



GANDHIJI AND MAHADEV DESAI

[Photo by Shri Kanu Gandhi.

A Sheaf of
Gandhi Anecdotes

By

G. RAMACHANDRAN

With a Foreword by

C. RAJAGOPALACHARI



HIND KITABS

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To
SOUNDRAM
BEST OF COMRADES, MY WIFE

FOREWORD

If there is any man with whom familiarity **does** not lessen but continually increases respect **and** love, it is Gandhiji. It may be true of all truly great men, but in my personal experience, I have found it true of Gandhiji. The more you move and work with him, the more you love and **admire** him.

The author of this book of anecdotes is a **lover** and not merely an admirer. Love is not blind as the stupid saying goes. On the contrary it is **only** love that sees.

Gandhiji is surrounded by admirers but not **all** of them have a sense of humour and the capacity to write for modern readers who have stomachs only for light fare. The public should be very grateful for this sheaf of true anecdotes. There is a demand for anecdotes and if some one does not supply true stories, legends will grow and fill the field.

Madras
Oct. 28, 1945

C. Rajagopalachari

PREFACE

Most of these little anecdotes were gathered some years ago and preserved carefully in my note-book. While in prison as a political convict in 1942-3, it gave me great joy to rewrite them in the present form. I long hesitated to publish them. I thought they were perhaps too intimate and personal glimpses of Gandhiji. I have now, however, put aside my hesitation in the hope that these glimpses might help somewhat to reveal Gandhiji as he really is, more than ordinary biographical detail.

Some of these anecdotes were gathered from my own personal experience and some from friends close to Gandhiji.

Sewagram, Wardha
6-9-45.

G. Ramachandran

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THE 'INCORRIGIBLE' ANDREWS

Gandhiji is a rare combination of exquisite gentleness and unbreakable hardness. His mind possesses at once the softness of a rose petal and the sternness of steel. The late Mr. C. F. Andrews was in some ways a perfect contrast to Gandhiji. It was not in him ever to be stern or hard. Sometimes his generosity outran his wisdom.

It was some time in 1926, Andrews was staying with Gandhiji in the Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati. Now and again he liked nothing better than to come and take rest with Gandhiji, cutting out all public engagements and doing only what writing pleased him. On this occasion when he was in the Satyagraha Ashram, a Congress worker from a district in South India arrived at Sabarmati. He was a young man and was in sore trouble. He had held the office of Secretary to his District Committee. A large sum of money had come into his hands for Congress work in his district, and he, like a good Secretary, had spent it all most generously on the various items of work entrusted to him. There had been only one little flaw. He had not kept anything like proper accounts, much less issued receipts or obtained vouchers. The consequence of it all was he had to account for nearly one

thousand rupees to his committee or find that amount for them. He was astounded when he was called upon either to submit accounts or make good the amount. He had certainly not taken a penny for himself. The whole money had been spent on Congress work. There was no doubt at all about this. He admitted he should have kept regular accounts, but where was the question even so of finding one thousand rupees for the committee, or for anybody else for that matter? He was nobody's paid servant. He had undertaken the work of Secretary of the District Congress as a pure labour of love, and that after resigning his post as a teacher in the local High School. In the midst of his perplexity he suddenly made up his mind he would go to Gandhiji, tell him everything, and ask for protection from an ungrateful Committee!

Gandhiji heard the whole story patiently. Andrews was seated by his side listening to the piteous recital of the troubled and indignant District Secretary. Gandhiji gently but persistently asked him several searching questions and had the position fully elucidated. There was no doubt that the young man had not misappropriated any money. He was guilty only in that he had not maintained proper accounts.

'What do you expect me to do for you?' asked Gandhiji.

The young man wanted Gandhiji to write to his District Committee asking them to exonerate

him. Andrews was all sympathy, but there was a hard look on Gandhiji's face.

'No, I shall write no such letters,' said Gandhiji 'On the contrary, I have no doubt your conduct was inexcusable. Every pie of public funds is a sacred trust. You can never be too careful with such a trust. To me every such pie unaccounted for is a pie misappropriated. Proper accounting is for a public worker not merely a matter of rupees and annas, but part of his character. You must be able even now to get most of the accounts in writing and procure the necessary vouchers. Otherwise, your Committee has a perfect right to demand the money from you. If necessary you should sell any property or other possessions you may have to discharge such a debt.'

The young man was shocked to his depths. He had never been in the Mahatma's presence before. He had expected saintly sympathy and compliance. He broke down and wept like a child.

Andrews was very much disturbed. He began reasoning with Gandhiji that this was not the way to deal with a 'repentant' young man.

'Yes, I want him to repent,' said Gandhiji, 'and he can repent only by full self-correction. Mere mental repentance will be of no avail. The test of repentance is the setting right of the wrong done. In the present case his Committee is right in demanding full accounts or the entire sum. He is a Congressman. He is educated. That he

