi being led by another who was almost blind

National Library,
Calcutta-27.





An educated, intelligent, ash-covered sadhu seen in the feeding centre

"I was conscious that one pair of eyes never left me"



china delicate, and she came in to meet us with that complete composure only natural among the high-caste educated ladies of the land. Family pictures hung on the wall, at the head of these was one of a young man, so young that his chin had not developed, his neck was thin and long, and he appeared hardly to have reached the age when a man shaves. He had been her husband, and at that age he had died and left her a widow. She had at no time for one moment considered committing suttee; when her money was freed by the Court, she had built this great place, a haven for pilgrims, one to which they were ever welcome to come, but they were also expected to leave after their pilgrimage was over; none were permitted to stay more than a reasonable period of time—about fourteen days. It was the most beautifully maintained ashram I have ever seen, even to the extent of having a little office in which were recorded the names of those who accepted the gracious hospitality of the patroness.

In her quiet way this now frail old lady has made her contribution to the gods by helping those who sought to worship them in this part of the Himalayas, a part which can become extremely cold in the winter; but she had made it in such a manner that those who went there had bright, happy memories of their whole stay, unspoil't by thoughts of nights spent in dark, dismal, small ashram rooms looking into a bare courtyard only decorated by a well-top. I can imagine that Divali was celebrated with many lights in this particular ashram and haven of peace.

It was surprising to hear that every day, even in the depth of winter, this now frail scrap of a woman walked down to the holy Ganges, about a quarter of a mile away, and there took her bath in the icy waters.

CHAPTER FOUR

BEFORE I started on this delving into the lives of sadhus I sought the advice of "those who are in the know" and was immediately warned by them of the difficulties I should encounter, phrases being used like "a closed book" and "vows of secrecy and silence". I was solemnly assured that only by actually becoming a sadhu, as certain foreign writers had done, could I hope to find out all those things I wanted to know, and that those writers had for the most part become devout sadhus with the result that they enlightened the world little as to what they had discovered. To become a sadhu I must "completely renounce all worldly ties, family, home, possessions, and wander like a beggar from one holy place to another, from one teacher to another, suffering untold austerities", none of which I had the slightest intention of doing. I explained that I just wanted to "look-see and find out"; and I did, too, without undergoing "untold sufferings", though there were many tiring journeys and some considerable inconvenience. But in all fairness to those whose advice I had sought, I have to admit that from the beginning I was more than fortunate, for I have known of more than one who has done his utmost to discover the secrets hidden behind sadhu practices and failed; I heard of one who by his indiscreet writings during and after his search caused the door to be closed the tighter for those who followed him.

The day after my arrival in Rishikesh, I wandered along to one of the larger ashrams on the road out of the little town, one which was the main feeding centre for those who wear the saffron robe, or are "sky clad". To this place at the hour before dusk, dozens of them come, walking considerable distances from lonely places round about, without clocks but knowing

the time by some instinct whether the sky be clear or cloud covered.

They wear the most amazing assortment of coverings, some a simple loin-cloth—a langottee, others coarse long-sleeved collarless shirts hanging over a length of cloth wrapped round like a skirt; but the most favoured was a length of cloth about a yard wide, first wrapped round the waist to hang like a skirt, then carried over one shoulder, and, if the length permitted, across the other one also, with not a pin nor hook to hold it in place, it being just tied into itself; one wore his cloth cut like a night-shirt, most all of them had dyed the material to a saffron shade.

Arriving a little early and going through the entrance I saw that already a few sadhus had come to the place, and were sitting under a veranda in two rows, one with their backs to the wall and the other in front of the pillars; between them was a space of about six feet and at one end sat a man reading from a holy book which was set before him on a small desk covered by an orange-coloured, gold-bordered, silk cloth. He wore ordinary civilian clothes; the book was large like a family Bible; of those who listened, some sat with eyes closed, some looking intently at the reader, none saw me enter or, after removing my shoes, step up on to the verandah and take a picture.

Gradually the numbers grew; then when about sixty had taken their places both under the veranda and outside, each man about a foot from his neighbour, plates and mugs before them, they started to sing and the manager of the organization came out from the kitchen with one man carrying a large brass tray full of chapaties (which are like unleavened bread shaped much as a pancake), another with a brass bucket of mustard-coloured, thick stew, and a third with a thicker greyish pudding.

As each man was served, so his singing ceased and he started to eat; the stewards—and again neither they nor the manager wore saffron robes—made a second round after they had given food to a few sadhus who without a word or sign of gratitude

carried it away with them. Then when all were satisfied, that which was left was given to the beggars who had stood patiently in the background hoping that the appetites of the fortunate sadhus would not be so great that nothing would remain for them, or that this might not be the kind of place where the dozens of sacred monkeys were entitled to their fill before these hungry mortals. But there was plenty for all and we were offered, and took away with us in a leaf, some of the pudding-like food which was most delicious sweetmeat, far better than could have been bought in any of the "hotels".

And as I wandered to and fro before the lines of sadhus, picking out from among them the characters catching my eye because of the beauty of their happy old faces, I was ever conscious that one pair of eyes never once left me. They were those of a curly-black-haired, golden skinned young man, but at that moment I was only interested in the old white bearded sadhus. Then as I found that there still remained one more film in my camera before completing the roll, I looked round for copy and the powerful eyes set in the beard-fringed face attracted me.

I then knew for certain that somewhere, sometime, I had before known their owner and my eyes lingered for a while upon him, encouraging him, so that as soon as he had finished his dish of food, he got up, hurriedly washed his mouth and hands under the tap at the end of the temple and came up to question me in English, "You were before in the Services?" And when I admitted that I was, he told me who he had been—a Paratroop sergeant, or Havildar as they are called in the Indian Army, who had worked under me some years before. I remembered him because it was he who had stilled some considerable unrest in the messroom on one unfortunate occasion; I recollected that they had then called him "the Padre". Now he had obtained his discharge from the Services and taken to the saffron cloth. As a writer, I knew from experience that being an Indian his story could well be as interesting as it might be flat.

We talked for a while, then wandered along the main road back to where a raised road crosses a wide nullah for about a quarter of a mile. There he stood; it was obvious that he lived somewhere over to the left—towards or even across the holy Ganges.

He was saying, "Almost as soon as I left the Services I bought some extra land and three buffalos and these, together with what savings I had left after I had repaired our house, I gave to my widowed mother. I asked her blessing after telling her that I had heard the call to come to the Himalayas, the home of our gods, and then I left her. She was smiling through her tears, Sahib. She was so very, very brave, my old mother. She never once reproved me for leaving her alone again, never once reminded me how in the letters she had written to me when I was in uniform she had so often said how she dreamed of the day of my return, and already had a lovely rich wife selected for me. My mother is a very holy woman, Sahib. I am happy that I did not have to do like so many others who hear that call, leave their people sometimes destitute, for my mother will be able to live in comfort on her land with her three buffalo."

"But didn't it break your heart to leave her like that?" I asked.

"No, not at all, Sahib. I was happy to come; the call of the gods is greater than that of the mother. I had heard that call even before I returned home, but did not understand or realize it until he who is now my guru—my teacher—came to our village while I rested before seeking work. Then it happened that one night—in the dead of it—I awakened and felt an urge to go down to the stream. And I went, and there I found a sadhu seated before a smouldering log. As he looked up at my approach I knew that he was my father—my spirit father. And I knew that when he went I must follow with him, even before he spoke to me saying, 'I have waited seven days for you to come to me my son.' And as he said that, I realized that for seven nights I had felt the same urge at midnight to leave my house and go down to the river caves where he then was."

"So you left with him right away?" I asked.

"No. I was torn within myself. Each night I went down to the caves to listen there for hours to him speaking such wonderful words of wisdom. The time came when I knew for certain that I should really have to go. But it was terrible, for, you see, my old mother was not really strong, she had aged with my years away. She had come of a rich family, she had never known want, and now it seemed that when she needed me most the gods were calling me. So it was that I bought the land; I went to the District Commissioner to make certain that it was in order, and I told him what I intended to do, about repairing the house and making good the well and buying the buffalo. He was an Englishman but he seemed to understand, although he declared, 'I never shall understand you queer fish so long as I live, and I've served for more than half a lifetime in India!' But he promised to do his best to see that my mother did not want."

"You hear from him? You write to your mother?" I asked.

"No, Sahib. I never hear from him; I never write to her. You see, when I took sanyas—that is, became a sadhu—I left behind the old life, I received another name. I now have no mother."

I wondered if he realized that there was little doubt that the Englishman had left India some years ago. I changed the talk to Service days, then as the sun started to cast long shadows before quickly disappearing behind the mountains I asked if he lived across the nullah, to which he replied:

"Yes. And I should much like you to see my hut one day. I live on an island in the holy Ganga, one which is cut off completely by the fast-flowing waters of our lovely goddess when she surrounds us with the snow thaw of the spring. It is an island on which so many sadhus like myself live, there are many schools, many teachers, and many students; I am but a student still. But I must first seek the permission of my guru before I may ask you there—he may refuse. Yet who knows perhaps tomorrow I shall be able to call you to meet him. It is my great wish that you should meet." And with that he left me

I learned afterwards that no European, and indeed very few

Indians, had trodden the island for about ten years; from the time when an American seeking copy for a book was invited there, and had taken many photographs and been told much of the lives of sadhus. Unfortunately he had not endeavoured to see their way of life and their teachings through other than his own eyes, and months later they first saw with delight pictures of themselves and their abode, then read the rubbish he had said about them, which was just as he saw them. No doubt he had been honest, but they only knew that he was far from being a friend, that he was one who had abused their trusting hospitality and honesty. They said nothing, but never since that time have Europeans been invited to visit their sacred abode. To me it was amazing that to this far-away, almost isolated place, copies of the magazines in which the serial articles appeared, should have found their way. It can well be that they were sent there by those friends in the outside world who sought to warn these "holy men" of the continued insincerity of man.

Next evening we again met and I was taken down the then wide, dried-up river bed to a small stream which crossed it, and told to be there next morning. "What time would suit you best?" my friend asked. Again we parted, the hour of ten being fixed, for the "great Guru" had said to him, "The man that you have trust in, I also have trust in, my son. You have learned much from me, but of others, the men who dwell in and belong to the outer world, you gained knowledge and experience long before you came to me. He who is your friend must and will be my friend. I know it!" All very flattering and flowery, but that did not matter, I was to be accepted on the "sacred island".

Next day at the hour arranged, I was at the stream. Large stepping stones had been placed across it, shallow though it was, and on the other side I followed a trodden track which led up the side of a silver sandbank into the woodlands of the island. Going on through the tall trees and past heavy, though not dense bushes, still following the track, I came on a crossing and here it was that another sadhu met me and signed me to follow him until we came out on to the other side of the island

with a large expanse of silver grey sand shore, on which were hundreds of great smooth grey rocks and boulders, spreading its way down to a great, swift-running, clear blue river—the sacred Mother Ganges.

Here and there among the rocks trees were growing out from the sands, and saffron-robed figures were sitting on the rocks cross-legged, some washing their clothes, others bathing, some wearing saffron clothes almost completely covering them, others stark naked; they looked up at me and then went on with whatever they were doing—most of them appeared to be doing nothing. Then in the distance and near to one of the trees I saw a figure standing, wearing just a tight langottee, his body a glorious copper shade, his hands resting on a long staff. He was looking wide-eyed and unblinking ahead, to above the mountain tops, sun worshipping. I then saw that this man was my host, and the hitherto silent sadhu who had guided me there told me that he would finish this period of his sun worship in a little while; that each day he was extending his gaze on the sun by about half an hour, so that eventually he would be able to fix his eyes upon it as it rose and, following it across the sky, only rest them when it had disappeared below the horizon. To my question "Why?" he made as though he had not heard me and walked away, so I just sat on a rock until the other one decided that his period of worship or penance—whichever he considered it—was complete.

After a while he relaxed and then turned to look towards me, I felt, as though conscious all the time that I had been there watching him and he was happy that I had seen him worshipping the sun, but it was obvious that the many minutes which elapsed before he moved and came over to me, were really necessary for him to recover his near normal sight. I can remember at that particular moment thinking of the two sadhvis I had seen pass the bungalow, one near blind, leading the other completely blind, and as he came closer I saw that the whites of his eyes were bloodshot, the eye balls far from clear, the iris delated.

As though immediately reading my thoughts he exclaimed

proudly, almost defiantly, "When winter comes I shall follow my guru and stand up to my neck in the sacred ice waters of the holy river, and like him I shall not feel the cold; I shall stand there for hours on end, washing my body clean of sins, afterwards absorbing into it some of the purity of the mighty goddess, and I shall bathe in the warm glow entering into me!"

Looking towards the river I saw that although it was quite wide, at this part it had been narrowed down from the lake-like spread farther up-stream, and from the cut logs then racing past in the water I could see that it was swift as well as deep, for, higher up, the colour of the water was pale blue with the sand close below, whereas here it was a deep blue, reflecting on the far side the trees which grew as though out of the rockface to overhang the river with lovely shades of green.

"But does it do any good to anyone else?" I asked.

"No. Why should it? It is for each of us to cleanse away his own sins when we have reached the stage that I have got to after many lives, and prepare himself for Nirvana. I am now reaching out to that goal we all endeavour to attain. I have turned my back on the world. I have given up all my worldly possessions. I am owner of nothing, even this cloth I wear, it is not mine, it has been lent to me, I do not possess it, I do not need it." And with that he pulled it off and with a theatrical gesture flung it on a nearby rock. His staff he reverently laid down on the sands and then exclaimed. "Now I am quite free, no longer am I earth bound. The god can take me to Nirvana whenever he wishes, nothing holds, binds, or ties me to this earth, I am as free as the birds in those trees, as free as the sacred milk-white cows you see wandering the island!"

Having said this he took a few steps, took up the loin cloth which he most carefully adjusted around his waist, and picked up the staff. So doing he was as good as telling me that he did not really consider himself yet free to leave this world and was therefore prepared to remain long enough to show me round, and he turned towards the trees of the island. I was afterwards to find that certain of the sadhus always demonstrated a point

in this rather dramatic manner. Indians as a rule talk very much with their hands and, to the non-Latin European way of thinking, exaggerate an expression in order to press home something they are explaining or demanding.

So now I knew why some sadhus unashamed and sometimes proudly walk the earth completely naked.

As we reached the trees and the undergrowth I saw that we had come upon a pathway edged with stones, that a flight of half a dozen steps had been formed from great smooth rocks, and that to one side a part which jutted out into the sands had been edged with boulders, its surface shingled over, and standing upright in the centre was a large grey sausage-shaped stone of which strangely enough there were thousands on the shore. Passing this my friend placed the palms of his hands together in supplication, stopped for a moment and bowed, and then moved on, afterwards looking back over his shoulder and quietly informing me that it was "the Lord Shiva". I then realized that it was indeed a natural shaped Shiva symbol, around the base of which flowers had been scattered.

Almost immediately after this we came on an open clearing with great trees shading the shingle floor and small thatched huts, much like miniature Forest Rangers' cottages, scattered about. The bases of the few sacred trees which came within the area had been built seat high with stones, and on these Shiva symbols set up. The front portion of each hut was like an open veranda, one or two had rush mats covering the floor, and then I saw in the half shadows that under one veranda roof a sadhu was sitting on a small saffron-edged, brown blanket. But he was unlike my friend, he was older, his hair long, and silvering like his beard; he had the lean lithe body of a young man though—this I saw as we went forward.

He had been meditating and was still seated tailor-fashion in what is to my mind the most picturesque of all the asanas or Yoga poses, the Lotus posture (Padmasana—Padma meaning Lotus in Sanskrit). This is one of the most popular "seats" for concentration and meditation; by many schools of thought this

“Pose of the Buddha” is considered the best of all the asanas, but it is for advanced Yogis. There are two forms, the free (mukta) and the bound (baddha). The sadhu I had come upon was then seated in the free position, with the knees bent, touching the ground; the feet, soles up placed on the opposite thighs near to the hips. During meditation, concentration, or the recitation of holy scriptures or words, with the back straight, the hands are placed with the side of the palms on the knee joints, the tip of the first finger and the thumb touching, thus forming with them what is known as the symbol of knowledge (Junana Madra). At other times, and not infrequently during meditation, the hands are placed loosely in the lap, usually with the palms upwards—cupped. Seated in this position, with the spine and central artery straight, there is rhythmical respiration, so that it is a most excellent position to take even for ordinary breathing exercises, let alone those most unbelievable ones which are undertaken by the Yogi.

And according to the ancient Hindu books, what a very wonderful asana this really is when, in addition to taking up the pose the tip of the tongue is placed against the roots of the teeth, it then cures diseases of the heart and lungs, fevers, digestive disorders, overcomes on the one hand laziness, on the other sleeplessness and even mental weaknesses.

I next realized that there was another and younger man sitting to one side. He was a disciple, the older man being “My guru, my Master!” for as my sadhu friend bent down and touched his feet he said, “Master, this is the Englishman I have told you about.” And I was rather surprised when the guru stood up to greet me first with the usual palms together Hindu gesture and then held out his hand. He spoke a little English, and I was afterwards to discover that he was a man very learned in the scriptures of the Hindu beliefs, that besides those of his pupils or disciples who lived each in his separate hut close by, there were two who came each day to sit at his feet and study, both retired men of some importance, one a High Court judge, the other a most successful business man.

Clasping my hand, he grasped it with the other, holding it longer than is usual with a handshake even for a Pathan, and in those few moments I was conscious that his eyes were searching my mind, "What kind of a man is this?" It was as though I could feel them boring into mine. At the same time I was also seeking his thoughts, and I realized that perhaps for the first time in my life I was looking at one who was as sincere and pure a man in thoughts and beliefs as I had yet known or even met among those who wore the saffron robe.

Until that time I had always imagined a guru—that is, a religious teacher of the Hindus—to be old, a philosopher with a long white beard, a slightly halting voice, having by his many years of experience gained that knowledge which had permitted him to set himself above other men as a teacher—a master. But this man, although his hair was greying, was youthful in body, his face, though slightly lined, was that of a man of say forty-five years, and as I noticed when I later saw him walking, his stride and carriage were like that of a youth. He had as though two sets of eyes—the one steel-like, discerning and serious, the other laughing; the creases round them being those of a man who was supremely happy and contented with his lot. Whereas with the first sadhu I had been caused to wonder how frequently he bathed, with his guru, even in that short space of time, I was aware of a strange and pleasant odour surrounding him, not unlike that of the lotus. When one has travelled the world and made a study of the men of many lands, there is so often born that invaluable intuition which enables one to judge most men on first meeting them; I instinctively knew that here was a man who could be trusted, one who was no humbug, one who was sincere, who carefully weighed up all that he heard or read, and then after carefully sifting, accepted that which he felt in his heart was possible and right.

The word guru really means more than teacher, it means guide: translated, the two syllables mean "darkness disperser". The guru is the one who, after blending his mind with that of his pupil, is from the knowledge gained by self-experience able

to distinguish the material from the illusory when the pupil's senses are withdrawn from external perception; he is thus able to save his pupil from going too far or suffering some hurt. He is believed to be one who is the reincarnation of seers and sages of old, one who has through thousands of lives become possessed of a deep knowledge and understanding of all things both material and spiritual.

He showed me the inside of his hut; it contained practically nothing but a mat spread on the floor, a few books on a box, a cloth hanging on the wall, a small brass bucket, a begging bowl, and a staff. There was no lamp—when darkness descends the sadhu goes to rest, he has no need of a light. I saw no cooking pot, though a smouldering log lay to one side. Then as we stood and talked a young man came into the compound carrying his brass bucket and a brass plate. In the bucket was a gruel, on the plate chappatis; he had returned with food from the feeding centre *for himself and his guru, he being one of the other disciples*. They asked me to share their meagre meal, but this I could not do and excused myself, explaining that I must return to the bungalow. In spite of that the guru detained me longer, his meal could wait he said, and he insisted upon accompanying me to the small stream which separated the island and asked me to come again next day when he said I would perhaps have some questions to ask of him; these he would gladly answer.

He who had brought me there then took over as my guide again and accompanied me to the main road. On the way he suddenly asked me if I ever happened to pass near to his home district, and, when I said that it was possible, asked, "If I give you her address, would you seek out my old mother, and then when you come this way again tell me how she is? Even without her address you would so easily know her, for although living in the plains she has the red cheeks of a girl from the hills—my mother was born in the hills—and she is always smiling, even when tears streamed down her face as I left her, she was smiling. If she should ask about me, her son, tell her that I am only happy if she is still happy, will you?"

I agreed to do as he asked. In fact, at that moment I was so carried away that I determined to make a special journey to see the old woman. I realized that this son had tried so very hard to renounce the world, but that an invisible umbilical cord still tied him to the woman who had given him birth, and, as with so many Indians, it was too strong to allow him to forget his mother forever.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE next morning when I went over to the island I started on what was to become an interesting study of the Yoga practices. Fortunately I was armed with a certain amount of knowledge—all gleaned from books. It was not a firm foundation, I was aware of that because so many writers disagreed on details and dates, but between them I was not left entirely ignorant of the subject.

I knew, for instance, that the word Yoga comes from the Sanskrit root “Yug”—to link, to join, to unite; the English word “yoke” originating from the same root. A Yogi is one who practises Yoga. The “home” of Yoga is India. Ross in his book, *The Meaning of Life to Hindus and Brahmins*, reminds us that during the excavations at Mohenjo Daro there was found a seal dated round about 3000 B.C. On this was a four-faced figure seated with legs folded in the Yogi-like posture which is traditionally associated with contemplation. Around this figure are four beasts, the bull, the elephant, the buffalo, and the rhinoceros, suggesting that the god later known as Shiva—the Great Yogi, was worshipped by the people of that age in the aspect of Pasupati—the Lord of Beasts. This could mean that Yoga asanas and disciplines are older—perhaps by a thousand years—than the Vedas and the Upanishads.

I knew that the *Vedas*—a word meaning knowledge—were the oldest books of the Hindus, that they are believed to be the inspired words of God as received by the great sages of ancient India thousands of years before the Christian era. I knew that the *Upanishads*, a word literally meaning that which brings us close to God, and of which some twelve are well known, were the inspired words of many different sages. I knew that there

were other religious books of the Hindus, such as the *Smritis*—meaning remembrances, which contain those words of God which were heard by the inspired sages, committed to memory and afterwards recorded by them. Then there is the famous *Bhagavad Gita*—the Song Celestial or the Lord's Song—propounded in India several centuries before Christ, and containing in its seven hundred verses the essence of the teachings of all religious philosophies; and this is but a part of the *Mahabharata*, a great Hindu collection of over one hundred thousand Sanskrit verses. Then there are the *Laws of Manu*, a volume much quoted—and so many others, the different sects concentrating upon their own particularly chosen books.

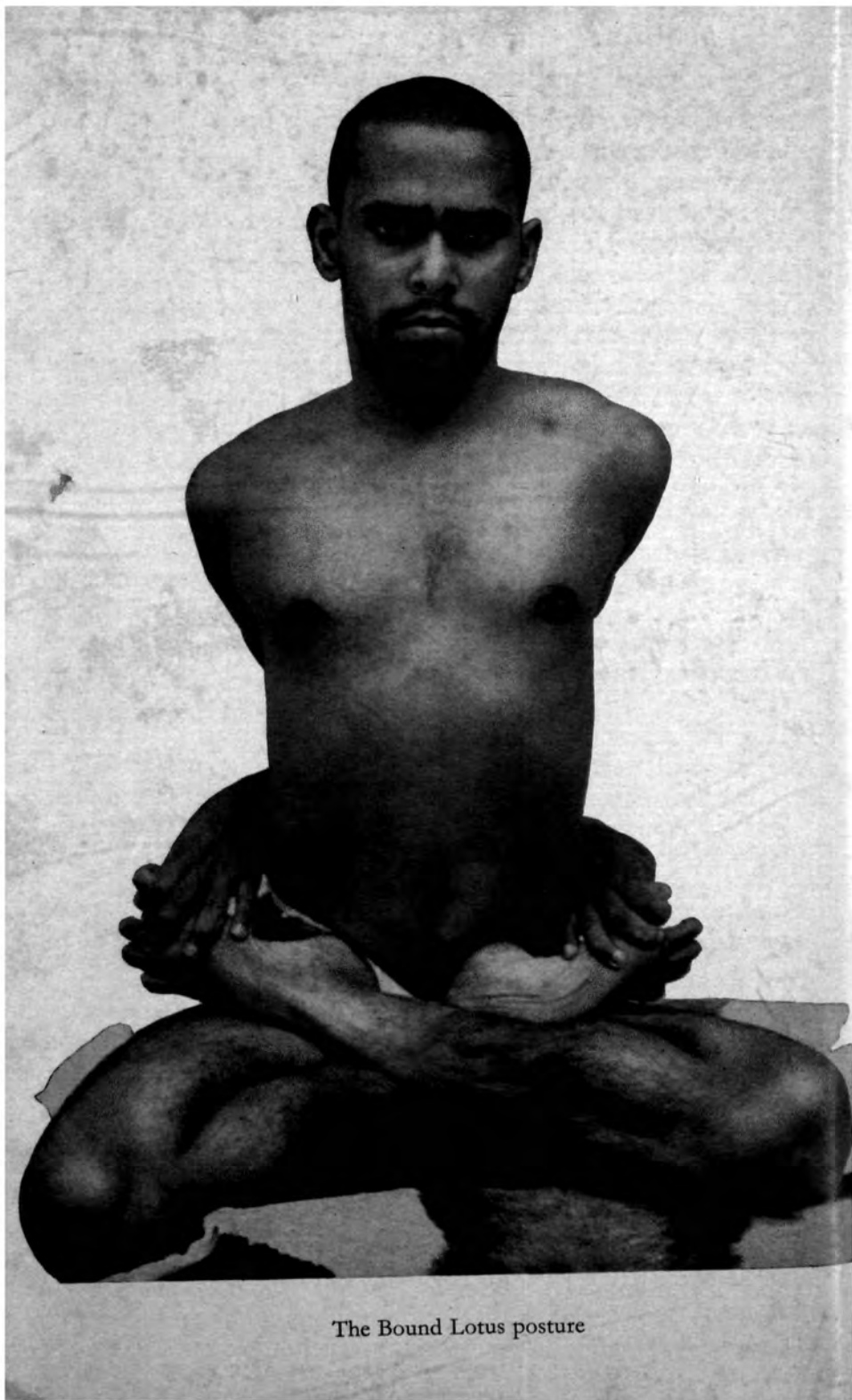
I knew that there was a belief, now among many peoples, that Jesus the Christ, between the ages of twelve and twenty-nine was in India, his years there being recorded in Hindu and Buddhist Shastras as well as in certain Yoga manuscripts; that he went to Puri, to South India, and Benares to study the *Vedas* and *Laws of Manu*, to the Himalayas where it is said that he studied in the solitary places the different paths of liberation, the art of contemplation, and meditated there until he found the perfect realization of his oneness with God.

I also knew that there were many kinds of Yoga, they might well be called schools of Yoga, each one setting out to supply the varying minds of men; but none are agreed about the number of recognized schools; some bracket two or more schools together, while others divide them. All, however, seem agreed with the *Shiva Samahita* that Raja Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Laya Yoga, and Mantra Yoga were the principal ones. I had before heard that Raja Yoga might safely be practised to quite an advanced stage without the help of a teacher, but that it was dangerous to undertake any of the others without the step by step guidance of an experienced guru such as were only to be found in India; that those who endeavoured to undertake them risked harm to the body, disease, and even insanity, for the student does not himself know when to move forward to the next stage, only the one who is watching and



Sun worship. "Looking wide-eyed and unblinking ahead"

National Library,
Calcutta-27.



The Bound Lotus posture

listening is able to judge that. I have a suspicion that some of the saffron-robed men I met from time to time had in the past practised these particular Yoga exercises without the guidance of a gurul

I knew that it was claimed that sadhus could so control the breath that like certain species of animals they could as it were go into a state of hibernation; and I had seen one such sadhu seated within wooden walls buried feet deep in the sandy earth, the mound four feet above him, behind the Delhi Fort and close by the Ghandi Samadhi; fourteen days later I saw the earth removed, saw them open the wooden door and stagger back with the heat and stench which came from within; and they then removed the dead body, since the sadhu's devoted disciple who had remained close by during the fourteen days could not bring back life into it even though he carried out every instruction of his late beloved master in the event of apparent death. I remember how, as I looked on the really saintly face of the dead sadhu and heard from those who had known him how kindly he was, I thought what a pity it had been that his belief in the Yoga practices had made him confident that he would come out of the tomb alive.

When I had crossed the little stream over the stepping stones and then walked through the woodlands, I came out at the other side of the island on to the sandy wide river bank. In the far distance I saw sadhus, many alone, either sitting and meditating or washing. Not far away, my late Havildar was standing just as I had before found him, resting on his long staff and gazing at the sun; I remembered that he would be doing this for an extra half-hour to-day. Close to the river, in fact just in it, I saw two figures sitting cross-legged, one facing the other, each on a separate great grey boulder. Then as I got the closer I recognized the guru; before him was a youth—almost young enough to be referred to as a boy. He held in his hand an open book, his only clothing was a small loin-cloth, his hair longish, his skin smooth and fair, his face intelligent, his hands artistic. Afterwards, when he stood up, I saw that his body was lithe and

perfectly sculptured like that of a young Grecian athlete as he moved freely across the sands to his hut.

He was the youngest disciple of the guru and had been with him but a few weeks. I endeavoured to find out his story, where he had come from, why he had come, but it was quite impossible; what was more, no one but myself seemed to have the slightest interest in his past. "One morning but a few moons ago when our guru awoke before the dawn to prepare himself for the day he found sitting before him this boy," my sadhu friend told me. "When he saw that our guru's eyes were opened this boy said quietly, 'I am here, my master, for I knew that you had called me to come to you!' and our guru is now testing him to decide whether he should take him as a disciple."

The boy must have crossed the stream and passed through the tall trees of the island during the night hours. Like a homing pigeon he had come straight to the one he believed had called him—his guru.

He had the appearance of having come from a family of high caste. There is little doubt that even as I then saw him, somewhere in India there was a weeping mother, maybe a furious father; it could be that he had suddenly disappeared from a boarding school, for his standard of education was good. In that event there would be a distracted and disgraced schoolmaster, unless the boy had always shown a deep interest in the sadhu life and had left behind a message.

When I tried to discover something of his background I found myself up against a solid stone wall. "He has renounced the world, for him the past is already dead, he has no mother, he has no father, our guru has to him given a new name, he has found himself with new brothers, for we all here are brothers!"

The book the boy held in his hand was that sacred book of the Hindus, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and I afterwards wondered whether the guru was not then explaining those four verses in Chapter Six of the book which directs the Yogi to "set in a pure place his seat firm, neither too high nor too low, covering it first with sacred kusha grass, then a deer skin and over that a

cloth. On this couch he should take his place, causing his mind to become intent and bringing into control both thought and sense, and let him practise Yoga for the purification of his soul. Holding his body, head, and neck firm, erect, and still, he must fix his gaze on the tip of his nose, and not permit his eyes to wander at that which is around him. His mind subdued, serene, and fearless, first under a vow of celibacy, he shall sit with his mind given over to concentrate on me alone", since but a few minutes later the guru moved from his rock, and with the boy following went towards an open space among the trees of the island, away from the silver sand and the large grey boulders.

He then spread out, one on top of the other, three layers of material which he had brought over with him, the boy following and copying each movement with a set of his own. The first layer, which looked much like coarse sacking, might well have been made up from dried grass, but I was certain that the second was not a deer skin, and I made a note to bring with me next time I came to Rishikesh a buck or deer skin for the guru, since in season most week-ends on shikar we shot one or more of them, handing the carcass over to the kitchen, never giving the skins a second thought—unless the horns were exceptionally long, in which event the head was mounted for wall decoration.

I had noticed when I first arrived that although the guru was quite naturally sitting in his favourite Lotus posture while he instructed his disciple in the scriptures, the boy sadhu had—although he had slipped from it because of the shape of the rock—taken up the simplest of all positions used during meditation, that which is called the Sukhasana and referred to by translators as "the easy posture", in which the most usual position—for there are a number of positions bearing the same name—is that where the pupil first sits with his legs stretched out before him, then bends the right leg at the knee and places the foot under the left leg; the left leg is next bent and the foot placed under the right leg, although it does not really matter which leg is first bent. The knees, which at first stick up, soon drop into the horizontal position.

But now the boy was being shown the Lotus posture by his guru, and I was amazed how quickly he mastered it; I have since discovered that Indians can usually undertake this asana with very little practice, whereas Europeans find it most difficult and some never do manage to perform it however much they try. The explanation is that generally an Indian's legs are longer, thinner, and more flexible, they are not so muscle-bound, in addition to which most of them have practised sitting cross legged on the floor since early childhood and can immediately take up the Lotus position.

Leaving the boy to sit in that position, the guru, although he had not acknowledged my presence, gave me by demonstration what I suppose he considered my first lesson. He removed his loin-cloth, laid it aside, and resumed his seat in the Lotus posture with the right foot on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh. He then placed his arms round behind his back and took hold of the toes of the same side of his body—though now placed on the opposite side, pulling his feet close to his belly with the heels each side of his navel, pressed his chin close to his chest and fixed his eyes on the middle of his brows saying as he did so, "The Padamasana badda" (The Bound Lotus posture). In both cases, free or bound, I could see that the knees were forced down to the ground by reason of the feet being placed on the hips, soles upwards.

Then as I gazed at the naked guru who had tied himself up as though in one great human knot, the most extraordinary fallacy of both scent and vision was cast over me. At first there came a most glorious perfume in the air, one which I imagined to be from the thousands of little white flowers I had seen on the bushes as I passed between them some considerable distance away, flowers which are called Rat ki Rani (Queen of the night). Next, it was as though the guru's shining coffee-coloured body was becoming lighter and lighter in shade until it ceased to change, remaining like old ivory. There was no movement, it was as though he had become solidified. I stood in wonderment, then rubbed my eyes as he became as though surrounded

by an extraordinary translucent mauve haze, tulle-like, which gradually took form, the edge more defined, and became an egg shape as though encasing him as he sat.

At that moment I remembered how, when I was searching out and checking material for my book *This is Kashmir*, I had been told a story by an aged Hindu temple priest, of how, during the cruel and merciless rule of the Pathans—who were Muslims—, a very famous holy sage was offered the choice of conversion or death. He refused to give an answer, and instead took up the Bound Lotus posture, immediately going into a trance. The soldiers grabbed him to find that he was then like a statue, cold, solid, and hard. They skinned one of the sacred cows they had just before slaughtered outside the temple, and after ramming the sadhu, still in his posture, into it, rowed the bundle out onto the Dal Lake wherein grow thousands of lovely lotus plants, and pitched it overboard. Years later, on that day in which the Muslim rulers fled the valley to be replaced by Sikhs, there was a great storm and the usually still waters of the Dal Lake became greatly disturbed. Then, as the storm died down and the clouds rolled away, in the light of a full moon could be seen a sacred white cow quietly swimming in the waters; on her back was the holy sage, now wreathed in an opal mist, shining like silver, and seated in the same Lotus posture. With the dawn, at the foot of the water-steps of a ruined temple which had been cast down by the Muslims, was found an old half-inflated cow skin; on it and upright sat the complete skeleton of the drowned sadhu still in the Lotus posture, the bones pure white and held fixed in position by a fossil formation over the joints. And they reverently carried him up to that Hindu temple which they built again, and with all the rites due to a great sage such as he had been, they buried him there in the midst of his beloved holy Himalayas with his face towards the north where, overlooking the valley and those that dwell there, stand the glorious and mighty mountains wherein are to be found his gods.

My thoughts now returned to the guru seated before me. I

had begun to wonder whether I might be about to witness the release of his soul from his earthly body, now that it was no longer tied to this world even by the slight loin-cloth that might hinder his escape to Nirvana, when I saw him again appearing like a living man, his skin wet with perspiration, his colour just as it had been but a few moments before, while the breeze must have changed in its direction, since the overpowering perfume was there no more.

The posture of the boy sadhu was then corrected by his guru for position, his heels adjusted so that they almost touched his pubic bone with his feet at the root of his thighs, his back made vertical, his chin adjusted so that it was close to his neck and chest. While his eyes were fixed on the tip of his nose, into his hands the guru placed a rosary of one hundred and eight lotus seeds. He was instructed to repeat the name of his god, the Lord Shiva, that number of times: by passing one lotus seed through his fingers each time he spoke the holy name he would ensure that he made no mistake, for the "Japa" would surely lose its value if one less or one more was uttered. What was more, he was warned that if through lack of concentration he should make one mistake in the pronunciation of the god's name, he would have to wait a while for the error to be obliterated, and then start all over again. The boy made a mistake when he was more than half way to the starting and finishing knot in the cord, and had to recommence his task. I moved away behind him thinking that my presence might be distracting him, and seated on a rock facing me the guru waited for my questions.

"Tell me," I said, "what is the first reason for teaching a pupil to take up a Yoga posture? I mean the simpler poses, those I have just seen? Is it to correct some bodily failing, to assist in developing certain organs, nerves, and senses which are either under-developed or not being used as they should be used? Is it to weaken or kill unnecessary use of an organ, a nerve, a limb; is it to suppress an urge, or what?"

And I was frankly surprised—having read a number of books on the subject and guessed an answer—when he replied, "No.

