ESSAY

DIVERSE ESSAYS

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Contents

THE LIBRARY 2
FEAR NOT 4
THE MADMAN 8
THE STAGE 13
THE PEACOCK'S CRY 18
IDLE TALK 23
FIFTEEN ANNAS 27
NEW RAINS 31
SLANDER 36
A SPRING OBSERVANCE 41
THE CLOSED HOUSE 46
AT THE ROAD'S EDGE 49
CHOTA NAGPUR 53
THE VOYAGE OF THE SAROJINI 57

THE LIBRARY

If someone could bind the century-long roar of the great ocean in such a way that it would fall silent like a sleeping infant, then this library might be compared to that silenced immensity. Here language stands still, the current has grown motionless, the undying light of the human soul lies bound in black fetters of letters, imprisoned within paper's cage. What if these should suddenly rise in rebellion, shatter the stillness, burn through the bars of their letters and break out entire! Upon the Himalayas' brow how many floods lie bound within the hard ice—so, within this library, who has bound the floods of the human heart!

Man has bound lightning with a wire of iron, but who knew that he would bind sound within silence. Who knew that he would wrap in paper the sound of music, the heart's hope, the joyous cry of the awakened soul, the divine speech of the sky. Who knew that man would imprison the past within the present. Over the fathomless ocean of time, he would raise a bridge from nothing but a single book at a time.

Within the library we stand at the meeting-place of a thousand roads. Some road has gone to the boundless sea, some road has climbed to the boundless summit, some road has descended into the fathomless depths of the human heart. Run in whatever direction you wish, nowhere will you be checked. Man has bound his own deliverance within so small a compass.

As in a conch-shell one hears the murmur of the sea, so within this library do you not hear the rising and falling of the heart? Here the hearts of the living and the dead dwell side by side in one neighbourhood. Argument and counter-argument live here like two brothers, together. Doubt and faith, search and discovery, dwell here body against body. Here the long-lived and the short-lived carry on life's journey with supreme patience and peace, none neglecting another.

How many rivers, crossing seas and mountains, have brought hither the voice of man; from how many hundreds of years' distance this voice comes travelling. Come, come hither—here the birth-song of light is being sung.

Whatever great soul, having first discovered the realm of immortality, called out on any day to mankind round about him, saying, "You are all children of the deathless, you dwell in a divine abode"—the voice of that great soul echoes through this library, in a thousand tongues, across a thousand years.

Have we, from this corner of Bengal, nothing to say? Have we no tidings to give to human society? Shall Bengal alone stand silent within the world's harmonious song!

Does not our sea, bounded upon its farther shore, tell us something? Does not our Ganges bring down some song of Kailasa from the Himalayan summit? Is there, then, no infinite blue sky above our heads? Has someone erased from thence the eternally luminous scripture of the stars?

From land and from foreign land, from the past and from the present, letters of mankind arrive daily at our door; shall we, in reply, scribble two or four flimsy columns of English news! Every nation is carving its own name upon the canvas of measureless time—shall the Bengali's name be written only on the second page of a petition! The struggle of the human soul against blind fate goes on; the trumpet has sounded, calling the soldiers, in every quarter of the earth—shall we do nothing but carry lawsuits and appeals over the gourds and pumpkins on the trellis above our own courtyard!

For many years silent, the life of Bengal has grown full to overflowing. Let it, in its own tongue, speak once its own word. Joined with the Bengali voice, the song of the world shall grow the sweeter.

Poush, 1292

FEAR NOT

Death is a vast, black, unyielding touchstone. Rubbed against it, every genuine coin of gold in the world is tried.

You love your country truly—its final test is whether you can die for your country. You love yourself truly—its final test, too, is whether you can lay down your life for your own betterment.

Were there not, hanging over the world's head, some universal, all-embracing fear such as this, there would be no way of weighing truth against falsehood, the small against the great and the middling, and seeing them clear in unmixed scales.

Those nations that have been weighed in the scale of death have received their passing marks. They have proved to themselves and to others that they need feel abashed by nothing further. By death alone has their life been tested. The wealthy man's true test lies in his giving; whoever possesses life, his true test lies in the power to give life. Whoever possesses scarcely any life at all is niggardly in dying.

To him who knows how to die belongs the right to joy; to him who conquers, it is fitting to enjoy the spoils. The man who clings with both hands to life's companionable pleasures—to that despised bondsman joy does not throw open her entire treasury; she gives him mere leavings and turns him from the door. But those who, at death's bare summons, snap their fingers and depart, who never once glance backward at cherished, long-familiar joy—joy seeks them out; joy, they alone know. Only those who can renounce with strength can possess with strength. In those who know not how to die, the meanness, the poverty, the vileness of their pleasure-seeking is not hidden beneath their carriages and their medals and their ribbons of office. In the bare severity, stripped of the luxury of renunciation, there is manhood; if I embrace it of my own will, I may yet save myself from shame.

There are two roads—the Kshatriya's road, and the Brahmin's road. Those who defy the fear of death—theirs is the world's wealth and joy. Those who can disdain the pleasures of life—theirs is the joy of liberation. In both alike lies manhood.

To say, "I will give my life," is hard; to say, "I do not want happiness," is no less hard. If we would walk this earth with heads lifted in the dignity of manhood, let us be able to speak one or the other of these two words. Either we must say "yes" to the call of valour, or we must say "no" to it. To weep "yes" while lacking the strength to seize it; to lie fallen saying "no" while lacking the ardour to seek it—bearing such reproach, if those who yet cling to life are not, by some mercy of their own nature, swept away, then for them there remains no other path to death.

The Bengali has nowadays come forth into the society of nations. The trouble is that he holds no pass from the world's chamber of death. However lofty his speech, therefore, he can claim no man's deference. For this reason his boasting rings altogether false, altogether nasal in tone. Short of dying, it is hard to see how this fault is to be mended.

Against our forefathers this is our gravest complaint. They are gone from us now—but why, on some fitting occasion, good or ill, did they not die properly? Had they died, we too, by right of inheritance, might have kept faith in our own power to die. Even without eating themselves, they left their sons the means of bread—only the means of death they did not leave behind. What greater misfortune, what deeper poverty, can there be than this?

The Englishman calls out to the martial races of our land and says: "You have fought, you know how to give your lives; but those who never fight, who know only how to talk—will you join their ranks and go play at Congress-making!"

One might answer this in argument. But argument does not remove shame. The Maker was no logician; that is why irrational things are to be met with at every step in this world. That is why those who know not how to die cannot mingle with one another on wholly equal footing, not merely in time of war but in time of peace as well. In the court of reason this is inconsistent, meaningless—but in the world it is true.

And so, reclining at ease in my armchair, when I dream the sweet political dream that "all India is becoming one, merging into a single whole," there rises, midway,

this one disquiet: why should the Sikh mingle with the Bengali as with his own brother? Because the Bengali has passed his B.A. and M.A.? But when the question of a sterner examination arises, whence shall the certificate be produced? Words alone accomplish much, but everyone knows that, at the hour of begging alms, mere talk cannot claim the place of curds; even so, where blood is required, pure words cannot supply its want.

And yet, when I recall that our grandmothers died by sahamarana with their husbands, hope stirs—that dying, perhaps, will not prove so very hard after all. Not all of them, certainly, died willingly. But that many did embrace death of their own free will, even foreign witnesses have testified.

In no country do all men, without exception, die fearlessly and freely. Only a small company can accept death in its true spirit—the rest die variously: some caught up in the crowd, some fallen through shame, some crudely driven by circumstance.

Fear never wholly leaves the mind. But to be afraid, one ought to feel shame—before oneself and before others. From childhood boys should be so reared that, feeling fear, they cannot easily and shamelessly confess to it. Reared thus, men come to courage through shame. If false pride must be indulged, then the false boast "I have courage" is the most forgivable of all falsehoods. For be it cowardice, be it ignorance, be it folly—nothing in human character is so mean a thing as fear. If a man without courage yet falsely boasts of it, at least his shame proves that this one virtue lives in him.

Where fearlessness itself is absent, the cultivation even of this shame serves some purpose. Like courage, shame too lends a man strength. To give up one's life for shame before the world is no impossible thing.

Therefore it may be granted that some among our grandmothers gave their lives even from shame before others. The power to give life was theirs—whether from shame, from love, or from religious ardour, they gave it; this fact we must hold in memory.

Indeed, to die in company is easy. The heroism of mounting the pyre alone is rare upon any field of battle.

To that grandmother of Bengal, devoted to the sacrifice of her life, we bow today. She who has suckled a nation will not forget it, even in heaven. O Ancestress, help your children pass beyond the ultimate fear of this world. You never dreamed that by your own self-forgetting valour you would put to shame even the world's heroes. As at the day's end, the household's business done, you would mount your husband's bed without a sound, so too, at the close of your married life's long drama, taking leave of the field of household labour, you mounted, just as simply, in bridal dress, wearing the vermilion of blessing at the parting of your hair, your husband's pyre. Death you have made beautiful, made auspicious, made holy—the pyre you have made joyous and blessed as the marriage-bed itself. That the fire of Bengal has been sanctified by your holy offering of life—from this day let us remember it. Our history is silent, but the fire in our every hearth carries your message still. That fire, your imperishable, undying shrine of memory, that boundless silken robe woven of the radiance of your final marriage—we shall bow to it, day upon day. May that tongue of flame, in the shape of your uplifted arm, bless every one among us. How easy death can be, how bright, how exalted—O you who dwell eternally silent in heaven, let fire, in the courtyard of our home, carry that tiding from your presence and proclaim to us fearlessness.

Kartik, 1309

THE MADMAN

A small town in the west. Before it, at the far edge of the great road, upon the thatched roofs, five or six palm trees rise into the sky like the gesture of a mute; and by a ruined house an ancient tamarind stands, its light, quivering foliage swollen, cloud upon green cloud. Upon the roofless plinth of a fallen house, young goats are grazing. Behind, to the very rim of the noon sky, stretches the green line of forest.

Today, above this town, the rains have suddenly drawn back their black veil entirely.

Much urgent writing of mine lies unfinished—unfinished it remains. I know this will be, in time, a cause of regret; so be it, that much I must accept. In what form Fullness will suddenly, at some unlooked-for hour, give a hint of itself, none can know beforehand and stand ready; but once it has shown its face, one cannot greet it with empty hands. He who, even then, can reckon profit and loss is indeed a most prudent man, and shall no doubt prosper in the world—but O luminous leisure of a single day in the heart of dense Ashadh, before your sudden uprising of white cloud-garlands, I have this day laid waste all my urgent labour—today I have not reckoned the future—today I have sold myself to the present hour.

Day follows day, making no claim upon me; then the sums never err, then every task comes easy. Life then proceeds, one day threaded divinely to the next, one labour to another; all moves forward evenly. But suddenly, without herald, a certain day arrives like a prince from beyond the seven seas, bearing no likeness to any ordinary day; then in a moment all the accumulated wealth of these many days is lost—then settled work finds itself sorely put to it.

But this very day is our great day—this day of disorder, this day for the ruining of work. The day that comes and throws our every day into confusion—that day is our joy. Other days are the days of prudence, the days of caution; let one single day be given over, entire, to sheer madness.

The word "madman" is, to us, no word of contempt. Mad Nimai we worship, calling him "the Mad One"; our own mad god is Maheshwara. Whether genius is one form of madness is a matter debated back and forth across Europe—we do not shrink from granting as much. Genius is indeed madness; it is deviation from rule, it comes only to overturn—it arrives like today's disorderly, uncreated day, suddenly, and wrecks the labour of every busy man, then departs—some curse it as it goes, some, seized by it, dance and leap till they are spent.

Bholanath, who in our scriptures embodies bliss, is, among all the gods, the most disorderly. That mad, unclothed one I see today, amid the flood of sunlight in this rain-washed blue sky. In the heart of this dense noon his damaru sounds its dim-dim beat. Today the naked, auspicious form of death stands so silent in the midst of this labouring world—a beautiful, tranquil image.

Bholanath, I know you to be strange. In life, moment by moment, in strange guise, you have stood holding out your beggar's bowl. You have thrown my accounts into utter disorder. I know your Nandi and your Bhringi well. I cannot say they have withheld from me even one drop of the offering of your intoxication. It has left me drunk; everything has come undone—today nothing of mine is in its place.

I know that happiness is the fare of every common day; joy lies beyond the everyday. Happiness, fearing lest dust somewhere touch its body, remains shrunk within itself; joy, rolling in the dust, shatters and scatters the barrier between itself and the whole of creation—for this reason dust is disgrace to happiness, but ornament to joy. Happiness fears the loss of something; joy, having given away all it possesses, is content. Therefore poverty is shame to happiness, but to joy poverty itself is riches. Happiness, within the bonds of arrangement, guards its own grace with care; joy, in the freedom of destruction, displays its beauty without reserve. Therefore happiness is bound by outward law; joy breaks that bond and makes its own law for itself. Happiness sits watching only for what is sweet; joy digests without effort even the poison of sorrow. Therefore happiness inclines only toward the good, while to joy, good and evil alike are one.

Within this creation dwells a Madman, who brings to pass, on sheer whim, whatever is unlooked-for. He is centrifugal—forever drawing the universe outward,

beyond the bounds of law. The god of order labours to shape every path of the world into a perfect circle, and this madman seizes it and twists it into a spiral.

This madman, at his own caprice, evolves birds out of the lineage of reptiles, and men out of the lineage of apes. There exists in the world a strenuous effort to preserve unchanged forever what has come to be, what already is; this one shatters that effort and clears the way for what does not yet exist. In his hand there is no flute; harmony's melody is not his own; the bow of Shiva twangs, the properly ordained sacrifice is ruined, and from nowhere an unprecedented, unheard-of thing comes flying in to settle. The madman is his handiwork, and genius too is his handiwork. By his pull, he whose strings snap becomes a lunatic; he whose strings are strung to sound some never-heard note becomes a genius! Both madman and genius stand outside the community; but the madman remains forever outside, while the genius drags the community itself into an eleventh chamber, and thereby enlarges its domain.

