

## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

**Talks with Sri Aurobindo**, by Nirodbaran; Silver Jubilee Publication of Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir, 15 Bankim Chatterjee Street, Calcutta-12.  
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"Time's accidents are steps in its vast scheme."

Sri Aurobindo (*Savitri*, VI, 2)

"O, 'tis an accident that heaven provides."

Shakespeare (*Measure for Measure*)

THUS, what happened at 2 a.m. in a night of 1938 was both. Sri Aurobindo had an accident; whatever be the physical circumstance causing it, it must have—on a different plane, in his vast scheme of things—a sublime significance. To Nirodbaran and his few confrères, however, it was heaven's providing (perhaps an indelicate designation for an accident but was not the Master all compassion?), and hats off to Nirodbaran—he now shares with us his jealous collection of the harvest of a *yuga*—twelve years' of conversation with Sri Aurobindo.

And here is bounty! "There was not a subject that was not touched, not a mystery that he did not illumine, not a phenomenon that passed unnoticed, humorous or serious, superficial or profound, mundane or mystic. Reminiscences, stories, talks on art and culture, on world-problems [and much more—Sadhana which included things from the action of Supermind to the phenomenon of levitation, Personalities which included Caesar and Shaw, Occultism extending from the Mother's powers to hypnotism—and so on and so forth—*Reviewer*] poured down in an abundant stream from an otherwise silent and reticent vastitude of knowledge and love and bliss," to quote from Nirodbaran's preface.

If the great works of Sri Aurobindo can be described as "Hills peep over hills, and Alps on Alps arise" (Pope), here are his incidental utterances which float around the peaks like clouds, not obscuring but diversifying the grand manifestation. Nevertheless, sharp lightnings are often revealed; we are dazed, startled at times as stark truths strike, only to recover enlightened the next moment.

From the disciples and admirers of Sri Aurobindo, of the present and of the resurgent future, to Nirodbaran is assured a continuous premium of gratefulness, for his two volumes of Correspondence and the present volume of Talks with Sri Aurobindo.

MANOJ DAS



**Sri Aurobindo Circle**, Twenty-third Number, 1967. Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

The Twenty-third Number of the Sri Aurobindo Circle is yet another successful addition to this series of refinedly assorted anthologies, this time with a few of the Mother's current messages and answers, extracts from Sri Aurobindo and his hitherto unpublished letters, the English rendering of one of his few Bengali essays, and five elegant dissertations on themes spiritual, literary and sociological by well-known scholars.

The fresh bunch of a full dozen of Sri Aurobindo's letters, the first stressing the relation and the difference between his message and those of the Gita, the Upanishads etc., the second interpreting the attitude of the ancient mystics to the secret truths in their possession, the third explaining the nature of Chaitanya's experiences, the fourth determining the two necessary conditions for Yoga, the fifth being an interesting document of Sri Aurobindo's ministration to a seeker of a different path, the next five interpreting the various experiences of his disciples, and the last one emphasising the condition which can give spiritual effectivity to our work—the whole collection is to be hailed as a happy annexation to the realm of Aurobindonian lore, along with *The Aryan Ideal and the Three Gunas* (translated from Sri Aurobindo's original Bengali by Arindam Basu), which acquaints us with the Master's insight into the play of *Gunas*—*Sattwa*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*—in various characters as well as in events like the French Revolution.

Jugal Kishore Mukherjee presents the first part (*Sight, More Sight...*) of a projected work of his, where, with his characteristic novel approach he traces "the cycle of the involution of the Sight of Sachchidananda (the *nimilan* or the 'closing in' of the eyes of Lord Shiva according to Indian Puranic mysticism) down to the abysmal Sleep of Matter, followed in its turn by the 'slow evolutionary ascension of sight and light from Matter to the half-lit and half-blind mind of man (the *unmilan* or the 'opening out' of the eyes of Shiva)". He notes that "we are only half way through this ascending march and our climb has to continue till we reach the Solar Supermind and embody its effulgence and power of sight, even in this material world of ours, even in this very earthly body".

*The Viziers of Bassora : A Study* by Prema Nandakumar is a candid discourse on one of Sri Aurobindo's sweet and significant early literary works, and this is followed by the concluding chapter of Sisir Kumar Ghose's book on Sri Aurobindo's Poetry where his able steerage leads us to see how Sri Aurobindo

Lent a vibrant cry to the unuttered vasts,  
And through great shoreless, voiceless, starless breadths  
Bore earthward fragments of revealing thought  
Hewn from the silence of the Ineffable. (*Savitri*)

We come then to the best tribute to Milton in 1967—which should be a significant year in Miltonian studies, being the third Centenary year of the publication



of *Paradise Lost*—in K.D. Sethna's exploration of *The Inspiration of Paradise Lost*. Here is an excellent unravelling of a divine romance—the Muse's wondrous frequentations of a poet whose poetry, to quote Macaulay, "acts like an incantation" and whose "merit lies less in its obvious meaning than in its occult power".

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's reference (in his article "*World Views*"—the last one in the anthology) to George Santayana's anxious wish for "some genius to appear to reconstitute the shattered picture," reminds one of Nathaniel Hawthorne's immortal story *The Great Stone Face*. Like the poet in the story who finally discovered the deliverer whose advent was predicted in an age-old legend, Iyengar recognises the genius of Santayana's dream in Sri Aurobindo.

All this, and two graceful art-leaves carrying two pictures of the Mother too !

MANOJ DAS

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