With the most simple of these asanas the intention is to ensure that the pupil is in such a comfortable position that he will not by any physical discomfort be distracted from his purpose, that being concentration, and yet that he is in such a position that he cannot fall asleep. During meditation, concentration, or prayer, if the pupil is allowed to lie down or even kneel, it is easy for him to fall asleep, but seated in one of the correct Yoga postures, always his seat is firm, after practice he is comfortable; with the back kept straight, the neck held with the chin in and down on the chest, the eyes on the tip of the nose, it is not easy to fall asleep. This is my first desire with my disciple."

"And then?" I asked, using a question so common in India in order to encourage the one who is talking to continue, go deeper into his subject, become more confidential—or indiscreet.

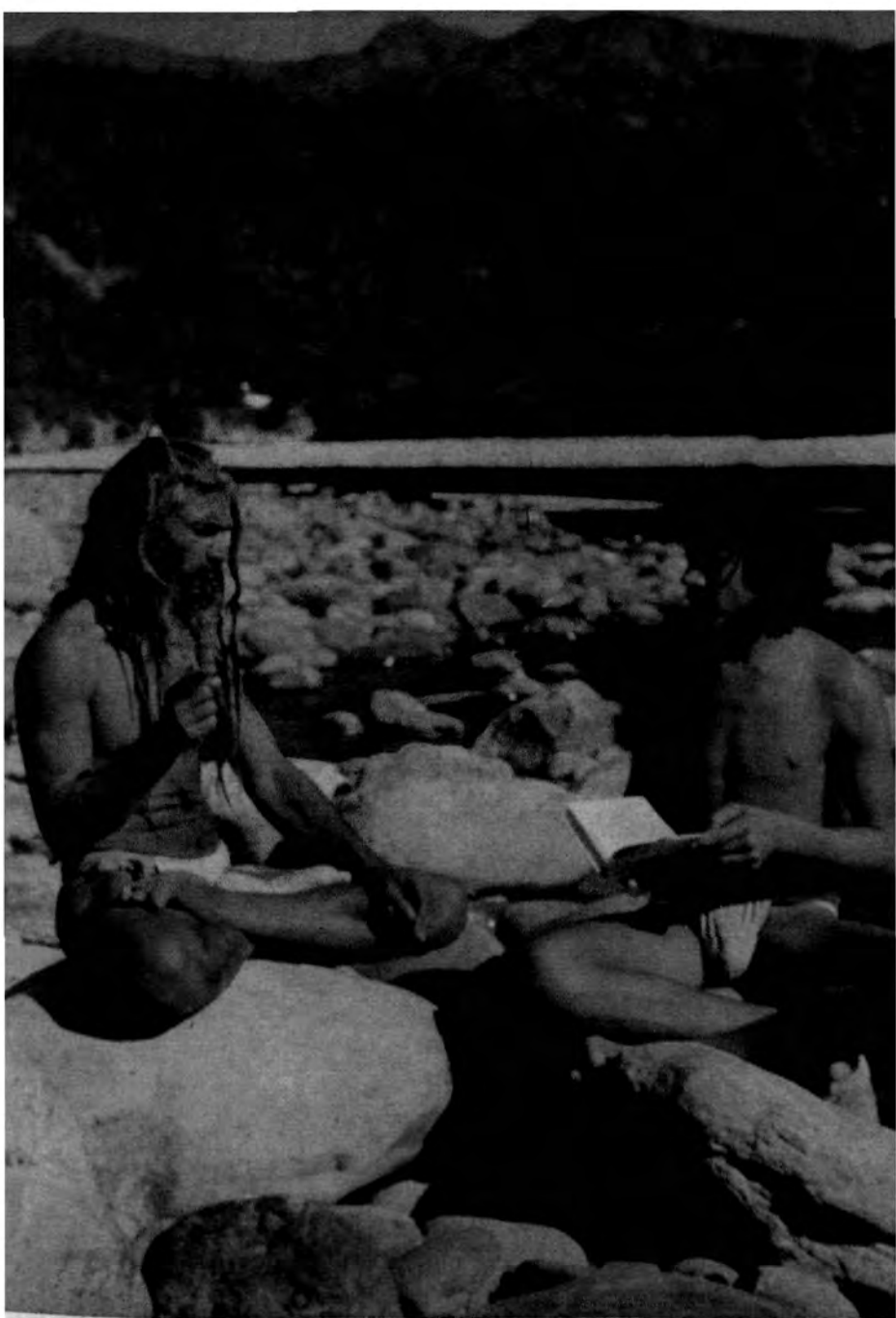
"The second stage will be to so train him that eventually he will through discipline, restraint, and concentration obtain for his soul a conscious union with the Divine Spirit. This he will only be able to attain when he has learned how to detach himself completely from this finite world. One teacher has described it as 'getting behind one's own mind'. We believe that each one of us contains just one tiny spark of the Supreme Soul. An English priest who once came to see us said that in the Holy book of the Christians, Jesus—who took much of his occult training from the Yogis here in India—said in one of his sermons, 'I and my Father are One.' We Yogis say 'I am Brahman', which is just the same. But to attain that supreme state this young man here has much to learn, the road is hard, long, and rough, but there will be no pitfalls into which he will drop if he looks straight ahead, for I shall be there to guide him and force upon him the severest and strictest discipline. I shall watch him as he makes his innermost efforts, to see that he does not reach out or go too far, and when I know that he is safely on the road, I shall then leave him and call other disciples to me. That I know to be my task in this day of life. It may be that in the next incarnation I also shall be permitted to reach out and enter Nirvana."

“But surely there must be hundreds of Indians who undertake these asanas purely with the desire to overcome some sickness, weakness, or deformity, or perhaps to build up a resistance to those illnesses which might possibly overtake them. I know there is a large number of such men and women in the West—why, they even have radio lessons demonstrating them—and I’m certain that those who follow the Yoga practices there only perform them with a view to body building, some in an effort to keep down weight, or as health exercises, and with absolutely no thought as to forcing the mind to take complete control over the body.”

“I have heard about them. But those people do not interest me. I myself practise, and I teach my disciples, to one end. Your friends in the outer world merely hover on the fringe of the so wonderful manifestations which are possible to body, mind, and soul through Yoga. To them, an asana is performed, and I am certain that they really do not perform it as has been laid down by the sages of old and in our ancient books—in order to gain some physical relief or cure some physical sickness—yes, and with some of your people I have been told there are those who seek for yet another physical pleasure and a before unknown sensation. But to us, to me for instance, by the practice of Yoga, my earth body, which because of asanas is always healthy and knowing no pain, is but a vehicle for me to obtain through my endeavours that eventual release of my soul. In contemplation and in meditation I find perfect bliss, complete happiness. I am oblivious of all that goes on around me. I force myself up onto another plane, a higher layer of the sky as it were; the earth is no more, I neither see, hear, feel, nor smell it. I ask you, what does a sadhu such as I am, one who leaves this earth during his meditations, really need of it?”

“And if this boy disciple of yours fails to make the grade, is unable to advance as you would wish, what then?”

“But he is not yet accepted by me as a disciple; he is but a pupil who is at present undergoing tests that I have and am now setting for him to ensure that he is really sincere in his desires,



Seated before his guru, the boy disciple held in his hands the sacred book of the Hindus.

National Library,
Calcutta-27.

and what is more, I must make certain he has reached that stage in his reincarnations when he is ready to become a sanyassin. So many young men of from his age up to the time when they leave the colleges and universities are carried away by maybe hero worship, perhaps are impressed by the first thing they read before they are able to absorb the other point of view, or are, in that period of their lives when they are finding themselves, liable to become over-emotional and mistake this for their true perception and outlook on life. Besides which there are so many youths in this country who during those years wish to draw attention to themselves either by sympathy or admiration, and not having either the qualities, brains, or opportunities to do so, they imagine that by becoming a sadhu they will draw that attention they seek to themselves, which they do for a time, but with their absence they are soon forgotten. At the finish they achieve the reverse of their desires, *for, when they eventually return to the world, they are faced with the difficult task of explaining away why they have discarded the intention they set off with after much self-publicity.* Then, there are those who seek to learn as much as they can of the Yoga teachings in order to go out into the villages and the towns, clad in the saffron cloth, to beg and so obtain an easy lazy living. So it is that those of us to whom the gods have given in this day of life the role of teachers, must test so very carefully and fully the one who comes and requests that he might be taken as a disciple.”

“What happens if you find them unfit to be accepted by you then?”

“After we have made the tests, there are many things we may do. If we find that they have but one intention, and that is to wear the saffron cloth, learn our secret teachings, and then defame the order, we drive them from our gardens. If they are sincere seekers, but are found as yet not to be ready to undertake the discipline of training, then they are advised to return to the world, there to study, to spread goodness by their examples and good works, maybe to marry and breed a son and

by so doing advance in their next incarnation, and we tell them to return here in the later years of their lives.”

I should here explain that according to the Hindu and Buddhist teachings, the spirit must undergo, some say hundreds, others thousands, of reincarnations. As a man lives, so will he either suffer for his sins or profit by the good he does in this life, or he may carry it forward to the next and there suffer or profit by it; this good or bad he has made for himself is known as karma. By building up good karma he ensures his advancement into a higher state in the next life, and it is therefore the desire of every Hindu and Buddhist—especially in later years when death is drawing near—to build up good karma. From this arises the Hindu caste system; those of the lowest, the people who used to be called untouchables, and the beggars, they all are but working out their past bad karma, that which they have made for themselves in a previous life. By giving to them one is helping himself, he is building up his own good karma. There is really no necessity to try and discover whether the beggar is worthy of the help or the alms he seeks; to give to one the giver knows is unworthy of it only creates bad karma for the giver; it also of course piles up the bad karma of the receiver, but if he who gives is unaware of the deception of the beggar, then by giving he is making good karma for himself. Hence beggars thrive around the temples, bathing ghats, and holy places. Eventually the soul becomes so purified after passing through many incarnations that it is fitted to enter Nirvana—the Supreme Soul.

“So that not all men may become Yogis?” I asked.

“No, not all men. And there are also others who by reason of their physical disabilities may not become our brothers; those who are without a limb, those who have become eunuchs.”

“But why those, especially when their disability had been caused or brought about by an accident or against their consent—why should they be debarred?”

“Because my friend, as you will later learn and perhaps see

for yourself, even were they able to join us, they could not undertake the asanas and bandhas.”

“Even the eunuchs? They have their arms; they have their legs?”

“They are eunuchs. Because of that, although as you say they have both arms and legs, they are unfitted to undertake the most important of our asanas and bandhas, that is the simple reason. The need to overcome, control, and divert that which is all important to perfect the Yogi’s most secret practice is not there; the vehicle through which this is possible has been removed by man.”

“And you of course would believe that they are just working out bad karma?”

“No doubt at all if this was done to them without their consent. If they agreed to the mutilation then they have created bad karma. It has been laid down in the *Laws of Manu* that ‘When eunuchs offer sacrificial viands to the fire it is unlucky for holy men and it displeases the gods; let him therefore avoid it.’”

As I looked at the boy sadhu who had by that time completed his task of reciting so many times the name of the god, my thoughts flashed back to the aged saffron-robed ones I had seen in the feeding centre; without doubt many were between seventy and eighty years of age; did he realize that so many years had yet to be lived in this life and that during these he would have to suffer the austerities of an ascetic?

During my studies—on paper—of Yoga, I had read in the *Shiva Samahita* these words: “Now I will explain to you the obstacles to Yoga which must be avoided, for by their removal the Yogis easily cross the sea of worldly sorrow.” Then were listed those things he must not eat; acids, astringents, pungent substances, salt, mustard, bitter things, that which is roasted in oil. He is further given the following rules for living: he must not walk too much, bath before sunrise, steal, be cruel to or kill any animals—and in that he is unable to eat bird, beast, or fish—even eggs may not be eaten, for all mean taking life; then he

must not bear enmity towards any persons, display any pride, resort to duplicity or crookedness, nor tell untruths; he must not fast, neither may he fill his belly too full; he is forbidden to “seek the companionship of women for his enjoyment; also worship or handle when sitting near to fire; much talking without regard to pleasantness or unpleasantness of speech.”

The way to success is also here revealed in this ancient book, for it says, “Now I will tell you the means by which success in Yoga is to be quickly obtained; it must be kept secret by the practitioners so that success may come with certainty.” “The great Yoga must always observe the following rules”, when eating “he should use clarified butter, milk, sweet food, betel without lime, camphor”. As to his mode of living he should use “kind words; dwell in a pleasant monastery or retired cell having a small door; wear little clothing; listen to discourses on truth; at all times discharge his household duties without attachment; sing the name of his god; listen to sweet music; have patience; know constancy and practise forgiveness; he must suffer austerities; carry out the purifications; display modesty; show devotion; and at all times remember his service to his guru”.

If so be he follows the words of the *Markandeya Purana*, he may, in order to assist him to reach the Attainments, eat the following foods “with concentrated mind and devoted care”, milk, butter milk, rice gruel, porridge, barley, saffron, oil cakes, and sattu—which is raw gram flour.

The ritual of eating is considerable and detailed, for “each morsel of food” has to be dedicated to one of the five vital energies. He must first drink water, and keeping silent concentrate; he partakes of the first morsel as an offering to the Life Breath, saying “Pranaya svaha”—meaning “An offering to the Life Breath”. With the second morsel his donation is to Apana—the Excreting vital energy; the third to Samana—the Digesting vital energy; the fourth to Udana—the Coughing vital energy; while the fifth goes to Vyana—the Circulating vital energy. The book goes on to say, “In this manner, bowing

to the vital energies, each one after the other, he shall partake of all the food. Then, after drinking water once again, and cleansing the mouth, he shall touch his heart."

As to first obtaining the food when a convenient feeding centre for sadhus is not at hand, the ancient *Laws of Manu* provide for this, saying, "When no smoke ascends from the kitchen, when the pestle lies motionless, when the embers have been extinguished, when the people have finished their meal, when the remnants in the dishes have been removed, let the ascetic go and beg. Let him be not sorry when he obtains nothing, nor rejoice when he obtains something, let him accept only so much as will sustain life, let him not care about the quality of his utensils." And what is more he may partake of but one meal a day.

It is interesting to read in this scripture that the direction in which one faces when eating will procure different results; facing the north ensures long life, the south brings fame; the west offers prosperity, while the east procures truthfulness. Most of those I saw eating were facing the north.

These, then, are the laws pertaining to the way of life which this boy sadhu was contemplating living; but were they? I was later to discover that the conditions of austerity that I had as yet heard of were kind to the Yogi in comparison to those laid down in the other sacred books and taught by other gurus in that part of the Himalayas.

CHAPTER SIX

RETURNING to the bungalow on the cliff overlooking the little town of Rishikesh and the holy Ganges, I found a visitor awaiting me in the compound. He was dressed in a garb which was a cross between those garments worn by Hindu sadhus and Moslem fakirs, a dull plum colour. Round his neck was a string of large seeds and hanging in front, like a pendant, a small calabash. His black hair was curly, there was a swagger in his manner, made the more so by the upturned twist of his moustache; his feet were bare. His eyes were fierce, searching; he took up an almost arrogant attitude, then held out his hand, a hand that was "live" and sensitive as he told me that he came from the part of the world that I had come from—the North-West Frontier. When I asked if he was a sadhu or a fakir, (Hindu or Muslim) he replied, "I am a holy man; that is sufficient in Rishikesh!"

Then I asked what he required of me, to which he answered, "I just wanted to meet you. I would like to get to know you. I am certain that we have met before have we not?"

To which I replied that so far as I was able to recollect I had not before set eyes upon him, that I was then unfortunately busy and perhaps we could meet again, at which he accepted a cigarette, permitted me to take a photograph of him—one I wanted since he was to me a mystery—, and off he went.

As he got some distance away, I turned to my Indian friend and asked him where I *had* seen him before, since by that time I was almost convinced that I remembered his face, but he replied that as far as he could recollect—and he had served with me for close on ten years—we had never met. Then he surprised me by exclaiming "No doubt he is a C.I.D.!"

“A detective? But what on earth would a detective be wanting in this place, with only sadhus about?”

“Just that—the sadhus. They may be dressed as sadhus—some of them undressed as sadhus, but you don’t imagine all of them ARE sadhus do you? It is just too easy when a man has committed a crime—a killing maybe—knowing the police are on his track, to dash up here, pull on saffron robes, or drag off all his clothes, cover himself with ashes, wash his hair in cow’s water to make it go ginger colour so that it looks as if he has been sitting over an incense bowl saying his prayers, and no one is any the wiser, for here a man’s past is of no interest!”

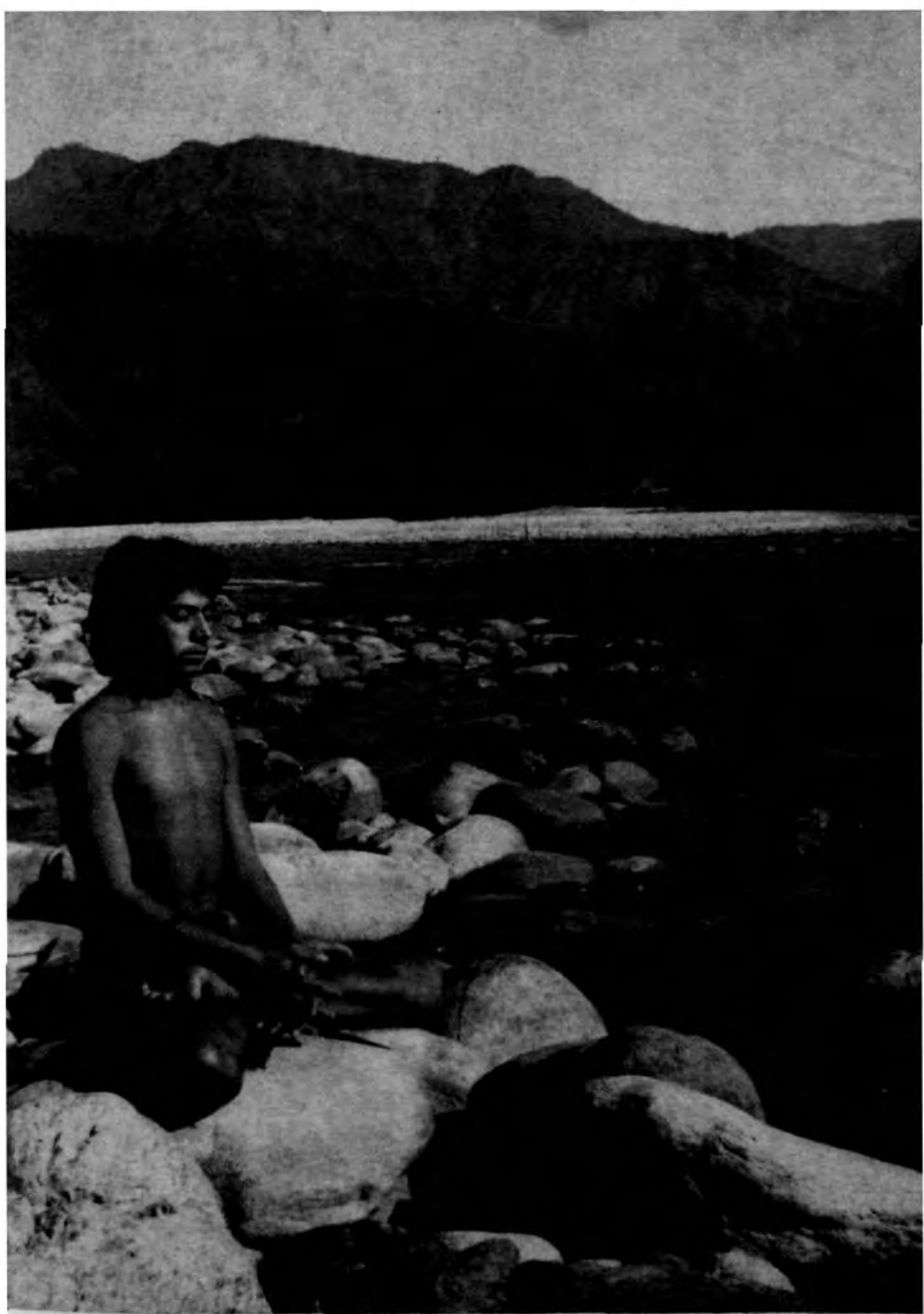
Many moons later, on the occasion of Holi, a festival when the people throw coloured powder and water over each other, being in Rishikesh I wandered down to the bathing ghat to see if any sort of ceremony was being performed during the previous evening, when on passing one of the open-fronted “hotels” I again saw this same self-styled “holy” man. He rushed out and invited me to join him over a cup of coffee together with some others there. I went in and found his friends to be residents of the district and not pilgrims as I had expected. One of them was keeping the assembled company roaring with laughter by recounting his experiences during the past few weeks. He had been away to Allahabad attending the Kumbh Mela, a great festival which is held every twelve years, each time at a different one of the four holy places made sacred by a legend which tells how one of the sons of the gods ran away with the pitcher containing holy nectar over which the gods and the demons were then fighting, and in his flight set it down in these four places. At Allahabad, three sacred rivers meet, the Ganges, the Jumna, and the mythical river Saraswati. Nearly four million people made the pilgrimage there in 1954 to “take a dip” in the sacred waters, while thousands of sadhus make it a meeting place, some coming on foot, some on horses, others in bullock waggons, and not a few on elephants; a huge tented camp springs up covering a thousand acres, dozens of special trains arrive daily at the special railway

stations, and police stations are set up. The great fête goes on for weeks.

The many orders of sadhus make up processions and follow their chosen leaders from their separate camps to perform their rituals and take their morning dip. Unfortunately, there are occasions when the processions meet—processions which include those of the Nagas order, known for the lightning use of weapons of offence and defence, the members of which fraternity go naked at all times. When they meet there is always the possibility of trouble in spite of the thousands of police present, for each order claims prior right to bathe, each claims their leader to be the most important. It seems that some of the orders had felt that their numbers were too small to be able to assert their rights, and certain outside organizations were asked to assist in making up the lack of numbers. They did this, but during an inquiry held over a most tragic stampede of the masses of people, in which not less than five hundred were trampled to death, it was disclosed that a number of “sadhus” who normally wear clothes, and also several householders from the district, had been recruited, discarded their clothing, and became temporary sky-clad sadhus to go to Allahabad to make good the lack of numbers of that one order.

They were now back from the mela, the householders again respectable citizens, having earned many rupees in Allahabad, given their blessings to hundreds of unsuspecting gullibles, and this one was now hooting over the stories he had to tell about “supplying the needs” of pilgrims. In their case it had been the reverse to “hiding under the cloak of religion”.

This revelation was disconcerting to me. No doubt there were thousands of Hindus, many who had attended the great mela, who were also disturbed by what they read in the reports of the inquiry. But little could be done about it other than for the patrons, most of whom were highly placed in the social and political world, to do their utmost to ensure that the good offices of those institutions to which they gave their names should not be defamed by a similar happening, that those who attend



The boy disciple saying his Japa while seated on a rock by the holy Ganges



“I am a holy man. That is sufficient in Rishikesh”

“Seated on a rock facing me, the guru waited for my questions”



religious festivals as representatives of their cults, sects, or organizations are really followers and not hirelings.

I turned towards the veranda of the bungalow and there saw awaiting me the saffron-robed figure of a man. He came forward to greet me, white bearded, fair skinned, a balding head, gold-rimmed spectacles; at once one could recognize the scholar, which he most certainly was, being a former High Court judge who had decided to spend his years of retirement as a sadhu in the lap of the Himalayas. Had his habit been of a darker shade he might have been a brother in a Roman Catholic monastery, for he was "comfortably covered" and afterwards stood with his hands folded on his stomach, the well-kept hands of a man of culture. He had a kindly expression, and was obviously at peace with the world, with not a care, perfectly content. And there were many such as he resident in the district, living either in ashrams or one-roomed "houses"

The English that he spoke was beautiful, making me proud of my own language; his voice was clear, firm, and deep; I afterwards realized that although he was a great talker he wasted few words. Not until I had met him at least half a dozen times did I discover that he had been up at Cambridge.

For many years he and his wife had looked forward to the day of his retirement. In the later months of his service, so many cases were pending in the courts that the judges agreed to extend sittings each day and shorten the vacation. "I so much regret having agreed to this," he told me, "for I was utterly tired every evening when I returned to my bungalow; so much so that I never realized that my dear wife was dying before my eyes, but although she was aware of it, knowing there was no cure, she bravely bore her sickness; only in the last few weeks did she take to her bed. God was good though, for he placed in the hands of the physicians the means whereby she could, although drugged to an extent, feel no pain. In her passing she took me with her to the very gates of what you know as heaven. I beheld with her the glorious flowering meadows, inhaled the fragrance of the blossoms, saw the sparkling cool, clear streams,

heard the song of the birds, the splash of the fountains, and as she turned with a smile to bid me farewell there came the wonderful etheric scent which I had—we had, for she had been with me on that occasion—before but once experienced and then in Rishikesh. So it was that, upon my final retirement, I settled my affairs, handed everything over to my sons and daughters, and came here, knowing that it was her wish, for by that time it had become my wish also.”

“So that in the days when you were married, your parents were even then enlightened enough to cast aside the orthodox Hindu customs and permit you to choose your own bride?” I asked.

“Oh no. My parents chose my bride for me, it is the custom of my people. I had no say in the matter. I knew they would select the right wife for me—and they did.”

“But you were much in love, was that just a chance happening?” I wanted to know.

“No, most certainly not, it was to be expected. After all, parents have the advantage over their children of many years of experience in life. They make the most studious selection of a mate for their child; a marriage failure cannot be thought of. They carefully compare the horoscopes of the two parties; after seeing the other parents, they each make searching inquiries into the family connections, social standing, financial conditions, moral and religious outlook; they want to know all about the health of the other party, they are aware of their own child’s weaknesses and match these against the strength of the proposed marriage partner; you see they are thinking ahead—of their grandsons also. As opposed to all this modern talk of falling in love, which is nothing more than the emotions of the hour or the effect of being thrown mentally out of balance by beauty or good looks, both of which change with the passing years, parents seek those qualities which really matter, which will be lasting and solid. And if they have chosen aright, then it will surely work out that husband and wife fall in love with the years. Only by their living together, knowing success and failure

together, sharing a home or part of a home which both can build, and getting to know and accept the secrets and intimacies of each others lives, understanding and forgiving each other's faults, can this become possible. How can the boy who sees the girl wearing her best saris, her hair beautifully dressed, and in her best mood, or the girl only knowing the boy as handsomely groomed, immaculate, and always in his best temper expect to remain in what they insist upon calling love after they are married and have seen each other in the mornings, he to discover her helpless inability to control his household, she to find that he is an incorrigible spendthrift? We believe that a marriage failure is mostly the fault of the parents. In any event though, as soon as the young couple are blessed with the gift of children, those children bind the marriage."

"And there is no divorce?" I asked.

"The only divorce for a Hindu is death."

"And now that you have taken the saffron robe you have discarded your family and your possessions. Does that mean that you never hear from or see your children or grandchildren?"

"On the contrary, I do. Seldom do they come to see me here, but at least once a year I go to Delhi and spend my time equally between the houses of my sons and daughters. You see, I do not belong to that cult which follows the ancient laws bidding us to turn our backs upon the world, look towards the holy Hima-layas, and walk steadily on until we finally sink from exhaustion at the feet of the god."

He was referring to the amazing teachings laid down in the ancient *Laws of Manu*, those that I had been reading but a few weeks before, and wondering how many men now followed them. "When a householder sees his skin wrinkled and his hair white, and the sons of his sons, then he must resort to the forest, abandoning all food raised by cultivation and all his belongings. In summer let him expose himself to the heat of five fires, during the rainy season live under the open sky, in winter dressed in wet clothes, thus gradually increasing the rigour of his austerities. Making no effort to procure things that give pleasure,

chaste, sleeping on the bare ground, not caring for any shelter, dwelling at the roots of trees . . . let him live without a fire, without house, wholly silent, subsisting on roots and fruit."

"There are several Sampradias, that is sects of sadhus, not just one or two," he was saying. "These each have a Mahant, or Managing Trustee at the head of the institution, his office being an elected one for which all members of that sect or fraternity have the right to vote. The Mahant remains in office for life, unless he is deprived of that office for some misbehaviour, senile old age, or some disease which they know can only find its end in death."

I sat back and listened; somehow, I knew that it would now be wise to ask no question, make no comment, and then he would go on. "You know sadhus have attained a special sanctity because the word occurs very frequently in the two epic poems of the Hindus, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. I remember so well having my dear wife, whom I afterwards realized had done it deliberately as a suggestion as to my future life when she had passed on, point out to me in the *Mahabharata* the passage. 'It is not that the holy places associated with ancient temples and sacred rivers and lakes do not purify the mind or the soul, it is not that the images made of clay and stone do not purify a man. They do, but after considerable time. The sadhus, however, purify a man by their very darshan or sight.' And it is believed that certain sages, some of which have passed on but a few years, had special qualifications, that their darshan was sufficient to bring about a change in the mental outlook of the devotee. The word sadhu also occurs in many holy books of the Sikhs as well as those of the Hindus."

He stopped; I was invited by his action to ask a question—if I was still interested. "You say there are very many sects; of these, which are the most important, what is the difference between, for instance, that to which you belong, the guru on the sacred island who wears his hair matted and seems to remove his cloth without embarrassment at any time, and those I see passing with shaven heads?"

“You happen to ask me about three of the more important sects almost in one breath. First of all, the most prominent of them all, the one to which I belong, the Sanyasis, a Sanskrit word which means the renunciation of worldly affairs, a word so important that it has a special chapter devoted to it in the *Bhagavad Gita*—the Song of the Lord Krishna. The Sanyasis have several sub-sects, the most important of these being the Dandi Sanyasis, followers of Shiva Shankar who is believed to be Yogeshwar, the Lord Propounder of Yoga. We believe that God exists in the whole universe which is comprised of matter and soul, all actions in human beings being guided by the *purusha*, that is, the dweller in the body, which means the soul. We believe in one God alone, and that God is within one’s own body and can be discovered there and realized. There is no necessity to make pilgrimages to distant temples, shrines, or holy places. Man’s own body is the temple wherein is enshrined his God—his soul.

“Generally the Sanyasis are far-travelled men, many of them having visited most of the important centres of pilgrimage. They are well endowed in the use of herbs for medicinal purposes, having known since before man can remember a remedy for almost every ailment, including snake-bite, typhoid, T.B., and insanity, and because of this humanitarian quality, as a fraternity they are greatly respected by the Hindus. We practice Yoga and lead a life of celibacy. You will find among us many members of the Hindu community who have enjoyed brilliant careers in the various professions.

“Then we come to the shaven sadhus, the Yogis. They are followers of Guru Gorakh Nath and as a fraternity own very large estates in Rajasthan, Nepal, and several other places in India. These sadhus discard the sacred thread which all Hindus wear, because the sacred thread is intended only for the follower of the *Vedas*, that is, the performers of holy deeds. They believe that the holy deeds enjoined by the *Vedas* entitle a person only to a superior birth in this world or in the worlds beyond, and when that meritorious act has exhausted itself, they again revert

to the land of mortals. They also remove the tuft of hair which is permitted to grow uncut from the crown of the head of the three classes of Hindus, the Brahmins, the Ksharriyas, and the Vaishyas. This fraternity has four centres or Maths where their Mahant Jagatguru Shankaracharya, as he is called, holds sway. All these Jagatgurus are very well versed in the lore of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* as well as in English literature. These Mahants are invariably men of high character. They ride in a silver palanquin, and all twenty-four hours of the day a silver lamp fuelled with clarified butter burns in their presence, this being a symbol that the sect has as its mission the dispelling of darkness and ignorance throughout the world. Both their ears are bored very considerably to permit heavy rings to be suspended from the lobes. They know a great deal of the magic of talisman. Naturally, as their name implies, they practice Yoga and are experts in all the many asanas enjoined in the Yoga Shastra. An inferior sect of these Yogis charm poisonous snakes and have for centuries known and used remedies for snake-bites. No doubt you have seen them in the large cities displaying their snakes and selling snake-bite medicines and by that means eking out a livelihood, why I never can understand, for their antidotes were the originals of those used by the doctors of modern medicine. Yet although they may appear poor, they have several large estates in India.

“Then we come to the Nagas or Avdhuts, they are the nudists, always a great attraction at Kumbh Melas and other great religious gatherings when they walk about completely naked; some of them carry out this practice at all times in the villages and remoter towns, just as you may have occasionally seen them here, for instance. Most of them remove any vestige of clothing during their devotions and when performing many of the asanas; strangely enough, during the practice of other asanas, those who have remained naked the day and night through will wrap around their private parts a clean cloth. They are followers of the Lord Shiva, whose symbol is an erect phallic emblem. They are also called Digambaras, meaning that they

have no garments other than the four directions and their sub-directions. Usually they cover their bodies with ashes, and like forest hermits permit their hair to grow long and become matted."

While he was speaking, I recollected that among the masses of notes I had somewhere before taken down, was much that he was now telling me. The information had been given me by a very learned lawyer who had practically retired, was the fine old patriarch not only of his family, but also of the Bar Association of Northern India, one who was as learned of Hindu lore as he was of the law of the land. I mentioned his name to the judge who immediately recognized it, saying, "I have no doubt whatsoever that he would have given you much more detailed information than I have, for not having donned the sadhu's robe he would have been more blunt, more candid, less restrained in telling you his opinions of certain of the sects."

When I found the notes, I discovered that his assumption was certainly correct, for I find: "Aghoris also called Vam Margis. Most of these people are utterly demoralized persons. They are followers of Shiva and worshippers of the phallus and the yoni—a man's and a woman's private parts. They indulge in orgies of drink and incest." "Char Vaks. They are atheists. They do not believe in any holy book of any caste. Their main slogan is 'So long as man lives, let him live a life of pleasure. He may incur even debt to purchase ghee (clarified butter), because after one's death, so one repents and therefore he is not required to pay his debts.' They eat meat, drink wines, and have no regard for ethics."

His notes on the Gokalya Gosains were enlightening in these days, for he says, "They trace their descent from Lord Krishna and the illiterate and ignorant people, sometimes highly placed literary persons also, worship them as the incarnation of Lord Krishna. Hence the word Gokalya Gosains—"The protectors of Cows like Lord Krishna, the dweller of Godul' which is a village in the U.P. near Mathura where Lord Krishna was born.

"People are keen to give their daughters to them even when

the parents are required to give them very big dowries. They marry several wives and because they cannot keep them for long in their households, these later on become Devadasinis—the servants of temples where they lead an immoral life. There was a time when every married girl had to spend the first night in a room with the head of this fraternity, but that custom has now disappeared, although they still continue to have big dowries. The cult of Devadasinis also still continues though it is fast disappearing.

“Jambodis. The Bishnoi Jats of the Punjab and Rajasthan have a special fraternity. They are called Jambodis. There was a time when they were masters of every household of their disciples. If a Jambodi was inside the house, the husband could not enter it so long as he was there. He must make his arrangements somewhere else. The Mahant had free access to the women of his fraternity and was considered to be an incarnation of God. When, however, he became old, he was secretly put to death and a new Mahant or guru was installed in his place. This practice also has considerably decreased and the Mahants are now treated just as the Mahants of other fraternities are.”

I then explained to the sadhu the band of religious men I had seen in Delhi. At once he recognized them as Udasin sadhus, with this information I turned the pages of my notes, and found that the old patriarch had not failed to include them among his descriptions of the different sects, with their description as “Udasins or Nirmala Sadhus. Both these words are derived from Sanskrit. Nirmala means one who has not sins, free from all sins. Udasin means having no truck with worldly affairs. They marry their wives and lead a temporal life. This fraternity consists mostly of the Sikh Jats of the Punjab. Some of them are very learned in the Shastras and in the Sanskrit language.”

It so happened that my sadhu friend had been in Delhi at the time of the arrival of this band, some seventy strong, and he also had been along to see them. They had been stopping there for a few days on their way to the great Kumbh Mela. His description of them was “A band of semi-naked holy men whose object

in life is to keep firstly the sadhus and then the people on the right path to God. In their wanderings all over the country they preach to the masses which come to gaze at them, the doctrines of the Hindu faith, the philosophy of good living and peace to all men." He agreed with me that those whom we had seen appeared to be well supplied with funds, their bullocks which drew the carts containing their tents, bedding and paraphernalia, and their horses being of the same excellent quality as was the enormous elephant.

He declared that I had indeed been fortunate to come upon them, for they were not a large fraternity and the India they covered was vast, "few Europeans realize that it is as large as the continent of which their own particular homeland is but a part".

There are other sects or fraternities. The Bairagis, for instance, those who are exponents of physical exercises like Gatka, sword play and lathi—that is, stick—play, and who are usually seen displaying their skill at the Kumbh Melas. They are mostly illiterate.

Then there are those who believe only in nature, according to whom there is no God; it is nature that is the cause of this universe, they are the Dadu Panthis.

One must also include among the sadhus the Nihangs or Kukas. They are followers of Guru Ram Singh, the founder of the sect, who opposed the Moslems in the days of Aurangzeb and other fanatic Islamic rulers. The guru was deported to Mandalay, in Burma, where he died long, long ago, but his followers believe him still to be alive. They wear the five *Kakkas* or Ks, *Keshas*, unshaven hair, *Kangha*, a comb, *Kara*, an iron bracelet, *Kirpan*, the sword, and *Kutch*, underwear knickers. They are never without any of them, fanatically so, for even as they take out one leg from the knickers, they put it into the clean pair before removing the pant from off the other leg. They also carry with them a heavy weight of iron weapons, consisting of a shield, several *karas* or rings over their turbans, iron armour, and all sorts of fantastic and old armaments. Some-

times these weapons weigh as much as eighty pounds but they willingly carry them wherever they go. So long as they are in the fraternity they are not permitted to take them off even at night, and will therefore have to recline upright in a corner and have their sleep or nap in that uncomfortable position, but they cannot lie down on the ground.