Not the madman only, not the genius only—amid the monotone triviality of our every day, the terrible suddenly appears with its blazing crest of matted hair. That terrible thing—in nature, some unlooked-for calamity; in man, some extraordinary sin—flares up like flame. Then how many webs of harmonious union are torn to shreds, how many bonds of the heart turned to ash! O Rudra, from the mere spark struck from the flickering flame upon your brow, the household lamp is lit in darkness—yet from that self-same spark, amid the wailing of thousands, the burning of houses breaks forth at midnight. Alas, Shambhu, by the movement of your dancing feet, right and left, both great merit and great sin alike are flung up into the world. Over the world, by the crude daily touch of careless hands, some common film settles down; by the violent shock of both good and evil you tear that film to pieces, and, keeping the current of life ever surging with the excitement of the unforeseen, you bring forth ever-new play of power, ever-new forms of creation. Madman, let not my fearful heart turn away from joining in this fierce joy of yours. In the blood-red sky of destruction, let your third eye, ablaze like the sun, illumine, with unwavering light, the innermost chamber of my inmost self. Dance, O frenzied one, dance. When, in the whirling force of that dance, the nebulae, luminous across a million leagues of sky, are set spinning, let not the beat of this

fierce music be broken by the flinching terror in my breast. O Conqueror of Death, in all our good and all our evil, be victory yours.

The coming of this our mad god is not a thing of rare occasion; his madness runs, unceasing, through the whole of creation—we merely catch, now and then, some glimpse of it. Ceaselessly death renews life, evil illumines good, the trivial is made unexpectedly precious. When that glimpse comes to us, then within form the formless stirs to life, within bondage freedom's revelation awakens in us.

In today's cloud-freed light, that image of the unprecedented has awakened for me. That road before me, that thatched grocer's shop, that broken plinth, that narrow lane, those trees—I had looked upon them, in the wear of daily use, as utterly trivial things. For this they had held me captive—confined me, day upon day, within just these few objects. Today, of a sudden, that triviality has wholly vanished. Today I see: what was eternally unfamiliar I had been looking at as though familiar—had never truly looked at all. Today I cannot come to the end of looking at all these things. Today they all stand about me, and yet they have not held me fast; each one has given me the road onward. My Madman was here all along—that unprecedented, unfamiliar, wondrous one had not scorned even the humble thatch of this grocer's roof—only the light by which he is seen had, until now, never fallen upon my eyes. And the wonder of it is that this near sight, this near thing, has today taken on for me the majesty of the utterly distant. With it, the snow-locked inaccessibility of Gaurishankar, the restless vastness of the great ocean's waves, proclaim their kinship.

Thus it is that one may suddenly discover, on some given day, that the very thing with which one had struck up so intimate an acquaintance lies wholly beyond that acquaintance's reach. Nothing is so rare, so unattainable, as that which I had, moment by moment, taken for a fixed and certain possession, and grown wholly complacent about. That which I thought I knew for good, around which I had drawn my boundary lines and sat contented, satisfied—I see now that it has, in a single instant, overrun every boundary and grown steeped in unfathomable mystery. That which, seen from the side of law, of settledness, appeared quite small, quite reasonable, quite my own—glimpsed suddenly from the side of breaking, from the vantage of that madman who haunts the burning-ground, leaves the mouth

without words—wonder of wonders! who is this? The one I have known my whole life long as such-and-such—who, then, is this?

He who on one side belongs to the household is, on the other, of the innermost soul; he who on one side belongs to labour is, on the other, beyond the reach of all necessity; he whom on one side I am touching is, on the other, beyond the grasp of any possession—he who on one side has fallen so neatly into step with all the world is, on the other, terribly disorderly, wholly and utterly himself alone.

Him whom I had never seen day after day, I saw today, and, released from the grip of the everyday, I live. I had thought myself bound within the fence of familiar things about me, by the rule of daily use; today I see that I have, all this while, been at play in the lap of the great Unprecedented. I had thought I was making my daily mark upon the world, fallen into the hands of some most solemn, most calculating chief clerk; today, hearing the vast, ungoverned, generous laughter of that great unaccountable Madman, greater than any clerk, roll through land and water and pierce the seven heavens, I have drawn a long breath and lived. My ledgers remain as they were. My burden of urgent business I have flung down at the feet of that Abandoner of Creation—let it, beneath the stroke of his wild dance, be ground to powder and blow away as dust.

Shravan, 1311

THE STAGE

In Bharata's treatise on dramaturgy there occurs a description of the theatre. In it I find no mention whatever of scenery. Nor do I believe that any particular loss was thereby suffered.

Wherever an art reigns alone, sovereign and unshared, there alone lies its full glory. To keep house with a rival is to be reduced—the more so if that rival is the stronger. If the Ramayana must be read set to a single melody, then from the Adikanda to the Uttarakanda that melody must remain forever the same, unvaried; as a raga, the poor thing never rises in rank. Whatever is great poetry supplies its own music by its own law, and disdains, with contempt, the aid of outward music. Whatever is high music speaks its own words by its own rule; it seeks no words from Kalidasa or Milton—the merest tom-tana-nana serves it splendidly. In pictures, in song, mingled with words, one may contrive some fairground affair of the decorative arts—but that is, at best, a kind of game; it is bazaar merchandise, unfit for the high seat of a royal festival.

But drama, unlike poetry meant only to be read, is by its very nature somewhat dependent. It is expressly made to fulfil itself through outward aid. That it waits upon performance is a thing it must concede.

We do not concede as much. As a faithful wife desires none but her husband, so good poetry waits for none but the imagining reader. In reading literature we all, within our minds, perform it for ourselves; poetry whose beauty is not unlocked by that inward performance has made no poet's name.

Rather, one might say that the art of acting is itself the truly dependent one. It waits, an orphan, by the roadside for some play to come along. Only by leaning upon the glory of the drama can it show forth its own.

As a weak-willed husband is held up to ridicule, so too, if a drama, waiting upon performance, diminishes itself on every side, it earns the selfsame ridicule. A

drama's temper should be this: "If I am performed, well and good; if not, that is performance's own misfortune—I lose nothing thereby."

Be that as it may, acting must own its subordination to poetry. But it does not follow that every art must be its slave. If it would keep its dignity, let it accept no more dependence than is strictly unavoidable for its own expression; whatever beyond this it takes on works its own degradation.

It goes without saying that the playwright's very words are utterly indispensable to the actor. Whatever laughing line the poet gives him, with that alone must he make us laugh; whatever occasion for tears the poet allows, with that alone, weeping, he draws tears to the spectator's eye. But why the painted scene? That hangs behind the actor; the actor does not create it, he merely has it painted for him; in my judgement this betrays the actor's own incapacity, his want of courage. To conjure illusion in the minds of the audience by such means, and thereby ease his own task, is to go begging at the painter's door.

Besides, has the spectator who has come to see your performance no resources of his own? Is he a child? Can he not, in a single matter, be trusted and relied upon? If that were truly so, such people ought not to be sold tickets even at double the price.

This is not testimony before a court of law, where each and every word must be proven upon oath. Those who have come to believe, to take joy—why so elaborate a contrivance to deceive them? They have not come with their powers of imagination locked away at home. Some you will make plain; the rest they will grasp themselves—such is the understanding between you and them.

Dushyanta, standing behind the trunk of a tree, overhears Shakuntala's talk with her friends. Excellent. Let the conversation flow, well-seasoned with feeling. Though no actual tree-trunk stand before me, I can supply it myself—so much creative power, at least, I possess. To render, as if directly witnessed, every gesture and inflection proper to the natures of Dushyanta, Shakuntala, Anasuya, and Priyamvada is no easy matter; and so, when we see these things directly before us, the heart is truly bathed in delight. But to imagine two trees, or a house, or a river,

is no difficult thing at all—to bring these forth by painted scenery, instead of leaving them in our own hands, is to declare the gravest distrust of us.

For this very reason I love our country's Jatra performances. In the Jatra there is no grave chasm between spectator and performer. Trusting one another, working in concert, the business proceeds with real warmth of heart. Poetic sentiment—the true substance—spreads outward, aided by performance, like a fountain, over the delighted hearts of the onlookers, in every direction. When Malini, in her flower-strewn garden, whiles away the hours searching for blossoms, what need is there to drag whole actual trees onto the stage to prove it—Malini alone brings the whole garden alive of itself. Were it not so, what merit would Malini herself possess, and what would the spectators, sitting like carven images, be doing there at all?

Had the poet of Shakuntala had to think of stage and scenery, he would, from the very outset, have called off the chase of the deer by the chariot. He was, of course, a great poet—had the chariot been stayed, it does not follow his pen would have been stayed too; but I ask, why should the great, for the sake of the trivial, diminish itself in any degree whatever? Within the mind of the one who imagines, a stage already exists—a stage that knows no want of room. There, at the magician's hand, the scenery fashions itself unbidden. That very stage, that very scenery, is the true goal of dramatic art; no artificial stage, no artificial scene, can ever be adequate to the poet's imagining.

And so, when Dushyanta and his charioteer, standing fixed in one place, narrate and enact between them the speed of the flying chariot, the spectator readily grasps this simple truth: the stage is small, but the poem is not small; and so, for poetry's sake, they cheerfully forgive this unavoidable defect of the stage, and, stretching their own field of imagination to fill that narrow space, exalt the very stage itself to greatness. But had poetry, for the stage's sake, been forced to make itself small, who could have forgiven those few unlucky blocks of wood?

The drama Shakuntala, depending on no outward scene whatever, has created its own scenery entirely by itself. For Kanva's hermitage, for the cloud-realm on the road to heaven, for Marich's forest of penance, it draws on no borrowed resource.

It has made itself wholly complete—in the shaping of character no less than in the depicting of nature—relying on nothing but its own poetic wealth.

We have said elsewhere that for the European nothing will do unless the real is truthfully rendered. It is not merely that imagination is to please their fancy—it must deceive them, like children, into taking the fictitious for the exactly real. The life-restoring elixir of poetic feeling alone will not suffice; the whole authentic fragrance of actuality is demanded besides. This being the age of iron, engineering is required to fetch that fragrance of the mythical mountain—and its cost is no trifle. The mere idle expenditure lavished upon this game on the London stage might swallow up how many a devastating famine of India.

The business, the play, the joy of the Eastern lands is all simple and easy. Because our feast is served upon a plantain leaf, the truest joy of a feast—namely, the unreserved invitation of the whole world into the compass of one's own house—becomes possible. Had the labour of arrangement been complicated and excessive, the true thing itself would have perished.

The theatre we have built in imitation of the West is a bloated, overladen thing. It is hard to move, next to impossible to bring to every man's door; in it Lakshmi's extravagance well-nigh smothers the lotus of Saraswati. In it, the capital of the rich man must far exceed the genius of poet and connoisseur alike. If the spectator has not been schooled in Western childishness, and if the actor holds true faith in himself and in the poem, then it would be an act worthy of a warm-hearted son of Hindustan to sweep away, from every quarter of the performance, its costly rubbish, and thereby grant it both freedom and dignity. The time has surely come to abandon so crude a Western barbarism as insisting that a garden must be dug up looking exactly like a real garden, or that a woman's part must be played by an unaffected, real woman.

On the whole, it may be said that complexity is proof only of incapacity; realism, entering art like a worm into a mango, drains, like the cockroach, every inward juice away, and where the true, unjaded hunger for real feeling is lacking, there costly outward abundance grows ever more monstrously—until at last, the rice quite smothered and buried, the chutney alone rises in a heap.

Poush, 1309

THE PEACOCK'S CRY

Suddenly hearing the cry of a household peacock, my friend exclaimed: I cannot bear that peacock's cry; there is no understanding why the poets have given the peacock's call a place in their verse.

When the poet has given equal welcome to the cuckoo's note of spring and the peacock's cry of the rains, one may suddenly suspect the poet has perhaps attained some deathly equanimity—that in his mind the distinction between good and bad, delicate and harsh, has been entirely lost.

Not the peacock's cry alone: none could call the croak of the frog or the shrill of the cricket sweet. Yet the poets have not scorned these sounds. They have not dared to set them beside the beloved's voice, but as chief elements in the great symphony of the six seasons they have granted them honour.

There is a certain sweetness that is unquestionably sweet, sweet through and through. It requires not a moment to establish its own charm. Taking the unhesitating testimony of the senses, the mind acknowledges its beauty without the shadow of a dispute. It is no discovery of the mind's own making, but something received direct from the senses; for that very reason the mind holds it cheap—calls it merely, purely sweet. That is, to grasp its sweetness demands no exercise of the inner faculties at all—the senses alone suffice. This is why connoisseurs of music, precisely for this reason, express the greatest disdain, saying: such-and-such a man sings sweetly. What is meant is that the sweet singer, by dragging song into the common court of our senses and rewarding it with such all-too-easy praise, insults it; song does not enter the refined court of cultivated taste and educated mind by that road. He who is expert in appraising jute wants no juice-swollen sample; he says, give me the dry fibre, and only then will I properly judge its weight. Just so, the true connoisseur of song says: do not swell the song's false grandeur with cheap seasoning—give me the dry material, and then alone shall I get the exact weight, and gladly pay the fair price for it. The cheap, outward sweetness only lowers the value of the true thing.

Whatever is too easily sweet very soon brings a kind of laziness to the mind—attention does not long endure. Almost at once, having reached its limit, the mind says: enough of this, there has been quite enough.

For this reason, whoever has gained special training in any art no longer cares for the perfectly simple, delicate portion at its threshold. Because that much he has already fathomed; he knows its range does not extend far, and so his inner faculties are not roused by it. The untrained man, on the other hand, grasps only that easy portion, yet never finds its limit—and for that very reason, that shallow part alone is his whole delight. The connoisseur's pleasure he regards as some odd affair, often even as sheer pretence and affectation.

For this very reason, in every branch of art, the pleasure of the educated and the uneducated travels down separate roads. Then one side says, "What could you possibly understand!" and the other, in anger, retorts, "What there is to understand, only you understand it—no one else in the world understands anything at all."

The joy of some deep harmony, the joy of composed and ordered arrangement, the joy of union with the far-off, the joy of contrast with the near-at-hand—these are joys of the mind. Without entering within, without understanding, there is no way to taste this pleasure. That which is caught instantly, at the surface, however immediate, is less enduring and less profound than this.

And in one sense it is more limited also. Whatever is shallow wears thin, with the spread of education and the wear of habit, and its hollowness soon shows through. Whatever is deep, though not immediately within reach of the multitude, retains its vigour long; the ideal of excellence dwelling within it does not soon grow stale.

Jayadeva's "Lalitalavangalata" pleases, but not for long. The senses present it to the mind, its sovereign; the mind, touching it once, sets it down—thereafter it is spent wholly in the enjoyment of sense alone. Beside "Lalitalavangalata," let us set a verse from the Kumarasambhava—

"Abarjita kinchidiva stanabhyam

Vaso vasana tarunarkaragam,
Paryaptapushpastabakavanamra
Sancharini pallavini lateva."

The metre is not sinuous, the words heavy with conjunct consonants—and yet one might mistake this verse for something sweeter, even to the ear, than "Lalitalavangalata." But that is illusion. The mind, by its own creative power, is filling out the pleasure of sense. Where the greedy senses do not crowd and press forward, there alone does the mind find room for such creation. In "paryaptapushpastabakavanamra" the rise and fall of rhythm, harsh and soft rightly mingled, has given the metre such a lilt as is not, like Jayadeva's, immediately, obviously apparent—it lies hidden; the mind does not receive it lazily, ready-made, but discovers it for itself, and rejoices. The beauty of feeling within this single verse likewise conspires with our minds to weave an inaudible music, a music surpassing all music of mere words; it seems as though the very ear has been soothed and satisfied—yet it is not truly the ear that is satisfied; it is the mind's own enchantment that deceives the ear.

If we do not grant this magician-mind of ours room for creation, it will not regard any sweetness whatever as sweet for long. Given the right material, it can make a harsh rhythm delicate, a hard word tender. It is to exercise that very power that the mind sends its appeal to the poets.

The peacock's cry is not sweet to the ear, yet in certain conditions, at certain seasons, the mind can render it sweet in the hearing—such is the mind's own power. The nature of that sweetness differs wholly from the sweetness of the cuckoo's note. At the mountain's foot, with the coming of new rain, amid the vine-tangled ancient forest, there arises a certain intoxication—the peacock's cry is the very song of that intoxication. In the doubly-deepened darkness of the tamal-tali groves, black-green in Ashadh, amid the murmurous rustle of countless swaying boughs, like a hundred thousand infants with lifted arms athirst for their mother's milk, the peacock, again and again, flings up at its highest pitch a certain brazen, clanging cry, and by it the very life of a forest festival awakens among the venerable community of ancient trees. The poet's peacock-cry is this song of the rains; the ear knows nothing of its sweetness—only the mind knows it. That is why the mind is

the more enraptured by it. And with it the mind gains much besides—the whole cloud-veiled sky, the shadow-drowned forest, the blue-tinged mountain crest, the vast, mute, unspoken, blind mass of Nature's own joy.

That is why the poet's peacock-cry is so bound up with the anguish of the lovelorn woman's separation. It does not, by being sweet to hear, agitate the traveller's wife—it lays bare the very heart-ache of the whole rainy season. In the love between man and woman there dwells an exceedingly primal, primitive feeling; it lies very near to outward nature, clinging close to the very body of water, earth, and sky. The six seasons, with their succession of flowering, tint this love in many hues, one after another. Whatever quickens the young shoot, sets the river rippling, sways the standing grain, sets this too astir with wonderful agitation. The plenitude of the full moon swells it; the crimson glow of dusk clothes it, blushing, as a new bride. When each season, in turn, touches love with its golden wand, love cannot but thrill through its whole frame—susceptible, like the forest's flowers and shoots, to nature's most hidden touch. That is why Kalidasa, quickened with the ardour of youth, described in what melodies the love of man and woman resounds through the strains of the six seasons; he understood that in this world the chief business of the turning seasons is the waking of love—the opening of flowers and all else besides is merely its incidental accompaniment. That is why the peacock's cry, that unwavering true note of the season of rains, strikes precisely upon the wound of separation.

Vidyapati has written—

"Matta dadduri dake dahuki
Phati jaot chhatiya."

This croaking of frogs harmonizes wonderfully—not with the exuberant mood of the first showers, but with the deep, unbroken mood of steady, continuous rain. Today there is no play of colour in the clouds, no gradation of tone; as though some ancient handmaid of Indra had smeared the courtyard of the sky evenly over with cloud, all is one uniform blackish grey. The tender, smooth green of the paddy, the deep hue of the jute, the yellow sheen of the sugarcane, lie merged into one universal darkness. There is no wind. Fearing the imminent downpour, none has

ventured onto the muddied roads. In the fields, the work upon the paddy was finished long ago. In the pond the water stands level with the bank. On such a day—lightless, motionless, without labour, without variety, one darkness smeared over all—the frog's croak strikes precisely the true note. Its tone, like that colourless cloud, like this radiance-less light, spreads through the silent, dense rain, and further thickens, drawing tighter still, the boundary of the monsoon on every side. It is more monotonous even than silence—it is a secluded clamour. With this the cricket's chirr blends well; for, as with the cloud, as with the shadow, so too the cricket's chirr is another kind of veil—it is, in the realm of sound, the very counterpart of darkness; it lends completeness to the night of rain.

Bhadra, 1308

IDLE TALK

More than any other kind of expenditure, idle expenditure reveals a man's true nature. For a man spends according to fixed rule, but he squanders according to his own fancy.

As with idle spending, so with idle talk—in idle talk a man betrays himself. The road along which words of counsel travel has lain trodden since the age of Manu; the path along which the words of business draw home their laden cart has been worn bare of grass and flower by the tread of every busy community. Idle talk alone must be spoken in one's own manner.

For this reason the harsh dictum by which Chanakya bade a certain type of man fall utterly silent might well be somewhat softened. In our judgement, that gentleman of whom Chanakya speaks remains respectable only so long as he speaks lofty matters, so long as he engages in proclaiming truths tried by the ages and acknowledged by all—but his peril begins the very moment he attempts to speak simple words in his own tongue.

The man who, lacking some particular thing worth saying, can say nothing at all—who either recites scripture or falls silent—O four-faced Brahma, his kinship, his friendship, his neighbourliness—

"Write it not upon his brow, write it not, write it not."

Not everything in the world is disposed to reveal itself. Coal does not burn without fire; crystal sparkles for no cause at all. Coal is useful; crystal is precious.

Certain rare persons can, like crystal, sparkle for no reason whatever. They express themselves with ease, needing no special occasion. They carry no anxious design to wring some particular benefit from another; effortlessly they make themselves shine, and delight simply in being seen to shine. Man so loves self-expression, light is so dear to him, that, forsaking necessity itself, even at the cost of an empty stomach, he grows eager for brilliance. Seeing this trait, no one can doubt that man

is the foremost among moths. That the moth may give its life, for no reason, at the sight of a bright flame needs no further explaining.

But not all are born with a moth's wings. Not all feel this enchantment of light. Many are prudent, deliberate men. Seeing a cavern, they strive to plumb its depths; but seeing a light, they will not even make the vain attempt to fly upward. Confronted with poetry, such men ask what profit is to be got from it; hearing a tale, they set it against the eighteen Puranas and, after much laborious research, sit ready to bestow either censure or praise strictly by the measure of sound doctrine. Toward whatever is without cause, whatever is unnecessary, they feel no attraction at all.

Those who worship light have shown no fondness for this fraternity. The names by which they have called them we do not endorse. Vararuchi has called them men without taste for the beautiful; in our judgement this itself offends good taste. What we think of them we shall keep to ourselves.

But that the ancients did not always weigh their words with care is evident from a certain Sanskrit verse. It tells how a pearl, torn loose by a lion's claw, lay fallen in the forest; some tribal woman, spying it from afar, ran and snatched it up; but finding, when she pressed it, that it was no ripe berry but a mere pearl, she flung it far away. It is plain enough: those who weigh the worth of everything solely by its usefulness, whom mere beauty and brilliance cannot move in the least, the poet is likening to this uncivilised woman. In our judgement the poet would have done better to remain silent about such people—for they are men of power, and, in particular, the office of judgement rests very largely in their hands. They act very much the schoolmaster.

Those who dwell in Saraswati's lotus-grove of poetry should not, I pray, trouble the dwellers in the humble bamboo-thicket along its bank.

The truly idle compositions of literature make no claim to say anything in particular. In Sanskrit letters, the Meghaduta stands as its shining example. It is neither religious discourse, nor discourse on duty; neither Purana nor history. It is the raving of that state wherein the human distinction between waking and unwaking

judgement dissolves entirely away. Should anyone, mistaking it for a wood-apple, lift it up in hope of filling his belly, let him at once set it down. There is nothing of practical use in it whatsoever. It is a flawless pearl, and though here and there some trace of the bloodstain of a rent and separated heart clings to it, even were that trace wiped clean away, its worth would in no wise be diminished.

It is precisely because it has no design that this poem is so limpid, so luminous. It is an enchantress; on the wind of imagination its sail, woven of moist cloud, has bellied out, and, bearing within it the longing of a lonely heart, it rushes with unchecked speed toward some wondrous, trackless destination—no other freight does it carry.

Tennyson spoke of "idle tears," of causeless drops shed for no reason—Meghaduta is the poem of just such idle tears of the eye. Hearing this, many will be quick to dispute with me. Many will say: when the Yaksha, cursed by his lord, has been parted from his beloved, why call the flowing of tears in Meghaduta causeless? I have no wish to argue; to such objections I shall give no answer. I will assert plainly: all this business of the Yaksha's exile is Kalidasa's own invention, the very story a mere pretext for the poem. Borrowing this scaffolding, he raised his edifice; let us now set that scaffolding aside. The truth of the matter is this—"Seeing what is beautiful, hearing what is sweet, even a contented mind grows otherwise inclined"—this Kalidasa himself has admitted elsewhere. On the first day of Ashadh, seeing suddenly the massed thunderheads gather, an uncaused separation wakes within our own hearts—Meghaduta is the unfounded raving of just such causeless separation. Were it not so, the separated lover would have sent the lightning as his messenger, and let the cloud go by. Otherwise the eastern cloud would never have lingered so long, wandered so far and wide, brought so many jasmine-groves to bloom, so lingeringly gathered up the upturned glances of the village brides.

If, even while reading poetry, one must open the ledger and reckon accounts, if one must, on the spot, settle what profit has been gained, then I confess we have, from Meghaduta, extracted one piece of information, and are pleased with it. It is this: that even in that age there were men, and even then the first day of Ashadh arrived on schedule.

But will the impatient Vararuchis, who fling such unkind epithets at such readers, count this a gain worth having? Will it advance knowledge, better the nation, reform character? Therefore let whatever is causeless, whatever is needless—O four-faced one—remain hidden within poems of pure feeling, for the delight of the discerning alone; whatever is necessary, whatever is beneficial, shall never lack for its proclaiming, nor for its customers.

Ashwin, 1309

FIFTEEN ANNAS

The wealthy man's garden is commonly larger than his house. The house is a bare necessity; the garden is excess—though it does no harm to have it. The generosity of wealth proves itself precisely in the unnecessary. Whatever horn the goat possesses suffices for its purpose; but seeing the antlers of the stag, fifteen-sixteenths of which serve no need whatever, we stand enchanted. It is not merely that the peacock's tail has won at some game of colour—in the pride of its own excess, the tail of the myna, the wagtail, the fantail, remains forever restless with shame.

The man who has rendered his life entirely necessary is, beyond doubt, an ideal man; but happily his example finds few followers—for if it did, human society would grow like a fruit all rind and no pulp whatsoever. There is no gainsaying that the man who is merely useful deserves our praise; and yet men love the man who is superfluous.

For the superfluous man can give himself, in every way, entire. The useful man of this world touches only some narrow portion of us, through the confined gate of his usefulness alone. He surrounds every other side of himself with the great wall of his own utility—leaving open but a single door, where we may stretch out a hand and he gives. But our superfluous friend is of no particular use, and thus has no wall at all. He is not our prop; he is merely our companion. From the useful man we gather our earnings; with the superfluous man we spend, in fellowship. Whoever shares our spending is our friend.

By the Creator's grace, most of us in this world are, like the antlers of the stag and the tail of the peacock, superfluous; most of our lives are unworthy of biography, and, mercifully, after most of our deaths, no subscription-book, seeking funds to raise our statue in stone, shall go weeping, in vain effort, from door to door.

Few remain immortal after death—and precisely for that reason is the world a place fit to live in. Were every carriage on the train a reserved one, what would become of the ordinary passenger's journey? To begin with, the great are worth a

hundred apiece—that is, so long as they live, they occupy, in the hearts of devotee and detractor alike, the room of a hundred men; and even in death they do not relinquish their place. Far from relinquishing it, many, seizing the very occasion of death, extend their domain the further. Our one safeguard is that their number is small. Were it otherwise, even in the graveyard there would be no room left for the humble huts of ordinary men. The earth is so cramped that the living must contest with the living for room. Whether the ground be earthly soil or the soil of the heart, how many men, to gain some little extra portion beyond their neighbour's, are ready to lie and cheat, staking this world and the next! And this contention of the living with the living is, at least, a contest between equals; but the contest of the living against the dead is far harder. The dead have passed beyond all frailty, all weakness—they dwell in the realm of imagination; how can we, mortal men, weighed down by the pull of gravity, by capillary attraction, by manifold other forces of pull and counter-pull, ever hope to prevail? For this very reason the Creator exiles most of the dead into a land of forgetting, where none lacks for room. Had He meant to keep our small, living selves, in the shadow of the mighty dead, forever downcast, forever thrust into a corner, why then did He make this world so radiant, so beautiful—for what cause did the human heart become, to the human heart, so utterly to be desired?