Another sect that I had come across were the Jains, a small but wealthy community. Their ascetics became divided into two orders about 3000 B.C. Now there are the white-clothed ones, called Svetambaras, best described as monks—and nuns also, for women are ordained into this particular order; then there are the Digambaras, the sky-clad ones. The monks of the white-clothed order are dressed in long garments which reach from neck to feet, they wear over their mouths a flap of cloth: the nuns wear a robe much the same shape, they carry a cloth with which they cover their mouths. I came across a bunch of nuns in spotless white passing from one town to another, they carried what I took to be cooking pots tied up in clothes, on their backs were large bundles—probably clothes and bedding; they also carried what looked like large-headed cotton floor mops, and I discovered that they were indeed used for that purpose. It is said that the Jains have not altered their modes of life since the inception of the sect. They never take life; they will not kill a flea, refuse to participate in the destruction of locusts; as they move forward, their eyes are on the ground in case they step on an ant; the mops they carry are for the purpose of gently sweeping the floor before they sit down. They never move, feed, or drink after dark or before daylight, for fear that they might unknowing take life. They strain and strain again water they drink or use for cooking. Their temples are maintained in a perfect state of preservation.

The sky-clad members of the order are a most amazing people. I know of one wealthy Jain business man who had lost his wife. He had sons and grandsons, and when, all the ceremonies necessary had been undertaken to ensure the safe passage to heaven for his wife's soul, he gave a most wonderful party to

all his friends and made lavish gifts to his sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, the sons and daughters were deeply offended. The morning following the party, he was nowhere to be found. On his desk was a large envelope addressed to his eldest son; when opened they found that it contained all the deeds and documents for the transfer of all his property and possessions to his sons and daughters. They heard from the chowkidar (night-watchman) that he had left the house completely naked except for a black begging bowl and a peacock feather brush, and they remembered that the previous season he had collected the shed feathers from a jungle peacock, for these ascetics will not pull them. They then knew that even were they to follow him he would deny them for he had renounced the world.

On the main road I once came across one such as he now is, the old man was being followed by young men, possibly his sons and grandsons, but he took no notice of them. I asked him if I might take his photograph and he willingly agreed, assuming a stiff stuated pose just like the idol of his particular god, Gommatesvara, a gigantic stark naked figure of which stands in many of the main temples. This sect subject themselves to every possible austerity and physical suffering; for instance, they do not shave their hair but pull every strand of it out by the roots; they start the day by deciding that they will eat and drink only when the omen they decide upon comes to their notice—when for example they see a house with a white cow being milked by a woman in yellow clothing—and if they fail to come upon one they return with an empty belly.

The white-bearded sadhu then told me of a great ashram built on the banks of the holy Ganges about two miles farther up-stream towards Lachman Jhula where the river narrows and a suspension bridge has been flung across it. This ashram is, he assured me, known about throughout the world. It is not ancient and the founder was still very active and living there although not young in years. He possessed a great knowledge of medicine, had a modern outlook on life, and was the author of some hundred books. It is an ashram with its own printing press

churning out literature in many languages, the whole place alive with saffron-robed sadhus with shaven heads, men who work like bees in a hive. When I also heard that there I should find one of the finest demonstrators of the Yoga asanas, I decided to visit it next day, being assured that I should find a genuine, generous welcome.

We sat out on the veranda looking across the cliff-top lawn, across the wide abyss in which flowed the holy Ganges, across to the sandy shores on the distant side, to the forest of trees which draped down to the mighty river from the mountain tops and seemed like some lovely velvet dark-green gown the goddess of the mountains might then be wearing. The old man pointed out how from where we were it appeared as though there was a girdle round the gown—it was as if he was following my flight of imagination—and from it fell a glittering silver cord with tassels—the flashings of a crystal waterfall which dropped and then spread out into many little streams to be lost within the forest slopes. As the sun slowly descended behind the mountain tops I was reminded of those Hardwar bazaar gaudy, tinselled pictures of the gods, each one standing on the topmost point of a mountain, and I could now well understand the pilgrim, carried away by his emotions created by at last reaching the place he had long sought, believing that he had at that moment really seen the glorious god there in all his magnificent golden raiment.

Looking to the right, there was the great river slithering between the low hills and away to the dry and uninteresting plains. The reflection of the setting sun upon the surface of the racing waters as they dashed over the boulders strewn across the river bed changed them into the golden tresses of the mythical Goddess Ganga. And turning again to the mountain I found that the green forests had now become the richer by the golden glow. The sounds which reached our ears all seemed to be changed to music, the swish of the wings and flight-cry of dozens of emerald-green parrots as they flashed past, the squeak of the rope with a bucket as it ran round the crude wooden

wheel suspended over the well behind the bungalow, and the ring of temple bells as in that twilight hour worshippers passed into the temples around and below us to do puja—that is, to recite their evening prayers and make offerings to the gods, while the air was smooth, cool, and fragrantly fresh as though being carried down by the lovely river from the distant snow-crowned mountains of the eternal snows—that mighty home of the gods.

Neither of us spoke; even though he had seen it a thousand times or more, the old sadhu appreciated the loveliness of the scene as much as I, a newcomer. Then, with the rising of the full moon, the green gown of the mountain goddess became cold and crisp, though the silver girdle glistened the brighter; and looking again down the winding river I found that the Goddess Ganga had also aged with the setting sun, her golden tresses now turned to silver, though remaining bright as they glistened in the moonlight. The birds had found their trees and were still and quiet; the man had left the well, no sound came from the rope; the people had completed their worship for the day, and the temple bells were silent. Soon the lamps now flickering in the little town would also be turned down, for those who dwell in these parts rise early, and early they go to rest.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ASHRAM to which I had been directed lay about two miles farther up the great river Ganges. I went through the little town, past the feeding centre in which I had discovered my ex-sergeant sadhu, and out on the road after going through the toll bar. Here I was confronted with a river bed almost a quarter of a mile wide, with boulders from fist to head size strewn over the whole of it, but since it was late in the summer there was merely a fairly wide stream running its centre course. The previous spring floods which had come down from the mountains must have been unusually heavy, for the stone bridge had been washed away and once again those who traversed the river had to go through a shallow ford, just as they always had done until the bridge was built a few years ago.

To either side of the road on the other bank were numbers of ashrams and monasteries. Sadhus were so frequent that the man not wearing a saffron robe or habit was conspicuous. Some of the monasteries looked as though they were almost falling down, the stones loose, the roofs broken, but they were filled with sadhus. I passed the small compound in which stood some little cottages, one of which I was told was the home of the judge-sadhu who had been to tea with me the previous evening, and went on farther to a curve in the road, round a great rock wallface with a temple high placed to my left. To the right and a few feet below the road was great expanse of boulders and then the mighty river, here much wider. I walked down on to the stones, and then realized that strangely almost every stone I picked up was a Shiva symbol in shape. I can only conclude that they must have been brought down from the glaciers of the mountains, maybe the famous sixty-mile-long Gangotri glacier,

and so rolled to that unusual shape. They told me that few pilgrims left without taking back some of these grey or white stones to be set up as idols by their Hindu friends who were worshippers of Lord Shiva.

The mountains here rose steep to the left, tree-covered and dense with undergrowth. Yet I knew that scattered among those forest slopes were the strange lone dwellings of dozens of hermit sadhus. Then on the distant shores there appeared a long red and grey building with wide steps leading down to the water. It was modern in its construction and I heard it called the Gita Bhavan, which I was later to visit. To the left of this and farther up-stream, was a large octagonal temple, the high, cream-coloured spire rising from a dome-like roof, making it appear like a candle, and from this building also steps led down to the river. Next, I saw that all along the sandy waterfront were little buildings, almost on the sand, but built on a sort of shelf of rock, doubtless just above the high-water line. Orange-coloured figures moved among the buildings, other brown figures were seated on great rocks surrounded by sand or water. An overloaded country craft was being rowed across the river towards the steps.

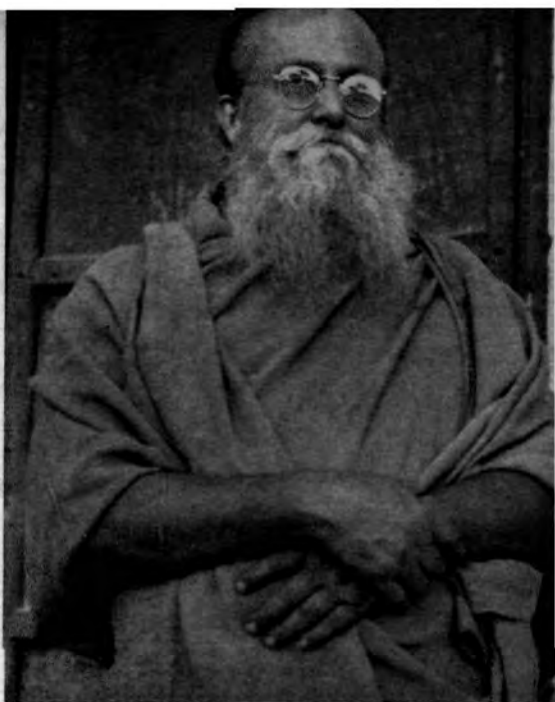
Then I came upon the great ashram I had been told about. Just before reaching it there were a number of small open shops. I had expected to find a spectacular building enclosed by high walls, just as the other ashrams I had before seen, but this was very different, it spread to right and left of the road, part of it being on the mountainside. The building in which "His Holiness"—as he was first spoken of to me—lived, was right down on the banks of the Ganges, off a narrow, rough stone roadway which branched from the main road as it continued on higher up the hill. This stone building was most unpretentious, it could easily have been taken for a shop warehouse, with its dull grey wall broken by one or two small shuttered windows. To the left was a side gate leading down a flight of narrow brick steps; then we passed through a wire door into an outer courtyard. It was like entering a cage, the walls and roof being covered with

wire-mesh to protect it from the hundreds of brown, thick-set monkeys which abound in that part. The floor was strewn with dozens of pairs of shoes; these belonged to the devotees who had come, some of them thousands of miles, in order to have darshan from the one they call the "Sage of the Himalayas".

A young saffron robed, shaven-headed sadhu came forward; he greeted me as though we had met before, and insisted that I came in to be introduced to "His Holiness". I stood at the entrance of the inner domain, which was really another wire-encased veranda outside his single room, and hesitated, for there seated—one could say enthroned—in a high armchair was the great man. He was indeed a great man physically, his head bald, his body—and he was bare to the waist—large. Round his neck were garlands of marigolds. Had he but tucked his legs under his seat I could have pictured him as a living replica I had so often seen in brass, stone, or ivory of the Buddha, and he reminded me the more so of those statues, because, like my favourite one, he was smiling; I was afterwards to discover that this happiness was natural to him. I guessed his age as fifty, but learnt later it was nearing seventy. He was then looking down benevolently at a devotee who was on his knees before him with palms together in worship, saying or reciting something while two girls wearing saris were standing close by softly singing; a crowd surrounded them all. The sage looked up over their heads towards me and called someone forward. Until the sadhu who had first spoken to us asked me to "Please go forward", it never dawned on me that it was I that he beckoned.

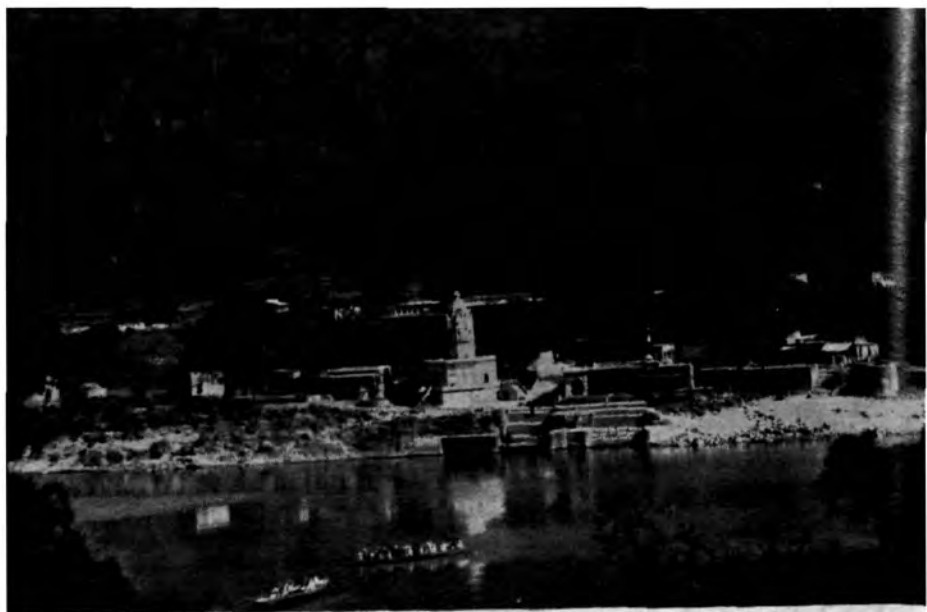
I did so, but most reluctantly, since it appeared that I had broken in upon some intimate ceremony, some form of devotion that was for those alone who were then there to partake of. He called for chairs to be brought forward—which was most embarrassing since everyone else either sat cross-legged on the ground or stood reverently round. Behind the great one stood a young man. Like his master, he had permitted the upper part of his habit to fall over the skirtlike or lungi portion, though his was of a coarser material. In one hand he held a staff, on his arm

"One could at once recognize
the scholar"



"His dance consisted of a
non-stop twirling round and
round"

National Library,
Calcutta-27.



The pilgrims' ferry boat crossing the Ganges above Rishikesh

The pliability of his body had to be seen to be believed



was a cloth bag and a heavy brown coat. He was the sage's constant attendant.

To my amazement, the sage turned to me as though we had met many times before, and asked numberless questions in the most excellent English. I was afterwards to discover that there were very few of the inmates of the ashram who could not speak English: I did not find one wearing a saffron robe who failed to do so. And during all this the girls continued to sing while the young man on his knees at our feet continued to recite whatever he had started. The conversation then became the most astounding one that I have ever taken part in, for whilst continuing it with me, the sage suddenly switched over for a sentence with those who had come to worship and sing to him, then back to me again for a while, then off to the others and this time he appeared to be addressing the complete congregation; then turning to his attendant he instructed him to fetch food and drink for the travellers—us, and in spite of my protests that we had only come from the nearby town, he insisted I took food with him. It seemed that in a flash a great dish of fruits and nuts was placed on a small table hastily brought forward, and cooling drinks—"fresh lime in holy Ganges water", was being poured into glasses. I have heard of people with split brains—those able to do two things at once, but this wonder was doing three things at the same time—carrying on separate conversations with three, sometimes four sets of people. He was possessed of a most amazing brain, and I was to be witness to the same thing happening many times afterwards.

As we talked, his secretary, together with a devoted, middle-aged disciple who had served him most of the time he had been there, came up with a sheaf of foolscap typed sheets. These the sage at once started to check off—but still carried on his conversation with me, apologizing for the interruption! As he turned to speak a farewell to the brother and two sisters who were departing, happily facing him, backing out and bowing with hands palms together, the secretary explained that these papers were "part of a manuscript Swamiji has written as the foreword

to his last book—you know of course that he has now written nearly two hundred books which are translated into many languages!" At which the sage turned and said, "Bring some of my books" and before I had time to realize what was happening, clutching camera straps in one hand, my arms were being loaded with a dozen or more of his books, books which he then took from me one after the other and inscribed on the front page, insisting that I accepted them. By this time I was protesting and endeavouring to explain that he had obviously mistaken me for some very important person who must at that time be expected at the ashram, but he assured me that it was not the case, that I was the important person!

His happy "second in command" explained that I was most certainly expected, "for Swamiji draws people to him, and he is only too delighted for you to take, and read, and keep his books. There are many more if you wish, oh yes, and recordings of his talks and his songs!" I then began to wonder if I had entered a mad house. It being the first time in my life that I had ever had gifts thrust on me by any religious community, I wondered what the answer would really be, so that when I was asked to write down my address, I imagined that this was required in order that the large bill for all those things which I was then unwillingly bowed down with might be sent on to me, and I insisted that I had no gramophone on which to play the records, and could really only take with me a few of the many books.

I then explained that "one day" I would like to have the opportunity to look over the ashram. "But why not now?" I was at once asked.

"Some other time," I pleaded "for now I have but half an hour before I must return to the bungalow for lunch."

"But in that time you can see quite a lot of the ashram. Then afterwards you must take food with us!"

Their friendly, sincere persistence was quite impossible to avoid; somehow I felt that they would be insulted if I did not at least look at those buildings belonging to the organization on this lower side of the road, and so I started off my tour with the

most senior disciple as guide. Crossing the narrow roadway which led to a flight of steps from which the free ferry boats cross the Ganges, we came upon that medical section which is under the control of a homoeopathic doctor. His treatments are carried out by giving his patients baths in the Ganges water, baths of different temperatures; his treatment also includes unusual sun baths, the patient being made to lie down in a white wooden, coffin-like box which has glass panels over it as a lid. The colour of the glass is changed according to the complaint being treated.

The uses, effect, and qualities of colour have long been known to the Yogis; only now are the practitioners of modern medicine realizing that there is much in what they have for so long declared to be fact though in the past some of their teachings must have filtered through to the West. For instance, the common phrase "seeing red". The Yogi will tell you that red is a dangerous colour to play with, that whereas it stimulates vitality, an excess of it will cause violence. With them, quite naturally, saffron-yellow is a colour which comes foremost in their teachings, it not only symbolizes holiness, but is referred to as "the colour of the spirit". Green they have said is a peaceful, harmonious colour, a soothing but not depressing one, and how many nursing homes and hospitals are there in the West that have not adopted this colour for the walls of their wards and sick rooms? It is only in the past fifty years or so that those who study hard and long into the night have discovered that a green shaded lamp prevents eyestrain. Violet on the other hand is the last colour for one who is suffering illness, for according to the Yogis it increases depression and melancholia. Blue—mid-blue—is cooling, encourages serenity, and quietens the worried or disturbed mind. Purple is to them a royal colour, an impressive one which stands out above the others. White, as with all Hindus, and with Christians also, is the colour which symbolizes innocence, virginity; with the Hindus it is a colour which is also connected with funerals, the widows wear white, not black as they do in the West.

One European doctor-scientist who practised Yoga for many years maintained that colour affects the glands; that red stimulates, purple heals, orange brightens, blue soothes, green pleases, brown rests. I was not surprised to hear later on that one vicar who had made a close study of the reaction of colour upon his congregations, maintained that red was warming and passionate, green was conducive to meditation, blue solemn and cold, yellow a happy colour, brown a sad one, and had bunches of coloured lights placed within the church with a control panel in the pulpit in order to assist the mood of his "flock" to match the mood of his sermon, prayers, or the hymns.

This light-ray treatment I had before heard about. Some time back I had come across a Buddhist monk in Kashmir who treated patients with medicines which consisted mostly of water, of sugar, and of oil which had been stored in bottles of different colours and stood out in the open—on his house-top—in order to gather the rays of the sun. The water, the oil, and the sugar which became syrup after remaining there for many days, caught only certain of the rays, the others being prevented from reaching the bottle contents by the colour of the glass. And so he maintained that a concentration of the necessary vitamins was taken by the patient, the harmful, or unnecessary ones being kept away from him. Patients drank the water and the syrup, sometimes they also took the oil, but that was mostly used for massage purposes. Like the Rishikesh ashram doctor, he claimed many cures, and I have little reason to doubt him. I knew personally of one cure effected by the Buddhist, that being with a patient who went to his ashram hospital, was made to lie naked on a bed, and was then covered with a thin layer of neem leaves through which the sun penetrated for twelve hours of the day. Famous specialists had failed even to check the advance of his sickness where this sadhu eventually made a lasting cure.

The "baths" reminded me of those which had been shown me in Pompeii, little cubicles like outhouses with a stool in the corner. In others were hip baths, yet others contained long

slipper baths, and the water used could naturally be none other than that which was carried up from the holy Ganges. The room in which it was heated reminded one of the washing house of a very old Cornish farm.

Here I saw a patient under manipulative treatment. At first I imagined he was enjoying the much favoured oil massage which all Indians like, but, "No. It is manipulation of the spine and other parts of the body," I was at once told. "We practise osteopathic, chiropractic, and neuromuscular techniques here, all of which are very different from massage, as different as the Yoga asanas are from ordinary physical exercises."

I listened for a while to a saffron-robed doctor explaining to some visitor the Earth Treatment. "The earth is a source of magnetism which is essential for daily life," he was saying. "Just walking with bare feet cures many diseases, but by lying down on the earth in an open place in the morning will ensure your obtaining the advantage of both an air bath and the earth's magnetism. It recharges the body; cosmic energy and earth magnetism will all the time be absorbed into the system. I can tell of countless patients suffering from chronic constipation being cured by being made to lay stomach down on those sandy banks of the holy Ganges. The earth's magnetism has a wonderful tonic effect on the solar plexus and whilst results can be obtained when the patient remains clothed, nude contact with the earth results in far quicker cures." The particular visitor he appeared to concentrate upon had an enormous corporation. But no one smiled; all looked at the speaker with serious expressions. It seemed that none of them pictured the portly one undertaking the "stomach to earth treatment".

"The whole of this department, including our Nature-Cure Sanatorium, is attended to by a Nature-cure doctor of great renown, one who has already gained for himself a great reputation" I was told, but when I started to ask other than the ordinary questions expected of a visitor I learned that "to explain everything would take an age, for many patients come to the ashram condemned to death by their own doctors, and

here have been found to be suffering from more than one disease and each complaint has its own separate treatment”

We went on to another part of the ashram where large quantities of ointments, syrups, powders, and other medicines were being packed for dispatch in response to dozens of orders received by each post. This was the ashram's Ayurvedic Pharmacy—which had been in existence for only about ten years and is now well known throughout the world, the pharmaceutical works posting its commodities to places as distant as Finland, Sweden, U.S.A., Australia, etc. It was explained to me that “these medicines are here being prepared under the guidance of qualified Ayurvedacharyas from ancient prescriptions contained in the authorized texts of sages and seers. The medicines are made from pure Himalayan herbs, potent minerals, and the sacred Ganges water. Taking recourse to these remedies will guarantee a quick and permanent cure for the sufferers who will be blessed with full vigour, energy, and longevity.”

I looked through a pamphlet published and printed in the ashram. Space does not permit me to quote the whole of this but a few extracts are interesting in their treatments, which cover a vast number of complaints, and surprising in their claims. By the amazing numbers of repeat orders which flood in there is proof that they must give results.

For instance, here is one: “An unfailing remedy for a number of diseases such as physical and mental weakness, diabetes, piles, various kinds of urinary disease, stone in the bladder, palpitation of heart, rheumatic pains, etc. This is a patent tonic for children and adults. It revives and strengthens memory. It can be used by all for strength, vigour, and vitality.” The course is thirty days. One pill being taken in a pint of milk, morning and evening. “Take a purgative before commencing. Avoid chillies, oil, jaggery, sweets and sour articles, alcohol and non-vegetarian dishes during the treatment.”

Another: “A powerful tonic and blood-purifier; a panacea for anaemia, diabetes, physical and mental debility, and urinary diseases. A first-rate body-builder and possesses mineral extracts,

especially iron and gold concentrated through the rays of the sun. Useful for dyspepsia, tuberculosis, hysteria, gonorrhoea, and syphilis. Cures diseases of the spleen, muscular atrophy, dystrophy, neurasthenia, and strengthens the nerves."

Another, this being a medicated oil: "Nourishes nerves, removes brain fag and excessive heat in the system. Serves as a patent hair oil, too. Recommended to persons of weak memory and irritable nature. Indispensable in summer season. Also a specific remedy for insomnia, premature greying of hair and baldness. It cures diseases of the ear. . . . It keeps good eyesight as it contains sandalwood oil and other cooling properties . . . to be massaged on the head in the morning before bath and at night before retiring to bed."

Then I read of a preparation made "with Kāsturi or musk and seventy-one rare Himalayan herbs, and eulogized in the Ayurvedic system as an effective tonic. It is particularly useful in anorexia or loss of appetite, diarrhoea, dysentery, and jaundice. It is an effective cure for leprosy in its early stages. It is a useful remedy for stones in kidney and bladder, and a nourishing tonic for the child and the nursing mother."

One tonic I actually tried out. It so happened that among the many who were then staying in the ashram, one who was a fairly regular visitor for long periods with his charming Kashmiri wife was a retired chief of the Indian Army Medical Services who also gave patients his specialist advice when consulted by the resident doctor of modern medicine. He told me that he had found this tonic invaluable.

". . . this wonderful medicine bestows good health and longevity, abundant energy, vim, vigour, and vitality. It is a very effective tonic for wasting diseases like tuberculosis, and a quick pick-up for convalescents. A unique elixir that develops brain-power, bestows wonderful memory, and helps to increase the power of concentration; improves digestion and purifies blood; invigorates and tones up the respiratory system; cures heart troubles and urinary diseases. It is a wonderful cure for asthma." And it was simple to take. "One tea-spoonful in the

early morning immediately followed by a pint of fresh warm milk or water." It reminded me of soft fudge, appeared to contain honey, and was "morish".

The result? It really was amazing, for but a few days later I climbed a mountain in search of an illusive "forest hermit" I wanted to meet, talk to and photograph, and in doing so, although I am no climber and always avoid it whenever possible, I easily outstripped both my companions who were half my age. I was not conscious of any increased power of concentration or developed brain-power though—but then I wonder, does one realize there is a slowing down or a speeding up of that faculty other than when undergoing a study course with periodical checks and examinations? I certainly admit to having felt considerably revitalized both whilst in Rishikesh and after my visit there, though friends refusing to be convinced, insisted that this was merely because I had been out of the dry enervating heat of the Delhi summer for a few days.

Many months after this particular visit to Rishikesh, I was travelling in the train from Madras to Delhi. The journey takes two days and two nights, and my companion in the coupé sleeping-berth compartment for part of the journey was an aged orthodox Hindu who wore a dhoti (loose cloth skirt), the usual collarless over-shirt, and sandals. He told me he was nearing his eightieth year and he looked it, but I have met few men of over sixty-five who were so full of pep—in his case, being cooped up with him for so long, most annoyingly so. His tonic came from the ashram. Amusement was mingled with interest as I read of the tonic that "This is a sovereign remedy for loss of vitality, wet dreams, and urinary diseases; removes physical and mental debility and develops strength, vigour, and vitality; purifies blood and tones up the liver and lungs." As to the dosage and taking, as usual milk was either mixed with it or drunk afterwards "to be taken just before sunrise and after sunset on an empty stomach and not used while suffering from disease. The patient should observe strict celibacy during the treatment. . . ." He completely convinced me of his vitality by insisting on taking

the top bunk which had been booked for him, and swinging up into it. With India, a land where I discovered that anything might happen, I admit to not really being alarmed or even concerned when I woke up in the morning to find my aged companion undertaking one of the Yoga asanas—standing on his head on the floor of the compartment, a position he maintained for well over a quarter of an hour in the running train, and I have no idea how long he had been in that position before I opened my eyes. I just made no comment, pretending I was used to it, just as did the attendant who brought my *chhota hasri* (morning tea) and found him in that position. I confess to having been completely bewildered when I first “came to” that morning to find him that way up, and then had the greatest difficulty in finding my bearings, trying to decide in which room of the bungalow I had gone to bed, after which, remembering that I was on a train journey, I had to convince myself that during my travels I had not discovered an upside-down world. “That’s what comes of delving too deeply into the occult!” friends commented when I told them about it.

My companion’s station of departure—a considerable relief to me—was two before mine. I found that by mistake he had left behind in the little toilet cabinet a packet of tooth powder. Then I recollected that among the hundred things he told me about himself he had proudly said, after opening his mouth to display the truth of his statement, “I still have every tooth in my head!” And sure enough that powder came from the famous Ashram Ayurvedic Pharmacy. “A sure remedy for bleeding and spongy gums, loose and shaky teeth. Cures all dental diseases and specially useful in pyrorrhoea. It increases the longevity of the teeth.”

Even while I was writing this book, and searching for any useful, interesting information that might go into its pages, I talked for some time during a cocktail party in Bombay to a very wealthy, cultured, and learned Parsee who told me that he had long passed his “allotted span of three score years and ten” and although I thought he looked withered and old, attributed his

“magnificent physical condition and stamina and alert mental outlook to a wonderful tonic which I must introduce you to” —I was certainly wilting a little after three months in the humid Bombay summer when he made this remark, but it concerned me that it was so obvious.

He had described the medicine as “one of the greatest of all the Ayurvedic tonics,” and when it arrived I discovered that it came out of that same Rishikesh pharmacy. “A potent specific for overcoming all chronic morbid conditions of the constitution and rejuvenating the system. It is prepared with Gold, Pearl, and Musk which are celebrated for their vitalizing tonic properties. Several rare super-refined bhasmas (like Abhrak bhasma, etc.), go into its preparation. Even a small dose at once manifests full potent effect upon you. It quickly eradicates all ills of the system; gold corrects vata, pearl sets right bile, phlegm, and blood, while the Kasturi purifies the entire body. This helps to retain youth, strengthens the heart, lungs, and liver, stimulates the circulation of blood, strengthens nerves, renews digestive powers and vitality, and imparts energy and vigour. All urinary diseases like gonorrhoea, gleet, diabetes, seminal discharge, as also all signs of consumption, wasting disease, cough, dull digestion, neurasthenia, insomnia, and female diseases, yield at once to this powerful tonic and medicine. Even healthy persons can take it as an invigorating tonic to retain a high level of health and strength. A complete course is for a period of twenty-one days.”

The Ayurvedic system of medicine is one of the oldest in India, most of the treatments being based on, if not taken entirely from, the old Hindu scriptures or having been practised centuries ago and passed down, as are the secrets gurus impart to their disciples, from one sage to another. Unlike the herbalists, these doctors of the human body employ minerals as well as herbs. The Ayurvedic methods are now taught in a number of their medical schools in India, with diplomas awarded by their own Board which is recognized by State Governments as a representative body of the practitioners of Indian systems of medicine.

From this part of the ashram I was taken to the doctor of modern medicine, a youngish man holding a medical degree of the Bombay University, one who had before been in practice for some time. Very proudly he showed me his new acquisition, a complete diathermy equipment, which was now added to the other electrical medical apparatus—X-ray and ultra-violet ray—already there; nearby was a beautifully equipped clinical laboratory with the very latest design of microscope. His consulting room was spotless, as indeed were those of the other doctors; he kept himself right up to date with the progress of medical research, and had the advantage of being able to pick the brains as well as consult the numbers of doctors of medicine who visited the ashram as pilgrims or devotees.

Here it was that I discovered that the great "Swamiji" himself was a fully qualified doctor, and had practised in Malaya for very many years before he renounced all, returned to India as a mendicant, and came to the Himalayas to find his guru in the place I then stood upon.

Other than in India, I cannot imagine doctors of the three methods of medicine, the Modern school, Ayurveda, and Homoeopathic, consulting together, but in this ashram I was assured that quite frequently this happens, or one of them will pass a patient on to the other. When with cases of sickness of the mind they fail to effect a cure between them, there is yet another doctor to whom they may be sent, he being "His Holiness", Swamiji himself, and all are agreed that so often where they had failed, if not effecting a complete cure, he has at least put the patient well on the road to recovery.

We left the lower ashram as it might be called, crossed the main road, and climbed a steep flight of wide stone steps through trees up the mountainside. Here and there we reached level ground and on either side of us stretched long buildings, with many doors leading into them from tree-shaded terraces which overlooked the wide holy Ganges flowing some hundreds of feet below. These were some of the fifty-odd visitor's rooms which have been built for those who come to spend a few days

—although they may remain weeks if they care—in the quiet atmosphere of the ashram. As with so many of the buildings, I saw that a slab cemented into the wall had been inscribed with the name of the one who had donated the money for the erection of the place. We climbed on and up past many other “cells”, bright and clean, so very unlike those dismal ones I had seen in the ashrams by the wayside. They took me into the studio; a bright intelligent-looking young monk in charge proudly showed me his cameras, showed me his ciné camera and then insisted that I must see at least a little of one of the films he had recently made. I asked him who had taught him photography. It was the same answer, “Swamiji”. Amazingly this place makes films and distributes them to members who are unable to visit it; films of the various asanas being performed, descriptive films of the ashram and the surrounding countryside, and of the festivals held there, a surprisingly large film library.

Yet one terrace higher we came upon a long low building with a wide wired-in monkey-protected veranda which had become an extension of the main buildings—one towards the rebuilding of which a wealthy devotee had given a considerable sum, and I should imagine only just in time, for it was crowded with electric-powered printing presses, type cases, benches, guillotine, stacks of printing paper, binding presses, and all that is required to produce the thousands of books and booklets which are issued from the ashram. Here were employed a few who wore the everyday clothes of the ordinary man, but orange coloured robes predominated, the manager, editor, first compositor, and such like posts being filled by sadhu inmates of the ashram. Many had gained their experience before they retired from the world and entered the ashram, others had found their knowledge there. “And how did you learn; who first showed you?” I asked one who had been there from the beginning. I received the same answer as always, “Swamiji of course!” Among them was a quiet, intelligent-looking girl. She was then copying a manuscript on a typewriter, but was also a proof reader. They told me she was soon to become a sadhvi—or nun.

Next, I was taken over to the museum, one which most certainly needed a guide to explain what all the close-hanging pictures on the walls depicted and to tell about the sandals, hats, symbols, glasses, and dozens of other odd things that were there. This duty was meticulously carried out by a most enthusiastic and valuable young monk who seemed to be brimming over with knowledge. The symbols and pictures were explained at great length, he seeming to weave it all into a story. Most of what he said was completely over my head; often I had just no idea of the meaning of many of the words, whether they described parts of the human body, the spirit, one of the hundreds of names of the many gods, holy places, or even asanas. I suppose I should have been flattered that he imagined that already I knew, it seems I must have appeared to have maintained an intelligent expression, but by the time he had finished my head was in a whirl, my legs ached, and I just wanted to get back to the bungalow.

But that was not all. We had to climb another flight of steps to the temple; certainly a most picturesque building, the outer columns being coloured blue, the white spire as though shooting up to the sky and defying the forest trees which covered the slopes behind it. This is a composite temple, with the idols of Shiva, Vishnu, and Shakti, so that all sections of the Hindus may worship there. A male temple dancer was dancing before it. He also was clothed in saffron, his robes flowing and voluminous like a nightgown with a sleeveless coat on top; over his shoulder a spotted deer skin was slung, round his neck a garland of marigolds. His head was swathed in an orange turban; his feet bare, with bells strapped round his ankles. He was dancing with eyes near closed, chanting or singing and accompanying himself with castanets made like large wooden fingers with metal rattles at each end. His dance consisted of non-stop twirling round and round, which went on and on until he fell down. No one went forward to pick him up, and after a while he scrambled to his feet and looked blankly around at us. It was an entirely different kind of dancing to any I had ever before seen.

A priest was sitting cross-legged on the floor to one side of the Shiva symbol; he poured water over the white idol which was decorated with flowers, then placed a garland of marigolds round a worshipper's neck. The woman then got up, rang the brass bell hanging overhead and walked away.

There seemed to be ugly brown monkeys with raw looking seats everywhere. "Swamiji will not let us throw stones and drive them off," they told me. I saw a stub-tailed, bruiser-like one dash out of a room with a bunch of bananas; a girl, who was obviously a visitor, for she wore a coloured sari, threw her shoe after it; for a moment it stopped, looked as though it intended to dash back to grab the shoe also, but she rushed on towards it. The brute bared its teeth and swore defiance at her, then climbed a tree, to sit just out of her reach eating the bananas.

I had hoped while there to meet a famous Yogi master of asanas I had been told by the "judge sadhu" was resident in the ashram. He had recently made an all-India tour, giving talks and demonstrations, and I wanted to get some photographs of these asanas, but he was unfortunately away. They said that he would probably be there the following day, in which case they were sure that he would be delighted to spare some of his time and oblige.

We returned to the main road. Here I was pressed to remain longer and take food with the sadhus, and only with the greatest difficulty did I manage to be firm and refuse as politely as I could, hoping that by so doing I had not spoilt my chances for the next day.

That evening as I sat on the veranda and watched the sun going down, musing over the day's tour of the ashram, I realized that my visit had indeed been unique in that although I had been there for well over three hours, during which time they had done their best to load me with books, records and other things, never once was money mentioned; I saw no poor box prominently displayed, the cost of maintaining the ashram was never discreetly slipped into the conversation. And what is more, never since have I been approached for a donation or asked to

join and pay a subscription. Surely there can be few religious organizations existing in the world of which this can be said.

I casually turned the pages of the books I had been presented with; many I found were under the authorship of various of the two hundred resident monks of the ashram. All of them started off with pages of praise for Swamiji, he being given the most elevated of titles in their description of his work and of himself; he was "Maharaj", "the indescribable divinity", "Spiritual Powerhouse", "a sage", "great saint", "Apostle of Love and Peace". The great majority completed their books with further pages about his good works, his sayings, what others had written of him. There remained no doubt in my mind that none among his devotees thought of him other than as the reincarnation of a god.

In the books written by the sage himself—and within the pages was at once discerned the doctor of medicine as well as of mind—there was a certain amount of repetition. With all the books the language used was unusually flowery, yet among all the verbiage there were many words of advice, comfort, and wisdom. To the new recruit to the doctrine of the sage, the words would have been confusing. Frequently since that time have I heard devotees quoting, as if they were their own ideas put into words, those which I have read in those books.