Moralists condemn us. They say our lives have been wasted. They goad us on, crying: rise, awake, work, waste not your time!

No doubt many waste time by doing nothing; but those who waste time while working, waste both their work and their time together. Beneath the tread of their feet the earth trembles, and it is to save the helpless world from the very hand of their efficiency that God has said, "I come again in every age."

Our lives are wasted. Let them be wasted. Most lives are made to be wasted. This fifteen-sixteenths of needless life is itself the proof of the Creator's opulence. That there is no poverty in His storehouse of life, we, lives of no avail, are its countless witnesses. In our boundless futility, our causeless excess, read the Creator's own greatness. As the flute, through its own emptiness, gives forth music, so we, through our fifteen-sixteenths of futility, proclaim the Creator's glory. The Buddha renounced the world for our sake; Christ gave his life for our sake; the sages

performed their austerities for our sake; and the saints have kept their vigil, awake, for our sake.

Our lives are wasted. Let them be wasted. For passing on is itself a kind of fulfilment. The river flows—not all its waters serve our bathing, our drinking, our irrigation of the autumn rice. Most of its water does nothing but maintain the flow. There is a vast fulfilment simply in the keeping of that flow, apart from any other task. The water we channel off to fill our tank we use for bathing, though we do not drink it; the water we pipe home and store in our jars we drink, though upon it no festival of light and shadow is ever held. To reckon usefulness the sole measure of success is the reasoning of the miser; to count purpose the sole measure of worth is the mark of a mean spirit.

Let us not, we the ordinary fifteen annas, reckon ourselves as worthless. We are the very motion of the world. In the world, in the human heart, our life's true substance lies. We hold nothing fast, we cling to nothing—we simply move on. Every song of the world sounds through us; the whole realm of shadow trembles upon us. That we laugh, weep, love—play at idle games with our friends—hold needless converse with our kin—spend the greater part of the day beside our neighbour to no purpose whatever, and then, with much pomp, marry off a son, set him up in an office, and, having left no fame behind us in this world, die, are burned, and turn to ash and blow away—we are part of the vast world's manifold play of waves; our small, trifling laughter and jest keep the whole current of humankind sparkling; our small, trifling talk and chatter keep all society murmurous with life.

What we call futile makes up the greater part of Nature herself. Most of the sun's rays are scattered uselessly into empty space; very few of the buds upon a tree survive to become fruit. But only He whose wealth this is can know whether it is truly waste. Without seeing the Maker's own ledger, I cannot pronounce that expenditure prodigal or otherwise. So too are we, most of us, of no use save to give one another company and give one another momentum—wherefore, laying no blame on ourselves or on others, chafing at nothing, if we can find our peace, easily, in some unmarked, unremembered end, then it is precisely within that purposelessness that we shall have truly fulfilled the purpose of life.

If the Creator has made me futile, then I am blessed indeed; but if, spurred by the moralist, I fancy I must render service, must make myself useful, then whatever grievous failure I thereby bring about is of my own making. For that I alone must answer. Not everyone is born to serve his fellow-man—wherefore there is no shame in failing to serve. I did not, it is true, go forth as a missionary to save China; but if hunting jackals at home, and squandering my days at the racecourse and the gaming table, is to be called failure, it is at least no such appalling, heartrending failure as the attempt to save China would have proved.

Not all grass becomes rice. In this world grass is almost everything, rice very little. But let the grass not lament its natural futility—let it remember that it clothes the parched dust of the earth in green, and softens the scorching heat of the sun with its ever-gentle coolness. Perhaps, among the tribe of grasses, the kusha grass once strove with all its might to become rice; perhaps, so as not to remain a mere blade of grass, so as to fulfil its life through utter devotion to another, some great agitation was born within it—and yet it did not become rice. But how fiercely, how unwaveringly, its gaze remains fixed upon another, is plain to see even now. On the whole, one may say such fierce devotion to another is not what the Creator intends. Better than this is the common grass's unrenowned, gentle, beautiful, humble, soft futility.

To put it briefly, mankind is divided into two classes—the fifteen annas, and the remaining one anna. The fifteen annas are calm, the one anna restless. The fifteen annas are unnecessary, the one anna necessary. In the air, the combustible, kindling oxygen is little; the still, calm nitrogen is abundant. Were this reversed, the earth would burn to ashes. So too in society: when some faction among the fifteen annas grows as restless and as self-important as the single anna, then the world's good is at an end, and those whose fate is death must ready themselves to die.

Magh, 1309

NEW RAINS

In my youth I found no end either to myself or to the world. What I would become, what I would not; what I could do, what I could not; in thought, in feeling, in deed, how far the range of my own nature might extend—none of this was fixed, and the world too remained undetermined, full of mystery. Now I have come to the very limit of every possibility concerning myself, and the world has shrunk correspondingly. Now this world has become for me nothing more than a succession of offices, drawing-rooms, and corridors. And the world has grown so overly familiar that I have quite forgotten how many such offices, drawing-rooms, and corridors have passed, like shadows, across this earth, leaving not so much as a mark upon it. How many an ageing man, taking his own chamber of litigation for the fixed pole and centre of the universe, sat reclining upon his bolster; their very names have blown away with their ashes upon the wind, past all recovering—and yet the earth wheels on, at the same unaltered pace, about the sun.

But the cloud of Ashadh, whenever it comes, year upon year, arrives charged at once with the freshness of the new and the accumulated weight of the old. We cannot mistake it, for it lies always beyond the reach of our use. It does not shrink to match our own diminishing. When I have been forsaken by a friend, wounded by an enemy, thwarted by misfortune, it is not merely that a scar has been left upon my heart, a line etched upon my brow—the very world standing motionless about me bears the print of that same blow. Its waters and lands lie wounded with my sorrow, marked with my anxious thought. When the arrow has struck me, the world around me has not stepped aside; the shaft, piercing me, has pierced it also. And so, again and again, stamped with the seal of my joys and sorrows, this world has come to be marked, indelibly, as my own.

The cloud bears no such mark. It is a wayfarer—it comes, it goes, it does not linger. My decline finds no leisure to touch it. It lies far beyond the reach of my hope and my despair.

For this reason, the Ashadh cloud that Kalidasa beheld from the palace-heights of Ujjayini is the very same cloud that we too have seen; in the interval, the history of

a changing humanity has never laid a hand upon it. But that Avanti, that Vidisha of his—where now are they? The cloud of Meghaduta appears, year after year, forever new and forever ancient—while Vikramaditya's Ujjayini, once firmer than any cloud, cannot now be rebuilt, however we might wish it, any more than a shattered dream.

At the mere sight of a cloud, "even a happy mind grows otherwise inclined"—for this very reason. Because the cloud owes no allegiance to any law of the human world, it draws man beyond his accustomed bounds. Because the cloud holds no connection whatever with our daily thought, our daily task, our daily business, it sets the mind free. Then the mind refuses the bridle; then the grief of the Yaksha, exiled by his lord's curse, grows wild and unrestrained. Master and servant, that is a worldly bond, a bond of society; the cloud makes us forget these very bonds so necessary to the world, and it is then the heart, breaking through its dam, strives to carve its own path outward.

The cloud, in its ever-shifting play of shape, in darkness, in thunder, in falling rain, flings across the familiar earth the suggestion of some vast unfamiliarity; it thickens about us the deep shadow of some far-off age, some far-off land; and then, what by the reckoning of the known world seemed impossible comes to seem, after all, quite possible. That her lord, bound fast by duty, cannot come to her—this the traveller's wife, in such an hour, refuses any longer to credit. The hard law of the world she knows, but knows it only in the intellect; that this law still holds sway in the world—of this, upon a day of dense and unbroken rain, her heart can find no conviction.

That very thought was in my mind—that through long use this vast world, this world of all the ages, has grown small for me. Whatever little of it I have come to possess, that alone I acknowledge as it; beyond the reach of my own enjoyment I scarcely grant it any existence at all. Life has hardened and bound itself fast, and, in binding, has drawn tight about itself only so much of the world as it requires. Because I no longer see any mystery within myself, or within my own portion of the world, I remain at peace; I believe I know myself entire, and have settled it that my own portion of the world, too, I know entire. And even as I thought this, covering the eastern horizon with a cool darkness, from somewhere that very cloud of

Kalidasa's, centuries old, arrived and stood before me. It is not mine; it is no part of my portion of the world; it draws me toward some city of Alaka, some realm of eternal youth, toward some eternal grief of parting, some eternal promise of reunion, toward the trackless pilgrim-shrine of eternal beauty in the city of Kailasa. Then whatever little I know of the world grows trivial, and whatever I could never know grows vast; and what I never gained begins to seem truer, even, than what I hold. I know that in my life, within my own strength, I have taken possession of very little indeed—that which is vast I have not so much as touched.

Covering over my daily field of labour, my daily, familiar world, the fully-laden new rain, heavy with moist cloud, sets me down, wholly alone, beyond every law and ordinance, in the midst of some unknown realm of feeling; it seizes these few years of the earth and plants me in the midst of a boundless span of eternal life; it leaves me companionless upon the bare rock of the deserted, single-peaked hermitage of Ramagiri. That solitary summit, and some eternal dwelling-place of mine, some eternal goal reachable only by the innermost soul, in the midst of the city of Alaka—there, I recall, a vast and beautiful world lies outstretched; a world echoing with the murmur of rivers, rugged with steep-flanked mountains, its slopes darkened with the shade of jambu-groves, fragrant with jasmine freshly bathed in new rain—a world immense. And the heart, wandering through its forests and its villages, its peaks, its river-banks, gathering ever fresh acquaintance with unfamiliar beauty, grows as eager, as the wild goose flying home to Manasa Lake, to reach at last the final release from its long separation.

Save for Meghaduta, no poem of new rains exists in any literature. In it all the inward feeling of the monsoon has been set down in the language of eternity. The unutterable epic-song of Nature's yearly festival of cloud has been bound fast in the speech of man.

In the Purvamegha, the vast world lies unveiled before our imagination. We, having become settled householders, dwelling at ease and content with half-shut, languid eyes, within the small house we occupied—the cloud of Kalidasa, "on the first day of Ashadh," suddenly arrived and turned us out of that dwelling. Far beyond our cattle-shed and our granary, where the restless, winding Narmada has traced her frowning brow, where the groves along Chitrakuta's banks stand in full bloom of

fresh kadamba, where by the doors of village elders, versed in old tales, the pipal resounds with young parrots' chatter—all this, subduing our familiar, narrow world, has come before us, radiant with the eternal truth of manifold beauty.

Even in the anguished haste of separation, the poet shortens no path. Over mountain, river, city, and countryside veiled in the blue shadow of the Ashadh clouds, he travels slowly, lost in feeling, lingering again and again. Whoever has called out, welcoming his enraptured eyes, he cannot say "no" to. The poet has drawn the reader's mind forth on the very force of separation, and yet again has slowed it to dwell upon the beauty of the road. However far the goal toward which the mind is rushing headlong, its long approach, too, is lovely, and cannot be slighted.

In the rains, torn loose from our accustomed, familiar world, the mind longs to go outward; in the Purvamegha the poet has roused that very longing within us and set its song ringing, making us companions to the cloud, leading us through the midst of an unfamiliar world. That world is "a flower never smelled"; it has not been sullied in the least by our daily use; there our imagination meets no wall of prior familiarity anywhere. As is the cloud, so is that world. This life of mine, of joy and grief, of weariness and languor, has nowhere touched it. The certainty of ripening age has not fenced it round, has not enclosed it, has not annexed it to the garden-plot of its own household.

New acquaintance with the unknown universe—this is the Purvamegha. The Uttaramegha has another office. It weaves about us a supremely intimate atmosphere, calling to mind "friendships from a former birth," and, amid a world of unprecedented beauty, sets the mind restless for some one, eternally known, eternally beloved.

In the Purvamegha, acquaintance with beauty through its endless variety; in the Uttaramegha, the union of joy with that very oneness. Through the world's manifoldness proceeds that joyous journey, and in the heavenly realm, within the One, lies the fulfilment of that quest.

On the day of new rains, who would not call this small world of daily business an exile? By our lord's own curse alone are we held fast here. The cloud arrives and calls us forth to journey—that is the song of the Purvamegha; and at journey's end it gives assurance of eternal reunion—that is the message of the Uttaramegha.

In the hidden depths of every true poet's work lie this Purvamegha and this Uttaramegha. Every great poem calls us out into vastness, and directs us, too, toward the innermost seclusion. First it severs our bonds and draws us forth; then it binds us fast to some infinitude. It brings us out upon the road at morning; it leads us home again at evening. Once, amid the melody, it whirls heaven and earth about us, then sets us down, in perfect joy, upon the final resting note.

The poet whose melody has range, yet nowhere comes to rest—in whom there is momentum only, and no assurance—his poetic art cannot endure among the highest rank of poetry. Some destination must, at the last, be reached; it is upon this trust alone that we quit our habitual, familiar world and set forth with the poet upon the road; to lead us, through a path all in flower, and then abandon us suddenly at the mouth of some hollow void, would be an act of betrayal. For this reason, in reading the work of any poet, we ask these two questions: to what does his Purvamegha lead us forth, and before what palace-gate does his Uttaramegha bring us, at last, to stand?

Shravan, 1308

SLANDER

Slander is so ancient and so universal a thing in this world that to voice, of a sudden, some novel opinion against it seems an act of impertinence.

Even a child knows that salt water is unfit for drinking—yet when I see that the water of the seven seas is brimming with salt, when I see this salt water girdling the whole earth, I can find in myself no courage whatever to say that it would be better had there been no salt in the ocean's water. It would certainly not be better; perhaps, for want of that saline water, the whole earth would have rotted away.

So too, if slander were not mingled into every particle of society, some vast calamity would surely have come to pass. Like salt, it preserves the whole of the social order from corruption.

The reader will say, "I understand! What you wish to say is a thing exceedingly old. That is—society remains sound only through fear of censure."