For myself, being a busy man I would better have welcomed a more concise version of what they had to tell me, but then I realize that the majority of those who read these books have most of the day at their disposal to browse through them, that with the Indian flowery language is often used to assist in working up the emotions which they consider to be necessary in order to absorb the focal point which the writer intends should be fully appreciated. It is like the coloured silver foil round a delicious sweetmeat; the eye takes up the beauty of the covering, and the flavour of the contents becomes the more delightful to the palate.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE FOLLOWING morning when I arrived at the ashram I was at once greeted by a sadhu I had not yet met. The usual politeness prevailed. "I am sorry that I was not here when you called yesterday," he said. "Had I but known of your coming I would most certainly have remained, but now perhaps I can be of some service to you."

So this was the one I had heard of, a great exponent of the asanas. Those who had illustrated the books on Yoga that I had read were bearded men and I was surprised to find him clean shaven. It is always difficult to guess the age of a man from the Far East, especially when his head is shaven, but I judged his to be about twenty-five years; I was about five years out.

His story I had discovered tucked away in a book which had been written after his all-India tour. Both his father and mother were devout and religious; his mother was the one who was mostly responsible for all his initial training. At the age of seventeen he became a school teacher, but only for a few months; then he joined the army, serving for about two years. During that time a leaflet issued by the ashram came into his hands, one which advised him to "read the *Gita*"; he says that within three months he could not only "read it fluently but also understand its meaning". He got leave and went off to the ashram. The mere words "ashram", "Rishikesh", and "Himalayas" overawed him, but he found another who was also going there, and so he went. He saw "Swamiji" and now says that he felt within himself that he had seen him before, "there was that familiarity, that bond of love and attraction in my heart for the guru"

Many times after that he felt impelled to go to the ashram. Until that time he had only known how to worship an image of

God, but while he was there he saw them assembled on the bank of the river and was amazed to see them all worship the holy Ganges; he had never thought of waving lights before a flowing river. "While here I saw a saint worshipping a river," he said. "At that very instant the river assumed a divine glow and in its place I saw the Manifest Grace of the Lord flowing by, whispering a message into my ears 'God pervades everything; this too, is His Special Form' and my entire outlook upon life became changed. I sought the advice of Swamiji as to my future. He told me to maintain a Spiritual Diary, one in a form which he laid down for me, in which I opened up to him my whole heart, my every action, my innermost thoughts. At the end of every month I sent the diary to Swamiji and he guided my future footsteps."

The guru had in fact not only taken an interest in the young man, he had assumed complete charge of the life of this disciple who, without realizing it, was passing through the initial period for his future training.

On his discharge from the army he again went to the ashram for a few days, after which he returned to his home in South India where he started on a teacher's training course.

Then one day he received an invitation to attend a celebration in the ashram. He took leave of his dearly beloved mother; he said it would be only for a few days. Did they both inwardly know that the Sage of the Himalayas had decided the time had come to tear the young man away from his family and "give him to the whole world as his glorious messenger?"

When he was sitting on the station platform in Madras, a poor boy, who was in great need, approached him. He simply asked, and the young man gave him every anna he possessed, leaving himself without even that money with which to purchase his railway ticket. But he got on the train, was never once asked for a ticket; fortunately, after twelve hours he found a friend travelling on the train, one who gave him food. After some wanderings he reached the ashram in Rishikesh. He told me that the great sage's words of greeting were "Remain here". His meek reply, "Yes, Swamiji," he has since adopted as a sacred Mantra.

A pathetic letter arrived at the ashram from the weeping mother who had heard that her son had joined them. Swamiji "coolly handed the letter to me with the aphoristic consolation 'Matha Naasti Pitha Naasti' which means 'For you there is neither mother nor father'. My troubled heart found instantaneous peace. The determination had been arrived at."

Within a year, this young man, having been well tested, was initiated into the Sacred Order of Sanyas and given a new name.

I am assured that he at once became a most extraordinary adept of Yoga asanas and Pranayama; every bit of his learning came from the books written by the sage; he had before—when in the army—studied the more simple of them, but now "at the feet of his guru, his progress was phenomenal". Even the all-India tour he made was amazing, for he started off penniless and wandered from Dwaraka in the west to Badrinath in the north. His vitality, I was afterwards to discover, was terrific, he must have personally trained hundreds of Indians and also scores of "foreigners" in the correct practice of asanas during that tour. I have to agree with those who told me before I saw his demonstrations that the "pliability of his body has to be seen to be believed". Accuracy in asanas required the combined qualities of the perfection of a contortionist, the strength of a gymnast, and the stamina of an athlete. Yet I know that this Yogi eats little and sleeps less.

It was soon obvious to me that I was not the first to ask the privilege of taking photographs, for he at once asked, "Shall we talk here?" and then pointing to the low concrete wall on the flat roof overlooking the great river said, "This is a favourite place for taking photographs; the background is not only the holy Ganga, but also there is a temple on the far bank."

It seemed a good enough place to me, nothing could have been more suitable, and we sat and discussed the asanas he would demonstrate, the more picturesque ones first, gradually going into the more difficult ones, those which had taken months to perfect. He left me and disappeared into a nearby room for a few moments. He was the first Indian I had met for many years

who "got down to his subject" so soon; then I remembered that they had said of him, "His secret is that he will never waste a single minute in idle gossip."

He came out having changed his sadhu saffron robes for a pair of blue bathing slippers. Over his arm he carried a rug which he spread out on the roof. At once he was down on it and started posing some of the asanas. I took a few pictures, but almost at once a crowd of visitors pressed around and the "background" of the blue Ganges and the shining white temple was lost.

It was he who suggested that it might be better at that time of day to go to his "lonely forest cell" as he called it. He picked up the rug, went into the room again, and returned as a sadhu. Together and alone we climbed the dozens of concrete steps I had gone up the previous day. On the many occasions I have mounted or descended them I have passed sadhus who have appeared to be preoccupied, and I have often wondered whether these steps are in fact one hundred and eight in number, so replacing the beads on a rosary, and if those I have passed have possibly been silently reciting the name of their god at each step.

Passing under a large arch at the foot of the short flight which leads up to the temple, I looked up and saw that the centrepiece of this arch was a coloured Ganesha—the god who must always be worshipped before Lord Shiva. I was feeling much fresher, with the result that the ashram temple looked more beautiful that morning; devotees were then entering with garlands of flowers. I met the dancer again; he was laughing, yet strangely when I said, "He looks happy enough in his work!" My escort replied, "He had news this morning that his mother had passed on!"

Behind the temple a narrow track led up into the forest trees, this we followed; after a while we came upon a dried-up stone tank, then a little white concrete building with a flat roof. This was the sadhu's home, but not the whole of the building, only the very smallest portion, for as he unlocked the door, remarking, "The monkeys are very clever, they can undo a catch, for that reason we must use padlocks," I saw that it was just a slip

of a room, a word which rightly describes it, for it was perhaps four feet wide, and no more than nine feet long. Into this had been crowded a desk, a chair, a stool, book shelves, a large white china figure of the god Krishna, and many odds and ends. I imagine that when he retired for the night he piled everything at the far end, and slept on the floor. The place had been built by the other occupant of the building and he had generously given the Yogi this cell, one in which he could be quiet and study undisturbed.

As he unlocked the room I heard a rustling in the branches of a nearby tree, and looking up saw about a dozen large monkeys; they moved to the end of the branches and leapt like a complete *corps de ballet* over to the outstretched branch of the adjoining tree, one which gave a better view of the front of the building. Suddenly I realized that these monkeys were quite different from the brown thick-necked heavy creatures I had seen down by the lower part of the ashram and at the top of the first flight of steps. They were grey-green, with black faces which were as though framed in a high collar of silver hair, slim creatures with unusually long tails, every moment being like that of a dancer as opposed to the others which moved like all-in wrestlers. I commented upon their beauty and that they were a different species to the others we had seen lower down and the Yogi said, "Yes, it is strange. Monkeys have their own territories, none of the brown ones will stray here—if they did they would be killed by the grey ones, and none of the grey ones will venture lower down. The temple is their frontier line, those you see here are not easy to catch, you have never seen a monkey-man with one of these on a chain have you? They are so quick and quiet in their movements that they are inside your room and out again with some of your possessions before you are aware of it, and they are very fleet of foot and arm. Swamiji has told us we must not throw stones at the monkeys. We can but say 'Yes, Swamiji' and so they breed apace and seem to know that they are protected by the orders of Swamiji." He was just stating a fact, not complaining.

He left his robe in the room. The building cast its grey shadow before it, and he suggested that the best place to take photographs of a demonstration would be the flat roof, on to which we climbed by way of a crude ladder.

But for the fact that his head was shaven, wearing the bathing slips he might have been any young Indian on a seaside beach. His body was masculine and slim; as an exponent of the asanas I had rather expected him to be broad shouldered, his muscles to stand out, it was not so but his arms and legs were sinuous; he carried about as much flesh as the average middle-class or working-class Indian—which is not a lot.

This time he spread a tiger skin on the flat roof, a roof so small that in order to get a picture I had to kneel at the very end of it, and as I looked behind me saw a drop of about fifty feet down the hillside.

“For illustration purposes you will of course require some of the more picturesque poses,” he said, and then, standing side on to me, he raised one leg behind his back and caught it with his hand, at the same time creating a balance by stretching the other arm forward. The result was as he himself described it “a beautiful pose”, and I had to agree, but it was one that I would never have associated with the many sadhus I knew who practised asanas. I should have expected to have seen a bronze Cupid or Eros figure poised like this on a fountain head. At once he must have sensed that the posture held no interest to me, for he knelt down with knees apart, placed his hands between them, palms backwards and raised off the ground and elbows close together, then bent forwards so that the elbows were pressed on each side of the navel and at the same time as he inhaled, straightened the legs, so raising them until they were parallel to the ground. With the head straight, face upwards, as he afterwards explained, this was the Mayurasan. The word Mayur means Peacock in Sanskrit, and for that reason—and of course the fact that the resultant position does make the practitioner appear like a peacock, it is known as the Peacock pose. It is a pose requiring considerable physical strength and suitable to gymnasts, and, as

I saw at the time, corresponded to the plank exercise on the parallel bars. "The pose should be maintained for five seconds—later, with experience, up to twenty seconds—then resting the toes on the ground, exhale, after which we rest for a few minutes and again take up the same position, so."

Again he described it as a "beautiful posture" but this one to him "has a charm all its own". He then added these words of advice. "It should never be attempted until the muscles have been made supple by other poses. One should take care to ensure that the bowels are empty; disease, or at least pain, will result if this is not done. You will probably experience some difficulty at first in keeping your balance once the legs are lifted from the ground; my advice is to put a folded blanket or cushion in front, since most learners fall forward on the face. It is best to try to fall sideways if you must fall. And if you cannot stretch both legs together, then slowly stretch one leg and follow it with the other, whilst if you lean slightly forward with the head down, the legs will come up."

"And what does one gain from this exercise?" I asked.

"So many things. It is the best asana known for stomach disorders, this being brought about by the pressure of the arms on the stomach below the navel. The abdomen is partially compressed, with the result that the blood is directed towards the digestive organs, and the kidneys, liver, and pancreas profit to that extent, while the stomach and the abdominal viscera are toned up. It encourages a wonderful appetite, cures diseases brought about by bile, phlegm, and wind; what is more, it cures diabetes and hemorrhoids. Those people who are not Yogis but have studied some of our asanas under a guru and returned to teach those to the world, declare that this particular asana will ensure the maximum physical exercise in the minimum amount of time, making it invaluable to the busy man." And when he added, "Swamiji says that this asana serves the same purpose as a hypodermic injection of adrenaline or digitalin," I realized that all his learning had come from the sage, who I remembered was of course a doctor.

He then followed with a remark the purport of which I did not understand for many days, after which time I had learned considerably more of the secret Yoga practices; he said, "This is an asana which many gurus insist upon being practised by their disciples for from eight to ten minutes before they perform the purification act of Vasti."

Thinking he was about to explain this mysterious Vasti I did not interrupt, but—just as the guru on the island had gone from the Lotus pose into the Bound Lotus pose, he went on to demonstrate a variety of the Peacock pose, by sitting down in the Lotus position, placing his hands backwards on the ground close and as before pressing into the abdomen; he was then in the Peacock posture but with folded legs. "The advantages to be gained from this asana are the same as with the other," he explained.

He continued, "So many of our asanas are named after birds or animals because they are poses which remind you of them. In all cases the Sanskrit word is used. There are, for instance, Matsyasana—the Fish posture; Salabhasana—the Locust posture; Bhujangasana—the Cobra posture; and many more, like, for example, Cock, Tortoise, Frog, Horse, Swan, Scorpion. Now which do you suggest might interest you next?"

"Matsyasana? Yes, a slightly unusual one, since after taking up this posture the practitioner can float on the water for a considerable time, just like a fish. That is why it is called Matsyasana. Here it is."

He sat down and took up the Lotus pose—that is with the right foot on the left thigh and the left foot over the right thigh. Next lying flat on his back with his knees still on the ground, he folded his arms behind his head, the hand of one gripping the arm of the other above the elbow: his face was up towards the sky.

"This is the simple variety of the pose," he explained. "Now for the full asana." He undid his arms and rested them at each side; keeping his elbow on the ground he gripped his toes with his hands, then, lifting his chest, stretched his neck back until the top of his head was on the ground and his face looking back.

“This is an excellent asana to practise after you have done the Sarvangasana—one in which you lie down, and bending at the shoulders, raise the leg and trunk so that they stand vertically; you use the elbows as props for this; but after a time it does stiffen the neck. Now Matsyasana relieves that stiffness brought about by holding the other position for a long period. With the neck now bent back the thyroids and the para-thyroids receive a plentiful supply of blood. The back and the neck are strengthened. While you are performing it the larynx and trachea are open wide and the lungs fill with fresh air and pure oxygen. The upper dorsal nerves profit; the endocrine glands, the pineal, and the pituitary glands located in the brain are stimulated. The abdominal muscles are exercised, the result being that constipation is removed; on account of the resultant deep breathing exercise it is a useful treatment for asthma, chronic bronchitis, and consumption.

“Now here is the Sarvangasana I told you about. Lying flat on your back you slowly raise the legs. Lift the trunk, the hips, and the legs until they are in a vertical line, with the hands supporting the back, one on each side, and the elbows hard on the ground. Then press the chin against the chest. The head, the shoulders are on the ground. The body must be vertical and straight without a movement. Retain the breath as long as you can and exhale through the nose, very slowly. When you have held the position at the start for say two minutes, later on as much as half an hour, you very slowly let the legs down to the ground, so.”

Getting up he explained with great sincerity, “This asana has been described by doctors of modern medicine as ‘a mysterious exercise which bestows wonderful benefits’. We Yogis say of it that it is a cure-all for every disease. Its value is obvious even to the lay-student of medicine, one who possesses but elementary knowledge of the human body. By its practice the thyroid gland which plays such an important part in the growth, nutrition, and structure of the body, is fully nourished. The thyroid gland when healthy ensures the healthy functioning of the alimentary,

circulatory, respiratory, genito-urinary, and nervous systems. The thyroid works together with other ductless glands, pituitary, pineal in the brain, suprarenal above the kidneys, spleen, liver, testes. And if the thyroid is diseased or does not function properly, then the other glands must of consequence suffer."

I was amazed at the medical knowledge of this young Yogi. Those who had imagined all those who wore the saffron cloth and wandered the roads of India to be unintelligent and uneducated, would do well to search a little deeper, for I found there are quite a number as learned as he.

Then I listened as he went on, "This asana causes large amounts of blood to get to the roots of the spinal nerves, the blood nourishes the spinal column which is kept elastic, and pliability of the spine ensures everlasting youth. This asana saves the spine from early ossification. It rejuvenates, causing those who have lost their potency to be happy once again; it checks nocturnal emissions. With hardening of the spine checked and ossification of the bones prevented, the degeneration of old age is unknown, and the practitioner remains energetic and agile at all times; he cannot be lazy. The spinal column is a very important part of the body containing as it does the spinal cord, spinal nerve, and sympathetic system; to the Yogi it is especially important and he must always keep it healthy. Corpulence and obesity, as well as constipation, congestion, and even enlargement of the liver and the spleen are definitely cured by this wonderful asana."

I was later assured that this is also a definite cure in the early stages of leprosy. The treatment consists of this asana combined with a diet of practically milk only, it being maintained by the Yogis that milk assists the thyroid to provide and distribute its juice in sufficient measure to subsidize and help nature in restoring the functions of the stricken parts before degeneration sets in. The other attribute to the leprosy treatment is sunbathing both morning and evening.

I have met one retired Indian doctor of the school of modern medicine who has not the slightest doubt that patients he,

together with a Yogi, treated in this manner were already in a fairly advanced stage of leprosy, although no part of the body had yet decomposed. I have met two people who have showed me discoloured patches, one on the hands, the other the nose, which doctors have said were the definite early stages of the disease, and which now, after the treatment, have almost regained their pliability and sense of touch. The one of those men who still had visible signs of the disease upon his hands, was then wearing a saffron robe, and was a wonderful musician, being at one time a famous artiste on the radio. His fascinating story, starting from the earliest of his memories—when he was a waif—is unfortunately far too long for this book.

“Now I will show you the asana you saw the old man performing in the train; the Sirshasana, the Topsy-Turvy pose, some call it the Skull gesture. First sit on the two knees. Interweave the fingers and by so doing make a finger lock and place the hands and the elbows, on the ground. Next put the top of your head on the ground within the finger lock; though here you must be most careful to ensure that it is not that portion of the head which is nearest the forehead touching the ground—that would result in a curvature of the spine when the whole body is balanced; it is the parietal—the frontal part of the top of the head which is placed on the ground. Raise the body so that only the head—between the elbows of course—and the toes touch the ground, and with the firm base you can lift the legs until they are in a vertical line with the body. At first you should remain in this position for five seconds only and gradually increase the time by fifteen seconds each week until you remain in the pose for from twenty minutes to half an hour. Some people prefer in the early stages to keep the palms of the hands flat on the ground, one on each side, and when they have learned to balance the body they take to the finger-lock; others make use of a wall and perform the asana standing upside down against that; yet others have a friend get them into position and hold them so for a while. One thing to remember always is that you must never breathe through the mouth, only through the nose;

it may be a little difficult in the beginning but that will soon be overcome.

“And when you have remained in the position long enough, complete the asana by bringing the legs down to the ground again, but very, very slowly, making every effort to avoid any jerks; then stand erect and quite still on your feet for two minutes, so permitting the circulation of the blood to take up the normal flow. This asana should be practised only in the mornings, and then before taking food, never twice in one morning, and those who undertake it for more than half an hour—which by the way is more than sufficient for any who are aged or not too strong—quantities of milk and ghee should be taken to ensure no deleterious effects. And three other points to be remembered; it is dangerous to take a cold bath, even to wash hands and face in cold water, to walk, or to sit in the cool breeze immediately after it. It should not be performed either before emptying the bowels nor after a bath. And it should not be done after breathing exercises—though other asanas may be performed prior to it.

“Those who are weak in the head, hot in the head, who suffer from affections of the lungs, experience a rapid heart, or have insomnia—though on this particular complaint one must take the advice of one’s guru—should not attempt this asana; needless to say, those who suffer a mental disarrangement should never be permitted to do it.

“But the benefits to those who may do so are manifold. When elderly men practise the Sirshasana, white hairs turn to black within a year.” I can only conclude that my “upside-down” companion on the Madras Mail had not then completed his year’s treatment! “Feebleness is a feeling of the past; they become agile, healthy, and vigorous.” That was certainly true of my train companion. “Now for the reasons for all this, and the other benefits. In this pose, with the body completely inverted, gravitation works upon it in a different direction; the arch of the aorta, the common carotids, the innominate, and the subclavian are flooded with rich arterial blood and only in this of all the

asanas is the brain, the root of the whole nervous system, washed in pure rich blood, with the result that the cranial nerves and the spinal cord with its thirty-one pairs of spinal nerves together with the whole sympathetic system obtain a full flush of nourishment; it is a terrific tonic to them all. It is a cure-all for every human ailment; diseases of liver, spleen, lungs, and the genito-urinary system are a thing of the past; renal colic, diabetes, pyorrhoea, deafness, piles, and constipation disappear." What a glorious mix-up of complaints, I was thinking! He went on, "Doctors prescribe this particular asana for ladies, since it cures many uterine and ovarian diseases; although naturally those who are with child and those experiencing courses should not undertake the exercise during that period." A fatuous remark, I thought. I cannot imagine one attempting it at such a time.

"I cannot describe all that can be gained from this asana. The brain-washing results in an increased memory, a more alert brain; Indian lawyers, occultists, thinkers, and politicians—among them some of the greatest in the land, appreciate it as a wonderful stimulant, even those among them who usually describe the Yogi as a humbug.

"With men, those who suffer from spermatorrhea or from nocturnal emissions are cured of their complaint. Near celibacy is advised during the practice of Sirshasana." Again my thoughts flashed back to the old man in the train, to the tonic he had recommended, but the Yogi went on, "Then we come to a greater gain for men; we sadhus especially value it for another reason. I will explain it to you as best I can, but as yet I have no knowledge as to how much you are versed in the Yoga secret doctrines and practices."

At these words I was at once attentive, for it appeared as though I had at long last reached the stage when I was about to learn something really interesting. "This particular asana is invaluable in keeping up Brahmacharya; the seminal energy is converted into Ojas Shakti, a process known as sex-sublimation. This energy so transmuted flows towards the brain where it is

stored up as a spiritual force which is available to be used for Dhyana—a contemplative purpose. When we do this asana we concentrate our imagination upon the seminal energy being converted into Ojas and rushing up the spinal column into the brain for storage—and it is so.”

With that he bent down, rolled up the tiger skin and said, “That, I am sure, will be sufficient for you for to-day. Perhaps you might care to come along to-morrow and I will demonstrate and explain more of our asanas to you.”

I dared not ask him to explain exactly what was meant by his descriptions of the valuable assets the Yogis gained, my one fear being that he might not go deeper into them later, and I hoped that as he progressed I should be able to unravel them; as it was, I had a fairly good idea as to what he had endeavoured to convey.

Together we went down the dozens of stone steps, past the temple, now surrounded by dozens of devotees, past the terraces of ashram guest-rooms, now filled with visitors, across the busy main road to the main office building.

Here we found the great sage seated behind a flat-topped desk; he was dictating something, signing letters, and auto-graphing books, whilst continuing to talk to dozens of young girls who were silently and shyly sitting on forms on two sides of the desk like swallows on telegraph wires. They had come in a body from South India and were obviously entranced by at last looking at him, receiving his darshan—the spiritual blessing bestowed by being in the presence of one so holy.

As all this went on I felt the greatest sympathy for the patient monk secretary who was endeavouring to take down what his lord was saying, and suffering the great one suddenly to break off, talk to the assembled people, even shoot a question at the poor secretary and then come back to business, but all the time happily smiling.

I explained that I had only come to thank him for allowing the Yogi to demonstrate for us, but he insisted that I must “sit down, just a moment for I have something to show you that

will be of great interest especially to you!" and then as before, "Bring cold drinks, bring food for our most august visitor" and I at once wished myself under the desk, for all eyes were now upon me. But the drinks were forthcoming; I must confess that after standing on the concrete roof for well over an hour in the hot sun they were most welcome.

He then went on with his discourse to his visitors; I soon discovered that his subject was "fasting". "It is a form of tapas which destroys effects of evil, a way quickly to purify yourself; it nullifies the effects of evil actions. It is a kind of self-punishment. What else does it do? It subdues passion!" Glancing round at his audience I thought they appeared the most docile flock, but one never knows. "What else does it do?" He looked hard at them all; the last thing he expected was an answer, and of course no one dared speak; he went on, "So many things. Fasting helps control the mind, it alerts the mind. We Hindus are not the only people to fast. Take the Christians for instance; observing Lent, they fast for forty days until the eve of Easter, a penitence undertaken in commemoration of the fast of their Saviour in the wilderness. The Mohammedans, what do they do? They fast during Ramazan, and they, like so many Hindus, take not even a drop of water during that fast. But what else does it do, what other good?" he asked, then with a benign smile went on, "I will tell you. In so many cases—numberless cases—it has restored health when all else has failed. I will tell you something to remember. If you fast when a disease is manifested, it will soon disappear and serious complications will be avoided. If you suffer dyspepsia or if you are feverish, fast for a day and you will be cured completely. Do this and save your doctor's bills, for medicine can only help nature, and if you take the medicine prescribed by some so-called doctors the treatment may be injurious. I have said so many times that nature is your reliable guide, doctor, friend, and nurse, so seek her help at all times, and nature's greatest curative agent is fasting. It gives her an opportunity to cleanse the whole system of the body and remove all those materials which clog certain of the organs and

parts. It is a most efficacious therapeutic agent; so many poisonous materials and toxins are eliminated by fasting. Fasting reduces fat—not that any of you need to be told that as yet!” he commented with a smile, to which the row of swallows responded with discreet little giggles.

“Something else I will tell you; it may surprise you. Fasting does not impair vitality; it does not result in weakness nor loss of weight. On the contrary, strength and vitality usually increase with fasting; the body seems to become light, the mind clear.

“Some people who at first fear to fast, later take great pleasure in it and enjoy doing so. The first and the second day you will be troubled by hunger, but from the third you will experience no difficulty; you will have no appetite. You must not permit your mind to wander and think about food when you are fasting. You need then to practise rigorous meditation, the brain will be calm and meditation will become quite easy. Start off by fasting for one day, then for two, and so on until you can do it quite happily for a week. When you break a fast, first take some orange juice, do not then fill the stomach.

“If your mind does some wrong action which will hurt another’s feelings, then punish the mind by fasting, and it will gradually come under your control.

“When you fast for health’s sake; when the channels of the body are clogged, then as the municipal people do when they clean out the sewers; stop the flow of waste into them and flush them out with water; drink plenty of it. Take an enema of soap water in the early morning to cleanse the bowels thoroughly. When the garage people overhaul an old car they drain all the old oil out of it, they flush it through, and it becomes like a new car.

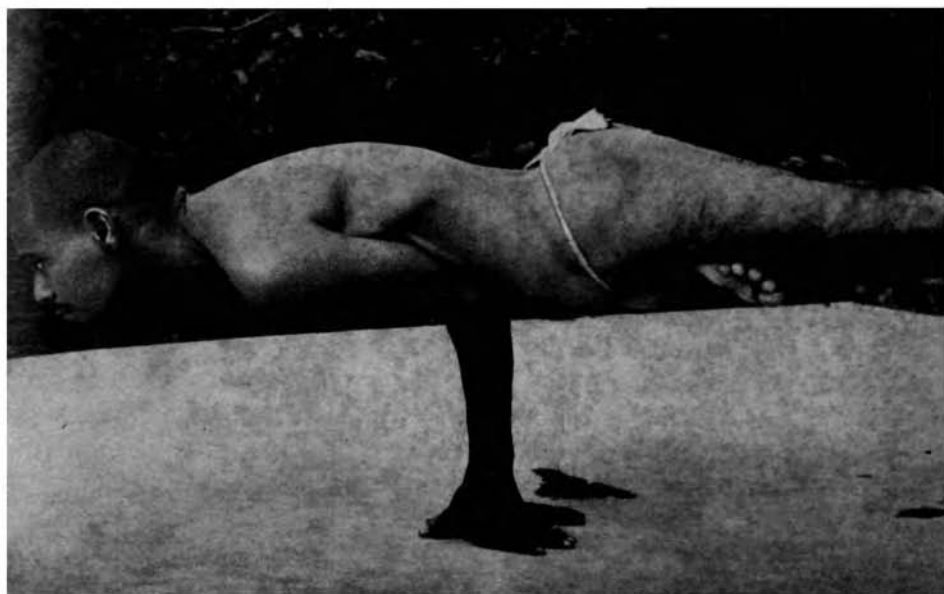
“Another thing I tell you. Fasting develops will-power. Gandhiji knew that, and as you know he was a great votary of fasting. If anything went wrong in his ashram or if anyone there conducted himself in a bad manner, he would take the burden of their sins upon himself and fast for several days. For Hindu-Muslim unity he fasted. For the freedom of this country he

fasted for forty-five days, By fasting you can melt the heart of the hardest-hearted man."

With all eyes intense upon him, he finished with emphasis, "Fast to calm your emotions. Fast to curb your passions. Fast to be healthy. Fast to control your tongue. Fast to destroy your sins. Fast to control your sleep. Fast to eliminate the poisons retained in your system. Fast and pray, purify and meditate, realize thyself and be free. Fast and you will shine with divine glory and splendour!"

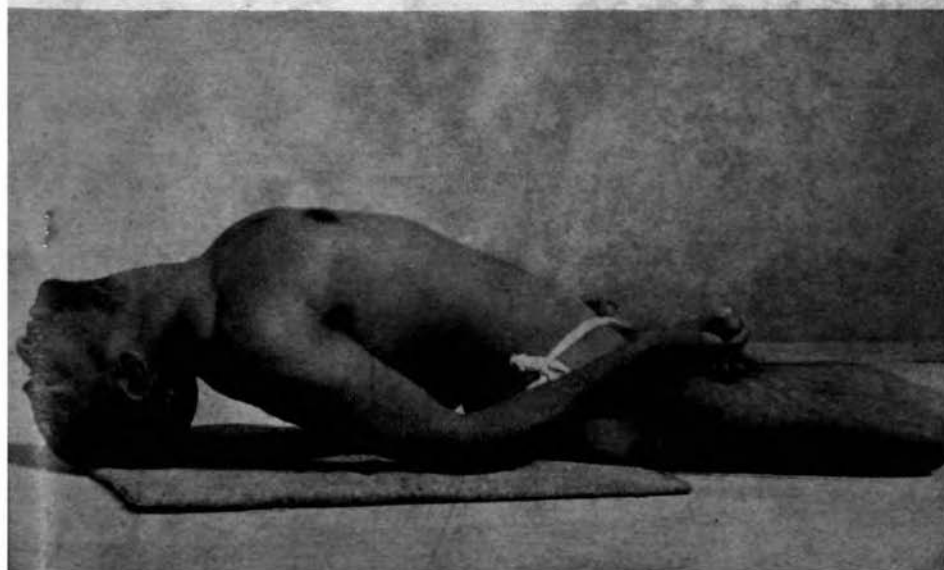
Then a monk I had not before seen came forward. Like all the others he was bare to the waist, his body was magnificent. I saw that he still retained his sacred thread, from the crown of his shaven head a tail of hair was hanging. This told me he had not entirely renounced the world. He was instructed to show us some of the asanas which had become his speciality. His "performance"—and there is no other word can better describe it—consisted of running off a half-poem, half-song in, I am certain, no words of any known language, intermingled with strange throat, nose, and mouth noises. These, speeding up, were mingled with the most amazing muscular displays such as "healthy body men" perform on the stage, then bending slightly forward with legs about a foot apart and hands on thighs, he finished by drawing in his stomach until his navel had completely disappeared and nothing seemed to divide it from the visible spine. From that he relaxed one side and contorted the other and vice versa. The silent swallows, with eyes wide and as though standing out on stalks, started to twitter. The demonstration was to me a strange, yet admittedly an apt, anti-climax to a discourse on fasting.

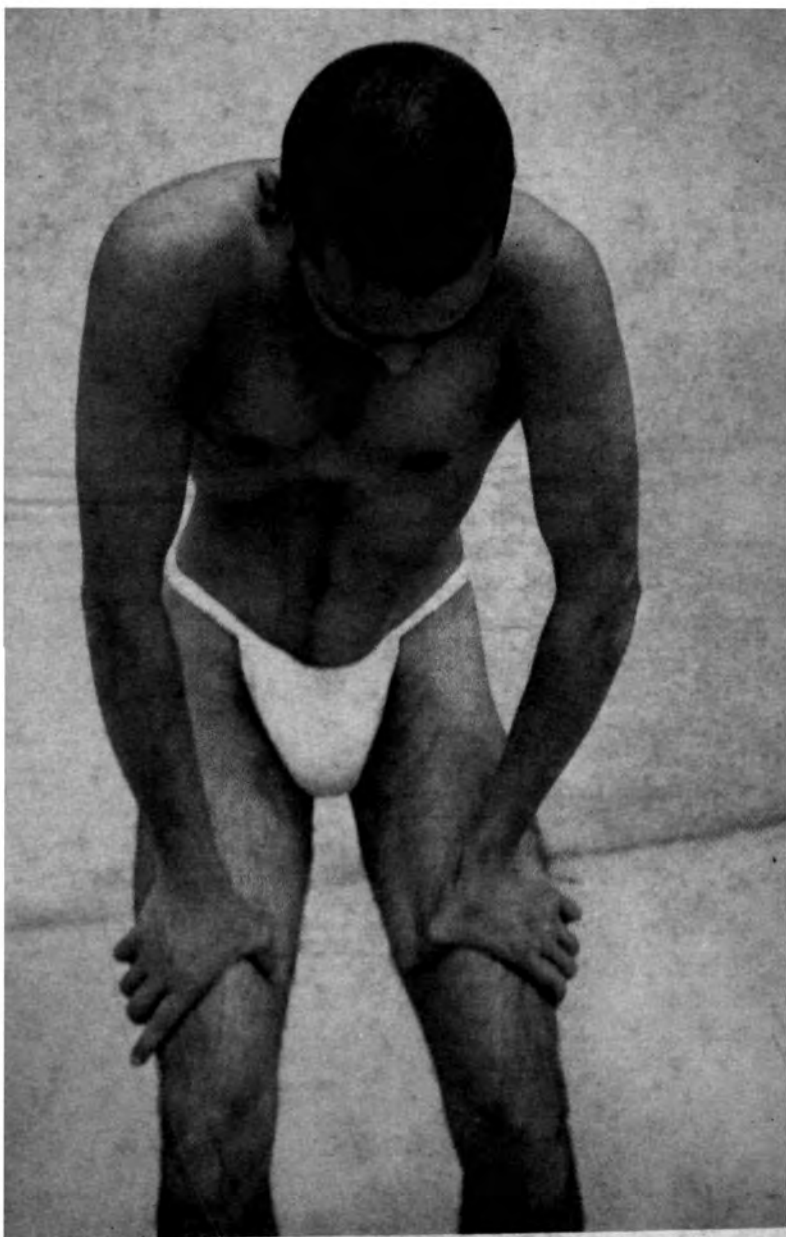
While this asana display was progressing, the Yogi who had been demonstrating for me over the last hour or so explained that this was Nauli Kriya. I am certain that the "flip, flop" mouth sounds made by the demonstrator as he contracted the muscles first on the right side and then on the left were not included in that asana though, and agree that the comment made when the "churning" was demonstrated, that it was "as



★ The Peacock posture

Matsyasana—the Fish posture





Nauli—shaking the belly

though an engine is working inside the abdominal factory", described it perfectly.

I have not the slightest doubt that the claim for this asana that it "eradicates chronic constipation, dyspepsia, and all other diseases of the gastro-intestinal system; the liver and pancreas being toned up, the kidneys and other organs of the abdomen being caused to function correctly" are justified. I should imagine that they could also stir up anything and cause considerable "inconvenience" if nothing worse.

It was with the greatest difficulty that I managed to extract myself from this company. One person only, let alone an audience which is completely lost in admiration and adoration for anyone I happen to be with, embarrasses me; one which, to show respect, sits silently and patiently waiting for the great one to speak—as so often happens in India—the more so. And I left "Swamiji" to cope with his long row of expectant swallows: I am quite sure that he was well able to do so.

CHAPTER NINE

THE FOLLOWING morning found me at the ashram at the same hour. I went down to pay my respects to Swamiji in his great cage; the sun at that hour not having warmed the air, he was seated wearing a heavy travelling coat with a white scarf round his neck. Before him was an Indian wearing a tweed jacket and grey flannels; the only thing odd about the civilian was that he was then on his knees and soon almost prostrate before the sage. When he got up, having paid his respects to Swamiji, he turned round and I was surprised to find that it was a good friend of mine who had recently retired from the highest post in the Army Medical Corps.

He then explained that he was actually staying in the ashram, having been given a cottage by Swamiji, and that he would probably remain there with his wife for another month. Here, he said, they found complete quiet and peace. They had brought their two servants and their car. To them it was a haven for perfect relaxation; they could attend the ceremonies, and what was more to those others who came there, the services of this great medical specialist were freely at their disposal.

Together he and I climbed the steps towards the Yogi sadhu's room, and as we went I asked his honest opinion of the ashram and the man who was at its head. He replied, "Swamiji is a great saint. As with all saints there are those who come and take advantage of him—that is inevitable, but he knows it—he recognizes them, yet he never gives up hope that even while they rob him or slander him he will be able to guide them the right way."

"And if he fails?" I asked.

"Then he fails—only temporarily, though, to his way of

thinking. He feels that he has sown a seed which will germinate later and may even blossom. He never speaks ill of anyone and he will not permit ill to be spoken of a soul. He is one of the most sincere and kindly men I know. He never moves from here, yet he is known everywhere by his writings."

"But where does all the money come from to run this place? That new building going up over there, for instance, they tell me it is for an eye hospital, and the new rows of visitors rooms, is this a wealthy society?"

"Far from it my friend. Only the other day Swamiji was telling me that his accountant warned him that they were heavily in debt, yet later during that very day he was saying that yet another floor must be added on top of the new one when it is completed. When his assistant protested 'but Swamiji we have yet to pay for what we still have to complete!' he replied, 'Do not worry, the money will come from somewhere', and the amazing thing about it all is that it does come. Tradesmen and technicians to whom the ashram owe money have complete confidence in him and allow him as much credit as he asks of them."

"Do they charge him interest?"