If this be an old thought, so much the better. I have said already: whatever is old is worthy of belief.

Indeed, were there no slander in the world, what glory would there be in life? I set my hand to some good work—if no one speaks ill of it, what is that good work worth? I have written something worthwhile—if it finds no detractor, what deeper insult could be offered to a worthy book! I have devoted my life to the practice of virtue—if no one detects therein some hidden base motive, then goodness itself has become altogether too easy a thing.

Greatness must, at every step, tread upon the thorns of slander. He who wins this contest gains no hero's noble fellowship thereby. Slander does not exist in this world to correct the guilty; its great office is rather to confer distinction upon greatness.

Few indeed can say that opposition and censure leave no mark upon them. No man of true feeling can say so. He whose heart is fuller has the greater capacity for suffering too. It is precisely the man possessed of heart who sets his hand to work worthy of the name. And when a man of quality and a work of substance appear, the edge of slander is whetted fourfold the sharper. From this we may perceive: wherever the Creator has granted greater privilege, there He has made sorrow and trial exceedingly severe. Let that ordinance of His prevail. Let sorrow, opposition, and censure fall in greater measure upon the good, upon the gifted. Let him who truly knows how to bear suffering be the one to suffer. Let not the anguish of slander be needlessly squandered upon some unworthy, trifling person.

The tender-hearted reader will say once more: "I know that slander has its use. When a man does wrong, it is well that his wrongdoing be proclaimed; but when a man does no wrong, no good can come to society from slandering him. A falsehood cannot, under any circumstance, be a good thing."

If this were so, slander could not survive at all. To establish, by evidence, that a wrongdoer is indeed guilty—that is judgment, that is trial. How many can bear so grave a charge, and in whose hands, at any rate, does the time to do so lie? Besides, no one has so excessive a concern for another's affairs. Had such concern existed, it would have been utterly insufferable to the person concerned. One can bear the slanderer, for I too hold in my own hand the pleasure of slandering the slanderer in turn; but who could bear a judge?

In truth, we slander on the flimsiest of evidence, and were it not for that very laxity of slander, the very bones of society would have been ground to powder. The verdict of slander is not final; the person slandered may, if he wishes, decline even to answer it. Indeed, to laugh off words of slander is itself accounted good sense. But were slander to become the verdict of a judge, then good sense would have to seek refuge with lawyer and attorney. Those who know will grant that dealing with lawyers and attorneys is no laughing matter. Therefore it appears that slander requires just so much weight as the world's necessity demands, and no less does it require just so much lightness as befits it.

The reader who earlier grew impatient with my words will surely say: "Whether upon trivial conjecture or upon certain proof, if slander must be uttered at all, it ought to be spoken with pain—one ought not take pleasure in slandering."

Whoever says such a thing is certainly a person of feeling. And so, upon reflection, it ought to be considered thus—that while the slandered person suffers pain from slander, if the slanderer too were to feel pain, then the measure of sorrow in the world would grow disproportionately, without bound. Were that so, every gathering would fall silent, every company of friends grow gloomy, the critic's eye would swim in tears, and from the depths of his readers' hearts long sighs would rise, one upon another. I hope the inhabitants of the planet Saturn are spared such a fate.

Besides, that mankind should slander and yet gain no pleasure from it—so terrible a slanderer does not exist even among men. The Creator has made man so pleasure-loving a creature that even while he goes about to save his own life by filling his own stomach, he still craves that pleasure which comes of satisfying hunger and pleasing the palate. That such a man should pay tram fare, go to a friend's house, slander another there, and yet derive no pleasure from it—any moral code demanding so impossible a thing is worthy of reverence, perhaps, but not of practice.

Even in mere discovery there is an element of pleasure. The hunt would afford not the slightest pleasure if the deer simply stood wherever it pleased and did not flee at sight of the hunter. It is not that we kill the deer because we bear it any grudge—the poor creature merely dwells in dense forest and is skilled at fleeing, and so must, of necessity, be killed.

Human character, and particularly human faults, dwell hidden in the thickets, and the moment they hear a footstep, they wish to bolt—hence slander affords such pleasure. I know the movements of the stars and planets, nothing is hidden from me—hearing such words from a slanderer's mouth, one may know at once that this person is a born hunter. Whatever part of yourself you wish to conceal, that very part I have flushed out and seized. I hook the fish in the water, I shoot down the bird in the sky with an arrow, I spread a net and trap the beast of the forest—how

great is the pleasure in this! To bring forth what hides, to bind what flees—what will man not do for this!

Man has a certain infatuation with the rare and difficult to obtain. He thinks that whatever is easily had cannot be genuine, that whatever lies on the surface is mere covering, and that whatever lies hidden must be the real thing. For this very reason, the moment he catches a glimpse of some secret, he grows suddenly delighted, believing—without further consideration—that he has now got at the truth of the matter. He thinks in his mind that the truth beneath the surface is not more true than the truth upon it; it is hard to make him understand that even if the truth lies outward, it remains no less true, and that what lies within is not, merely by being within, necessarily true while the other is false. It is this very infatuation that makes the reader prefer to believe some profound, deep-lying theory more true than the simple beauty of poetry, and makes the wise regard a sin committed in darkness as more substantial, and give it more weight, than a virtue practised in the light. For this reason, the moment we hear someone slandered, we feel we have obtained his true measure. In this world I need keep house with very few people indeed—yet what profit is there in knowing the true measure of a hundred, of a thousand others? Yet eagerness for true knowledge is a trait inherent in man's nature; it forms a chief part of humanity itself, and so there is no disputing it. Only when we happen to have long leisure to grieve do we then reflect that whatever is beautiful, whatever is whole, whatever blossoms outward like a flower and shows itself to view—because it comes forth into the open, the prudent man, fearing to be deceived, dares not fully trust it and take complete joy in it. Is deceit, then, the ultimate deceit in this world? Or is not-being-deceived the ultimate gain?

But the burden of these matters does not rest upon me; human character was fully formed long before I was born. I was merely trying to understand, and to make understood, this one point—that the pleasure ordinary people commonly derive from slander is not the pleasure of malice. Malice can never, in general, be pleasurable, and if malice were to spread through every stratum of the whole of society, the poison it would generate would be beyond society's power to digest. We have heard even many good people slander even innocent people; the reason for this is not that there are no good people, no innocent people, in the world—the reason is that, generally speaking, the wellspring of slander is not malice.

But that malice-driven slander does not exist at all in the world—to write such a thing, one would have to wait for the Golden Age to arrive. Of that kind of slander there is no more to be said. My only prayer is that toward that unfortunate soul in whom such slander is inborn, I may still find it in myself to feel compassion.

Agrahayan, 1309

A SPRING OBSERVANCE

Beyond this field, through the fresh young leaves of the sal forest, the wind of spring has come blowing.

In the history of expression, a part of man is indeed bound up with trees and plants. That at one time we were creatures of the branches—of this our nature still bears sufficient testimony. But even long before that, in some primal age, we were surely rooted things—can we have forgotten this? In that primeval age, in the peopleless midday, when the spring wind, giving no notice to anyone, would suddenly come rushing through our boughs, did we not, on that very day, write treatises declaring that we had come forth to serve the world? On that day we all stood still, trembling like the mute, like the bewildered; our whole bodies rustled and murmured, singing like madmen; from our very roots up to the tender tips of our young shoots, we grew restless within, inwardly, with the flow of sap. That primeval season of Phalgun-Chaitra would pass thus, in intoxication brimming with sap and in meaningless raving. And so there was no accounting owed to anyone for it.

If, afterward, a day of penitence came, if the drought of Baishakh-Jyaishtha had to be silently endured, head bowed—that I grant. Whatever belongs to whatever day must be accepted just as it comes. If enjoyment in the season of sap, and patience in the season of scorching, may be so readily embraced, then when the shower of consolation begins to fall, filling all ten directions, there is strength enough to draw it, entire, down into the very marrow of the bone.

But it was not my intention to say all this. People may suspect that, taking refuge in allegory, I have sat down to deliver a sermon. The suspicion cannot be called wholly groundless. The habit has gone bad.

I was saying this—that, having arrived at the final compartment of expression, many divisions have come to pass within mankind. The mineral portion, the vegetable portion, the animal portion, the barbarian portion, the true portion, the divine portion, and so forth. Each of these several portions has its own particular season of birth. I shall not take upon myself the burden of determining which

portion falls in which season. To reconcile one single theory to the very end would require telling a great many falsehoods. I am willing to say so; but I cannot manage so much labour today.

Today, reading on and on, gazing before me again and again, I have sat down to write only what comes easily to mind.

After a long winter, today, as new spring breathes forth suddenly in the midst of the noonday field, I feel within myself a great discord with human life. Its melody does not accord with the vast, with the whole. Whatever demands the world made upon me in winter, those very same demands continue today, exactly as before. The seasons are various, but the task remains one and the same. There is, it seems, a certain grand achievement in making the mind triumphant over the changing of the seasons, in rendering it insensible to them. The mind is a great fellow—what can it not do? It can, wholly disregarding the southern wind, rush headlong through the busy marketplace. Granted it can—but does it follow that it must do so? Its doing so will not leave the southern wind pining away at home—but who, then, shall bear the loss?

It was only a few days ago that leaves kept dropping, rustling, from our amloki, mahua, and sal boughs—like a traveller returning from far Phalgun, no sooner had he arrived at the door and heaved a single sigh of relief, than our whole forest-community abandoned the business of shedding leaves and, overnight, began sprouting tender new shoots instead.

We are human beings—there is no possibility of our being like that. Even when all around us the wind changes, the leaves change, the colours change, we still, like the ox yoked to its cart, go on hauling behind us the accumulated burden of the past at an unvarying pace, raising the dust of a single unbroken road. The bearer still carries the very same pole that was pressing against his ribs before.

I have no almanac at hand; I judge by guess that today is perhaps the fifteenth or sixteenth of Phalgun—the Goddess of Spring is today a maiden of sixteen. And yet, even today, newspapers keep issuing hour upon hour; and reading them, I see that our authorities are equally busy making laws for our welfare, and the opposition

equally engrossed in scrutinising them clause by clause. That these should be accounted the very highest affairs in the universe—that, with no regard whatever for the frantic bustle of Viceroy and Lieutenant-Governor, editor and sub-editor, the surging festival-assembly of the southern sea should come forth each year bearing that same eternal, message-laden tiding of new life, freshly proclaiming the promise of undying vitality across the face of the earth—this is no small thing for man to do; but we have no leisure to reflect upon such matters.

In olden days, when our clouds called, it was held inauspicious to undertake study; in the season of rain, travellers returned home. I cannot say that reading is impossible on a rainy day, or that working abroad during the monsoon is out of the question—man is free, independent; man is not one who clings to the skirts of inert Nature. But that because he has this power, he must therefore go on rebelling ceaselessly against vast Nature—what warrant is there for such a claim? If man would acknowledge his own kinship with the universe, would, for the sake of the new blue-black gathering clouds in the sky, set aside his reading and set aside his work, would preserve some small measure of reverence for the southern wind and refrain awhile from debating legislation—man would not go on sounding, forever, like a discordant note within the whole harmony of the created world. In the almanac certain vegetables—brinjal, beans, pumpkin—are forbidden on particular days; a few more prohibitions are needed—on which season it is unlawful to read the newspaper, in which season failing to attend the office is a mortal sin; rather than leaving this to the private judgement of the unappreciative, the scripture-makers ought to fix it once and for all.

That in springtime the heart of the lovelorn woman cries out in anguish—this we have read in ancient poetry; to write it now makes us feel a certain shyness, lest people laugh at us. In this very way have we severed the connection between our minds and Nature. In spring, throughout every forest and grove, the time for flowers to bloom arrives; then comes the abundance of their vitality, the festival of their unfolding. Then, in the ecstasy of self-giving, the vine and the tender shoot go mad; then they keep no account whatsoever—where two fruits ought to set, there they set twenty-five buds instead. Shall man alone check this flood of abundance? Shall he not blossom himself, not bear fruit, not wish to give—shall he do nothing but sweep the house, scour the dishes, and knit woollen mufflers, he who has none

of their affliction, until four in the afternoon? Are we, then, so utterly and only human? Are we no part at all of spring's deeply-flowing sap, its blossoming vine and flowering bough? They who stand encircling the courtyard of our home, covering it with shade, filling it with fragrance, embracing it with their arms—are they truly so foreign to us that when they burst into bloom, we shall put on our office-coats and go to work—shall no unutterable pang make our very heartstrings tremble like a shoot of new leaf?

Today, at least, I shall acknowledge my kinship, ancient beyond reckoning, with trees and plants. That to go about busily working is the sole peerless fulfilment of life—this, today, I shall in no wise grant. Today my invitation is to the home of that great elder sister of a bygone age, the goddess of the forest, to celebrate the festival of sibling affection. There, today, I must mingle with the vine and shoot as with the very people of my own household—today I shall spend the whole day fallen in shadow, today I must stretch out both hands and clasp the earth to myself; and when the spring breeze blows, I would let its joy pass, unhindered, rushing through the very ribs of my breast—there, let it wake no such sound as the trees and plants themselves do not understand. Thus, until the very end of Chaitra, I shall spread my life out raw and green among earth, air, and sky—I shall lie quietly fallen, now in light, now in shadow.

But alas, no work has ceased; the account-book still lies open just the same. I have fallen into the machinery of rule, into the trap of duty—now, whether spring comes or spring goes, what does it matter?

To human society I humbly submit: this state of affairs is not right; it needs correcting. It is not by being separate from the universe that man's glory consists. Man is great because within him lies every variety of the universe. Man is mineral with the mineral, vine with the vine, deer and bird with deer and bird. Every door, of every hall, in Nature's palace, stands open to him. But what use is it that they stand open! When, season by season, invitations to festival arrive from one hall or another, if man, refusing to heed them, lies content within the confines of his own narrow den—then how did he come to possess so vast a privilege? Without acknowledging that to become fully human he must become all things, why has man set up manhood as some narrow banner of rebellion against the universe, and

gone on holding it aloft? Why does he go on proudly, again and again, declaring: I am not mineral, not vegetable, not beast—I am man; I only work and criticise, I govern and I rebel. Why does he not say instead: I am all things; with all things I hold unbounded communion; the banner of separateness is not mine.