"No, but I suspect that they charge him fantastic prices for what they supply or do. You see they are not his followers. They are just business men. Now here is an example, that cottage in which I live here is pestered by monkeys; I decided to have the veranda wired in, and the usual ashram contractor came. The price I had to pay him was more than double that which I could have got it done for."

We talked about the demonstrations of asanas I was then photographing and making notes of, and I mentioned that the blue bathing trunks gave the pictures an unrealistic appearance. Dare I ask the Yogi to wear just whatever he usually wore in practising these asanas? But even as I spoke we saw him coming towards us and the question was never answered. The doctor left us; I am sure he had no conversation with the Yogi, he had no opportunity, yet when we again climbed on to the roof of

the cottage, the blue bathing slips were gone when he slipped off his sadhu's clothes and he then wore just the lungi cloth which he pulled tight, saying with a grin, "I have an idea you would prefer the more natural and not the unreal costume for your illustrations!"

He went on, "Also I have been deciding upon some of the more artistic asanas. Here is one I know you will wish to picture. It is called Vrichikasana—the Scorpion pose." With hands and elbows on the ground he raised his body, then threw his legs back and high in the air, bending the knees so that the soles of his feet rested on the top of his head with the toes forming a sort of sun shade to his eyes.

"You agree it is an attractive posture?" he asked. "This is an asana which may be practised only when you have complete and perfect body control." He remained apparently quite comfortably in the position for quite five minutes while I reloaded my camera. Looking up after this had been completed, I quite expected to find that my model was trembling, but there was not a movement, not a quiver, I could have taken a time exposure.

"Now here is the Kukutasana—the Cock pose. You sit in the Padmasana or Lotus position, with legs crossed and soles up on the opposite hips, so, then insert the two hands between the calves and the thighs where the upperpart of the feet are pressing, and place the hands flat on the ground. Now, raising the body so that the elbow joints are between calves and thighs, you present a picture of the cock bird, hence the name. By performing this picturesque asana you gain all that you would from the Lotus pose and more. The arms are strengthened, laziness vanishes, those with weak digestive organs profit by it, night pollutions finish.

"Now I give you another variation of the Lotus pose, also it combines the Sirshasana—the Topsy-Turvy pose. This is called the Ordva Padmasana or Above Lotus pose. So first we perform the Sirshasana, then bend the right leg and place it on the left thigh, then the left leg and place it over the other thigh; you

must do this slowly. But until you can perform the Sirshasana for fifteen minutes you should not try this one, for in falling you can quite easily injure your legs. You can remain in this position for from five to ten minutes and then gradually increase the time."

He slowly came down from the position after I had taken my photograph, and then explained that to profit most from this asana a prayer or *Japa*—repetition of a sacred word—should be said. "In the old days, *Tapasvins* used to stand on the heads for as many as twelve years and repeat the Mantras of the Ishta, Devata, or Guru. If you meditate or perform *Japa* when you are undertaking *Ordva Padmasana* it deeply touches the heart of the Lord with the result that he quickly showers his blessing upon you. The results obtained from this asana are wonderful. You will enjoy a long life in perfect health. An advocate known to us who practises this particular asana considerably increased his powers of memory by it, a judge is able to turn out double the amount of work in the Courts against that he used to do. Medical students have cured themselves of spermatorrhoea by this asana alone.

"Here is an asana which requires much balance. It is called *Garbhasana*—Child in the Womb pose, for it resembles the position taken up by the baby in the womb of its mother. You first perform the Lotus pose, then follow up as with *Kukutasana* by inserting your hands between thighs and calves, but this time you do not place the hands on the ground, you press the arms through farther and so bring them out, then bending the elbows catch hold of the ears, the right hand taking the right ear, the left hand the left ear. This part of the asana must be done with care because as you reach to take hold of the ears you slowly lift the body until it balances on the buttocks. You remain so for three minutes and repeat the asana five times. Now the benefits: augmented digestive power with an increased appetite. The bowels are quite free with resulting clear motions. Many intestinal inconveniences disappear and many diseases are cured by it.

“Now I will show you a pose which many people from your country tell me is like a famous piece of statuary. We call it the *Ardha Matsyendrasana*—meaning the Half-Spine Twist. The word *Matsyendra* comes from the name of the *Yogi* who was a disciple of the Lord *Shiva*; this all happened on a lonely island to which both had gone.

“Now, a great many *asanas* cause the spine to be bent either forwards or backwards, to right or left, but this is not sufficient, it must also be twisted sideways, and in *Matsyendrasana* this is done, thus together with the other *asanas* ensuring a perfect elasticity to the spinal column. Here is the picturesque *asana*. First place the left heel touching the *yonis*—the perineal space, that is the soft part between the anus and the external organ of generation, and remember the heel must not move from this position. Now, bending the right knee, place the right ankle at the root of the left thigh, resting the foot well on the ground and close to the left hip joint. Place the left arm-pit over the top of the now vertically bent right knee and push that knee back a little so that it touches the back part of the arm-pit; with the hand catch hold of the left foot. Then apply pressure at the left shoulder-joint and very slowly twist the spine and turn to the extreme right. The face should also be turned to the right as far as you can, bringing it in line with the right shoulder. Then swing the right arm round behind the back and with the hand catch hold of the left thigh. You can retain the pose for from five to fifteen seconds, the whole time keeping the vertebral column erect, on no account may you bend. You can then make a similar twist to the left side. This *asana*—besides being a great asset to the *Yogi* in his practices—from the ordinary man’s point of view massages the abdominal organs. The nerve-roots of the spine and sympathetic system are toned up and all sorts of muscular rheumatism including *lumbago* are cured.”

Suffering a sharp attack of *lumbago* some months later I remembered this particular *asana* and can only conclude that the *Yogi* had never experienced anything like it. I made no attempt to cure it by the *asana*, so am unable to confirm whether

it really is a remedy to be recommended, but after seeing it performed I am certain that no sufferer could even start to take up the complicated positions laid down by Lord Shiva to his disciple so very long ago.

“Here is another artistic asana,” the Yogi was saying as he at first lay flat on the ground. “This is Halasana, since when it is completed it looks like a plough. You keep the two hands with palms down near to the thighs. Then without bending the legs gradually raise them higher and higher, keeping the hands on the ground, but raising the hips and the lumbar part of the back and bringing the legs over until the toes touch the ground beyond the head. The knees, kept close together, must be quite straight; the legs and the thighs in a straight line. With the chin pressed against the chest you now breathe slowly through the nose, the mouth being kept shut. Sometimes Yogis improve upon this asana by now removing the hands and with them catching hold of the toes. When you have finished, slowly raise the legs and bring them back to the original of lying flat on the ground. This asana can be usefully undertaken for five or six times. To profit spiritually it should be held quite still for a long period at a stretch.”

He followed this by a demonstration of the Salabhasana—the Locust pose, lying with feet together face downwards on the ground, with his hands palms upwards by his sides, then inhaling he stiffened his whole body, first raised his legs, soles up, in the air and then his head. After holding the pose for quite half a minute, he brought the legs slowly down, following this by exhaling very slowly.

“Now I will show you a more artistic asana which is much like that one,” he explained. “This is the Dhanurasana—the Bow pose. You will see that the body becomes the bended bow, with the arms and forelegs the string of the bow.” And lying down as in the previously shown asana he bent his knees so that his feet came over his back and he caught his ankles with his hands.

“You will observe that the whole of the body rests on the abdomen, and this asana massages that part of the body—natur-

ally the stomach must be empty to perform this, and if you move backwards and forwards you well massage the abdominal region. We always say, 'swing and rock and rejoice, the whole time repeating mentally Om, Om, Om'.

"The advantages to be gained from this wonderful asana are obvious, the portly man reduces his fat, and constipation, dyspepsia, or sluggish liver is gone; rheumatism of the legs goes also. The appetite is improved, digestion energized; it is a great blessing to those who suffer from gastro-intestinal complaints. The spine is caused to bend back, it keeps it elastic, early hardening of the bones cannot take place, and the practitioner will afterwards find himself bounding with energy and overflowing with vitality."

I felt that I had by now seen enough of the eighty-four asanas, and I have not the slightest doubt that had I not called a halt this enthusiast would have demonstrated the whole lot, but I stopped him by asking "What about the Purification exercises I have heard talked about?"

"Yes," he replied. "I can demonstrate those to you if you wish—though it will be for you to decide which would be suited to illustrate your book. However, let us go down to the area before my room for that purpose, it is getting far too hot up here for you I can see." And only then did I realize that I was streaming with perspiration, a river was running down my spine with the sun directly behind me.

And so we went down the ladder-way to the shade of the bungalow. The ever-watching monkeys swung over to the trees adjoining those in which they had sat and watched and chattered—ever alert to leap on the roof and dart off with a part of my equipment.

The Yogi brought out a chair for me, he seated himself on the ground, but not being one who appreciates anyone sitting at his feet I asked for a low stool in place of the upright chair and settled down with a "a cool drink of holy Ganges water", never for one moment questioning whether it had been first boiled as I should have done in the city.

“Before we commence on the inner Purification exercises I should tell you our theory about outer cleanliness,” he said. “The Christians maintain that cleanliness is next to godliness. We say exactly the same. We believe that the best time to take a bath is before sunrise, the bath being in cold water; the reason for choosing that particular hour is that with the water becoming cooler during the night, it evolves much oxygen. We never use soap in a tropical climate, and here you will find that the doctors of modern medicine say the same, while ladies have told me that their beauty specialists also agree upon this in all climates. The reason for this instruction is that nature supplies sufficient oil to the body to keep the skin smooth and soft; this comes through the sebaceous glands of the skin. So-called civilized people by using soap remove that natural secretion, and the skin becomes dry and hard; there are some soaps which corrode the skin, block up the pores. The correct way to take a bath is to enter the water—and running water, more so that in rivers or streams, is most exhilarating and strengthening—and wipe the body, rubbing the dirt away with the hands. After coming from the water the body should be vigorously rubbed with a rough towel. If it so happens that you have become so begrimed with dirt that water is insufficient to remove it, then a mixture of soap-nut powder and green-gram powder is excellent—it is not only cooling, but cheap.

“Keep in mind, though, that you must not take a cold bath immediately after performing asanas, nor for that matter any kind of exercise. You must permit the body to cool off first, waiting for at least half an hour. And never bathe after your meals. There is another bath you may take, that being a sun-bath, a source of energy and power; the rays are a wonderful tonic. If by building your house on the banks of a river you can obtain the reflected rays of the sun, then those are of greater benefit than the direct rays. The sun heals so many diseases. Temples to the sun god have been built in all countries for ages, in India, in Egypt, in Greece; in many places people still worship the sun. Expose your whole body to the rays of the sun.

“But I could go on and on about sunbathing and that is not what you have requested me to explain and demonstrate; you seek knowledge of the inner cleansings, teachings which have been passed down to us through the ages. These are associated with what is known as Kundalini Yoga. Kundalini—known as the Coiled Serpent—resides within the body of every human being. She lives at the base of the spine in the yoni, the space between the anus and the sex organ, and there she sleeps. You will possibly learn how by certain asanas, by meditation and concentration, it is possible for any man to awaken the Kundalini—that is easy, and force that coiled serpent to rise until she eventually makes union with Shiva at the Sahasrara Chakra, which is at the top of the head—that is difficult. This, doubtless, is not now understood by you. Anyway, before awakening the Kundalini one of the necessities is purity of the body—inwardly; there are other requirements, but they can come later.”

He then returned to his cell and came out carrying a pot of water, a rolled bandage, and what looked like a pipe cleaner with a length of string attached to it. These he placed at his side.

“First of all I will show you Dhauti.” This is one of the six acts described in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* as follows:

“In accordance with the instructions of the guru, swallow a strip of cloth four fingers wide and fifteen cubits long and then pull it up again. This is the washing.” There follows in the next verse the benefits to be gained: “Ailments such as coughs, enlarged spleen, leprosy, and twenty affections of the lymph undoubtedly vanish as a result of the practice of washing out the stomach.”

Sitting down and crossing his legs, he pushed the length of cloth, which looked to me like a muslin bandage stitched at each edge and, I afterwards learnt, measuring three inches wide and fifteen feet long, into the pot of water to soak. Then taking it out, he squeezed it a little and placing one end in his mouth proceeded to swallow the lot inch by inch with perfect ease and with no sign of retching. When it was down, with it still there, but holding on to the end, he shook his belly and then explained,

“In the not so long ago the Yogis always used red cloth for this purpose, but stupid ignorant people imagined that they were taking out their intestines and washing them when they performed the act.” A statement which immediately reminded me of having years before heard a lecturer in London insisting that he had actually seen “a Yogi in India vomit up his entrails and then swallow them”!

He withdrew the length of cloth very slowly, then said, “This is an exercise which should be performed when the stomach is empty—the morning is therefore the best time. Many people drink one or two glasses of water before swallowing the cloth, this assists in washing out the stomach. After you have finished it is best to take a cup of milk, so lubricating the throat as it were. This exercise should not be undertaken every day, every fourth day is more than enough, once a week is really sufficient. Let the cloth remain inside for five minutes, it will by then have collected and will bring up with it all the impurities of the stomach. Afterwards wash well the cloth using plenty of soap—boil it if you wish, and always keep it in a clean place, a tin is best.

“Something like this act is what we know as the Elephant Act as a means to washing out the stomach. You have no doubt seen an elephant fill his trunk with water and then fire-hose it out. That is exactly what the Yogi does in the performance of this act. The book *Bhakti Sagara* explains it as ‘the drinking to one’s fill and returning it and giving it out, that no illness may attack the body’. Naturally, the act is performed before food is eaten; unless of course it is done in order to remove some poison or bad food which has been taken. After cleaning your teeth you just swallow as many glasses of water as possible, then shake the stomach well; if you are new to the ordeal you will probably need to put your finger down your throat and cause yourself to vomit, but later you will have learnt to contract the stomach and the water will come up. When the water comes out clear you will know that the stomach is quite clean. I have shown many Europeans how to perform this act.” And while he was

talking I recollected having seen a young Australian in a circus which was then touring India, swallow a large glass bowl full of water containing six goldfish, after which he walked round the arena and then, standing in the middle, vomitted the lot up again into the bowl into which the fish appeared one after the other and started to swim round.

“In yet another manner the stomach and the whole digestive tract may be purified. The act is known as Shanka Pashali Kriya, a most effective method; water is swallowed—sometimes certain herbs are made into a medicine and added. After the required quantity is in the stomach, by muscular control the entrance to the stomach is closed and by abdominal contractions the fluid is passed quickly through the whole of the digestive system and within a minute or so evacuated.”

He sat down, saying, “Next we come to the act known as Neti, the cleansing of the nose. There are two ways of doing this, the first is by water cleansing; water is placed in a bowl and slowly drawn up, afterwards forcibly expelled. After the teeth have been cleaned you will ascertain through which nostril you happen to be breathing; hold your finger against the other and draw in water through the ‘live’ one. The water will flow down into the throat, at first it may irritate the throat, the back of the head will itch; if the water is too cold there will be aching, but with practice this will cease. Then the water must be ejected, and this can be done through either nostril. After a quart or two of water has thus passed, reverse the nostrils, so cleaning both. The *Gberanda Sambita* tells us that this act purifies the skull and produces clairvoyance. It cures rhinitis and coryza.” I had before heard of an actress who did this to make her eyes brilliant, and was told that it also increased their strength. At the same time it is dangerous to those with acute affections of the eyes.

The sadhu then picked up the piece of string attached to the pipe cleaner, saying, “This is the string method of cleaning. For this you can see we use a piece of very soft stranded string a cubit long” and to demonstrate this he measured it against his

forearm—about eighteen inches. “The end is stiffened with beeswax, the whole is soaked in water, so. Then insert the thread into one nostril, with the finger against the other nostril to keep it closed, draw in the string by a number of powerful inhalations. When you feel that it has arrived at the back of the mouth, catch hold of it with the finger and thumb and very slowly, to prevent injury, draw it out through the mouth. After a while you will learn to grab the cord without retching, and will also be able to pull it gently backwards and forwards to thoroughly cleanse the nostril. Then you repeat the same act with the other nostril. Some of us have become so expert in the act that we can take the string in at one nostril and out at the other, so!

“Internal cleansing is also possible by swallowing air. There is a guru on the island you know of who demonstrates this Kriya with smoke from herbs. To perform the act you imagine that each time you open your mouth you are swallowing food, and closing the lips you swallow the air until your stomach and also your intestines are filled with so much air that lying limp on the water you will float. When you wish to pass the air right through you as was done with the water, you simply contract the abdominal muscles; the Peacock pose taken up at this time will considerably assist the final passage.

“Another of the acts you saw performed yesterday in Swamiji’s office. This is, as I then told you, called Nauli or the shaking of the belly. In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* it says of this, ‘Stooping the shoulders, shake the belly rapidly from right to left like quivering water—the adepts call this Nauli.’ Another way to do this is to sit in the Lotus pose or take up the Raised Lotus position, and, after exhaling all the air from the lungs, do your best to shake the belly from left to right. As you saw it, the sadhu stood up with legs slightly apart and rested his hands on his thighs, this is done to prevent losing balance. You begin by practising this morning and evening until you are wet with perspiration. At first there will be a slight pain in the abdomen, but do not fear, that will soon be overcome, at the same time you need to be careful until you are certain none of the intestines

are still adhering to the back. Those who are corpulent should not attempt to do this. It is one which helps considerably in the two acts of washing the stomach, which I have shown you, and washing the colon and also the bladder, which I have yet to explain. Once you have mastered this act, all other muscular contractions become easy. It is known as 'the ladder to breath control'.

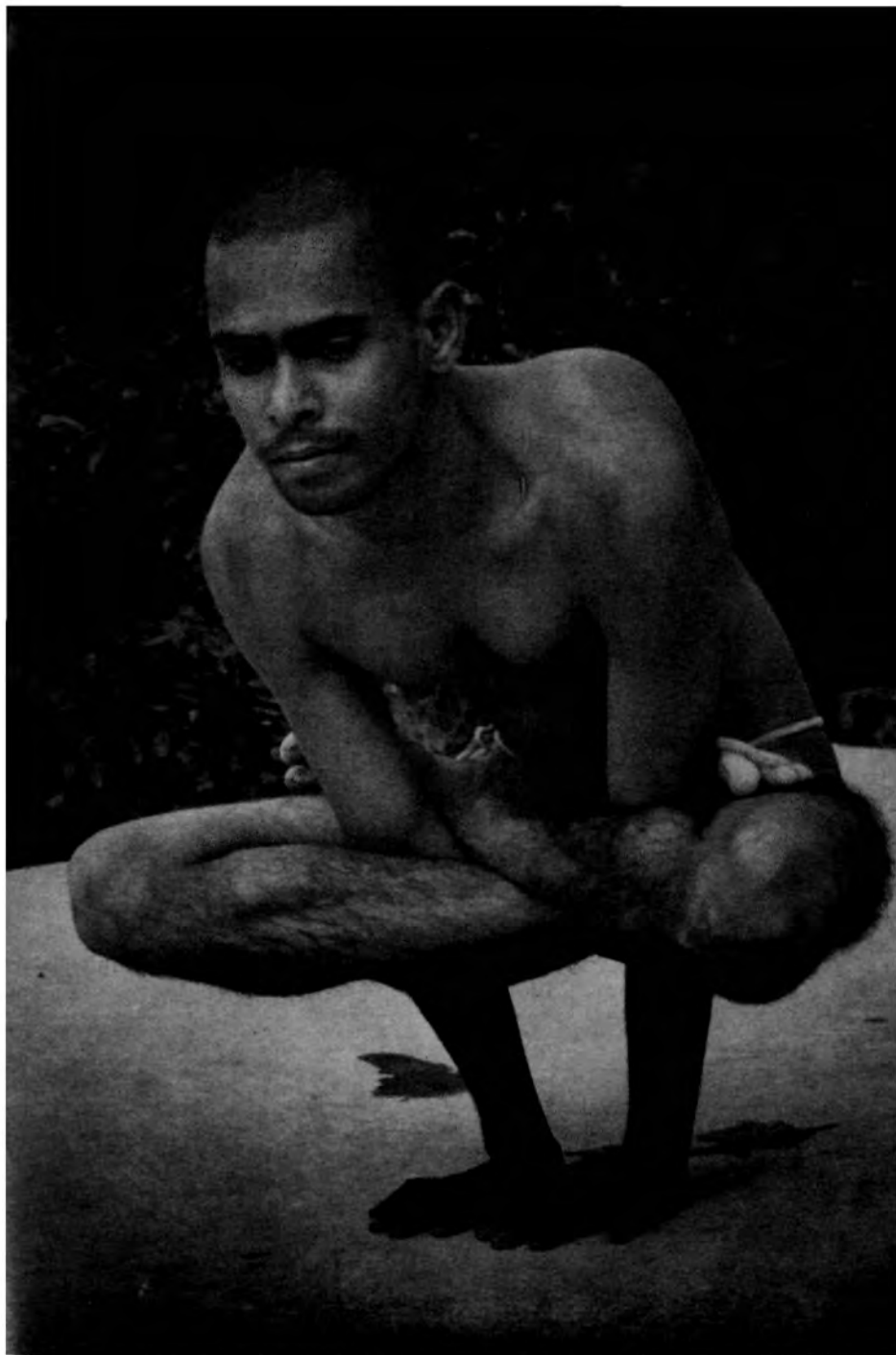
"So now we come to Basti, the washing of the bowels, which is to us the most important of all the acts. As with the stomach washing, there are two varieties of this act, first the air washing—often the prelude to the other—and this is very similar to the Nauli exercise. The practitioner, in the standing position, starts off by isolating the two recti abdominal muscles, first together, then separately; the result being much like the diaphragm-raising exercise. By now raising the diaphragm, a downward and forward pushing effort is made to that part of the abdomen above the pubic bone. Having learnt to isolate the muscles, the final stage is reached with quick contraction and relaxation of each of the muscles in rapid succession; at the same time the colon and intestines are depleted of air. While the recti abdominal muscles are being isolated, providing the pupil has learnt how to open the sphincters voluntarily, water can be drawn into the colon; if he cannot do this, then a bamboo tube six fingers long and of thumb thickness, smeared over with ghee may be three-parts inserted into the rectum and the water will be drawn in naturally. Many Yogis having at the same time created a vacuum in the bladder by the exercise, take advantage of this and also draw in water through the urethra, those who are experienced in the practice being able to perform the act without the aid of a catheter, others resort to the traditional silver tube which is removed immediately the incoming rush of water ceases. Those who have not before performed the exercise which causes a vacuum in the colon, can, by using the bamboo tube, squat down in water on the toes with the buttocks resting on the heels which are hard pressed together, and contract the rectum, thus slowly drawing in water. Then, after well shaking

the abdominal muscles, by performing the drawing back posture the water is at once expelled.

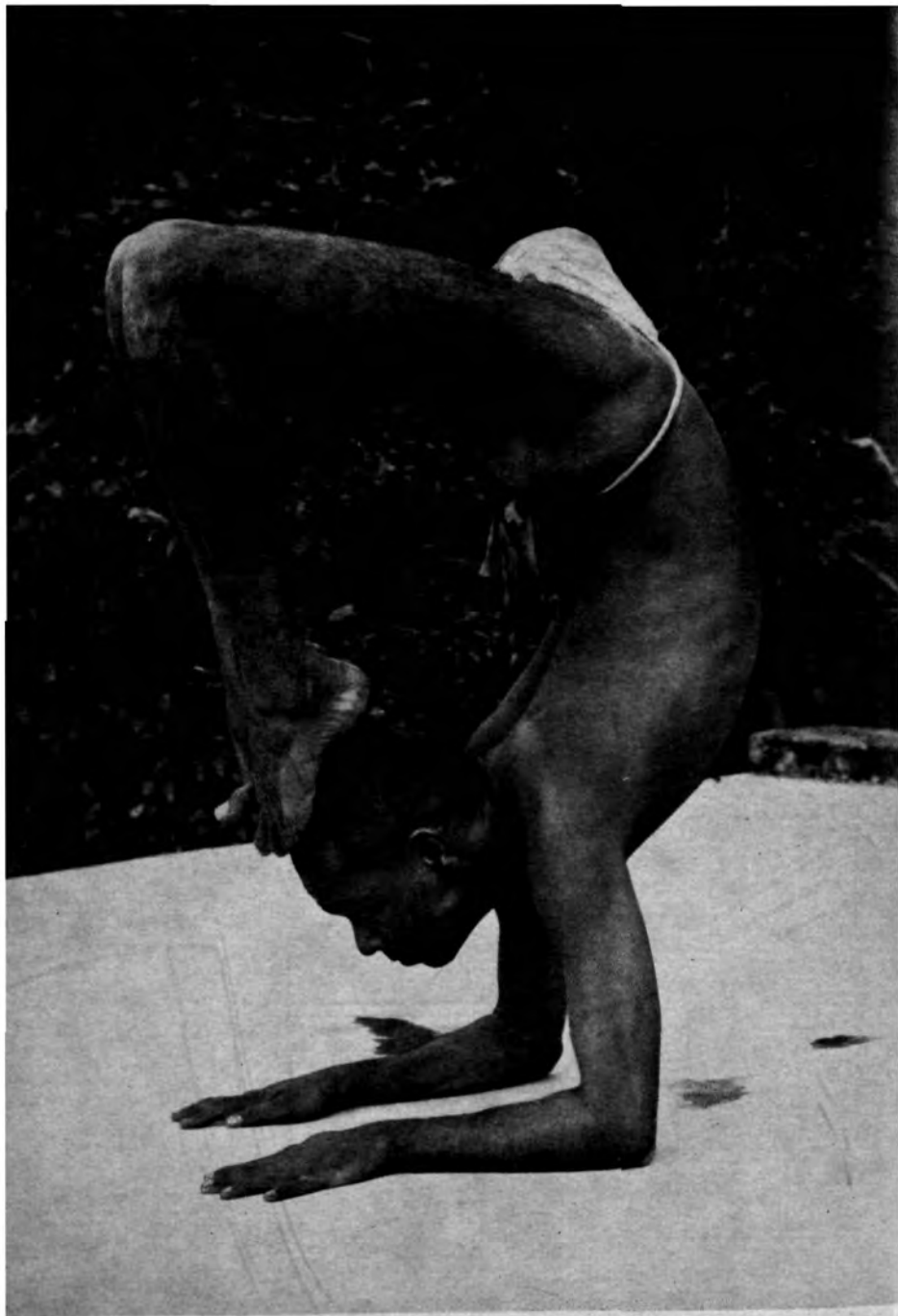
“Now we come to the last of the six Purification acts or exercises. This is called *Tratak*—fixing with the eyes—steadily gazing at an object without winking. This is told of in both the *Goraksha Sambita* and *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* in these words: ‘To fix with insistence the sight, without winking, on a minute object until the tears come to the eyes is known to the Great Teachers as *Tratak*. It destroys eye troubles, it prevents sleepiness and laziness. *Tratak* deserves to be secretly treasured in the world like chests of gold.’ This has always been included among the six Purification exercises, but it is principally intended for the development of concentration and mental focusing. Swamiji says that there is no other effective method for control of the mind. By its practice you will obtain complete balance from your mind, a perfect stillness, and nothing will then be able to distract you from your thought. But this is an act which may be undertaken only by those who are physically and mentally suited to it, it must not be undertaken when the practitioner is suffering some mental stress, anger, anxiety, sorrow, when preparing for an examination, or memorizing long passages of a book or play, nor by those who drink alcohol, take drugs or eat meat. There are three varieties of this act; the first is that by which you close the eyes and ‘fix’ or concentrate upon a spot between the brows; the second consists in ‘fixing’ upon some distant object, it might be the moon, a star, or far mountain top, even a house, a tree, or a ship on the horizon; the third is that by which you ‘fix’ upon some object nearer, the light of a candle, the picture of the god, the sacred worm ‘Om’ written upon a sheet of paper pasted upon the wall, or, closer still, the tip of your nose, or the reflection of your eye pupil in a mirror. Those who have eye trouble would naturally only fix with the eyes closed. If you decide to fix upon the sun, then only do so when it is rising, never when it is at the full, or you will injure the eyesight, probably blind yourself. When you first start off you will find that with hard concentration your head will ache, but

persevere and that stage will pass. You should go on until the eyes start to water, then immediately stop and do not practise the exercise again that day. To fix with the eyes closed some refer to as 'The inner fixing', you gaze at a picture of the god and absorb it into the mind, then with the eyes closed fix the eyes at a point between the brows, at first the eyes will try to quiver as you make every effort to 'see' the picture of the god, but after a while they steady down, and then concentration is easy. After these fixing exercises have been continued for about six months, he who so desires may see whatever he wishes to materialize, he is able to read the thoughts of others, he knows that which is happening in far countries, and also that which is about to happen. As to the physical advantages, when guided by a guru there is an improvement in the eyesight, but I remind you, do not 'fix' upon the sun as you have seen done near to this ashram by those who endeavour to please the god by gazing upon it for the whole day.

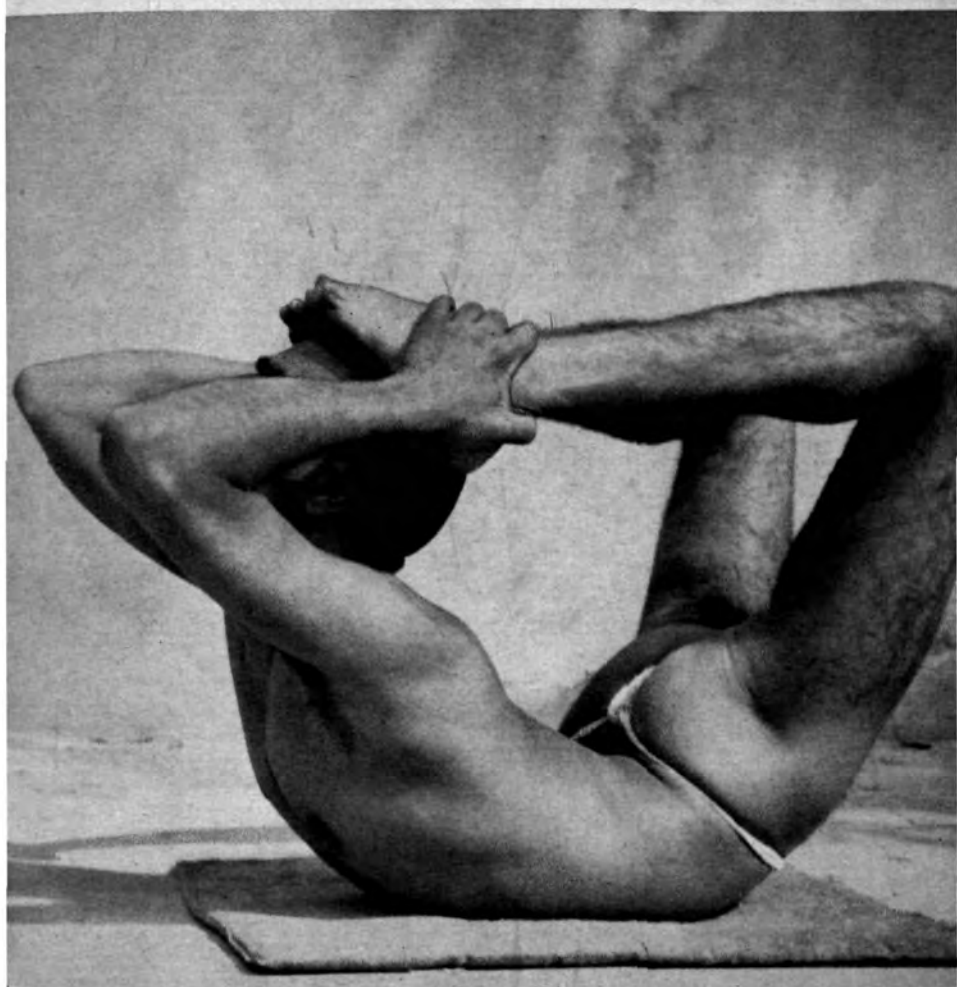
"And, as I am about to finish, I have thought that there is another act which is not considered as one of the six acts, but is usually included with them. This is Kapalabhiti—some call it the 'action of the breathing bellows', it is an exercise for the purification of the head and the lungs; the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* assures us that it is a cure for lymph deficiencies. For those who have mucus in the head, the nose or the lungs, this exercise, combined with washing out the stomach with the strip of cloth, is a most excellent remedy. Sitting in the Lotus posture, with hands on knees, you practise rapid inhalations and exhalations, not retaining the breath, but drawing it in as quickly as you release it. If you are suffering bad health it should not be undertaken, nor at any time during the rains. You start off with ten expulsions each round and gradually increase them until you reach one hundred and twenty each round. This will do your respiratory system and nasal passages much good besides cleansing them, removing any spasm from the bronchial tubes, greatly relieving asthma. There is also a toning up of the circulatory and respiratory systems.



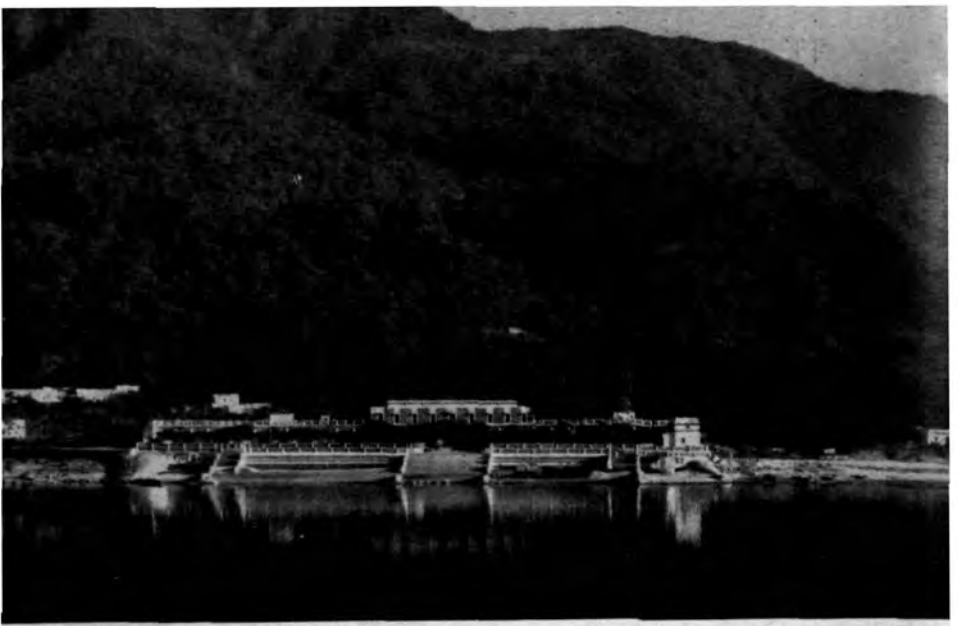
Kukutasana—the Cock posture National Library,
Calcutta-27.



Vrichikasana—the Scorpion posture



Dhanurasana—the Bow posture



The great Gita Bhavan ashram on the banks of the Ganges above Rishikesh

“Every page of the Gita is written upon the walls of the ashram”



"I have now completed telling you and demonstrating to you the many acts. Later on you will, if you are so wishful, learn how there are other qualities which may be brought to the body—to the subtle body, and also a strengthening of the vital energy."

And with that we again returned to Swamiji's office. Yesterday's swallows had flown, but as always there were others who had come in their places, this time they were men and women of middle age. His talk to them was well forward, the subject being discussed—a one-sided discussion once again—being food. I wondered if he was able to read my innermost thoughts, and fears; if he knew that the evening before, after most carefully drawing the curtains of the main room of the bungalow, we had shared a chicken for dinner, and when darkness fell had gone out into the compound, dug a hole, and like murderers disposed of the awful evidence, burying the bones so that no one should be aware of our guilt; that I had wanted to throw the incriminating bones into the river, but even though my companion was not a Hindu, he would not permit such sacrilege; I wondered if Swamiji knew that in the morning I looked out of the bathroom window as I shaved and was considerably concerned to see three dogs were then sniffing round the place where our guilt lay buried deep in the ground.

But, if he knew this, Swamiji said nothing. I heard him telling them all of the wonderful qualities of honey, referring to it as a "most nutritious natural food and tonic, one so very easily digested and assimilated. One which strengthens a weak heart, a weak stomach, and a weak brain, the bees being the greatest manufacturers of sweets with far greater skill and producing a far healthier sweet than any sweetmeat maker with all his dexterity, ingenuity, and many ingredients can ever hope to make. Honey contains all the mineral elements to be found in the human body, containing eighty per cent of nutriment in the most assimilable form, with the sugars dextrose and lævulose, formic acid, and iron, and containing enzymes, which break up the complex foods into substances which can be easily digested and absorbed. Honey does not require digestion, it is ready to

be absorbed into the bloodstream. A teaspoonful of honey a day will keep the stomach in order all your life. It kills bacteria and enables the body to overcome diseases; disease germs cannot grow in honey. It is a substitute for orange juice and cod-liver oil, so very useful when fighting coughs, colds, bronchial catarrh, and sore throats. . . ."And so he went on with his interesting lecture, but I wanted to get away and signed to him that I was off. As I went, his strong voice was ringing in my ears as he said, "As soon as a child is born its tongue should be smeared with honey, it should be the first food that it takes." In my haste I had left behind my precious camera. I returned for it and Swamiji was saying, "Take a tablespoonful of honey in hot water when you are tired or exhausted by over-exertion and you will find that it braces you up immediately, making you strong and active again. Soak ten almonds in water at night, remove the skins in the morning, then take them with two tablespoonfuls of honey and you will find them a potent brain tonic."