Alas, bird chained to the perch of society, today the sky's blue is dream-drenched as the eyes of the lovelorn woman, today the leaf's green is fresh as a young girl's cheek, today the wind of spring is restless as the eagerness of union. And yet, yet your two wings remain bound today, yet upon your feet the fetters of duty still clank and rattle—is this, then, to be human?

Chaitra, 1309

THE CLOSED HOUSE

Within the great house, one room alone stands shut. Rust has gathered on its lock; its key can nowhere be found. In the evening no light burns in that room; in the daytime no one dwells within it—since how long, none can say.

To open that room one feels afraid; walking past it in the dark, one's very body shudders. Where men do not laugh and speak with men, there our fear is greatest. In that sacred place where man and man exchange looks and greeting, no fear can ever enter.

Two doors stand shut, facing each other, in the middle of the house. Set your ear against the door and you may hear, within, a low murmuring sound.

This room is a widow. Someone once was here; that one is gone, and since then the door of this chamber has remained closed. Since that day none has ever come here, and from here none has ever gone. Since that day, it is as if death itself has died within these walls.

In this world the ceaseless current of life sweeps death rushing onward; the dead can find no place to linger anywhere. Fearing this, the tomb, like a miser, hides the dead within walls of stone to save it from the thief's hand, and fear keeps watch over it day and night. Death alone is condemned by men as a thief, but that life too, in a single unguarded moment, steals death away and disperses it among its own vast, sprawling family—of this, no one ever speaks.

The earth takes death into her lap, and life too she keeps in her lap; in her embrace the two play together like brother and sister. Seeing this flow of life and death, seeing the play of shadow and light upon the crest of the wave, we feel no fear at all; but the sight of bound death, of arrested shadow, brings fear upon us at once. Where death's motion continues, where death dances hand in hand with life, there death too has its life, and there death is not terrible. But death arrested, motionless, shut within four walls—that is death indeed, and that alone is terrible. For this reason the burial ground is fear's own dwelling place.

Whatever comes into this world, that same thing departs. In this flow alone lies the health of the world. Let the passage of even the smallest particle be obstructed, and the world's harmony is broken. As life comes, so life goes. As death comes, so death too goes. Why do you try to seize and hold it fast? Why turn the heart to stone, and entomb death within that very stone? It becomes then merely the cause of disease. Let it go, let it depart—do not obstruct the flow of life and death. Keep both doors of the heart equally open. Let all enter by the door of entrance, let all depart by the door of departure.

This house has kept both its doors shut. The ancient darkness of the day the door was first closed still keeps its solitary vigil within the room even now. Outside the house, day follows day, night follows night; within the house, only that one day sits enthroned still. There, time is arrested within four walls. The past dwells nowhere else—it dwells here, in this room.

Between the inside and the outside of this house, complete severance has come to pass. Tidings from without do not reach within; the breath from within cannot come out. The current of the world flows past on both sides of this house. This house seems to have cut the very cord of its kinship with the universe.

The house, its door shut fast, gazes toward the road. When the light of the full moon falls, kneeling, at its very door, who can say whether that door longs, or does not long, to open? When from the next room the joyous clamour of festival rises, does not its darkness then wish to break free? In what manner this house desires, in what manner it listens, we cannot at all comprehend.

That noisy day when children once played within this room now lies weeping in the midnight silence of this house. Upon the loving, tender play that once unfolded within these walls, a door has suddenly fallen shut—standing outside this silent house, I hear their weeping. Love and affection were not made to be shut up and kept confined. They were not made to be severed from human company and kept apart, guarded in isolation. Bind them by force, and they weep for the field of the world.

So let not this house remain shut in mourning—throw wide its door. Let it, seeing the sunlight, hearing the response of humankind, be startled, and let its fear take flight. Joy and sorrow, grief and festival, birth and death shall pass forever through its casement like the sacred breeze, day upon day. Then shall it be joined once more to the whole of the universe.

Therefore, keep not this house shut—open the door. At the sight of the sun's light, at the touch of human presence, let fear, startled, take its leave. Joy and sorrow, grief and celebration, birth and death, shall pass through its window forever, like a sacred wind. Thus shall it become one with all the world once more.

Ashwin-Kartik, 1292

AT THE ROAD'S EDGE

I sit writing at the edge of the road, and what I write I cannot tell, for I hardly know myself.

A shaded road. At its edge, my small dwelling. Its window stands open. In the early morning the sun's first ray comes, with the trembling shadow of the ashoka branch, and stands before me; it looks upon me, falls into my lap and plays there, comes and settles upon my page, and when it departs, leaves behind a touch of golden hue upon the page; the mark of its molten-gold kiss remains upon my writing. Around my page, dawn bursts into bloom. The flowers of the field, the colours of the clouds, the morning breeze, and a trace still lingering of sleep, all mingle within my pages; the love of the dawn-sun entwines itself about the edges of my letters.

Past my window how many people come, how many go. The light of dawn blesses them, says tenderly, "May your journey be blessed"—the birds sing their benediction, and along the wayside flowers bloom here and there like hope itself springing up. At the start of the journey all say, "Fear not, fear not." In the morning the whole created universe sings its song of auspicious departure. Across the boundless blue the sun's chariot of light goes rushing on. All creation, animate and inanimate, seems in that very instant to have burst forth proclaiming the triumph of the Lord of the Universe. Smiling Dawn stretches out its arms across the sky, pointing the way onward toward the infinite, showing the world its path. Dawn is the world's hope, its assurance, the invocation at the opening of each day's drama. Each day it lifts the veil of gold from the previous night and brings tidings of blessing from heaven into the world, gathers, as it were, the very nectar of the whole day, and with it the paradise-flowers of Nandan come drifting down, awakening the fragrance of earth's flowers. Dawn is the blessing upon the world's setting-forth; and that blessing is no falsehood.

Casting their shadow upon my page, the people of the world pass along the road. They carry nothing with them. They go on, forgetting joy and sorrow as they walk. They go on, casting off, at every step, the burden of each passing moment. Their

laughter and their weeping fall upon my page and take root there and sprout. Their songs they themselves forget; their love they leave behind, unforgotten.

Nothing else remains, but love remains with them always. Their whole journey they make only in loving. Wherever upon the road they set their feet, that very spot they love. There alone they wish to leave their heart behind—with the tears of their parting they make that ground fertile. Along both sides of their road, new flowers and new stars bloom continually. New and ever-new fellow-travellers they go on loving as they advance. Drawn by love's pull, they move on; for want of love, the weariness of every step would be unbearable. Like a mother's tenderness, the beauty of the world accompanies them along every road, calls them forth from the dark inner chamber of the heart, and, coming from behind, embraces them from in front and draws them onward.

Had anyone the power to bind love and hold it fast, the traveller's journey would come to a halt. Had love anywhere found its grave, the traveller would lie upon that grave like a lifeless stone, a mere symbol of what once was. As the rudder binds the boat to itself, so true love never holds anyone bound, but draws him onward instead. In the pull of love's bond, every other bond is torn away. Beneath the force of the greater love, the threads of every lesser love snap. That is why the world moves on at all—else it would have grown motionless beneath the sheer weight of itself.

As the travellers pass, I, from my window, see their laughter, hear their weeping. The very love that makes one weep is the same love that afterward wipes away the tears, that kindles anew the light of laughter. In laughter, in tears, in light, in rain, love keeps the garden of beauty around us forever in bloom. Love never lets anyone weep forever. The very love that makes you weep for the loss of one shall bring another close to you in turn; love says, "Look once more, with kindness—those who remain are, in nothing, less than the one who is gone." But you, blinded with tears, can see no other, and so you cannot love. You then wish to die, unable to bear the world's tasks. You sit turned away, unwilling to set out upon life's journey. But in the end love triumphs; love draws you forth, and you cannot lie forever, face buried, upon death.

Those who set out at dawn with joyful hearts must go very far. Very, very far indeed. Had they no love for the road itself, they could never travel so long a path. It is because they love the road that every footstep brings them contentment. Because they love this road, they go on; and yet, because they love this road, they wish they need not go on at all. They do not wish to lift their feet. At every step they feel the illusion: "What I have had, I shall never have again"—yet, having advanced, they forget it all once more. At every step they wipe away their grief, again and again. It is only because they anticipate sorrow beforehand that they weep at all; otherwise there is no cause for weeping.

See there—a mother, cradling her small child to her breast, walks along the road of the world. Who has bound the mother to this child? Who is it that, through this child, draws the mother onward? By love's power, the thorns of the path turn to flowers beneath the mother's feet. Who has made the road as sweet as home itself, by placing the child in the mother's arms? Yet, alas, why does the mother misunderstand? Why does she think that within this one child alone lies the end of her infinity? On the infinite road, where all the children of the world gather together to play, one child, taking his mother's hand, leads her into that very kingdom of childhood—there dwell a hundred million children. There the tender mouths of the world's own have blossomed, turning the very place into a paradise garden. What eagerness there is to snatch and hold the moon of the sky close! There resounds the sweet babble of broken speech. But listen now to the other side—how the helpless, tender ones are weeping! Disease enters their infant bodies and wastes away their soft limbs, delicate as flower petals. No sound comes from their tender throats; they try, feebly, to cry, but the cry dies within the throat itself. And ah, what cruelty the barbarous adults inflict upon these little ones!

One child comes and makes a mother the mother of every child in the world. She who has no child of her own finds a door of the infinite heaven shut fast before her; that one child comes and opens for her that very door of heaven; and then you may go, and let him go too. His work is finished; he has other work to do.

Love takes us from within outward, from self toward the other, advances us from the one toward the other. That is why I call it the light of the road; were it merely the light of a will-o'-the-wisp, it would lead you astray, break your neck, and cast

you into some pit or other, sealing you in altogether—and, falling into that one particular thing, your infinite journey would come to its end there—other travellers would pass you by, taking you for dead. But now there is no possibility of that. To love one is to learn to love another as well; that is, the very purpose of surpassing the one lies in moving toward the other.

All have come only to show the way; none has come to obstruct the way. For this reason none crowds around and encircles you; all step aside and clear your path, all pass by, one after another. None can bind either himself or another. Should a man, of his own will, build a wall around himself, the flowing current of time, striking again and again, will one day break that wall down and expose him upon the open road. Then, lacking that shelter, he trembles, shivering; he weeps aloud in his misery, crying "alas, alas." He curses the world for its double-dealing. He strives with all his might to bury himself in the dust.

We were, after all, born as travellers—had the Infinite Power simply seized us by force and carried us along this endless road, had blind fate dragged us on by the very roots of our hair, what could we, in our weakness, have done? But at the outset of the journey we hear no thunderclap of command—we hear, instead, the assuring voice of the dawn. There is hardship upon the road, there is sorrow, no doubt, and yet still we go on, loving as we go. We do not always heed it, true, yet love stretches forth its arms toward us from a thousand directions. May we learn to bow our heads to that ceaseless call of love, to walk on without becoming entangled in illusion, so that in the end inexorable law does not come and bind us fast in chains.

I sit beside this vast lament and this vast rejoicing of countless people. I see, I think, I love. I say to the travellers: "May your journey be blessed. I give you my love as provision for the road." For, to walk the road, nothing more is needed than love alone. May all give that love to all. May traveller help traveller upon the way.

Agrahayan, 1292

CHOTA NAGPUR

I boarded the train for Howrah at night. Jolted by the shaking of the carriage, sleep grows blurred and confused. Waking, sleeping, dreaming, and consciousness get mixed together like a hodgepodge. Now and then, rows of lights, the clanging of bells, clamour, the calling out of station names in a medley of voices. Then, with the "clang-clang-clang" of three strokes of the bell, in a moment everything vanishes—all darkness, all silence—only, amid the faintly starlit night, the ceaseless rattle of the carriage wheels. To the rhythm of that sound, within my head a whole procession of nonsensical dreams goes on dancing throughout the night. At four in the morning we had to change trains at Madhupur station. When the darkness had faded, I sat by the carriage window and looked out at the morning light upon the world beyond.

The train pressed steadily onward. In parts of the broken field one could see the sandy bed of a dried-up river; along that dry channel great black stones lay strewn like the skeleton of the earth. Now and then a hill would appear, shaped like a human head. The distant hills were a deep blue, as though the blue clouds of the sky had come down to play and been caught fast upon the earth; as if they had lifted a wing to fly up into the sky, but, being bound, could not rise; and their own kindred clouds came down from the sky to embrace them in passing. See there—a man black as stone, with matted, tangled hair tied in a knot, standing with a bundle of sticks in his hand. Two buffaloes yoked together with a plough, the ploughing not yet begun, standing motionless, gazing at the passing train. Here and there a patch of ground was fenced round with aloe hedges, all neat and gleaming, with a lined well in the middle. All about, great expanses of dryness showed everywhere. The thin, tall, withered white grasses looked somehow like grey hair. The short, leafless shrubs had dried and curled up, turned black. Far off, here and there, a palm tree stood with its small head and one long leg. Now and then a peepul tree, or a mango tree, would appear too. In the midst of this parched field, the roofless, broken foundation of one solitary old hut stood facing its own shadow. Nearby, part of the thick trunk of a large felled tree.

At six in the morning we arrived at Giridih station. There is no railway beyond this. From here one must travel by dak-gari. The dak-gari is drawn by men. Can this even be called a carriage? A small cage upon four wheels, nothing more.