CHAPTER TEN

A FEW days later the ex-judge sadhu came to see me. By that time I had begun to look forward to his visits, knowing that when he called something of interest would result from our talks. After telling him of my days in the ashram he had directed me to, and my success with the Yogi demonstrator of asanas, he said, "You told me before of your reactions to the guru on the island. I think that it would now do you no harm to cross the holy Ganges and seek again on the other side, for there you will find sadhus of great interest, aged men who have renounced the world after holding high positions, young men who have renounced the world whilst in their adolescence, men who did so in their youth and have grown ancient here in Rishikesh; there is one who is without the slightest doubt over one hundred years old. They live in huts by the shores of the sacred river, they also live in caves high in the mountains, caves which look down on the glorious river, and there they remain, only occasionally coming down to a feeding centre, sometimes staying in the mountains for months on end, living on a few fruits, yet, in spite of all, when they come down to the centre their physique is if anything more magnificent than when they were last seen there."

"And how do I find them? Is there anyone who can guide or direct me there to them?" I asked.

"Meet them at the great feeding centre on the other side. The ashram distributes food at ten. Talk to them, some will turn their backs and walk away, do not be disturbed, they are not against you, they desire speech with no man, they have sought solitude and wish to be alone. Then follow the paths which go up into the hills, tread those which wander down to the banks

of the river, those lonely paths lead to the abode of sadhus only, for no others live on that side of the river. There is only the newly-built Gita Bhavan which the trustees are for ever making larger that it may accommodate the devotees who go there, some out of interest, others escaping from the busy life of the world for a few days, perhaps a few weeks in which to find solitude to meditate and worship by the sacred river. The Trust which runs this great temple, the ashram, and the feeding centre also provides the great ferry boats which ply to and fro and which carry pilgrims across, so saving them having to trudge up to the great suspension bridge at Lakshman Jhula and thereby cross the river to walk some miles down to the ashram. You should not leave Rishikesh without visiting that place. And I also have an idca that it will cause you to return again, that your appetite will then become such that you will first see and absorb, then wish to seek further."

And so next morning, with flasks and pack lunches, we set off. The ferry boats ply between the ashram where I had spent so much time with the Yogi, its steps leading down to the great river, and the steps that go up to the ashram on the other side. They use great flat-bottomed boats much like fishing smacks which four rowers using enormous oars—scaffold poles with a plate of wood tied on at the end as a paddle—row across.

As we stood by the steps, we saw our asana Yogi. With the weather hotting up, the little stream which flowed close to his cell behind the temple had dried up, and he had decided to move "for the summer months only" down to a cell which was by the river, a larger room with a great stone front veranda to it, one I should have thought he would have preferred with people coming and going, with life, movement, and voices; but no, it was "for the summer months only, while there is this difficulty about the water carrying: When my sparkling stream again flows I shall return to the jungle room, to the silver grey monkeys, away from these ugly brown ones".

Sitting in the shade of his new abode we watched another Yogi, a much older one, an elder of the ashram, performing the

Matsyasana—the Fish pose—in its correct environment, for he was lying in the water and floating. He was a bulky man, perhaps fifty years of age. “You will watch, and before the ferry boat is here he will have gradually elevated out from the water!” the asana Yogi explained, and I was amazed, when after some little while I turned from talking to him, to see that the floating Yogi had indeed come higher out of the water and floated on it like a dead fish or log. Half an hour later, for, although we had been told it would be there at eight o’clock, the boat did not come until long past nine, the floating sadhu was right out of the water, his buttocks, his shoulders, and head being the only parts of his body which even touched it, and so he floated like a dead body, yet talked and sang some hymns in that position. I am told that this is no uncommon sight in that part of the Ganges.

The ferry came. We managed to sit on the prow of the boat and with the sun in the wrong direction at that time of the day for me to get a picture from the bank of the floating sadhu, I still hoped to snap one as we passed him in the boat, but soon it was full, then more than full, then overflowing, people shouting at each other, boatmen giving orders to move up, move here, move there; women shrieking at the tops of their voices, hot and tired children crying and men bellowing, all giving orders, and by the time we started off I was in no position to take a photograph, being more concerned that cameras and lunch knapsack did not go overboard.

Hundreds of enormous fish—Mahaseer—surrounded the boat as soon as passengers embarked, some were nearly four feet long, great fat grey fish with silver- and gold-splashed scales and heads, like cod, moving round and round waiting for the grams of food the pilgrims would cast to them, for here were boys selling the food the sacred fish especially like, and when this was thrown to them it was an amazing sight to see them fighting and scrambling over each other, many coming right out of the water to get at the food. These fish follow the boat about a third of the way into midstream, then leave it, for the

centre of the river is neutral waters; another school of fish attend to the boats when on the other side.

We were pulled out into the fast stream, the boat then being carried by the current, and the momentum which had been set up by the rowers, across it. The river being low we passed in midstream a sandbank on the end of which a Shiva symbol stone had become embedded in erect position; I noticed that it wore a garland of orange marigolds and they told me that the first ferry boat across performed this ceremony each day to ensure the safe passage of pilgrims; I certainly felt that something like that was required, for with the swift river and the hundred or more people on board a craft deep in the water, panic would have resulted from the boat being even slightly tipped. It was strange, though, that this stone should have so planted itself—and I was assured that it had, that no man had a hand in its being there during that particular season.

We went too low downstream for the steps and so disembarked on the great grey rocks. Nearby were saffron-robed sadhus sitting on the rocks, some reading holy books, others saying prayers or, with rosary in hand, reciting Japa—and one was surrounded by many fishes as he cast in the odd grain of food to them whilst reciting something.

To the right and left were small huts, some of stone, some part brick, some seeming to be near caves, while sadhus, either saffron-robed or near-naked were lying or sitting on the silver sands. Great wide white steps led from the river to the Gita Bhavan temple and ashram, the walls of the buildings being white with red slabs. When you get close you realize that each great slab is inscribed in sanskrit. The whole of the Hindu holy book *Bhagavad Gita*, usually referred to as the Gita, is printed upon the walls, these slabs being either above or between the small pilgrim rooms, each of which are about ten feet square and having door and window only, the garden before them filled with flowering shrubs. Over the entrance is a coloured statuette of the Lord Krishna, it was he who is said to have written this wonderful holy work. What could be more wonderful

for followers of the *Gita* than to sit in the quietness of such an ashram surrounded by its adoration of the god and his work, and reciting passages from the holy book as they gaze upon the sacred banks of the river, drinking and bathing in the cool waters away from the rush and noise and turmoil of the cities, and lifting their eyes from the clear blue waters to find above them the mighty Himalayas, the home of so many gods?

We went on to where we should have landed from the boat. Here stands a tall white hexagon-shaped temple; within it is the one god, the symbol of Shiva, and before and facing it a white stone figure of the bull Nandi, sitting as always. One so often comes across this combination. Even as we had come up the canal bank we stopped for a while under a sacred banyan tree and there, on a circular plinth, was the white marble bull facing the Shiva symbol, a stone which had been carried down from Rishikesh and set in a saucer of stone with a small channel running away from it so that those who wished to worship at the wayside shrine might so do by carrying Ganges water from the nearby canal and pouring it over the stone.

We climbed a slope with steps here and there, higher up the bank, passing four coolies carrying a dandy chair in which was seated an aged Hindu gentleman; it seemed that he must be a man of money, for the coolies wore clean shirts and clothes and had crimson cushions resting on their shoulders to prevent the cross pole cutting into the bone.

At the top, we found ourselves in the centre of an enormous ashram, so large that many rooms were not occupied. A well-head decorated the centre, a temple was set to one side and to the other was the feeding centre, one to which all the sadhus on that side of the river came daily for food at ten in the morning. And they were by that time starting to arrive, knowing by the sun, when it is visible, and at others by some unknown means, when the correct time of the day has come. Many take an hour or more to reach the place, for they come from far. Some talk among themselves, others are silent and speak to no one. They bring black begging bowls or brass buckets in which to collect

the ready-cooked food which they take as a right, and wear the most amazing collection of garments. Most wear saffron, but there are some in white and other colours. The beggars sit back and hope for a portion to be left for them—I was told there always is, but they must wait, for the sadhus are not regular visitors, many do not come for many days, they do not book in and book out, they may feel the god tells them to move on and after going to the centre for many months will of a sudden cease to arrive. No one has any concern as to whether they might be sick, it is usually thought that they have gone up higher into the Himalayas if the season for pilgrimages to some sacred places there has arrived. Doubtless some die and no one is any the wiser, for wild animals are common in those parts and snakes also.

I met there one most interesting old fellow, he was a noisy old chap, with frizzy white beard, laughing eyes, and wearing round his waist a gay cloth belt. In one hand he had a clapper box—a sort of double-sided drum on a stick with a stone or bead on the end of a cord tied to it; by twisting the stick the drum is struck by the clapper. Over one shoulder he carried a cloth bag; over his woollen hat—saffron coloured like his clothes—an aluminium food bowl was set at a rakish angle. He wore brown rubber plimsolls. He knew everyone there, shot mischievous gibes at the silent ones, cracked jokes with the others, everyone of them had known him the whole of the time they had lived in those parts for there was no man older than he; he claimed to be over one hundred years old, and I was assured by everyone, including the Town Clerk, that there was little doubt that he must be that age, since by testing him on happenings which took place all that way back they discovered that he still had a most accurate memory of them. He asked us to go to his "house" to take tea, and I only got away from him by promising to do so if I happened to be on that side of the river during the afternoon, a decision he did not really understand, for tea-time in those parts is any time.

There were three sadhus with blanket rolls on their backs and

carrying buckets, etc., who had spent the winter in Budrinath, a temple high in the Himalayas which is frozen in for months, they would soon be returning to ensure that the sacred flame was kept burning the winter through in the temple. But they were not of the sadhus who belonged to that part, and strangely enough, although there is no selection between the dozens of different codes of the sadhu faiths, these strangers are expected to stand back and take their food after the "regulars" have been satisfied, but before the beggars, of course.

There was one man of about thirty-five who at once reminded me of pictures of the Christ, his face longish and bearded, his saffron habit simple. I had before seen one who might have been taken for his brother; that one wore a saffron sheet round his shoulders and wooden sandals with webbing straps, but this sadhu wore his feet bare, round his neck was a simple rosary, he carried his food away in a small bucket as did the others. Then, talking to him for a while, I discovered that he was one who followed the Christian faith, his holy book being the Bible. He felt that he could "better study in the quietude of the Himalayas as our Saviour did when he was on this earth" he explained.

Then there was another, one we later met outside a garden made beautiful with the colour and scent of many flowers. He had collected degrees in his younger days—not that he looked more than forty at that time, but it is indeed difficult to decide upon the age of these men. He was shaven, even his head, the dome shape of which would have delighted a phrenologist; tall of figure and handsome of face, I found that he had come to that part intending to remain a while—he had been there many months—before he proceeded to a shrine sacred to the Buddha—for he was a Buddhist, his mother had come from Ceylon; again, his English was excellent, he wore his long cloth over one shoulder, leaving bare the other, so telling the world—at least those who understood the signs—that he was of a certain sect or order of the faith. He dwelt in a small concrete-built house which had been made long, long ago, obviously by one who had erected it as a sort of summer retreat from the city,

perhaps to get away from his family and find a few weeks' peace; it had been deserted and overgrown for as long as anyone could remember, then this Buddhist sadhu had found it, made the house good and the garden beautiful—the Buddhists are great flower lovers; his home was a haven in the jungle. When he went on, he would leave the door open for any who cared to take it and if none cared to do so, then house and garden would fall back into the condition they had before known.

I saw one old fellow wearing a saffron pullover, he was a chatty old man and soon told us that he had been a professor of English in one of the most famous Indian ladies' colleges. His wife had died and, feeling that he had no further ties to this world, having married off his sons and daughters, he resigned his position and had taken a room here in the quiet so that he might meditate undisturbed. He spoke of the greatest in the land as though they had been his friends, and I have little doubt that they were; now, wearing coarse saffron robes and carrying his brass bucket, he came to the centre from his room for food each day; then in the eventide of his life, gazing upon the river, he quietly spent the day in meditation or reading, though I felt he enjoyed hearing about those he had known and I now knew, what they were doing, where they were going, how they had been promoted, and so on.

Then among the crowd I saw crossing the great grass-covered area between the buildings a man clothed in a sackcloth all-enveloping garment. His hair was long and in ropes, he was of excellent carriage. He was quite alone, no one took any notice of him, but as he came from the feeding centre kitchen with his bucket of food I spoke to him, asking if I might take his photograph; he did not object. Then we talked for a little. I asked which sect he followed and he told me with a smile, "I worship God only. I follow the Vedanta Path." As he went away, my companion told me that he thought he was one of the naked fraternity but since women visitors frequently come to the ashram, he covered himself with the sackcloth when he collected food. I did not know at that time that we were to meet again,

that I should eventually set him aside as one of the most sincere of all the sadhus I have ever met; and with all the other "silent ones", we watched him walk quickly away towards the forests of the mountains.

There were so many we spoke to; few of them would talk about their past, that time had gone, as also had their names, they had severed all connections with those days, and would be most annoyed if asked what their name was before they changed it upon becoming a sadhu.

The cost of maintaining a great ashram like this one and dispensing food daily must be enormous. I was told that it was met by a famous Bombay merchant and was but a part of the charities he kept going throughout India. I feel that it is as well for the sadhu fraternity that such as he still dispense such charity, for without it those who were not sincere and just having an easy, lazy life, would come off pretty badly and possibly soon change their mode when they found food and the respectability, even adoration, they enjoyed from visitors in season was not to be had.

We wandered along the wide tracks down which many of the visitors pass during the season, pathways lined with mango trees. By the wayside there are mango topes—or gardens. The fruit, the sacred orange, saffron coloured. There were flowers in profusion, great bushes of double pink clusters of roses, shiny leaves bespattered with the scarlet flowers of the wild pomegranate, violet hibiscus, pale mauve convolvulus, here and there the great massing tree was a shower of violet, the flowers of the jacaranda, or the bright red of the flame of the forest, trees which blossom before they leaf. In odd places there were small hedged-in plots where a sadhu who had been a garden lover during his years in the world had continued by growing a few flowers with which to brighten his life, a few vegetables in case he was unable to get to the feeding centre. Grey monkeys were in the trees, coming down to gather the ripe fruits which fell when they shook the branches, for they are fastidious and only eat the fruits fit for man. Here and there we found a small stream,

diverted into a pool which without a doubt the sadhus used for their bathing purposes. By the side of the track were small huts with sadhus clad in picturesque costumes, but soon we realized that most of those who so carefully placed themselves in close proximity to the road were professional beggars in sadhu cloth, for they started bargaining before they allowed you to take a picture.

Just off the road, on a side track, we came upon a sadhu applying his forehead marks. Before him was his little box. He had made a mixture of vermilion and was then about to place it in the correct position on his forehead with a matchstick, his vanity mirror before him. I took a snap before he had seen me, then asked if I might take another. He refused to take money for it.

Many of the sadhus you see in those parts wear no tilak markings upon their forehead. When they do, these are most elaborate. The various sects have their own markings which are usually on the forehead, these changing with the parts of the country from which they come. For instance, followers of the Lord Shiva, in imitation of the symbol, will have those of phallic origin, or two or three horizontal lines across the forehead, perhaps with a dot between or over them; in one part, the figure of a trident, in another, that of a crescent moon. They use the ashes collected from the sacrificial fire, from burnt cow dung, from sandalwood paste, or tumeric steeped in lime-juice and saltpetre. The ashes used are to represent the disintegrating force associated with the Lord Shiva. Followers of the Lord Vishnu usually make the sign of two perpendicular lines on their foreheads, at times with a dot or circle between them. They also mark their bodies with Vishnu emblems, the conch, the discus, or the lotus. Their signs are made in many colours, black, red, yellow, and of sandalwood paste or charcoal-ash taken from the smouldering fire in which incense had been burned before the image of the god. Followers of the Lord Vishnu who come from the north of India wear white lines drawn between the eyes on the forehead, curved like a letter U; this represents the sole of

the right foot of Vishnu, and the central vermilion mark is the emblem of his consort, Lakshmi. Those followers who come from the south have an elaborate device which is much like the trident, the outer prongs painted with chalk to represent Vishnu's two feet, the red one, Lakshmi, and the white one over the nose representing the lotus. We came across a sadhu with long hair piled high on his head. When he let this down so that I could take his picture, it reached nearly to the ground. He was wearing these elaborate symbols on his arms, and although he was then hurrying along, he agreed to stop for a few moments, and refused to take money for so doing, but accepted a present of some oranges; breaking one in half, he offered a part back to me, as is the custom of genuine sadhus, though I have found few in other parts who did so.

Throughout India I have seen so many sadhus who had voluntarily suffered some spectacular mutilation of their poor bodies, those who lay on beds of spikes or barbed wire mattresses, those who had meat hooks fixed into their bodies with lemons or even weights hanging from them, or spike their cheeks. I have seen those who had even suffered harm to their private parts, those who had stood on one leg, held up their arms, or undertaken some other self-infliction for so long a time that the limb had grown in that position and they were unable to attend to themselves. I have seen others who, following the writings of old, have permitted themselves to be hung by the feet from a hook head downwards over a smoking fire for hours on end swinging in the breeze like a carcass of a sheep, while their brother "sadhus" sat by in the shade of a nearby sacred banyan tree, keeping the "holy fire", as those who came to look and drop their contributions were told it was, going with cow-cakes. I have seen these men taken down from between the great scaffold trident from which they had been hanging, half dazed, their red rimmed unseeing eyes running, their hair smoked, and watched them within a little while crawl forward to smear their bodies with the fire's white ash.

But I saw none who performed such "purification acts for the

good of humanity at large" here in the lap of the Himalayas. There were certainly plenty of "odd" people about, but they did not inflict hurt upon their persons. It seems that such types find it a paying profession to be where the crowds who are not learned in the religions of the world are to be found, and few who have no interest in religion bother to go to such a place as I had sought out, where accommodation, transportation, and food are difficult to obtain. The masses want the circus, the show and the entertainment brought to their doors, they have not got the time, the money nor the patience to go to them. So long as it is not made easy for trippers to seek out those places, so long as accommodation and feeding remain a difficulty, for so long will the sadhus remain there. Encouraging tourists by offering convenient facilities will only result in the "attraction" moving on or shutting themselves behind high walls, as some have already done in the areas fast becoming populated.

Going back to the ashram we looked down through the trees and saw that a ferry boat which had arrived was quickly filling up, and just managed to get there before it put off from the bank.

Arriving on the other side, we were met by an elder of that particular ashram, the Yogi we had before seen floating on the surface of the Ganges. He said that a ceremony Swamiji was certain I would wish to witness was being held up for my arrival. This was the one in which the student casts off the ties of the world and gives himself, or herself, up to the will of the god—"takes sanyas". There were ten candidates, eight men who had worked in the ashram for some time, the girl I had seen in the press section, and a European woman who had not long arrived. Their guru was Swamiji.

The ceremony was to take place on the guru's enclosed veranda overlooking the holy Ganges. I saw that already many people had congregated there, then going up I met the girl dressed in white and making her way—quite alone—towards the guru's rooms. Quite happily she stood for a picture which would be her last in ordinary clothes. She told me that she had

first felt the desire to "take sanyas" when but eight years of age, but until she found Swamiji when on a visit to the ashram with her brother, she had never felt that she had discovered her true guru. Now she knew that she was right, she had stayed there many months. Her mother had arrived and tried to convince her that she should wait a little longer, the mother had pleaded with her, then with Swamiji, but it was the same hard answer that many a Roman Catholic has met when their daughters or sisters have decided to become nuns, and now the girl was so happy because Swamiji had so talked to her mother that the old lady would be there to see her pass through the ceremony. As to the European woman, I had before spoken to her, and was amazed at her sudden decision to cast off the world, knowing that she had a husband and sons. I was not at all convinced that she was sincere. Still, that was for her guru to decide, and it seemed that Swamiji had thought differently. I then remembered that her arrival in India had been attended by some publicity, she was one who "had heard the voice of her guru calling her to the Himalayas" and she had just come in answer to that voice which kept repeating the call every night.

When we eventually arrived on the veranda we found it packed tight with people; and I had always imagined that only members of the actual fraternity could be present at such ceremonies. There were a number of men and women sadhus from other ashrams come to attend the ceremony, but apart from the mother of the girl and the sadhus of the ashram, the majority of the people were just like myself.

In the centre of the veranda the ceremonial sandalwood fire had been lighted and kept going by ghee—clarified cow's butter—being added; the smoke was choking those on the windward of it. Swamiji was there dressed like all the others, in white; I remember that I was rather surprised to find that he was not wearing an elaborate robe of some sort since he was officiating. The men were bare to the waist, lines of sandalwood paste were on their foreheads, their sacred threads were over one shoulder and across their bodies; save for the tail of hair from the crown,

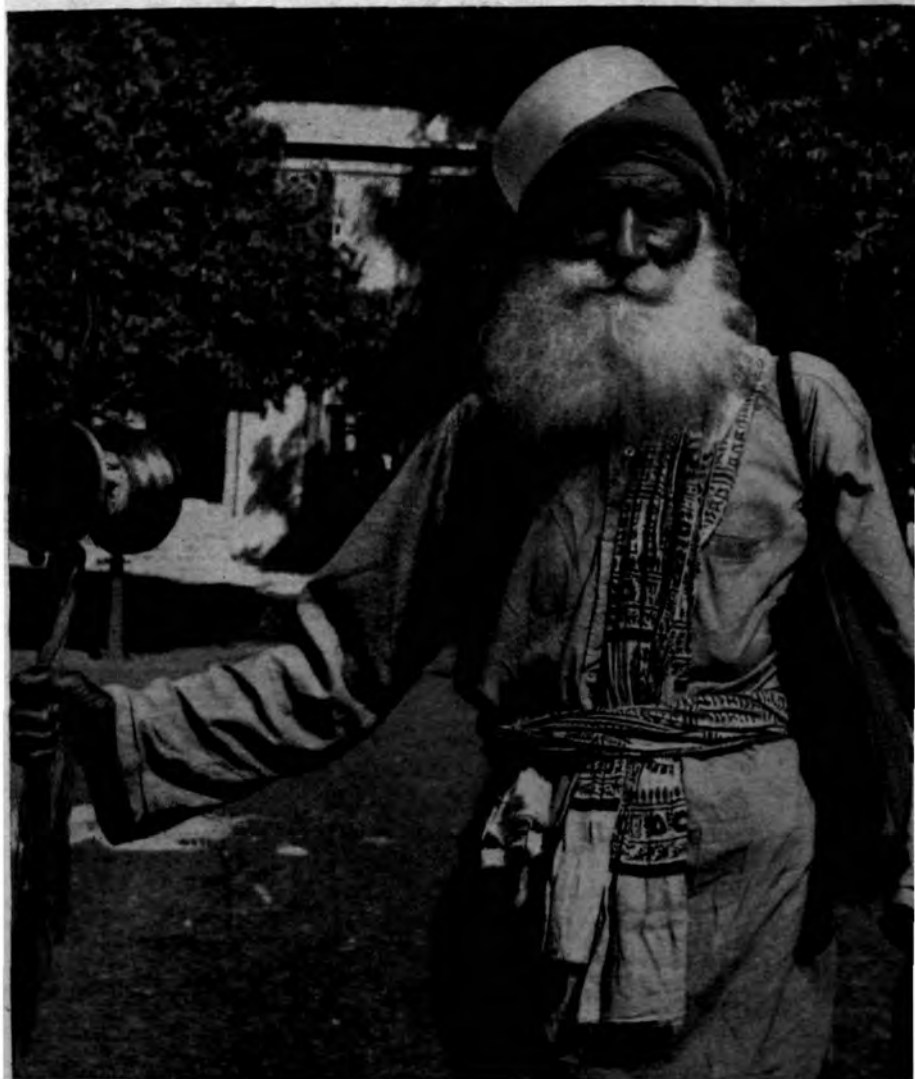
their heads had been shaven. Many Hindus, certainly those who dwell in the Himalayas, believe that by this rite, called the Chhoti, the gods will lift them to heaven as they are released from this life. The two women had seated themselves in the circle formed by the men, but were at the head of the veranda so that they were both facing the audience. In the centre sat the monk who had demonstrated the stomach asana in Swamiji's office, he was taking a leading part in the ceremony and at the same time himself becoming a sadhu and renouncing the world.

They were singing holy songs following him. He would stop and recite mantras which they would repeat after him. Coconuts were added to the fire, they all threw on handfuls of rice and so it went on and on and on; I thought it would never end and was unable to follow what was being said. I watched the unhappy mother, but she was not crying. Swamiji had stilled her fears. After some considerable time, during which I was getting hotter and hotter and choking from the smoke of the sandalwood, coconuts, ghee, rice, and other things, the singing and reciting ceased and there came a hush over the people present; those actually taking part in the ceremony looked up happily, and Swamiji, a pair of scissors in his hand, got down from his chair to move round the ring. The candidate was given a small square of newspaper which he held before him and Swamiji first cut and removed the sacred thread, which had been placed round the young man's neck when he was an infant, and dropped it into the newspaper, then clipped off the tuft of hair; this joined the cord. The candidate had cast off all the past. Swamiji gave each of them a new name. He reached the women, and they smiled up at him. Swamiji had spared the mother the misery of seeing her daughter shaven, he had promised not to carry out that part of the ceremony until later, yet as I turned to look at the old lady I saw tears stream down her face. The European woman, who had during prayers and songs put on as perfect a performance as one would witness on the stage of any nativity play, also smiled at Swamiji, knowing he was not intending to shave her flaxen hair.

Nandi the bull facing the Shiva
symbol on the canal bank



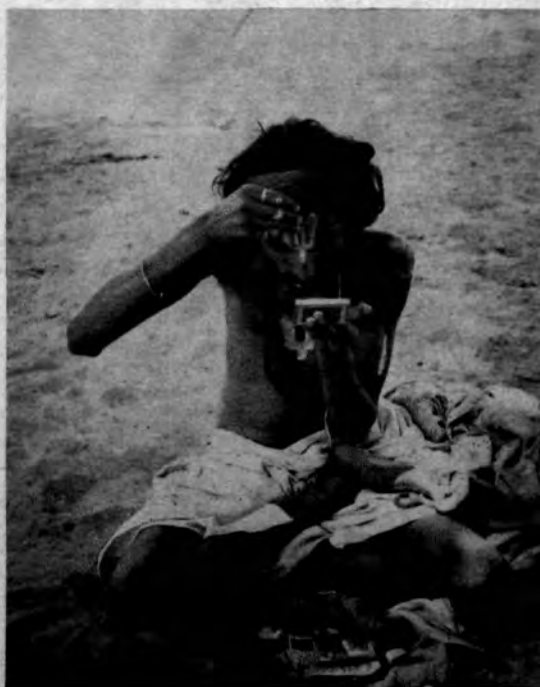
"He claimed to be over one
hundred years old"



“ . . . clothed in a sackcloth,
all-enveloping garment, his
hair long and in ropes”



“We came upon a sadhu
applying his forehead marks”



Their guru then gave them a short talk about what they had taken upon themselves, their responsibilities to the god, a reminder that they had now cast aside their families and their people and found new brothers and sisters, at which stage I saw the mother take out her handkerchief, and what mother would not have done the same? He told them that they must not throw stones at the monkeys, that they must always speak the truth and act the truth, and he then quoted many verses from the scriptures, reminding them where they could find those teachings. There was nothing they could not do by meditation and concentration, and so he went on and on, but not longer than many sermons I have had occasion to suffer in churches. I am certain that all he told them was by that time familiar to them and that his talk was really for those who had gathered there to watch—and weep.

Then, following the master of ceremonies, they went down the steps to the holy Ganges, cast their pieces of newspaper with thread and hair on to the waters, took their baths, and as they came out from the water, Swamiji handed them new clothes of saffron-dyed cloth, after which all were embraced by their new brothers; each of them then went forward to the guru to stoop down and touch his feet—wipe the dust from his feet—in homage to him. Finally, with the holy Ganges and the distant temple in the background they posed for many photographs.

I will admit that the seriousness of the ceremony was considerably lost to me when one of the elders explained that there was nothing to prevent a sanyasin giving up his or her vows and returning to the world “as an ordinary householder”, and said that many of the members of the ashram changed into white when they went out of the ashram to pay visits to places outside the town. I wondered if the girl’s mother had been told of this, and so stilled in her anxiety.

Some months later I returned to the ashram. The girl had several women pupils of her own by that time, and was teaching them asanas, as well as doing all the Hindi translations for the

publications. She wore saffron robes and, with shaven head, appeared just like a boy. For an Indian girl to part with her hair is one of the greatest sacrifices she can make. The beauty of a woman's hair in that country is in its length as well as its lustre. When parents exchange the photographs of their sons and daughters before arranging a meeting to discuss the possibilities of their child's marriage, the picture of the girl will usually show her with her hair hanging down her back.

But I have seen few women looking so radiantly happy as that girl, and was so glad that I had thought to take for her a small antelope skin on which to sit during her meditations.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ON THE way back to the bungalow we overtook the judge. During our conversation I told him about the old sadhu's invitation to tea. "But of course you must not fail to take a dish of tea with him. He'll walk miles for a cup of tea," he exclaimed. "And remember his invitation really means that he hopes that you will arrive with the packet of tea!" he finished with a laugh.

Then, sitting in the back of the car, he carefully drew a map of the other bank of the river, showing us how we must follow a wide path to the left from the great feeding centre, then take to the second track which turned off by a giant tree, going along it for some distance until we saw the sandy bank of the Ganges; to the right we would find the small garden of the hundred-years-old sadhu, quite easy to recognize since there were a number of tea bushes growing there, and in the corner his cell, a cave in the rock built out with other smaller rocks, all of which were Shiva shaped, and held together with earth bound by the roots of creepers. "Until but a few years back he was considered a great exponent of the Yoga asanas; he is a guru who has had many disciples, and will doubtless be pleased to tell you about its wonders or at least direct you to one of his disciples who practices Kundalini Yoga."

I wondered if we should ask the judge to come with us the next day, but believing that if he had wanted to do so he would have offered to guide us, left it at that.

We found his map to be drawn with every detail shown as we walked along first the wide path and then the track, even to the bends, and there were crosses he had not explained to us marking great boulders in the path, and circles where other large trees stood.

The garden and little house in the corner were as he had told us, except that the creepers were then a mass of blossom.

On a sack laid on the ground were the drying leaves of tea from the bushes grown there; "Orange Peko!" the ancient shouted at us as we bent down to examine it. "Brought from Darjeeling, and grown there high on the hills. They told me that it was in such a steep place that tea pickers could not reach it and they had to train monkeys to collect it. Better trained than these rascals we have here!" and he cackled with laughter at his own joke, suddenly stopping and opening his eyes wide at the sight of the green labelled tin I had brought.

When he had made the much talked of tea I realized that the tin I had brought him would probably last him six months if not more, for it was so weak that a babe could have taken it. We had passed a herd of little cows grazing in the woodlands nearby, and when he disappeared for a few moments with brass bucket in hand, I guessed he had gone to milk one of them; indeed he had, for he returned with the bucket frothy and full.

A box was dragged out of the cell for me to sit on; my companion, being an Indian, was expected to sit on the ground as the old man did. "Yes," he declared, "I have been here in these parts for close on one hundred years. I must have been about six when I first came, but I don't remember exactly. I had followed some hillmen who had been working in the plains, and then during one cold night I went out into the darkness and couldn't find my way back to them. In the end I saw a fire burning, went over to it and found a Yogi sitting there. I stayed with him for twelve years. He was my guru. Then one morning I awoke and found he had gone; he was an old man, must have been sixty or seventy." Saying which, he cackled again, "I suppose he felt that his time had come when he must take himself off to the Home of the Gods, there to be carried away."

"And you never heard of him again," I commented, then asked, "Do most of the gurus pass out of this life in that way?"

He replied, "Some know at exactly which day and hour their spirit will leave this earth. They surprise their disciples by telling

them beforehand. Then as the hour comes nearer they do not go into retreat but sit in meditation, and when the appointed hour is come they pass over."

"And their disciples cremate them."

"No, it is not unusual for them to be buried, though it is also usual for the great sage to declare his wish before he leaves them. Some express the desire to be laid in the arms of the Goddess Ganga by being placed in her waters to be carried away. When they have expressed a wish to be buried, they are placed in a sitting position and it is good that it be beside a sacred river: they will then be ready for the time when they again appear upon this earth."

I changed the subject, and asked, "As a boy and a young man did you remain here all the time then?"

"Of course not," he replied, as though I should have known the answer. "With my guru I moved from one holy place to another covering the whole of this wonderful country. First we went to Benares, then on to . . ." and as I had before heard so many tell, he recited off a great string of the names of cities, shrines and other sacred places, but having started I knew I dare not interrupt. Finally he mentioned those shrines of the Himalayas like Gangotri, Yamunotri, and Amarnath. At this I showed interest, for I had made the hazardous journey to Amarnath* and we talked for long about it, the only difference—and a considerable one—being, that he had made the pilgrimage on foot while I had gone on horseback most of the way. According to his beliefs, there was another far more important difference, this being that by walking he had gained the merit of the gods at every step, whereas, not being aged or sick, by going on horseback I had not. Even then my trip had been treacherous in parts, but it had been worth it, not only to see the great Shiva ice symbol, but also to move with and among the masses of devout, every one of whom seemed to be interesting to watch or talk to.

Then he mentioned the mountain temples of Badrinath and Kedarnath, those shrines to which only the previous day I had

*Discribed in *This is Kashmir*.

seen priests journeying. Shrines which are to be visited by many routes over the mountains, from many sacred towns, Almora for instance, which is another place like Rishikesh, seething with sadhus.

But in these days he was sorry to see the many buses which covered much of the route from Rishikesh to the sacred places. "When I was a young man it was all so different, now pilgrims seem only to think of motor-cars and getting through the trip in the shortest time so that they can return to their desks and their benches, while years ago time did not matter and men trudged the whole way and gained great merit from the gods."

I had seen the crowded buses leaving Rishikesh; after five miles or so the road is so narrow that only one-way traffic is permissible and therefore the day is divided into three-hour periods, with the traffic flowing to and from Rishikesh alternately. He told us of three caves some sixteen miles up the road, one the abode of a great guru, one who had been the last disciple of a very great sage; now dwelling in the smallest of the caves, he used the larger ones as classrooms for his many disciples who lived in small houses in the vicinity. Then of "an Englishwoman of noble birth who had left all and followed Gandhiji, taking sanyas, and now since his death she has lived in those parts, at one time opening a haven for useless cows which would have been slaughtered". At the time that he was telling me this there was much agitation in the Indian Parliament over cow-slaughter, a Bill for their protection being put before the House; hundreds of sadhus were parading there with long poles on the end of which were small saffron flags painted with a red swastika, and demanding that the Bill be passed. But it had received short shrift, and been cast out; yet the sadhus were still persisting that cow-slaughter must be stopped. This demand they will never cease to make so long as India exists.

It seemed that the whole way to the sacred places was peppered with shrines and temples, even sacred tanks on the road—known as the Badri-Kedar Route—all of them associated with some historical-mythological happening to the gods. At the

confluence of the rivers Alakananda and Bhagirathi at Devaprayag, it is said that the Lord Rama did a thousand years penance for having killed Ravana. I had heard about this place with its houses close covering the hills and giving it the strange appearance of being walled in by them. At Gupta Kashi, there is within the temple a sacred tank fed by two "dharas" or underground streams. The old sadhu told us that near Havan Kund there is kept burning a sacred fire which had been kept alive throughout the countless centuries since the day when at that place the Lord Shiva was married to the goddess Parvathi. At Gopeshwara there is an ancient Shiva temple; the story told is that a cowman on reaching his home with the herd found that one was missing; when he eventually found the cow she was standing pouring the milk from her udder over a natural Shivalinga standing up from the ground; a temple was, of course, built over the hallowed spot.

The way is hard, taking many days to reach Kedarnath, going through the most wonderful country, in places massed with flowers, in others the slopes covered with pines and deodar trees, with clear sparkling streams. In some parts there are warm and even hot springs where the pilgrims can bathe. Along the route, feeding centres are set up in the season, and even dispensaries for those who falter by the wayside. In parts these are made necessary on account of the precarious journey over rough roads and along narrow bridle paths, with a fall of many thousand feet to one side, through the danger of landslides and the fording of rushing rivers and, at times, lack of shelter with little clothing. Early in the season—and this usually opens in the month of May—there is still snow and ice on the route; in places ice bridges remain; they look safe, then give way of a sudden without a moment's warning.

Nearing the glorious Kedar valley it is customary for the pilgrims who are proceeding there to cry "Jai Kedars" to those who are returning, they reply with the greeting "Jai Badri Vishals". The square-spired temple is set between two mountains, nearly twelve thousand feet above sea level, the snow-

covered slopes rising high behind it, the edifice being set on a stone base reached by way of a wide stepway. The huge Shivalinga idol is claimed to be the largest in the whole world. It is a massive rock, which those who go to worship declare throws out "resplendent light" as they gaze upon this "The most holy of holies, the glorious emblem of Supreme Divinity". It is an emblem which, though rough of surface, is soothing to the pilgrim who has pointed out to him the entrances to the distant caves made sacred by their having once been the abode of sages and saints, and the pathways up which the gods are known to have gone on their ascent to the higher regions, there to join the immortals. In the distance on a clear day can be seen the mountains rising to 23,000 feet. Many of the sages of old are known to have followed that same icy "great path" taken by the gods, and in their going they signed their names upon the rocks on the road to Mahaprasthan.