First we went to the Giridih dak-bungalow and bathed and took our meal. As far as the eye can see around the dak-bungalow, there is no trace of grass. Here and there a scattered handful of trees. All around, it seems as if waves of red earth have risen up. A scrawny tattoo pony stood tethered beneath a tree, looking about on every side, wondering what it might find to eat, and, having nothing else to do, rubbed itself against the trunk of the tree, scratching its body. Tied by a long rope to another tree was a goat, which, after considerable research, was tearing off, bit by bit, some green vegetable growth that resembled a leafy vegetable, going pat-pat. From here we set out on our journey. A hilly road. Looking forward and backward one could see far into the distance. Through the dry, empty, wide-stretching plain, the shadowless, long, winding road, twisting like a serpent, lay parched under the sun. Now, with much straining and hauling, the men would push the carriage up onto some rise in the road; now the carriage would go rolling and rumbling swiftly down some sloping stretch. As we went on and on, hills gradually began to appear on either side. Tall, slender sal trees. Termite mounds. The stumps of felled trees. In places, an entire hillside was covered from top to bottom with nothing but tall, thin, leafless trees. These starving trees held up their dry, wasted, bony, long fingers toward the sky; looking at these hills, one felt as though they had been pierced through by a thousand arrows, as though they were Bhishma's bed of arrows. Clouds gathered in the sky, and a light rain began to fall. The coolies, hauling the carriage, would every now and then let out a dreadful shout. Now and then the carriage would strike some pebble in the road and give a violent jolt. At one point in the plain the road ended, and, in a broad expanse of sandy bed, a thin trickle of river appeared. Asking the name of the river, the coolies said, "Barakar River." Straining and hauling, they dragged the carriage across this river and set it once more upon the road. On either side of the road stood pools of stagnant water, in which four or five buffaloes lay, heads resting upon one another's backs, half their bodies submerged, casting a sidelong glance toward us now and then, in utter laziness.

When evening came, we got down from the carriage and walked. In the near distance two hills could be seen, with a road rising and dipping through the pass between them. Wherever one looked, there were no people, no habitation, no crops, no cultivated fields; on every side the uneven earth lay silent, soundless, still as a hard, solid ocean. Over the far edges of the horizon, the flickering golden shadow of twilight had settled. Though there was no sign of man or beast anywhere, still one felt as though, upon this vast expanse of earth stretched out like a bed, preparations for sleep were somehow being made for some titanic being. It was as though someone stood as a sentinel with finger to lips, and so all held their breath in fear. From far away, like a mirage, a single traveller passed slowly by us on horseback, bearing a load.

The night passed somehow, in waking, sleeping, and turning from side to side. Waking, I saw, on the left, a dense, leafy forest. Vines upon every tree, the ground covered with all manner of undergrowth. Above the forest's crown, the distant blue peaks of hills could be seen. Massive boulders. Here and there, in the cracks of the rocks, a tree; its hungry roots, grown long, thrusting out from every side, splitting the stone apart, gripping it fast with hard fists, trying to wring food from it. Suddenly, on the left, the jungle vanished. A wide-stretching, far-reaching field. In the distance cattle grazed, looking as small as goats. With buffalo or ox yoked to the plough, farmers ploughed, twisting the tails of the beasts. The tilled fields rose in terraces upon the hillside to the left, step upon step.

At three in the afternoon we arrived at the Hazaribagh dak-bungalow. Set in a vast, open plain, the town of Hazaribagh appeared quite clean and neat. There was little of the urban about it. Narrow lanes and alleys, refuse, gutters, jostling crowds, uproar, carriages and horses, dust and mud, flies and mosquitoes—of all these there was little; amid field, hill, and greenery the town gleamed bright and clear.

A day passed. Now it is midday. I sit alone, silent, in an easy chair before the veranda of the dak-bungalow. The sky is deep blue. Two patches of thin cloud drift by, sails of white unfurled. A light breeze is blowing. A certain earthy-grassy fragrance comes wafting. On the veranda roof, a squirrel. Two mynas come to the veranda and, with a start, flick their tails and hop about. Along the road nearby, cattle are being driven, and I hear the tinkling of the bells at their throats. People

pass along the road—some with umbrellas over their heads, some with bundles on their shoulders, some driving a cow or two, some mounted on a small tattoo pony—all moving very slowly, unhurried; no clamour, no bustle, no trace of anxious thought upon their faces. Watching them, one feels that human life here does not move panting and gasping like a swift engine, nor groaning like the wheel of a heavily laden ox-cart. As, beneath the trees, a little cool spring flows gently, murmuring, shadow upon shadow, so life here seems to flow. There, that is the courthouse. But even the courthouse here does not wear so stern an aspect. Within, though lawyer and pleader wage their battles one against another, outside, from the peepul tree, two hoopoes keep up their ceaseless calling back and forth. Litigants sit clustered in the shade of a mango tree, laughing uproariously—I can hear it even from here. Now and then, from the courthouse, the noon bell rings out. Amid the soft, unhurried motion of life all around, the sound of this bell, when one hears it, makes one realise that time has not simply drifted away upon the current of languor—time stands fixed, in the midst of all, proclaiming with an iron voice, each hour, "Whether any other wakes or not, I remain awake." But the writer's own state is not quite the same. Drowsiness is stealing over my eyes.

Ashadh, 1292

THE VOYAGE OF THE SAROJINI

(An Incomplete Account)

Friday, the 11th of Jyaishtha. English date, the 23rd of May, 1884. Today, at an auspicious hour, the steamer Sarojini, with her two iron-hulled companion vessels lashed to either side, would set out for Barisal, the place of her duty. The company of travellers had grown; the arrangement had been that we three should go—three men of middle years. Rising in the morning, I had packed my things and stood ready; with a somewhat downcast face I was making all preparations to take leave of my most amiably teasing sister-in-law, when word came that she, together with her children, would be joining us on the journey. She had heard from someone that, on the very route by which we were to travel to Barisal, many others had, it was said, set out for Barisal and never arrived; and fearing lest we too should be so deceived, she spent a good long while gazing intently at the nails of the five small, slender fingers of her right hand, weighing the matter most deliberately, until at last, at precisely eight o'clock, having drawn from those nail-tips every last consideration and argument she could possibly muster, she climbed up and seated herself in the carriage along with us.

The streets of Calcutta in the morning are not a particularly pretty sight, especially Chitpur Road. The first rays of the morning sun fell upon the roofs of the sheytkora-carriage stables, and upon the shops of the Muslim traders selling chandeliers of glass beads in a row beyond. The sunlight glittered so fiercely upon the gas-lamps that one could hardly bear to look that way. Having played the part of stars all through the night without fully satisfying their ambition, the lamps now, in the morning, from a hundred thousand miles away, made faces at the sun and strove with all their might to gleam the brighter for it. The tram-car went whistling along, but as yet few passengers had gathered. The Municipality's cart, bearing away Calcutta's refuse, moved along at an exceedingly sluggish pace. Along the edge of the footpath stood rows of sheytkora carriages, waiting for fares; and in that interval the horse-skeletons, wrapped in horsehide, hung their heads and chewed abstractedly at very dry bundles of hay; watching their air of otherworldly detachment, one felt that, after much profound reflection, they had failed to find

any distinction whatsoever, upon comparing all the affairs of this great universe, with the bundle of hay lying before them. To the south, at the Muslim shops, parts of the carcasses of goats hung on ropes, some cut into pieces on skewers turning over the flame, while the enormous, red-fleshed, beardless butchers baked great loaves of bread in their huge hands. Beside the kebab shop was a place where puffed rice-balls were being made; from very early dawn their ovens had been lit. Some, lifting the flaps of their shirts, were washing face and hands; some swept before their shops; one, by chance, with dye-reddened beard, spectacles perched on his nose, was reading a page of some Persian book. Ahead stood a mosque; a blind beggar sat with outstretched hand upon its steps.

We reached the coal-ghat on the bank of the Ganges. From a distance, the moored boats with their thatched awnings looked like the huge shoes of some giant, sized to fit his feet. It seemed as though, having suddenly come to life, they were remembering their absent feet and waiting restlessly to go clip-clopping off somewhere. If only they could move once, that seemed to be their wish. Now and then one would rise up, as if standing tall to look toward the shore to see if anyone were coming, then sink back down again. Now, eager and restless, it would move toward the water, then, on some second thought, check itself and turn back toward the bank. No sooner had our feet touched ground from the carriage than boatmen came swarming upon us in droves. One says, "In my boat!" another says, "In my boat!" In this manner, in the wave of boatmen, the little boat of our body was whirled about, now to the right, now to the left, now in the middle, caught in an eddy. At last, driven by circumstance—or perhaps by the working of some particular deed from a former birth—we fell into one particular boat. The sail was hoisted, and the boat set off. There were rather more waves on the Ganges today than usual, and the wind too had risen. It was flood-tide now. Little boats, sails unfurled, were speeding along today with great vigour, listing over almost onto their own beam-ends. A huge steamer, with two iron-hulled companions on either side, its funnel raised in utter disdain of the small boats about it, came rushing toward us in a gong-gong of sound, breathing smoke. Looking closely, we saw it was our own ship. "Hold! Hold! Stop! Stop!" The boatman said, "Do not fear, sir, I have caught many a ship in just this way before." Needless to say, this time too he caught it. A ladder was lowered from the ship. The children were lifted up first, and

then, when my sister-in-law, with great difficulty, had lifted her own two lotus-soft feet up onto the ship, we too, like bees swarming, climbed up after her.

II

Though the current and the wind were against us, our great elephant of a vessel, trunk raised aloft, trumpeting, ignoring altogether the elegance of an elephant's stately gait, rushed forward at the speed of forty racehorses. We six, together with the ship's elderly captain, all seven of us together, sat down in easy-chairs in a somewhat open space before the ship's cabin. Above our heads there was but a single awning. From ahead, the wind came rushing with a whooshing sound past our ears, entering our clothes and suddenly billowing them out with a flapping noise, and again and again it encouraged my sister-in-law's long, well-arranged hair into fresh acts of rebellion. Being, apparently, of the lineage of serpents, it rose in revolt, and, escaping the confines of its braid, went searching for a path into the crevices of my honoured sister-in-law's nostrils and the corners of her mouth; while other locks, rearing upward, tossing about, staged a veritable festival of the serpent-realm right upon her head; only the great python called the braid remained bound in its hundred coils, pierced through with its hundred pins, wound about itself a hundred times, lying lifeless, coiled like a rope near the nape of her neck. At length, at some point, our elder brother, letting his head sink toward his shoulder, began to doze off, and my sister-in-law too, forgetting the rebelliousness of her hair, closed her eyes upon her chair.

The ship went on without pause. Waves leaped up on every side—among them, one now and again, outstripping the rest, raising its white hood, would seem to come dashing suddenly against the ship's deck as if to strike it; roaring, calling to its comrades behind by raising its head; swelling and swelling in defiance as it advanced—overhead the sunlight blazed like brilliant eyes—it would rise up, tilting to peer closely at the boats to see what they carried within; and then, in a moment, its curiosity satisfied, giving the boat a shake, it would go rushing off elsewhere. Little skiffs, unfurling their sails, seemed to be enjoying, of their own accord, the pleasure of their own sweet motion; they cared nothing for the dignity of the great, mast-crowned ship, paid no heed even to the mournful blast of the steamer's whistle—rather, they would spread their sails right before the very face of some

great vessel, laughing and making mischief as they passed; nor did the ship take any great offence at this. But the ferry-boats behaved quite differently—they took a full three hours just to move at all, their very appearance suggesting sheer stupidity, and, being themselves incapable of getting out of the way, they would in the end insist that the ship move aside for them—when they came too close alongside, such impudence became almost unbearable.

At one point word came that our ship had no captain. That he had slipped away, unnoticed, the very night before the ship set sail—hearing this, my sister-in-law's drowsiness vanished at once; it struck her suddenly that, in the absence of a captain, the safest course was to rely upon the immovable refuge of the anchor. Our elder brother said there was no need for that; those beneath the captain were in no way inferior to the captain himself. The old captain-sahib was of the same opinion. The rest of us remained silent, but our minds were by no means set at ease. Still, seeing that the ship really was moving along, and that even the shouting and commotion left no want of a captain apparent, I too held my peace. Suddenly the throbbing heartbeat of the ship's engine stopped! The machinery had ceased! A cry went up—"Drop anchor! Drop anchor!"—and the anchor was dropped. Somewhere in the machinery a joint had come loose, and only when it was repaired could the ship move again. Repairs began. It was now half past ten; there seemed little likelihood that repairs would be finished before two o'clock.