I heard later that some hundreds of feet above the valley is to be found the rock from which the river bursts. Its precipice is known as the Bhairava Jhamp or "leap" and from this pilgrims of old used to throw themselves down as an offering to the god, a practice which was eventually stopped by the British. In the distant days this immolation was attended by the most imposing rites, the happy one who was to give his life to the gods being accompanied to the place by a musical procession, and after certain ceremonies going to his doom midst the chanting of prayers by the many saffron-robed priests. From what I heard, it seems that not a few who have come along are so overawed by the sanctity that they now wander on and on into the snows, finally to disappear from the face of the earth. It would be impossible to miss one such pilgrim from among the many hundreds who tread the path.

One can imagine this happening after such an occasion when many who have watched have declared that they have seen that which has been told by the priests of the place, the Lord Shiva showing himself in visible form on the peak above to those who are watching, while the priests and the pandas explain that the

snow showers which are blown by the winds from the mountain tops are in fact the wreaths of smoke which rise from the sacrificial fires.

The distance between Kedar and Badri as the gods could travel is but twenty-two miles on the snow-covered range; they say that Pujari worshipped in Kedar in the morning, used this route, and worshipped at Badri in the evening. The pilgrim route is just over one hundred miles; on the journey is seen the Satopanth glacier and the Satopanth lake.

Having lived in those parts and traversed the mountain paths for so many years, the old sadhu's description of scenery was scanty; he did not appreciate all of nature's wonders, his thoughts, after having once visited a shrine were spent in visualizing the sacred place he was to again set his eyes upon. With the judge-sadhu it was different, for many of the Himalayan shrines had not been discovered by him until his retirement; he was still able fully to appreciate all the beauties that the gods had showered on his pathway to the sacred places; the hundred-years-old sadhu's pictures were but a hasty sketch, the judge-sadhu's like a Balinese painting, nothing was overlooked, he telling me that same evening of the delightful flowers which are blooming in the spring when the pilgrims are first permitted to pass along the roads, the landslides having been cleared away, the profusion of pale rose-coloured auriculars, the masses of delightful primroses deliciously scented. The primeval oak woods they passed through, the boughs of the giants gnarled and festooned with long white moss creepers or thick glistening ivy. Among the forest trees are to be seen great chestnuts, hazels, maples, and walnuts. Then, as the woods become less dense, there are masses of double pink rose bushes, great sprays of the flowers, far larger than are to be found in the majority of gardens in the plains, and syringa bushes throwing out a heavy fragrance. It is said that the scent is so powerful that with the rarity of the air many pilgrims are for a while overcome and near to fainting, many are so carried away that they believe it to be the presence of the gods. Those pandas who act as guides

carry with them little bags of cloves and peppers which they hand out at such times to those who have engaged them. They explain that the distant sounds they hear—those which are really caused by avalanches or the renderings of the ice or hard frozen snow in the surrounding mountains, are the voices of the great gods and goddesses as they converse one with the other.

The route to those who love nature and are making their first pilgrimage along it must be full of wonders. On the enormously high mountain passes, though among the cold snows, the air is so clear that the traveller becomes sunburned, then going down through dark and narrow gorges where the air is cool and damp, he glimpses the distant peaks shining like burnished silver in the deep blue of the heavens. That part which is between six and ten thousand feet high is lush with vegetation, and in the autumn the delicious wild fruits like strawberries, and one much like the raspberry, are to be found there to quench the thirst. Flowers are still to be seen even at that time of the year, among them the white anemone and masses of columbine. The pilgrims path is hard going, though. Where the so-called bridges—consisting of two or three logs cast across a fast, frothy white river and tied together with vines—have been washed away, early in the season a rope bridge may be temporarily thrown from one bank to the other and tied fast to trees or great boulders at either end, the pilgrim's passage being made safe by prayer flags—bits of rag or even paper—which the coolies have tied to sticks planted in the ground at either end, for the coolies are mostly Buddhists.

Down in the lower slopes the grass is close, yet more than sufficient for the few cattle which feed there and supply their milk at outrageous prices to those who journey through; the track is covered with rounded stones, rhododendron bushes are found, even iris and anemone brighten the scene with their colours. Lovely waterfalls drop lace-like into swirling pools, and then comes the roar of the waters as they dash through a narrow gorge, the panda showing his charges where it is safe to bathe, this usually being close to a shrine or temple. Amazingly, in

places hot springs burst from the rock close to ice-cold racing rivers.

Badrinath is the favoured dwelling place of the god Vishnu. In these days it is only a forty-mile trek to those who have no wish to visit Kedar. It is usual, however, for pilgrims to set aside a fortnight in which to enjoy it, though it can be done in under that time. The first seventy miles of the journey from Rishikesh to Kirtinagar can be covered by car or bus, then follows a short walk over a mountain pathway, and crossing a suspension bridge another bus service can be picked up to carry pilgrims to Srinagar, and from there another service runs to Pipalkoti, which is the end of the wheel journey. The trek now commences, and every three or four miles are to be found "Chatties", thatched houses which are like the old wild-west stores-cum-hotels, with provisions on the ground floor and rooms for travellers above. Here can be bought food, here one can cook it with the kitchen utensils used by all. One sees numbers of devotees trudging along with loads of bedding tied to their backs; others have employed porters—sherpas, yet others hire "dandis", carried on the shoulders of four or six sherpas. Those who make the journey from Hardwar set aside between one hundred and fifty and two hundred rupees to cover expenses the whole way through, and this includes the bus fares. The road is steep in parts, the paths narrow and perilous, but that makes it all the more desirable to the pilgrim who over the forty miles of rough going gains sufficient merit to make him happy. The whole way, the bridle path follows along banks of the River Alakananda, which is one of the two main tributaries of the River Ganges, and is a mighty raw, rough, untamed river which rushes wildly on, dashing over rocks and through close channels towards its sister stream.

The famous shrine of Badrinath stands a little distance from this river in a valley which is about a mile wide and rests between two great peaks, the Nar and Narayan Parbat. One of the temples is said to have been built over a thousand years ago, its copper-plated roof and gilded ball glistening in the sun is an

imposing sight set off against the silver of the snows spread on the mountains surrounding it. It stands amidst many houses, and there are also post office and telegraph services reminding one that the world is close by; these are kept open even during the winter months, when from November to April the place becomes snowbound. Here is a sulphur hot spring (so hot that its water must be mixed with that from a cold one nearby) in which the traveller soothes his weary limbs—at a price, for it appears at the foot of the Badrinarayan temple. The spring temperature is about 125 degrees, yet sadhus can be seen at times standing in the near-boiling water.

The principal idol in the temple is of black stone. The priest officiating is broad in his beliefs, the service for pilgrims being simple and acceptable to followers of almost any sect of the Hindus, even to Buddhists, with chantings and prayers to the Holy One. The old sadhu told us that followers of Vishnu see in the idol their god, those who worship Shiva gaze upon it and are sure that it is their god seated cross-legged in meditation; Buddhists have declared it to be none other than the Lord Buddha. I asked him if ever a Christian had there seen the Christ. He smiled and answered that all pictures or statues of the Christ or even the Virgin Mary portrayed them full length figures, and then surprised me with his knowledge of that faith by suddenly saying “except of course in those where the Virgin Mary is seated holding the Christ Child, or when as Mary the Mother of Jesus she is seated weeping at the foot of the Holy Cross”.

I found in a book written nearly a hundred years ago a traveller's description of his visit there, in which he told how several lamps are always burning before the idol; how in those days much ceremony was displayed to ensure the comfort of the idol, it being daily provided with meals, the doors of the sanctuary then being closed while the god consumed the meal alone; how these meals were served in dishes and cups made of gold and silver; “and a large establishment of servants is kept up, both male and female, the latter as dancing-girls and mistresses of the celibate priests. The only persons who have access to the

inner apartments are the servants, and no one but the Rawal himself is allowed to touch the idol." The Rawal is the chief priest.

To make the pilgrimage to Kedarnath if you are a follower of Lord Shiva, or to Badrinath if your god is Vishnu—especially if you take the sacred bath after the ceremonies—will ensure not only the sins of this life being washed away, as can be accomplished by bathing in the sacred Ganges, but the sins of all your past lives also being removed.

The old man then went on to tell us proudly of how thrice he had made the pilgrimage to the holy Mount Kailas, a journey done on foot and covering nearly two hundred and forty miles from Almora. Kailas is a spectacle which every worshipper of Shiva hopes one day to set his eyes upon, but because of the tremendous journey, and its being within Tibet, it is not an easy task to accomplish and one which few can ever realize.

Mount Kailas is to followers of the Lord Shiva the most awe-inspiring spectacle; without a doubt it is the largest natural perfect Shiva symbol to be found anywhere in the world. The old sadhu assured me that it is most certainly the home of the god. One can well imagine that the one who first discovered it in all its splendour and beauty, rising four thousand feet straight out of a great grassy plain and separated from the main range by a great ravine, must have gasped at the glistening symbol which suddenly appeared before him. The dome-shaped peak is covered with snow. The stratification of the rock is marked with a series of ledges which surround it and catch the snow falling from above, thus forming great bands of alternate white and purple. One such great band, greater than all the rest, encircles the base of the mount, this the old sadhu told me is the mark made thousands—maybe millions—of years ago when a Rakshas or demon endeavoured to drag this great majestic throne of the Lord Shiva from the plain.

Its worship has come down from ancient times, and the name of him who first came upon it, as do the pilgrims now from between the mountain slopes, is lost. To obtain the full merit

the devotee must make the complete circumambulation, one which is usually undertaken in two days, although it can easily be done in one.

The teapot, refilled with hot water many times so that the old sadhu might keep himself refreshed as he spoke, was now dry, its last emptyings having been almost as clear as the waters of the Ganges, and I felt it was time to leave him, but before doing so asked if he knew of another as learned as he who could enlighten or teach us something of the philosophy of the Yogis.

He made no reply for a while and I began to wonder if I had offended him by my question, when he exclaimed, "You have, I know, been shown a number of the asanas. You will have learnt how they will benefit the physical body. But as yet I do not think you have learnt or realize the deeper teachings of Yoga. It can be that you are not yet ready, on the other hand it can be that you will understand more than the average man who comes to seek us out. I think that your friend and my friend, the one who was a judge before he renounced the world, will have intended that I send you to one whom I consider the most learned of all my disciples, a very advanced soul. He will at once know if the time has come to tell you of some of the secret teachings which have passed down to us through the thousands of years.

"He was my pupil nearly thirty years ago, after my sending him into the forest to meditate, then after seven years he knew that he must again seek another guru and could tell you how one dawn he gathered up his cloth, his begging bowl, and staff, and strode the forest pathway for but seven furlongs to a spot where in the shade of a great lone rock he found his new teacher awaiting him. He remained with him for a further seven years and at the end of that time the great sage left his pupils after telling them that within the hour his stay among them would have finished. They had been seated in a half-circle round him as he sat with the rockface of a mountain within but a few feet of his back. They recited with him many mantras, and looking up as they had completed one, they saw their guru place his hands together in salutation, a glorious smile spread over his face, and

then, as though he had gradually become a mist, he had left them. A heavenly perfume pervaded the place, and those who visit it again after all these years still breathe the wonderful fragrance, and as they looked to one side towards the waters of the holy Ganges, it appeared to them that the river had become luminous, the mist which spread above it becoming like sandalwood smoke within a temple, whilst there was a distant chanting of music."

"And where did all this happen?" I asked.

"Not very far from here. If you were to follow the holy Ganges for about five miles towards its earthly source, you would find that the course changes and that it gently flows from east to west—such spots as these are always the most sacred of all—and when you visit the great one to whom I am going to direct you, you will find that from his dwelling can be seen through the trees of the forest the place I have told you about."

He then stood up and took us a short way back along the path by which we had come. With a staff he drew upon the dusty earth a plan of the road we must take, crossing three times a small stream and following a path which was well trodden for some distance but which then turned off on to a track that might be difficult to follow since it was seldom used, those who studied under the sadhu taking a shorter road to reach the feeding centre.

We sat down under a great tree and had our pack lunches. From there we could see the wide liquid curves of the river below us, with the two ferry boats making their crossing, being carried far downstream before they could reach the other side of the current. We could pick out the "houses" of the great ashram where asanas had been demonstrated to us, and follow with our eyes the wide stepway up to the temple on the hillside, standing out in its pale blue against the white ashram rooms, and then we picked out the small hut of the sadhu high behind it. The sands which ran down from the road and footways to the water were sprinkled with grey boulders and brown figures, those under the ashram being patients taking "the earth cure",

the others being sadhus or pilgrims bathing; we watched the horse-drawn tongas and the buses slowly winding their way up the hill, some setting forth to the temples high above those we had that morning heard about from the old sadhu.

Then, having finished the picnic meal, we went on and in a short while came upon a hedged-in garden with small buildings within it. The entrance path was stone flagged; a little racing stream, which had obviously passed through it ran out close by. The tree-shaded garden was a mass of colour, the buildings whitewashed, and after standing outside the V-shaped cattle-protecting entrance "gate" we saw a saffron-robed figure, beckoned him, and asked for directions to the guru's abode.

"You have arrived. It is here, please enter." And we learned that the sadhu was one of the disciples. "I will tell my guru that you have come," he said, and went off, leaving us to admire the mass of flowers growing there, flowers which he had been watering when we arrived.

He returned almost immediately to tell us that the guru was in meditation and could not be disturbed, and when I asked how long he might so remain he replied "Maybe for half an hour, and yet it could be for two hours or more."

We wandered round the garden, hoping that his period of meditation would be short, and were shown the Shiva idol, a smooth pure white stone within a tiny temple, so low down that we had to bend to see it, but then of course, the worshippers sit cross-legged before it; outside the door of the temple and facing the emblem was seated a white stone figure of the faithful bull.

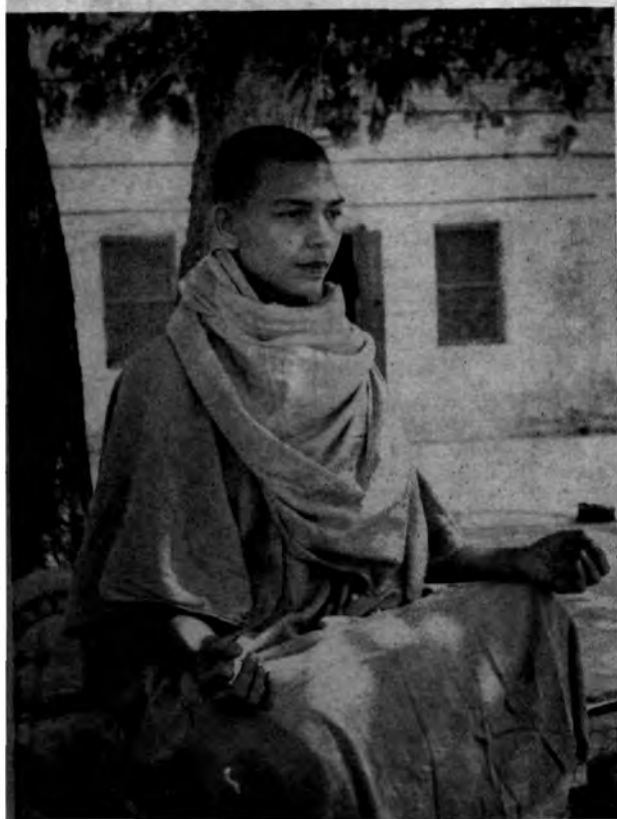
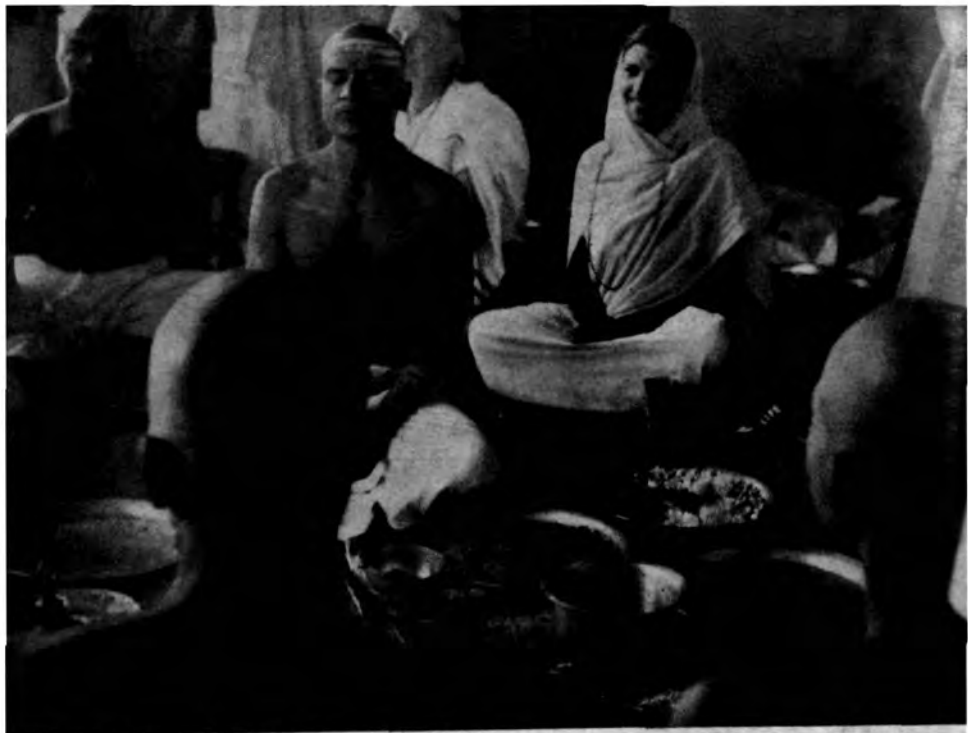
We were shown the small block of cells set aside for the disciples and peeped into the one that belonged to the sadhu who was taking us round; it was smaller if anything than the room first used by the asana Yogi in the great ashram, having only a narrow wooden bench obviously used as a bed, for at the head of it was rolled a length of hessian and nearby an antelope skin and a thin blanket. A covered veranda with walls on three sides was the place where the disciples received their instruction, and quite separate at the far end was a room with door open wherein

Ordva Padmasana—the Above Lotus posture



A follower of the Lord Vishnu, as the markings indicate

National Library
Calcutta



The ceremony of "taking san-
yas" in progress

"She now wore saffron robes
and, with shaven head, ap-
peared just like a boy"

was the guru, a room which might have been eight feet square. I commented upon the smallness of the disciple's cells and was told that those who were advanced in their instruction also had their "houses" close by, and then what appeared at first to be ruins of buildings were pointed out to me, and I saw that they were dwellings.

Half an hour later, the guru still being in meditation, I remembered the judge-sadhu telling us about some others living in caves on the mountains hereabouts, and asked our guide if he knew where they could be found.

"Yes," he said, "I know of them. But most have now gone away up to Badrinath. Yet there remains one always; he very occasionally passes this garden on his way down to the feeding centre. I can only tell you the direction, give you a very rough idea of the way, for I have never been there, few have."

He did not draw a map on paper nor on the sand, but just explained the way. "Follow the stream, through a forest path, up a narrow steep track on the mountain side" and so on, and yet, strangely, as we went it all seemed to fit in exactly. It was as though we were being guided there by some unseen hand, and eventually, much later, when we looked up and saw the smoke-blackened entrances to three caves close to the top of the mountain, I was not at all surprised that we had arrived.

But there was no sign of life there, and I climbed up the natural stone stairway, which was like a twenty-foot ladder set in the face of the rock, to peer inside in case the sadhu was then in meditation. I found one cave empty of human life, yet with evidence of its occupation; a few smouldering logs to one side, on the other a low raised board bed; on a natural stone shelf at the back a few ancient books and a folding X-shaped book-rest which those who sit on the ground use to hold the book they are reading, and hanging on one side was a hessian gown.

As I scrambled down the rough stone staircase I saw coming down a narrow pathway a near-naked sadhu, his long hair piled high on his head, carrying in his hand a brass bucket of water. At once I connected the hessian gown and the man, for it was

he I had spoken to at the feeding centre but a day before, and now so soon we met again. The amazing thing to me was that although it was obvious from the state of the track that few ever trod that way, he did not appear to be astonished that I had come.

He climbed up into his cave and then invited me to join him. This I did, then remembering that my shoes were made of leather, I sat with my feet over the edge; yet he made no protest about my camera case, also of leather, being there. We talked for a while and I learned his sadhu name. Although the previous name is never asked, I did learn that he came from the Punjab—which I could tell from his features—and that he had left his home when he was quite young to wander after a sadhu who later became his guru and taught and guided him for many years, eventually leaving him when he was about sixteen. Since that time—about ten years—he had remained in the cave, reading the holy books which had been left him by his guru and in meditation.

As he had before said, he followed the Vedanta Path, believing in but one God; and he pointed towards the heavens. His special holy book, brown with age and constant handling, was a teaching of Hindu philosophy which lays great emphasis upon there being but one God.

His day, after awakening at four in the morning, was occupied by sitting in Dyan Jyog—meditation—for about two hours, from then until nine he read the holy book, after which he took his bath in the nearby stream and collected water, and then either went down to the feeding centre to collect food, or searched the nearby jungle for some fruits. Again he read one of the holy books, after which, at about six or seven in the evening, as the daylight faded, he sat in meditation for hours, sometimes on throughout the whole of the night, concentrating upon the wonderful words of wisdom contained in the great book, upon their meaning as he now knew them to be, or in following their wise teachings.

Compared with the hundreds of other sadhus I had seen about the district, his' physique was magnificent. He told me that he

did not follow any of the instructions for asanas as laid down in the books of Yoga, but that he did undertake certain exercises, "They could be those practised by the Yogis, I would not know. I have not interested myself in them. I only follow my guru's teachings." he explained.

As I sat there with him and looked into the distance, I could see the River Ganges. To him it was a very beautiful river, a truly wonderful sight, but all rivers, which were God's gifts to mankind, were the same; the river we then both looked down upon was no more sacred than any of the others.

"Then why do you come here to meditate?" I asked.

"Because so many good spirits inhabit the place; because it is quiet and cool in the summer time. Here I can sit and think and no one, nothing, will disturb me."

"And you chose this spot which faces the north so that you could see the mountains in which live the gods?" I asked.

To which he replied, "God is everywhere. He is here with us. I do not believe that we must rush hither and thither searching for God. If we but call upon him with all sincerity he will come to us."

I changed to more material subjects, "Why do you wear your hair uncut?" I asked.

"So that when I go down to the feeding centre or to any other place they may know that I have for many years studied the scriptures and meditated upon God. So that they will know that I am no humbug who has suddenly decided that this is an easy way to live."

"But you draw no marks upon your face nor body."

"Why should I? Of what use are they? It is not the visible, it is the invisible markings which matter to God. They are here,—within my heart."

We talked on in this manner for some time, then I asked if I might take a photograph of him. He made no objection and remained as before, sitting cross-legged for it to be taken. I had coloured film in the camera, and with the dark cave facing the north could only give a long exposure, hoping that something

would come of it. All that I could see when I looked down into the reflex, was the small triangle of white cloth over his nakedness, and the belt of webbing which held it in place.

Then watching him I saw that I could take an exposure of many minutes if I wished, for he looked straight ahead at me and did not move or twitch; but a long exposure was not possible, for I could not hold the camera still in my hand for that time. I looked up with my finger on the trigger. Again I experienced that same uncanny transformation as had taken place with the guru on the sacred island, for this young sadhu now also seemed almost to disappear within a translucent argentine-amethyst egg-shaped mist, whilst the overpowering perfume again came to me. In spite of this, I took two exposures, the space of time being perhaps three minutes, and then the vision faded, though neither it nor the scent completely disappeared for quite a time.

When the negatives were developed I quite expected to find the mist there, but it was not so; I had unfortunately underexposed the film and had later to return to the cave.*

When we again talked I realized that his eyes were quite different to those of most other Indians. The pupils I had at first thought to be brown were of changing shades, as though reflecting the colours around us, and, as with the guru of whom he then reminded me, there was about him the scent of the lotus, of which I had been half conscious for some time. Then as I looked at his upturned hands, I noticed the brown lines on his pink palms; that all those which are to the palmist so very

*And of this second visit I must tell of an amazing experience. I took four coloured photographs with flash bulbs. For the first shot, the setting of the camera was worked out on the formula based on the distance from the sadhu and the flash power of the lamp. Before taking the second one, I looked up to discover that the light was brighter, and forgetting that I was using a flash, stopped down; this also happened for the third and fourth picture. When they were processed, only the first picture—the frontispiece of this book—was perfect, the others becoming gradually under-exposed. But my companion using a camera loaded with black and white film and taking advantage of my flashes, was unconscious of any change in the light and did not stop down; all four of his pictures were perfect. Obviously it was only me, not he nor my camera who saw the aura which was around the cave sadhu.

important, the life line, head line, heart line and so on, were deep and clear. I have never seen such a long life line; what was more unusual was the fact that the other masses of thread lines which appear on the ordinary person's hands were not to be found.

I have never been impressed as much by any sadhu, or for that matter any follower of any faith, as I was by his simple religion and his sincerity, which after many visits and searchings I found to be perfectly genuine.

I left him, promising myself that I would return later, for I saw that he possessed no pure buck-skin upon which to take his seat, and I knew that I must bring him one. Again I found the path down with perfect ease, although many times coming upon a place where the track forked off in two directions, and finally we reached the guru's garden only to find that he was still in meditation and would now probably remain so until darkness fell, perhaps continuing throughout the whole night.

CHAPTER TWELVE

MANY weeks passed before I could again return to Rishikesh, but I brought with me an antelope skin for the girl I had seen "take sanyas" and a large black buck-skin for the sadhu in the cave. He explained that he would be pleased to use it, not because it was laid down in certain holy books that it should be a seat for meditation, but because it was my gift to him and would be more comfortable to sit on than a bare rock or an earth floor.

My visit was for two purposes, the first being to take another picture of the cave sadhu, which I came well prepared for this time, and the second was to meet the guru I afterwards heard spoken of as "the Sage", and by those who studied under him as "the Mahatma", he being the one who lived on the other side of the holy Ganges in the small garden ashram with his many disciples.

When I arrived at his gate I found that he was expecting me, the hundred-years-old sadhu having seen me on the road the previous evening. The disciples had gone down to the feeding centre and we were therefore left alone for some time. I soon discovered that this sage was one who practised a very advanced system of Yoga physical, mental, and breathing exercises; that those who came to him were first instructed in many of the asanas I had already seen demonstrated, after which in the solitude of this mountainside garden ashram they were lifted to a higher plane. He appeared to me to be a more advanced guru than the one I had met on the sacred island, though it is quite possible that had I searched into the learning of the other I should have discovered that their knowledge was equal. I found that they knew each other, had met since my last visit, and that

“the Mahatma” had also talked with many others I knew, the judge-sadhu being among them.

“Yoga,” he explained, “is the subjection of the sensory impulses, self-realization, a method of reintegration. When these impulses have been sought out and conquered, then all mysteries and tribulations will disappear; without question the Yogi finds courage, joy, happiness, power, strength, and wisdom, and although guided by his guru it is the Yogi who does all this himself, guided by his guru but himself placing each step on the Spiritual Path. Only he can eventually join his human spirit with the Supreme Being, but in order to achieve that there is much that he must conquer through his own mind and physical being; this he can do through Samadhi, a state of superconsciousness, and this is not possible until he has awakened the Kundalini.

“Thousands of years ago the sages and adepts worked out a means whereby this was possible. They discovered that within the casket of man was a subtle body; they came to know much about its construction. Later I will describe to you the centres of power known as the Chakras, these are so close to the physical that they are visible to those possessed of clairvoyant sight; then there are the Nadis, the astral tubes which carry astral matter conveying psychic currents. The word Nadi comes from the Sanskrit ‘nad’ which means ‘motion’, and it is through these Nadis that Pranic current—the vital force—moves. Being made of subtle matter they are not visible to the naked eye. These Yoga Nadis must not be confused with the ordinary arteries, veins, and nerves; they are quite different.

“These subtle tubes, Nadi, have a great influence in the physical body. Prana, the actual vital energy, the Nadis, and the Chakras all have gross manifestations and operation in the physical body. The gross nerves and plexuses have a close relationship to the subtle ones, and since these physical centres have this close relationship with the astral ones, those vibrations which the Yogi produces in the physical centres have their response in the astral centres.

“Nadis are all-important to the Yogi. When the Kundalini is

awakened she travels up through the Sushumna Nadi, but this is only possible when the Nadis are pure, and for that reason the first step is to purify the Nadis. The second essential is for the student to have a complete knowledge of the locations, functions, and nature of the main Nadis and the Chakras."

All the Nadis spring from the Kanda, the centre of the astral body, which the *Upanishads* tell us is situated nine digits above the genitals—that is something like twelve inches above the anus. It is the shape of an egg and is covered in membrane.

In the ashram on the other river bank I had learned much that was to be of help to me in grasping the teachings of the Mahatma, many of the asanas I had there been shown being performed in the practice of Kundalini Yoga; the acts I had also seen demonstrated. I told him of these poses which I knew about; it seemed that a few of these were practised by his pupils, but he explained, "In order to obtain the full quality, the utmost value from most of the asanas, it is very necessary to combine with them hand poses, breath control, and utterances of a sacred 'sealing' power."

According to him, the most important of all the asanas to be used by the Yogi when he desires to meditate or concentrate had never been displayed for me.

"Here it is," he said. "It is one which is looked upon with great favour by numbers of Yogis and declared by Siddhas—those who have reached perfection—the best of all the seats. It is called Siddhasana, and since Siddha means 'adept' in Sanskrit, you can rightly conclude that this is the posture which was taken up by the great adepts of Yoga in the past."

Taking up a sitting position, he explained that this asana was particularly compounded for those who wished to become established in celibacy. I afterwards found in a fairly modern book on Yoga the warning that "it is not an asana which should be undertaken by a married man, since it weakens the male in him. It is one to be used only by those who have renounced this world."

And as the sage showed me the position, he explained, "The

Gheranda Sambita describes this asana's position in these words: 'The practitioner who has subdued his passion, having placed one heel on the anal aperture should keep the other heel on the root of the generative organ. Afterwards—that is during meditation and concentration—he should fix his chin upon his chest and, being quiet and straight, gaze at the spot between his eyebrows. This is called Siddhasana and leads to emancipation.' Another great work, the *Goraksha Sambita*, instructs the student to 'hard press the left heel on the Yoni place, and place the right heel on the lingam, thus opening the door of liberation'. Really only different words used by writers of the varying works in describing the same parts of the human body."

A day or so later I carried to him an American book on Yoga which described this asana he considered to be the most important of all. It explained that the pupil should take up the positions as follows. "Bend the left leg at the knee and place the heel at the soft portion of the perineum. Then fold the right leg and place the heel against the pubic bone just above the genitals which should be nicely arranged so that no pressure is felt."

"Doubtless that describes an excellent exercise for one who has no desire to complete the asana and obtain its real value," was the Mahatma's comment, "but it is not the perfect pose as prescribed by the sages of old and passed down to them from the Lord Shiva. It is not one which could be used by those who practise to the full the Kundalini Yogasana, but then we have to appreciate that the writer of that particular book had no desire to find himself brought before a judge by an unhappy wife and charged with having spoilt her husband.

"Perfection in the seat is attained when the body is quite still. It is best that the arms be held straight out with the sides of the palms resting on the knees, the small fingers crooked to touch the root of the thumbs, the other fingers bent, thus ensuring that none of the vital energy, which is known as Prana Vagu, escapes through the finger tips. The Yogi who has practised this asana can remain in the position for many hours; after one hour has passed, he usually closes his eyes to prevent too much strain

upon the muscles. This is a wonderful strengthener of both heart and lungs, and with the resultant deeper and slower breathing the digestion is regulated, and diseases of the heart, colds, fevers and nightmares are cured." I was beginning to wonder if I was again in for a repetition of the descriptions of the many mixed cures to be had from these asanas, and for one moment thought that he might even start to explain the remaining dozens of asanas. He went on, "With the practice of Siddhasana the circulation is stimulated and energy is activated, since there then takes place a rapid stimulus as a result of the awakening of the Kundalini."

Kundalini, which is spoken of as a goddess, he described as a mysterious power, an energy, a force which pervades the whole universe and which is contained within the individual body, remaining dormant and lying like a sleeping serpent in three and a half coils in a cavity close to the base of the spine with her head blocking a channel, "which is finer than a spider's thread", known as the Sushumna and running straight up the spine to the crown of the head, to the Brahma-randhra.

The Chakras, he went on to explain in the same flowery language that he had by that time drifted into (and which I found unusually difficult to follow, having to sort out that which was to me the verbiage and retain that which was material), are to the ordinary person invisible force-centres which are known to exist in the physical body, although those who possess a degree of clairvoyance are able to see them in the etheric double. To them they appear as saucer-like depressions on the surface of the body.

I afterwards discovered that the various schools of Yoga varied to a slight degree as to the position in which these centres are to be found in the subtle body, but he maintained that the Mulandhara Chakra—the Root Chakra—is located at the base of the spine, between the reproductory organ and the anus, being two fingers distance from each, and here, in what I had before heard referred to as "the Yoni", Kundalini sleeps.

Although in Sanskrit the word Chakra signifies a wheel, he spoke of them as lotus, the Mulandhara being one with four

petals, alternately orange and orange-red in their colour. When the Kundalini rises, these four petals vanish. And, quoting from *Shiva Samhita*, he went on, "This centre is called Kula, which means the womb; it shines like gold; within it is to be found the Swayambhu linga, which is the Self-born symbol. There is to be found the Siddha, the Realized Being, named Dviranda, the double-egged. In the middle of this lotus is the Yoni, and within it the Kundalini or Coiled Energy. Above it is the shining Kama-bija—The Seed of Lust, which hovers like a flame. The wise man who meditates upon this Chakra realizes the Darduri, the Attainment which enables him to travel through space." According to other works "the seeker also acquires learning in speech and poetry, together with skill and the qualities required for organization".

Each of the Chakras had its own deity. Brahma the Creator, the "Lord of Vastness" riding upon a swan, being the deity of the Mulandhara Chakra.

Next, he explained the second centre which is called the Svadishthana Chakra, and is situated at the root of the reproductive organ, saying that "this lotus has six petals; its colour is pure blood-red. The Devata is the goddess Rakini. Within this Chakra is a space much like the moon crescent or the conch shell. The colour of this is white. The one who meditates upon this Chakra and meditates upon the Devata need have no fear of water, he gains perfect control over that element, he obtains so many psychic powers together with intuitional knowledge and a perfect and complete control over his senses." And according to one ancient work, "The Yogi becomes possessed of the full knowledge of the astral entities. He becomes the conqueror of death."

The third centre from the root is the Manipura Chakra which is situated at the navel or solar plexus, receiving its primary force with ten radiations, thus dividing itself into ten petals, the colours being a blending of red and green—"like darkening clouds, which clear and take on a golden tinge". Within it there is a triangular form which is red, and here rests the Seed of Fire.

The presiding deity is Vishnu, the goddess Lakshmi—the Supremely Virtuous. He who concentrates upon this Chakra becomes free from all pain and disease; he can acquire hidden treasures. The *Gheranda Sambhita* assures us that “even though he may be thrown into a burning fire he will remain alive without fear of death” and *Shiva Sambhita* says that “all desires will be fulfilled and time defeated. The seeker can enter into other people’s bodies. He knows medicinal plants. He gains the power to make gold and silver.”

Next comes the fourth centre, the fourth lotus, the Anahata Chakra which is at the heart and corresponding to the Cardiac Plexus in the physical body. With twelve petals, it is flaming red in colour. The presiding deity is Isha and the goddess is Kakini. He who concentrates upon this Chakra gains knowledge beyond compare. He is able to see past, present, and future, with power to hear from afar and to see distant and subtle things. He can wander through space. He obtains cosmic love and all the other divine qualities.

The fifth centre of force is the Vishuddha Chakra which is situated in the laryngeal, at the throat, with its sixteen divisions or petals silver-blue and gleaming. The Devata is the goddess Shakini. “He who ever concentrates on this centre becomes a scholar of the Sacred Knowledge, a prince among Yogis, the *Shiva Sambhita* tells us,” the Mahatma explained, and went on, “The Lord Shiva has said, ‘In this place is found the third linga, the emblem of the Fourth Stage which is my own self, the Giver of Liberation. By merely concentrating upon it the Lord of Yogis becomes identified with me’ and a few verses before this he had said, ‘If the anger of the Yogi who has established himself in this centre is aroused, then most certainly will the three worlds tremble.’”

The Ajna Chakra which is the sixth centre, is between the two eyebrows, and said by some to be white, by others its two petals are seen to be, one, pale rose, the other a mauve shade. The presiding deity is the Supreme Lord Shiva, the goddess Hakini. “This centre is called the centre of command. ‘He who, keeping

it secret, meditates on the Centre of Command, sees all the results of his actions in previous births destroyed without difficulty," said the Mahatma, again quoting from an old scripture, and then he went on, "The Yogi who meditates on this centre at the time of his death, dissolves into the Supreme Being when the life-breath leaves him." This is the centre upon which the sight is fixed when the Yogi takes up many of the seated asanas for meditation and concentration, it will be remembered.

"And finally we reach the Brahmarandhra, the Crown Chakra, the principal aperture, the lotus with one thousand petals, the dwelling place of the human soul. This is the place which is soft on the head of the newborn child. This is the Chakra which is the last to be awakened. Though all the Chakras were originally the same size, as man advanced upon the Spiritual Path, so it has developed until the heads of some men are almost covered by it."

"And what is its colour?" I asked the Mahatma.

"The thousand petals which form this Chakra appear as though they contain all the prismatic hues, but the whole effect is deep amethyst."

He then exclaimed dramatically "By bathing in the topmost, the Brahmarandhra, the Yogi at last obtains liberation."

After a minute or so he went on, "But before the Kundalini can penetrate through the Chakras she must first be awakened. There are certain muscular contractions and mental concentrations known as Bandhas, and certain gestures called Mudras which are laid down in our holy books and practised by the Yogi for this purpose. They take many years to master, and I have to impress upon you that they must not be attempted without having a guru present.

"In the *Gheranda Sambita* there are twenty-five Bandhas and Mudras laid down. By explanation and demonstration I will show you a few of these in order that you may learn how to awaken the goddess Kundalini and cause her to move upwards. Only by a combination of physical contortions, terrific concentration—inwards—of the mental faculties, complete control

over the Nadis so that Prana can be driven in the right direction, can this become possible, though. Every effort is made by the Yogi to reach that state when he can obtain control over his gross body, his earth body, and also his subtle body so that through them he can release his spirit.

“Yet before you can possibly understand my demonstrations, and my explanations of them, you must first know something of the subtle body and its energies. It is generally accepted in the outer world that the human being can be divided into two parts which are the body and the soul; but that is not so. We Yogis know that there are three elements contained in the living human being; the gross body, the spirit of Self, and also the subtle body. The spirit is but a tiny part of the Supreme Being, indivisible, although it is enclosed within the human. It is contained within seven casings, six of which pertain to the subtle body, the seventh is the gross body. This subtle body remains when the gross body dies and when it is destroyed; it lives through all the reincarnations. The subtle body and the gross body are connected at several points, these being the Chakras, and here the subtle nerves of the subtle body are connected to the physical nerves, and here it is that they receive the reactions of the sense organs, and pass on to the body the orders of the conscious and the reaction of the subtle body.

“Next I must tell you something about Prana. Prana is the sum total of all the energy manifest in the universe, it is subtle, unseen. Breath is the external manifestation of Prana; it is gross, you can smell breath, you can also see it with the naked eye when a man’s warm breath meets the cold air of the mountains. By the control of the gross breath, the Yogi can direct and also control the subtle Prana. Once you can gain control of Prana you can control the mind, for the mind cannot work without it. Prana is the sum total of all the latent forces which are hidden within men and are everywhere around us. Heat, electricity, light, they are the manifestations of Prana. Prana is related to the mind, through the mind to the will, through the will to the individual soul, and so to the Supreme Being.

“The seat of Prana is one, but it has many functions to perform and is divided up into ten vital energies, of which five are most important and connected with the Chakras. They are given different names according to their special functions. Prana is breathing, its region the chest; Apana is excreting, its region the anus; Vyana is circulation of the blood, its region the entire body; Udana is coughing, its region the throat; Samana is digesting, its region the navel. The sub-prana’s functions and reflexes cover eructation and hiccupping; blinking; hunger, thirst; assimilation, decomposition of the body. But all these are subtle energies. Prana is not seen nor is it heard, it has no scent like air which passes out from the gross body. By controlling breathing you can control the various functions of the body. You can control and develop the body, the mind, the soul. The method by which Prana is controlled by regulation of the breath is called Pranayama, and through this you can control your character and consciously harmonize the universal individual life with the cosmic life.

“The subtle channels through which these energies flow are called the Nadis; the most important of these is Sushumna, the thread-like channel which is situated inside the spinal column. The next in importance are Ida and Pingala, corresponding in the physical body to the right and left sympathetic chains; Ida starts from the right testicle and ends in the left nostril; Pingala starts from the left testicle and ends in the right nostril. There are seventy-two thousand of these subtle channels throughout the body carrying the vital energies.

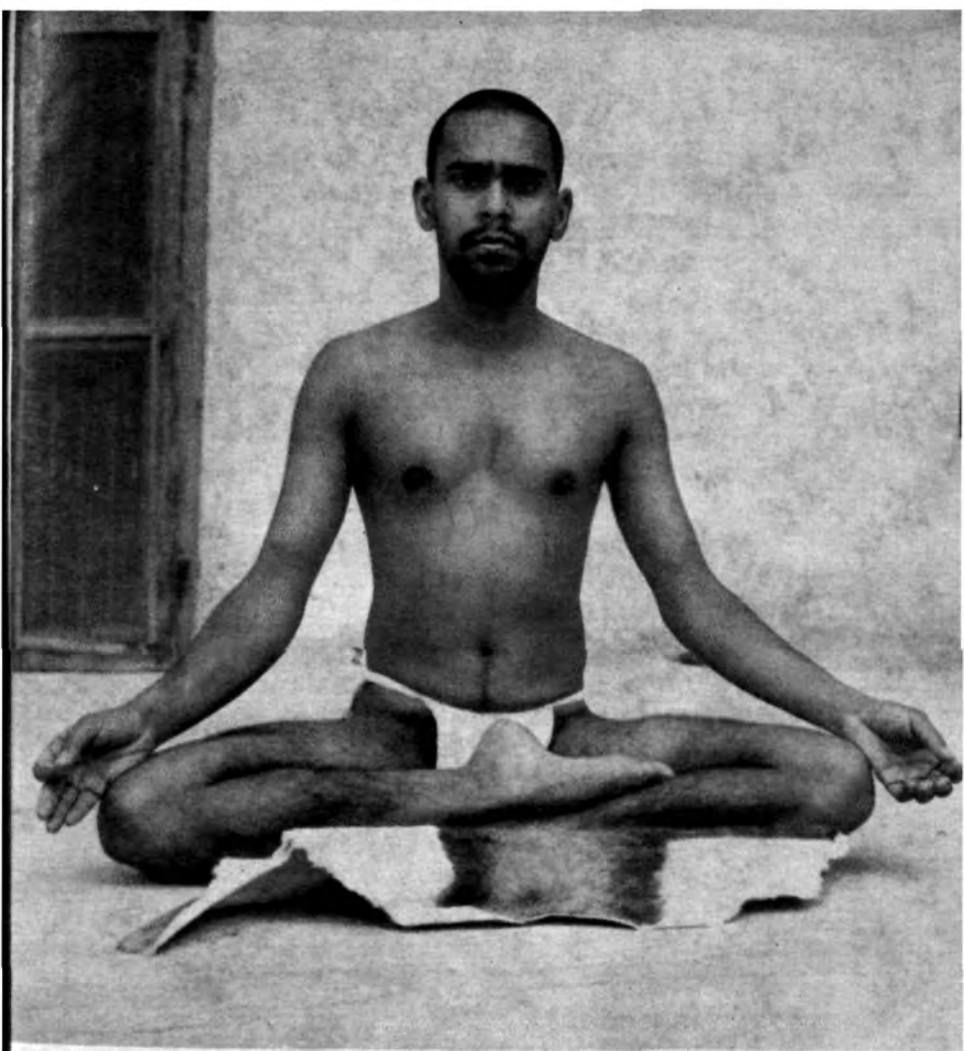
“You must appreciate that the breath which moves in the gross physical body and the Prana which moves in the subtle body are so connected that they act and react one upon the other; they are interwoven, they run side by side with each other, and thus we are able to assist, if not control, the subtle body to an extent by physical exercise, and act upon it by mental concentration.”

I then had to agree with the Mahatma that what he had told me was quite sufficient to absorb in one day and he suggested

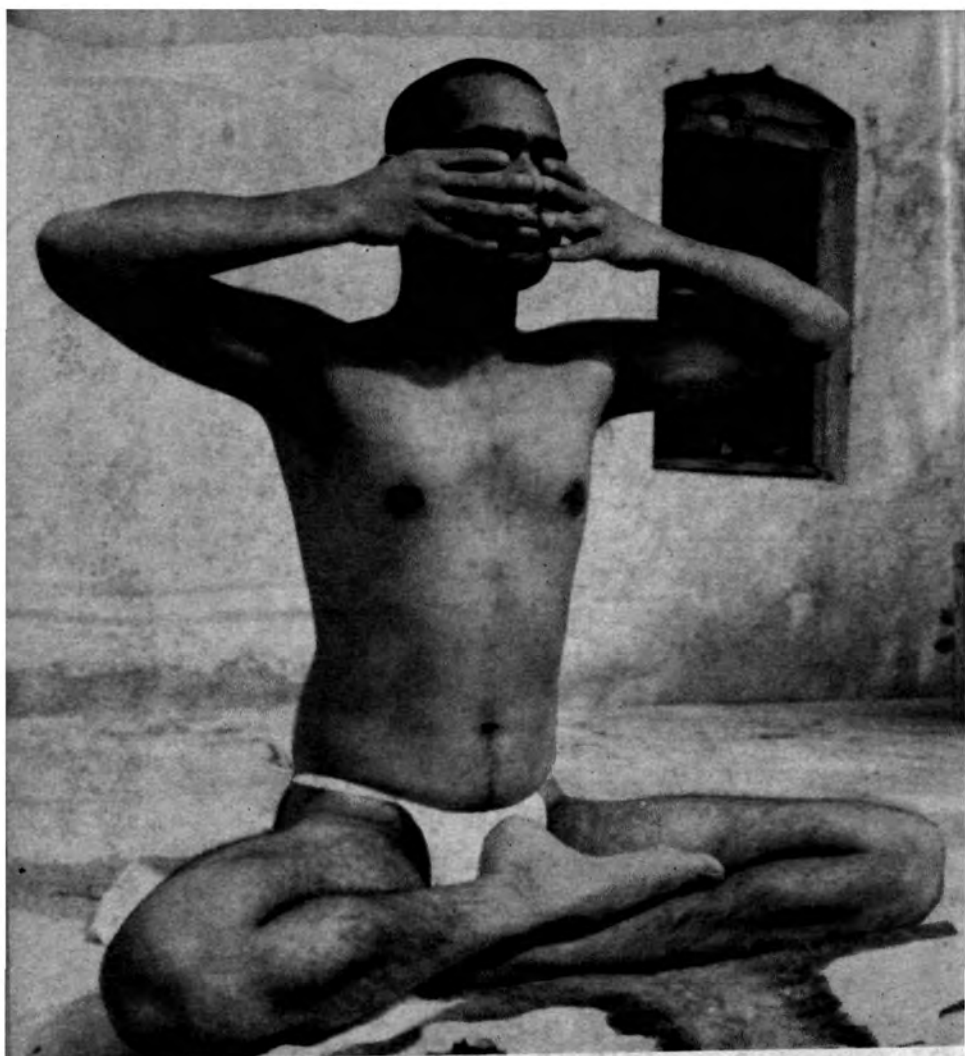
that the following morning I should come back at the same hour, when he would disclose to me certain "most secret acts and controls" as he called them, of which I had perhaps not heard of nor imagined possible, but which must be undertaken before a student can perform the more powerful Bandhas and Mudras.

We left the Mahatma's garden together with his most senior disciple, and followed the racing crystal-clear little stream as it turned off towards the "abodes" of those who lived outside the garden. They were but a few hundred yards away, but the air was so different there; in the garden it was cool but still, held by the overshadowing spreading trees; the homes of the disciples were against the hillside, but when I reached the place I found that at some time a great stone bungalow had stood on the site, and but for a few flowering shrubs, the space was open, surrounded by many trees, with the little stream running through what had once been an artificial course. But now Mother Nature had taken a hand and, bringing it back to herself, made it beautiful. The "abodes" were what little remained of the great bungalow, the roofs of the larger rooms having fallen in and become overgrown. These were the smaller rooms and closets, their ruins covered and made delightful by the creepers and green moss which had spread over the rocks and stones with which they had been made, and these had become mellowed to soft and soothing shades.

The rooms contained as little as do any adepts' homes; a raised hard wooden bed, a brass bucket, a begging bowl, and a book. It is easy for the sadhu to pick up his all and move on when he feels that the gods so desire. Yet here and there were signs that those who lived there had put out some effort to make the place home, with a pathway edged with white Shiva stones; a few flowering plants growing close to the entrance of the cave-like room, from which doorway he who dwelt there could gaze across and over the trees which spread down the hillside, and there find the goddess Ganga, clear and blue and cool, flowing past. On the other side, the temple of the large



Siddhasana—the seat of the adept



The Yoni Mudra

ashram stood out blue-white among the trees, the clang and ring of the bells sounding very close in the quiet air.

When I arrived the following day I found that the Mahatma had with him two or three of his disciples; he invited me to join them, and then explained that before the Yogi can perform the Mudra known as Khechari, it is necessary for him to lengthen his tongue sufficiently to permit him to turn it backwards so that it may close the cavity at the back of the palate. In the preliminary stage, he is instructed to so lengthen the tongue that its tip can touch the space between the two eyebrows. But in order to do this it is necessary to cut the tendon which holds the tongue in the mouth.

I watched the Mahatma do this to one of the disciples who sat perfectly still and quite conscious as, with a sharp knife (made, as laid down in the sacred scripture, "the shape of a cactus leaf"), a hair's-thickness cut was made. I have little doubt that it was most painful, the more so when he rubbed in a mixture of powdered rock salt and Myrobalan to ensure that the two cut edges would not again join. This operation, the guru performs upon his disciple once a week, and by the end of six months the tongue is completely free. But this is not all; cutting the tendon at the base of the tongue will not lengthen it, and so when this is finished, the student is instructed in "milking the tongue". This he does by gripping the tip and drawing it out, then stretching it in all directions; at first he is able to reach the tip of the nose; that can even be done after "milking" by one who has not had the tendon at the base of the tongue cut, as was then demonstrated to me by another disciple who I suspect was hoping to undertake the Mudra without operation. I was assured that very little retching is experienced as the Yogi advances from the tip of the nose to the brow position, and that it was soon overcome with practice. The Mahatma's tongue was long and thin like a serpent's; the sight of it appeared to encourage his disciples, who treated him as little less than a god, so that I was indeed surprised to find one among them who had not yet submitted to the cut of the cactus-shaped knife. I can well believe.

as I have read or heard somewhere since, that after three years' pulling the tongue could "reach the hair line of the forehead, the ear holes, and the hollow of the neck". And now I can also imagine that it would be perfectly easy for the Yogi to swallow his tongue.

The Mahatma was silent, neither he nor his disciples moved. I was wondering if this was a period for prayer, when he broke the silence with "Now I will tell you of the most secret of all the controls. Much of my teaching to my disciples I give to them in the words of the great ones who scribed the words of wisdom many thousands of years past. First, I must explain to you that the most powerful energy contained in the human body is Ojas; this is a subtle power which is stored in the brain, and the more a man possesses of it the greater is his power, the greater his intellect, the greater his spiritual strength. Whilst one man may speak with a lovely voice, use beautiful language, express delightful thoughts, he may not impress his listeners; yet another man may have none of those qualities, but the words he speaks remain in the minds of those who have heard him and they seek to learn more from him. That is the power of Ojas.

"We Yogis maintain that if only that human vehicle which carries the seed from man to woman, and which we have named Bindu, is controlled, being either prevented from being spent or reabsorbed, then it will be drawn up into the brain to become Ojas, and we therefore concentrate upon achieving that goal.

"It has been written, 'The falling of Bindu is life. Therefore with all his power a man should hold his Bindu.' He who wastes his seed or Bindu, becomes weak in body and mind: he is a slave to anger, to laziness, to fear; his memory shortens, his blood loses its richness and he becomes pallid; he ages prematurely. Whereas he who retains his Bindu, and he who uses that power contained within him in order to regain his Bindu when it is spilled, will enjoy long life, his brain will always be alert and he will be able with ease to concentrate and meditate.

"A Mudra known as the Vajroli is practised by the Yogi who desires to retain or reabsorb his Bindu so that it may be

converted in Ojas. It is written in *Shiva Samhita* that 'at the time of giving out his water he should with inner strength draw up the air and, giving out very little water, draw it up again according to the instructions of the guru. Practising this always will help towards controlling the Bindu and lead to great attainment. This is a Mudra which takes many months to perfect; there are but few who have become great adepts in the act, but those who have, even whilst they sleep, possess such control over mind and body that none of their Bindu will spill. The Yogi who is successful in this practice has a good smell emanating from his body, this being like the scent of the lotus blossom; a perfect peace surrounds him. To those who with clairvoyant sight can see his aura, it appears clear and tinged with mauve.'

For over half an hour he quoted those verses from the sacred scriptures of the Hindus which pertain to the Yogi, with his principle disciple demonstrating where he thought necessary; every verse, every demonstration being followed by the warning of the closest secrecy, he explaining that the written word was useless without a demonstration of the act, and that without the constant attention of a guru, it was highly dangerous, both physically and mentally to perform the Mudra.*

"Now I will explain to you the Yoni Mudra," he said. "First take up the Siddhasana posture, with the one heel closing the anal aperture, and with the other, after withdrawing the male organ into the pubic arch, hold it hidden within that place, thus sealing both those lower exits from the body." This latter amazing exercise I had before read about in Sir John Woodroffe's famous book *The Serpent Power*. He went on, "By using both hands, each taking one side of the face, we are able to

*I have since talked over what I then heard and saw with many eminent medical men. They are not convinced that this conversion from the physical to the subtle is possible; they maintain that the act is nothing more than a physical-cum-mental retention which is much like the method of birth control which was practiced in France for some years, and agree with the Mahatma that its practice can easily affect both the body and the brain. For that reason, and the fact that this is neither a medical nor an advanced book on Yoga, I have decided that the Mudra be left as I have already explained it. The true seeker will from my previous paragraphs be able to visualize the acts which are attempted by the Yogi.

completely shut off the world and become alone; the thumbs close the ears, the index fingers seal the eyes, press close the nostrils with the middle fingers, and the mouth is held tight by the ring fingers holding the upper lip and the little fingers the lower lip. Then try to contract the Yoni place wherein dwells the Kundalini. The Yogi now inhales Pranavayu and unites it with Apanavaym, awakening the Kundalini.

“Maha Mudra is that most important of all the Mudras, one which cleanses the passage to the Sushumna. Sitting on the ground the left heel is placed at the anus, gently pressing it; then stretching out the right leg to full length, bend forward and grasp the big toe of the foot between thumb and forefinger; with the head close to the knee, press the chin firmly against the chest and fix the gaze between the eyebrows.”

I found that there are many asanas which will awaken the Kundalini, for instance that in which the hands are placed on the ground through the folded legs, the breath retained while gently banging the buttocks on the ground. It seemed that the difficulty was not the awakening of the Kundalini so much as to clear the way for her to rise through the Chakras. In one Bandha she is stifled, and in order to escape rises up.

One ageing Anglo-Indian I know of practised the Virareethakarani Mudra. He had followed the instructions contained in a book. “Placing the head on the ground, raise the legs up straight. Rest the elbows on the ground and support the buttocks with the hands remaining steady. The sun dwells in the root of the navel and moon in the root of the palate. By this Mudra the sun and the moon change places. On the first day, do it for only one minute, gradually increasing the period to three hours. After six months wrinkles on the face and grey hairs on the head will disappear.”

But something must have gone wrong, for after forcing himself to complete the six months—such was his faith—, he had to give up. He had aged six years in that six months, his hair had become quite white, his eyes deep sunken, the wrinkles were increased tenfold.

During the next few days, a great many Mudras and Bandhas were explained and shown to me, while extracts from the ancient scriptures were quoted. Often the disciples would please their master by joining in and repeating them with him; occasionally they would look up at me, as though I also should know them.

It seemed to me to be an age before the Mahatma eventually reached that stage of his teachings when he thought fit to tell the purpose behind his instruction in the Mudras and the Bandhas after performing the cleansings and the acts, and then it was all said in so few words, he explaining that when the goddess Kundalini awakens she starts hissing, rising up the Sushumna through the Chakras. At the first terrific effort of willpower used by the Yogi during his meditation she may only reach the first Chakra, but this she pierces, "the lotus flower which was before turned downwards now facing upwards". She may then return to her base. In the next effort on the part of the Yogi she will rise again, passing through the first Chakra, maybe to the Heart Chakra, which, once she has pierced it, she makes her new home; and so, with the efforts of the Yogi, she ascends. "As she enters each Chakra there is an enhancement of life. Eventually she reaches the topmost centre, the Sahasrara lotus with its thousand petals. Here she enjoys the bliss of union with her lord, Paramashiva; as she returns she gives back to each of the Chakras its own specific faculties, but now much enhanced."

He then concluded his talk by saying, "Here are the words of the *Shatchakra Nurupana*: 'In her subtle state, lustrous like lightning and fine like a lotus fibre, she goes to the gleaming flame-like Shiva, the Supreme Bliss, and of a sudden produces the Bliss of Liberation. The beautiful Kundalini drinks the excellent red nectar issuing from Para Shiva, and returns from there, where shines Eternal and Transcendent Bliss in all its glory. . . . The Yogi who has gained tranquility of mind makes offering to the Devatas in the six Chakras. . . .'"

That the Mahatma is a great teacher, I have not the slightest doubt, but I did feel that before one could go to him and seek this advanced knowledge and learning one would need to have

been for some years under a guru who took his disciples from the very early stages; one who had been as the century-old guru was, years before, to the Mahatma himself.

He was so very patient with me, never for one moment letting me imagine that the question I asked him was near elementary, but I was conscious of my ignorance all the time. Those who were his disciples did not appear to me as "ordinary men" as had the monks in the great ashram on the other side of the river. It was obvious to even the casual observer that they were hardly of this world all the time. I knew that some of them had been enjoying a state when they "got behind their own minds" for hours on end. They did not appear to be terribly "happy in their work".

The Mahatma was different though; he always seemed to be in touch with the world. I kept the appointments he had made for me, and therefore did not see him during his hours of meditation or when he was undertaking the different poses, gestures, and contractions of Mudras and Bandhas.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WHEN I had to explain that my stay in Rishikesh was nearing its close, the Mahatma appeared to be surprised; it seemed as though he imagined that I was intending to remain there for some time—as though he might even have dreamed of a new disciple. Then as I bade him farewell that day he said kindly, “If you still seek further knowledge, do not forget there is always your good friend, the one who was before a judge. He is very learned in the occult, and will, because of his past life, be able to pick out those portions of our teachings which apply to this present world.”

This most excellent suggestion I at once followed up while on the way home by calling on the ex-judge in his little tree-shaded cottage at the end of a pathway which led up behind a great monastery set on the hillside. Standing before the four little white buildings which he had built there a few years back, so providing shelter for three others such as he, I saw that like the abodes of the disciples of the Mahatma, they also looked towards the sacred Ganges but from the other bank. Between the river and themselves were the dull red roofs of the monastery buildings below, then marshlands lush with emerald-green grass, and between these and the great river a wide spread of smooth white “Shiva” stones.

The old man came out and welcomed me to his “humble abode”, which was much more comfortably furnished than any of the rooms I had yet seen used as shelters for sadhus. We talked for some time before he showed me his wonderful library, one which completely covered two of the walls of his room and was threatening another. There were scores of volumes, not only copies of the ancient writings and of Yoga teachings, but

also a number pertaining to other religions, and set on one side were books written by "newcomers to the field" as he called them, they being the leaders of new "religions" mostly discoveries either from India or America; all these he had read and studied, for parts were underlined, margins had masses of neat pencil comments, and pages of close written notes were tucked in the back of each book.

"There is such a large number of schools of occult learning and Yoga teaching," he said with a sigh, and then ran off a long list of their names, many of which I had never before heard. "They each have their own pet theories as to how man can achieve that one purpose for which they believe he was sent to this earth—that being, through their own bodies to secure re-integration with the Supreme Being of which their individual spirit is but a part. Their efforts to attain this are, physically, through abstinences, breath control, observances, and postures; and, mentally, by concentration, meditation, contemplation, and identification—all of which are made possible only after they have completely withdrawn the mind from all external objects such as sight, sound, smell, and feeling. In some schools of thought there are the different purifications to be undertaken, there are the various body gestures and the strange muscular contractions which are brought into play in that great effort to control and then force the subtle energies and the power which lies latent within each of us to do as we command.

"Many of these acts, asanas, and so on you will by now have either heard about or seen performed, but there are other observancies which must be undertaken; you cannot possibly have learned of them all. Over the years, as you can see from my precious library, I have studied hard and delved deeply into the occult teachings, and the more I read the more I realize how very little I really do know.

"To me, the act of concentration and meditation has at times been nothing more than at first concentrating upon the wondrous words of the sages of old, then searching for their inner meaning, since in so many cases have I found that there lies

buried an inner meaning, then having decided in my own mind what has been brought down to me, and having realized the beauty of the words or the wonder and wisdom of that which was being unfolded, I have meditated upon it sometimes for hours.

“So you see, we each have our own ways in which to concentrate and meditate. There are some you pass upon the road or meet with in the hills who endeavour to reach their goal by concentrating upon a particular god, they having formed their own mind-picture of him; with many, it may be just a copy of the picture of that god displayed in the little shops, with most it will be one particular god image remembered by them in a temple in some place. They concentrate hard upon it, completely oblivious of all that is going on around them—it is for that purpose that many sadhus take themselves off to the jungles, the forests, and the open spaces where they cannot be distracted or disturbed.

“Others, by the repetition of the sacred words, are helped along their way, the mind is trained to concentrate by the utmost care being taken in the pronunciation of the word, the consciousness is kept awake by the movement of the hands over the rosary beads, for at no time may the Yogi fall into a state of unconsciousness; he must be awake and conscious all the time, his thoughts are inward though, his is an inner-consciousness; that is what he first seeks.

“Finally, when he comes to contemplate, meditate, and eventually concentrate upon the goddess Kundalini, his control and power over his body and mind is such that he can force the goddess by sheer effort of concentration up through the Chakras one after the other until she reaches the Supreme Bliss. And he will afterwards tell how with his ‘inner-sight’ he saw each of the Chakras lift their lotus blossom heads to show their faces; that to him it was as though he drew the goddess Kundalini up to each, for after she had reached the one, there to rest a while, he concentrated upon that Chakra which was set higher within himself.”

I then asked a question which, as I was half-way through it, I thought might sound too practical, almost irreverent. "How long does the Kundalini's journey from her seat to the Crown Chakra take?"

And I was frankly amazed when he replied "I have before asked and searched for that answer. I eventually found it. It takes about an hour. Only those who have endeavoured to concentrate upon forcing the Kundalini up to the Heart Chakra can possibly imagine the terrific mental effort which is required during that hour to complete the journey, though.

"But to reach that stage of perfection requires many years of practice and concentration even when the Yogi is studying under and guided by an excellent guru. I have read books written by those who claim to have reached that stage of perfection within six months. I am far from fitted to deny them, but I find it extremely difficult to believe that they really did reach the final goal.

"As the Yogi progresses along his course towards that final reintegration, he conquers many things, among them the laws of nature. These supra-human powers are called the 'Attainments'. There are eight principal or main physical attainments, and thirty subsidiary ones. The eight supra-human powers gained by the practice of Yoga are fully manifest only when breath control is complete. You should know of these, but I will not recite to you all the details, it will be sufficient that you know of their being possible.

"First, there is Anima, the power to become as small as an atom. Through this attainment the Yogi can become just as small as he wishes; he can see the smallest things, 'even the inner structure of the atom', and they appear to him as clearly as if they were normal in size. Next, there is Laghima, the power to become without weight. The Yogi does this by developing within each cell of his body a centrifugal force which is as strong as the force of gravity contained in the world. Acts of levitation, which you have no doubt seen, are simple when the Yogi knows how."

I had myself seen an act of levitation performed by a Yogi, but it was not absolutely complete, the tip of the centre finger was his support, he declaring that but for his hold upon the earth by that finger tip he would float away into the heavens—which was something I should have thought he would have wanted to accomplish, but according to him he was not yet ready for the final ascension.

“The third accomplishment is known as Mahima, the power to become immensely large, this enables the Yogi to see vast things, the workings of the solar systems or the universes. Then we come to Garima, which is to become very heavy, a power which enables the Yogi to make not only his own body, but any object he wishes, as heavy as a mountain of iron. Some of the books exclude this particular attainment from their list and in its place insert Kamavasayita, which is perfect and complete satisfaction, a mental attainment. The fifth attainment is Prapti, which means the power to be transported anywhere at any time the Yogi desires. The next is Prakamya; merely by the thought to see one’s wishes immediately fulfilled. *Shiva Sambhita* says that this also means to become invisible or visible at will. The seventh attainment is called Vashitva, by which the adept has the power to control all creatures and elements. According to *Shiva Sambhita*, this power extends over any of the creatures of the three worlds, whether belonging to the past, present, or future. He can control the wind, the rain, and all the other elements. Then we come to the last of the attainments. This is called Ishitva, meaning Lordship; by this, the adept in his unrivalled glory rules over all things. He has power over the formation, existence, and dissolution of all beings and all things; he can create beings, make them live and disappear not only in the past and the present, but in the future. He appears as a god.

“I will just rapidly run through some of the subsidiary attainments, those particular ones which I know will astonish you. The power of thought-reading; of knowledge of previous births; of things which are not only on the other side of the world, but those which are subtle; of the heavenly world; of the

stars and their movements; the power to leave and re-enter the body; of the free movement of the mind outside the body. Those will be sufficient to show you how much there is to be learned, how much is contained within those books of the ancients.

“Leaving these, we come to the Mantras, which translated is a ‘holy word’, a means of concentrating the mind. It is with the help of Divine names and the principal holy word represented by the hermetic formulae—the Mantras, as well as by the principal forms which are represented by mystic designs—the Yantras—, that man is enabled to bring under control his mental agitation which until stilled hides from him the Supreme Being. There is practised a form of rhythmic repetition of a Mantra; this is called Japa. Repetition of hermetic formulae is best carried out with the aid of a rosary so that no mistakes may be made.

“The Mantras were composed by the seers and sages of old to whom the gods had made known that there was a secret power contained within certain sounds.

“The greatest of all the Mantras, is the single syllable OM, one which is pronounced AUM. It is described as the Syllable of Obeisance, and represents the highest, the most abstract aspect of Divinity. When this syllable is spoken, either audibly or silently, the mind must be made to dwell deeply upon its meaning. It was known to the great adepts of old: the law-makers like Manu; they knew of it as the most supreme, the most powerful of all Mantras. This sacred syllable which is symbolic of Vedic knowledge has been referred to as ‘The Root of Eternal Wisdom’. They have said that to concentrate upon the Deity and speak this sacred word, will cause the Deity to appear before the adept.

“Quite recently I was reading of Narada, the mighty god-intoxicated sage of ancient India who had attained all the powers which have been declared possible to us by the great gurus of Yoga philosophy either by their written or spoken words.”

Then looking at my watch I saw that I must leave him, but he promised to wander along later to enjoy with me from my bungalow veranda the sun setting behind the mountains. I had

felt rather guilty as I sat with him, and after a while began to wonder if by chance I had arrived at his room at a time he usually set aside for meditation, but if I had done so he showed no signs of being disturbed by me.

Later we sat as before and watched the glorious sunset, our eyes at times turning to the rushing waters of the goddess Ganga, her wonderful tresses glistening and changing from gold to silver with the fading day, just as they had done since man had first discovered her beauty, just as they would continue to do until the end of the world. The glittering bronze-green gown of the mountain goddess was now shimmering in the autumn evening breeze which warmly touched the leaves of the trees, her covering; the girdle had retained its lovely lustre all through the months that I had been away.

Neither of us spoke until the sun had disappeared and its red glow gone, then while I drank my coffee and he sipped his glass of milk and munched the arrow-root biscuits I had brought with me after discovering his weakness for them, we talked of my return to Delhi, of the possibility of my returning to Rishikesh for Christmas and bringing with me a copy of the film *The Conquest of Everest*, which I had pondered over showing to these sadhus who had spoken of those great mountains with such reverence, wondering if they might be not too happy that man had at long last reached the summit of the highest peak of them all, a feat which certain of the great gurus had long declared impossible.

Then I switched the conversation to his interesting library, saying that at Christmas time I should very much like to contribute a volume to his collection if he would let me know of one he particularly desired, and explaining that he need have no fear in mentioning the title of one which was considered difficult to get, since there were some excellent booksellers in Oxford, and I ran accounts with most of them.

But when he spoke it was as though he half-answered me and was part lost in his thoughts, saying, "You know, my friend, as I now read through my many books, which are the collection of

a lifetime, and as I listen to those who dwell in these parts, chat to those who pass through and stay a few days in the monastery in which I have my hut, and then when I lay aside my saffron cloth and wear white in order to again meet those who are my blood brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, and grandsons, I am a little perplexed, I begin to wonder—yes, I wonder . . .” and he was silent for so long that I looked up to see if he had fallen asleep.

He sighed, pulled himself up in his chair, and when he again spoke it seemed to be a different voice, as if a stranger had come and joined us. “It can be of course that I have read too many books,” he exclaimed, “delved too deeply into so many different creeds, and by so doing I have become a little confused—the fruits of having spent too many years of my life on the bench. But as I think about all these teachings, I realize that all creeds, followers of all religions, seek to reach the same beyond. And I wonder, can it be that each and all the teachings are really right, and that just as there may be many roads to the same temple, some who seek the true God find the rough road, others the smooth, some the straight road, others that which wanders?”

Then he took off his spectacles and pointed across the wide river towards the other side saying, “One day very soon I think I shall climb that mountain to seek out and converse with the young sadhu you have talked about, one whose outlook and inner sight have not been for years impregnated and impressed by the concerns of this world. He sounds very interesting to me; you see, the truth is that I am really but a seeker still.”

“Don’t you think he also might be a seeker?” I asked.

“No, my friend, I don’t think he is, or ever was. That is, if by seeker you mean one who searches among the many teachings for that particular one which he feels to be right, who searches just as the disciple will search for so many years to find his own true guru. I am sure that he has always followed the one simple path which was first pointed out to him by his guru who, after placing his feet upon it, left him; since that time he has ignored all others, never deviating from his guru’s teaching.

"You see I cannot forget that you came amongst us as a stranger; you have revealed to me that there have been but two of the many thousands of saffron-robed and sky-clad ones who live and pass through this sacred place who have caused you to at once become conscious of the etheric scent which we believe surrounds those who are pure and those who have been very close to that Supreme Bliss which we all seek. One of those was the guru on the 'sacred island'; the etheric scent and the sight of his clear aura was apparent to you for a short time whilst he was undertaking the Baddha Padmasana: the clear aura and the etheric perfume that you were conscious of with the cave sadhu remained with you for very long, even whilst he spoke to you, whilst you took his photograph sitting in Sukhasana, which is just a comfortable position, he neither concentrating nor meditating. I know that he has made a very great impression upon both your conscious and your sub-conscious minds, even though you have mentioned little about him to me. When, as now, I look into this picture of him, one you took with the aid of a flash, something I doubt if he has ever seen or heard of before, I find no fear in those strange eyes, but my good friend, there is much else to be read in them by those who have an understanding of the occult.

"When you speak of him to those of the outside world there will be many who will doubtless exclaim, 'What a waste of a good life!' But I wonder, is it so? He will have gained much during those ten years of deep meditation and concentration which have passed; he will have travelled far into the higher planes which so few have attained; he will have returned with experiences, impressions, and learning which will be for him to impart to those disciples he is now ready to receive. Yes, I really must one day climb that slope, steep though it may be, and meet with him!"

Then he suddenly changed the subject and asked me when I intended leaving.

"I hope to get away by eight in the morning," I said. "That will allow me to reach Delhi during the early afternoon."

"What a pity that you are having to leave us so soon," he replied, and then, "In but another two weeks time I might have begged a seat with you."

"But why not come now? Two weeks can surely make little difference to you, with a lifetime ahead, and car travel is so much more comfortable than the slow, crowded train."

"Well, maybe I will. Let us see," he exclaimed as he got up to leave me, to return to the solitude of his book-lined room.

But although we waited until nine o'clock the following morning, he did not arrive. I then went back along the road to the monastery and climbed up to his little marigold-fringed bungalow. The door was closed, and the saffron-robed sadhu in the next cottage garden told me that my bespectacled white-bearded friend had left about an hour before and gone farther back up the road to where the ferry crosses to the far side of the holy Ganges, to that place where the almost hidden track leads up to the mountain-top cave.

So it was that we left for the "outside world" alone.

And as we drove along the narrow winding road back to Hardwar, and then for miles along the straight run by the side of the Ganges Canal, I found myself pondering over those many talks and experiences which had left me bewildered and wondering.

As the old man had but the day before reminded me, there had been but two among the thousands dwelling and wandering through those sacred parts who, according to his understanding, had revealed to me any spiritual signs of having advanced to that stage which all of them are seeking. There had been others who had impressed me with their good works and large following—Swarajji for instance. And I wondered, were any of them really on the right road? Or as my aged and wise friend had asked, could it be that all of them were right?

One thing that had impressed itself upon my mind, was the fact that none of those lone gurus went out to seek disciples; the disciples had searched for and discovered them. Another, was the amazing manner in which they all live; surely only in a

country as sympathetic, superstitious, tolerant, and understanding as Mother India could those hundreds of thousands of "holy men" wander around and live without turning a hand, accepting food and gifts as their right, without a sign of gratitude. And finally, did they—among them many intellectuals—really get anywhere with their austerities, asanas, acts, cleansings, meditations, concentrations, and contractions, in that deep search into their own bodies and minds for that which I am positive many really believe is the true heaven to be found there?

I am convinced that there is that something deep within each one of us, a power which is dormant, and also that it can be activated if we do but know how. Why I am so certain, I cannot explain; only by seeing and talking with those who have reached that stage is it possible to arrive at that positive conclusion. Unless I had done this, I am sure that no book could ever have convinced me. One day, I hope to return to dig much deeper. As it is, like the white-bearded bespectacled old sadhu who remains there, I am but a seeker still.