Sitting there, I began watching the beauty of the Ganges' banks. From south of Shantipur onward, nowhere else is the beauty of the Ganges' shore quite like this. Trees, shade, cottages—an unbroken feast for the eyes stretching in rows along both banks, nowhere pausing. In places the bank, covered in green grass, sloped down and merged into the lap of the Ganges; in places dense trees, entangled in webs of creeper, leaned right down to the water's edge, their shadows trembling ceaselessly upon the water; a few rays of sunlight glimmered here and there amid that shadow, and the rest glinted upon the trembling, smooth, green leaves of the trees. One or two country boats lay moored close by to some tree-trunk, sleeping a deep, restful sleep beneath that shade, gently rocked by the murmur of the ceaseless water. On the other side, through the very dense shade of great trees, a broken, winding footpath came down to the water's edge. Along that path the village women were coming down to fetch water, pitchers on their hips; boys were

splashing water at one another and swimming with great commotion in the mud below. What beauty in these old, broken ghats! One almost forgets that men built these ghats at all; they seem, like the trees, to belong naturally to the Ganges' own shore. Through the great cracks in their stones, peepul trees have grown up; grass sprouts through the gaps between the bricks of the steps; through many years' monsoon rains, moss has settled upon their surface—and its colour has blended so naturally with the green of the surrounding foliage. Where man's work left off, Nature seems to have taken it up in her own hands and refined it further; brush in hand, she has touched her own colour here and there. She has spoiled the excessively rigid, proud, gleaming neatness, and established instead a broken, disordered charm. All the village boys and girls who come here to bathe or to fetch water seem to have formed some particular bond with this place—one is its granddaughter, another its nephew, another its mother or aunt. When their grandfathers and grandmothers were small, they played upon these very steps, slipped and fell here in the rainy season. And that famous singer of jatra-plays, blind Srinivas, who in the evenings, sitting on this very step, played his violin and sang "The Days Are Gone, the Days Are Gone" in raga Gauri, while two or four villagers gathered round—no one now even remembers his name. Even the ruined temples along the Ganges' bank seem to hold some special sanctity. Within them no image of the deity remains. But the temple itself has become, like some very ancient sage with matted locks, an object of the deepest reverence and holiness. In one place or another there would be a settlement of people—there, fishermen's boats lay moored in rows. Some in the water, some hauled up on the bank, some turned bottom-up on the shore for repair, their ribs showing. The huts were clustered rather closely together—some fenced with crooked, patchy wattle; two or four cows grazing; a couple of the village's scrawny dogs wandering idly along the riverbank; a naked boy stood with a finger in his mouth, staring in wonder at our ship, before a patch of brinjal plants. Fishermen's boys, floating gourd-shells and carrying little rope-tied nets, wandered along the banks catching prawns. Before us, on the shore, beneath the web-like roots of a banyan tree, the river's current had washed away the earth, and within those very roots a secluded shelter had come to be formed. An old woman lived there with two or four earthen pots and a single mat. And again, elsewhere, upon a sandbank, kaash-grass stretched far into the distance; in autumn, when it flowers, at every ripple of the breeze waves of laughter seem to rise upon a sea of mirth. For whatever reason, even the brick-kilns

along the Ganges' bank look rather pleasing to me; around them no trees grow, on every side lies rough, uneven waste ground, here and there bricks scattered about, many broken shards strewn around, in places earth dug up—amid this barrenness and desolation the kilns stand somehow like unfortunate wretches. Amid a row of trees, a twelve-shrined temple of Shiva could be seen; before it, a ghat, and from the naubat-khana the ceremonial drums were sounding. Right beside it, the ferry-crossing. A rough ghat, built with palm-trunks laid step by step. And to the south, a potter's house, gourds hanging down from the thatched roof. An elderly woman was plastering the wall of her cottage with cow-dung; the courtyard was clean, gleaming; only in one corner a bottle-gourd vine climbed upon a trellis, and elsewhere a tulsi-plant stood in its little shrine.

If one has not seen the beauty of the western bank of the Ganges, floating a boat at sunset upon its unrippled water, one might as well say one has never seen the beauty of Bengal at all. No description can do justice to this holy, peaceful, incomparable beauty. In that golden-shadowed, faded evening light—the tall coconut trees, the temple-spires, the heads of the still trees etched against the canvas of the sky, and, upon the motionless water, the evening's glow like a shimmer of loveliness—sweet stillness, silenced clamour, unfathomable peace—all these together appear like a mirage of paradise, like a picture of some far-off, beyond-the-shadow-path Shantiniketan, painted along the very margin of the western horizon. Gradually the evening light fades away; here and there in the forest a lamp is lit, one by one; suddenly a wind rises from the south, the leaves rustle and tremble, the swift river flows on in the darkness, and against the banks the ceaseless beat of waves keeps up its splashing sound—nothing more can be seen or heard, only the chirr of crickets rising, and fireflies flickering on and off in the darkness. Night deepens further. Gradually the moon of the seventh day of the dark fortnight rises slowly into the sky, through dense darkness, over the crowns of the peepul trees. Below, the ranked darkness of the forest; above, the pale glow of the moon. In one place, upon the Ganges, half lit and half dark, a patch of light falls and breaks apart, wave upon wave. Upon the indistinct line of forest on the far bank a little more light falls, yet even in that light nothing can be clearly seen—it only renders the far bank's remoteness and vagueness the more sweetly mysterious. This side seems the realm of sleep, that far side the land of dreams.

These pictures of the Ganges rising in my mind—are they all the fruit of this one voyage of the steamer? Not so. These are pictures of many bygone days, etched within the mind. They are pictures of great joy; today I have set them, on every side, in a frame of crystal tears. Beauty such as this I shall never see again in this life.

The repairs were finished; the passengers had eaten; with much noise the anchor was raised. The ship set off. To the left, the vast estate of the Nawab of Muchikhola; to the right, the Shibpur Botanical Garden. The further south we went, the wider the Ganges grew. At two or three in the afternoon, having partaken of fruit, we began discussing where we should stop for the evening. Many ships passed us, going and coming, flags flying on either side—watching their proud motion, our own enthusiasm grew all the greater. Though the wind blew against us, the current was in our favour. Along with our enthusiasm, the ship's speed too increased greatly—the ship rocked and swayed handsomely now. From a distance we saw great waves rising, lifting their necks; we all waited eagerly for them—they came dashing against the ship's side in impotent fury, roaring, striking their heads violently against the ship's iron ribs—then, defeated, retreating two steps, only to come rushing forward again to strike once more—we all watched this together with delight. Suddenly I saw the captain-sahib turn pale and rush toward the helmsman. Suddenly a cry went up: "Here! Here! Hold! Hold! Stop! Stop!" Our hearts were shaken far more violently than by any wave of the Ganges. Looking ahead, I saw a great iron buoy rushing straight at our ship—that is, we were rushing straight upon the buoy. There was no way to check it now. Everyone stood as if spellbound, staring at the buoy. The thing came on like a charging buffalo, horns lowered. At last it struck.

III

Where now was that ceaseless splashing of water, that day-and-night festival of a hundred thousand waves, where that unbroken line of forest, that unconfined blue of the sky, that infinite, varied wave of youth, ever-surging toward the boundless like the swelling heart of the earth in the fullness of her new spring, where those tender, hidden hair-like growths concealed within Nature's own green body—above, that ever-still sky, below, that ever-restless flowing river! Where now is the

union, unbroken through love, of the eternally silent with the eternally clamorous, of the everywhere-equal with the endlessly varied, of the utterly indifferent with the ever-changing? Here, all around, the very brick and mortar, the dust and the nose-ring, the carriage and the horse, are locked in sudden collision. Here, on every side, is the meeting of wall with wall, of door with door-latch, of beam with rafter, of collar-stud tightly fastened to button.

Readers have doubtless understood by now—all this while I have been writing on location, so to speak—if not exactly on location on land, then certainly on location on water—now we have returned, land-lubbers that we are, back to dry land. Now what I write about that place, I write here; what happened earlier, I set down later; so whatever errors I make from now on, I cannot be held responsible for them.

It is now midday. Before me sits a desk; on the doormat sleeps a fat black dog; on the veranda a chained monkey picks the lice from its tail; three crows sit upon the parapet, cawing for no reason, and now and then, with a sudden dart, snatch up a mouthful of the monkey's leftover rice in their beaks and go perch upon the roof. In a corner of the room, inside an old harmonium-case, a few rats are scratching and gnawing. In this one dry, hard chamber of a Calcutta house I am summoning up the Ganges—there is far more room here than in the parched belly of some fasting hermit of old. And there is no such thing as spatial limitation in Nature at all. That exists only in our minds. See—within the seed lies the whole forest; within a single living creature lies its infinite line of descendants. That bottle of blue-black ink I bought from Stephens' shop—within every single drop of it lies latent the very marrow-tincture of how many readers' cleverness! Were this bottle of ink to fall, by chance, into truly capable hands, then, looking at it, I might think: just as, before creation began, this vast, luminous, undying world lay latent within darkness, so within this one bottle of darkness lies latent how much luminous, new creation. Merely looking at a bottle brings so many thoughts to mind—were I to stand where Stephens' ink-factory itself stands, and reflect upon it even once, I doubt I could keep my head steady at all. How many manuscripts, how many failures, how much fame, how much disgrace, how much knowledge, how much madness, how many death-warrants, declarations of war, letters of love, have flowed out, turned black, in that stream! That stream, when it flowed over all the world—then—never mind the ink, as it gradually thickened and dried, the whole of Stephens' factory itself

seemed, by some strange chance, to have tipped right over—this brings to mind the matter of blotting paper. But let us turn the stream back again. Come, let us return now to the current of the Ganges.

See the proof of the difference between a true event and a work of fiction: our ship struck the buoy, and yet did not sink—there was no occasion for supreme heroics, no one had to be rescued at the risk of life—in the first chapter no one drowned and died, and in the twenty-sixth chapter no one arose alive upon the shore. That I did not drown was, doubtless, a matter of good fortune, but in the writing of it, it makes for rather poor material. Readers will surely be greatly disappointed; but that I did not drown is no fault of mine—it is entirely the working of fate. Let no one, therefore, be angry with me on that account—this is my earnest plea.

I did not die, true, but I did receive a thoroughly good butting from the buffalo of the god of death. And so that jolt remained etched upon the tablet of memory. For a while we all sat gazing blankly at one another's faces—the same expression upon every face, all feeling that any exchange of words was quite superfluous. My sister-in-law sat curled somehow into a great chair. Her two small dependents clung, huddled, to either side of me. Elder brother, for some time, stroked his moustache repeatedly without being able to reach any conclusion. The captain-sahib, in anger, said the whole fault lay with the helmsman; the helmsman said the fault lay with the man who had been steering under him; that man said the fault lay with the wheel itself. The wheel, saying nothing at all, remained submerged bolt upright in the water, and the Ganges, in her ambivalence, preserved its modesty.

It was here that the anchor was dropped. The passengers' enthusiasm gradually diminished as we watched; the same expressions of face, the same imaginative engine-throb of speed and sound that had shown itself in the morning, were nowhere to be seen in the same measure by evening. Our enthusiasm sank, along with the anchor, seven cubits down into the water. Our one consolation was that we ourselves did not have to sink so far. But suddenly the possibility of just that struck our consciousness. The more we mulled this over, the more terribly the possibility of our sinking loomed in our minds. At this moment the sun approached the crest of the western hills. Considering that the path to not reaching Barisal was far simpler and shorter than the path to reaching it, elder brother began pacing up

and down upon the ship's deck. Sitting upon a thick coil of rope, I tried to kindle a little light of wit and humour amid this thickening darkness, but, like matchsticks in the rainy season, they would not properly catch fire. After much striking, one would give just a small flicker now and then. Just when the ship Sarojini, together with her passengers, had attained the fourfold state of liberation in the muddy resting-bed of the Ganges' depths, I began imagining, in various ways, how, in a single paragraph of the newspaper, in the corner devoted to □□□ □□□□□□□□—, within a mere four lines, I might attain so concise a release from earthly bonds. I could well imagine how this piece of news would slip down, effortlessly, the readers' throats, like some tiny pill along with a spoonful of hot tea. Friends would say of the present writer, "Ah, what a truly great and worthy man has passed away—we shall not see his like again." And of the writer's revered sister-in-law they would say, "Ah, she was a woman full of both faults and virtues, but whatever she was, she certainly held the household together." And so on, and so forth. As fine white flour is ground and comes pouring out from between the grindstones, just so did a shower of laughter come pouring from between my sister-in-law's tightly pressed lips.

Stars rose in the sky, the southern wind began to blow. The sailors had finished their evening prayers. One eccentric sailor, playing his stringed instrument, shaking a head full of curly, tangled hair, was singing away with tremendous enthusiasm. On the deck, wherever I found space upon the bedding, I lay down; now and then an indistinct yawn, or a distinctly audible snore, reached my ears. Conversation ceased. It felt as though some vast bird of nightmare had settled silently upon us, brooding over each one of us as though we were so many eggs. I could bear it no longer. I began to feel that it was time for "a sweet conclusion." If, by some chance, we should find ourselves arriving at the very last chapter of our misfortunes, if the ship should come to rest right at the far bank of the Vaitarani itself, then, by all means, strike up the band—let us not, like some kill-joy at the assembly of Chitragupta, appear there with a long face. And if that place should indeed be dark, then why the delay of carrying darkness along with us all the way to Rani Ganj laden with coal? Play on, then! My young nephew struck up a note on the sitar. Jhini-jhini, jhin-jhin, the raga Iman-Kalyan began to play.

The next day, upon investigation, it was discovered that the ship lacked this, that, and the other thing in great quantity. Without these things the ship does indeed move, but not according to the passengers' needs—it moves only according to its own caprice. Men had to be sent to Calcutta to fetch the ship's necessary equipment. For now, we must remain here a few days more.

Unless one stops now and then, in the middle of the Ganges, one cannot properly enjoy its sweetness. For one of a river's chief beauties is the beauty of motion. The sweet restlessness on every side, the coming and going of tide and ebb, the rise and fall of the waves, the festival of light and shadow upon the water—unless one comes to a halt, once, in the very middle of the Ganges, one cannot see these things properly at all. And the ship's panting and gasping, the heat of the furnace, the sailors' commotion, the engine's laboured, wheezing breath like some spellbound demon with narrowed eyes, the angry foaming belch of the two wheels turning ceaselessly on either side two thousand times—all this seems a great violence done to the Ganges. Besides, to rush headlong, business-bent, ignoring the beauty of the Ganges, may well suit the overcivilised nineteenth century, but it does not sit well with a lover of true feeling. It is as if, on one's way to the office, one stuffed rice into one's mouth—an insult to one's very food. It is as if one contrived some abridged edition of a pilgrimage to the Ganges. It is as if one swallowed down the mere table of contents of the Mahabharata.

Our ship stood fast, its neck bound in iron chains. The swift-flowing river went on rushing past. Sometimes turbulent with waves, sometimes calm; sometimes narrow, sometimes broad; in places eroding its banks, in places building up sandbanks. In one or two places one could not see any shore at all—before us the far bank looked like a bank of cloud. All about, fishing-boats and boats under sail. Great ships glided by like the enormous aquatic reptiles of the primeval earth. Now the day was declining. Women had come to bathe in the Ganges' waters; the sun was low. Amid bamboo groves, date-palm thickets, mango orchards, and undergrowth, one village after another appeared. On the shore, a calf, imitating some notion of its own, stood clapping in various poses of neck and tail; whoever had descended into this world clothed in that particular hide had evidently not thought it necessary to wear any more elaborate costume. Gradually darkness fell.

Lamps were lit in the cottages along the shore. Setting aside the wakeful languor of the whole day, I surrendered body and mind to the night's sleep.

Shravan-Bhadra, Agrahayan, 1291