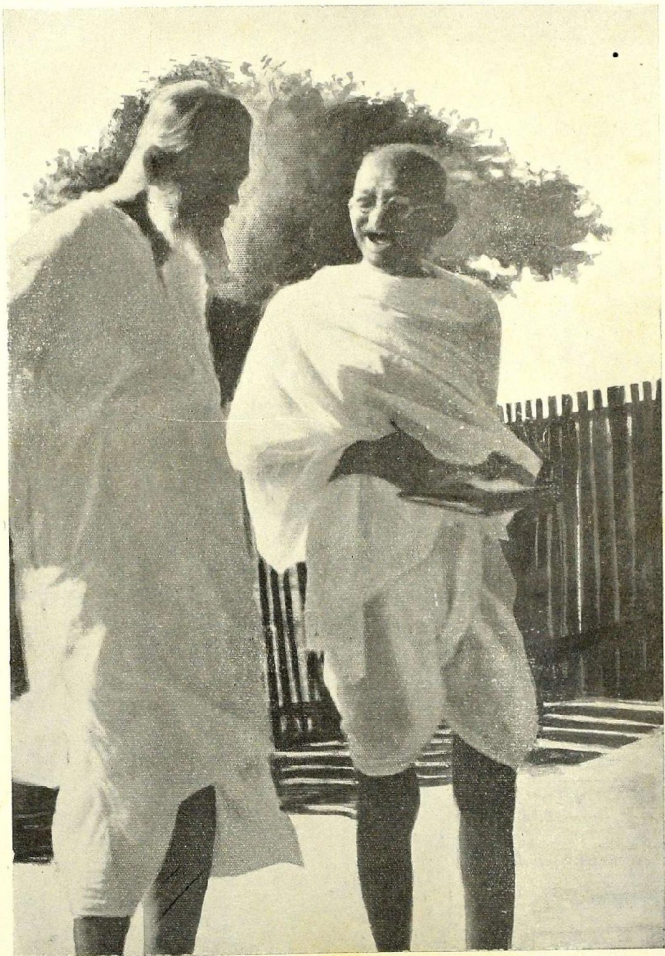
took no salary and was doing the work voluntarily only adds to his responsibility. On him, as on every single Congressman rests the fair name of the Congress. No, he must go back at once, raise the money and pay back every pie. It is only after that I can be of any help to him.'

Then there arose another difficulty. The young man had not enough money to pay the railway fare back home. He needed at least thirty-five rupees for this.

Andrews' heart melted. 'Well, Bapu, let us give him that sum, and let him get back home as quickly as he can and raise the money.'

'No,' came Gandhiji's clear voice again, 'from where can I or you give him thirty-five rupees? We are both penniless. We could only take the money from public funds entrusted to our care. To do that would be wholly wrong. If he has no money he must walk back home in easy stages. He is already in debt to his Committee. He should not add to it by borrowing from us. And who knows if he is really going to do the right thing. His first act of atonement must be to resist the temptation to borrow or to ask for any more money.'

Andrews was now frankly put out. He said it was nonsense for Gandhiji to suggest that the young man should walk back to his distant home. But Gandhiji was adamant, and the young man had to leave after supper and a night's rest in the Ashram.



GANDHIJI AND DEENABHANDU ANDREWS

Gandhiji's last words were, 'Go home, act right, and then write to me. God bless you: I expect to hear from you soon.'

But Deenabandhu Andrews characteristically figured in the last scene again. He offered to walk with the young man to the Sabarmati Station, a mile away from the Ashram.

At the railway station Andrews drew out of his pocket thirty-five rupees that he had, in the meantime, procured from a friend, and thrust the money into the young man's hands, and then saw him off.

Back at the Ashram, he went straight to Gandhiji and said with a smile, 'Bapu, I have a confession to make.'

Gandhiji quickly interrupted him with a laugh and said, 'Yes—I know—you must have paid money to that young man. Don't I know you? You are incorrigible.'

Mr. C. F. Andrews joined heartily in the laughter like a schoolboy discovered in some act of innocent mischief.

GANDHIJI AND A BLIND WOMAN

Gandhiji has some traits of character that are quite Western. One should not forget that in England as a student, and in South Africa, as a lawyer, and public worker, he came into close contact with Europeans of all sorts. He is unsentimental even while he is capable of profound sympathy for those in suffering.

Once there came to the Satyagraha Ashram in Sabarmati a blind woman. She was a middle-aged Tamilian. She had just the one red-and-yellow saree she wore. She possessed absolutely nothing else. She arrived on an afternoon—how exactly none could say. The Ashram inmates only knew she was there seated quietly on the verandah of the weaving shed. Beggars are strictly disallowed in the Ashram precincts. She was immediately questioned as to her business in the Ashram. She was a cool hand though.

‘Don’t you see I am blind?’ she asked.

She was reported to Sri Maganlal Gandhi, the Ashram Manager, who was a stern upholder of all Ashram rules.

He went to her and said, ‘Sister, we can do nothing for you. You must go away.’

He found in a moment that he had caught a Tartar in this Tamil woman.

‘Go away? What! Is this Mahatma Gandhi’s

Ashram or some police station? I am starving, I want food. I have no home; I want shelter in this Ashram. Who are you? Where is Gandhiji?’

For once in his life someone was talking back to Sri Maganlal! But he was a good man. He reasoned with her. He told her Gandhiji was very busy, that the Ashram never entertained a beggar, that every one in the Ashram had to work eight hours a day for his food, that her place was in some ‘Home for the Blind’, and that he would send her to the one in the city nearby. She let him finish. And then she had her say. If Gandhiji was busy, she was not; she would wait, she was blind, and she could not work, and she certainly was not going away anywhere just yet. Sri Manganlal had to admit he was beaten. Later, he informed Gandhiji.

Gandhiji, after a brief conversation with her, said, ‘Let her stay for the night. Give her food and a place to sleep in. We shall see what we can do with her in the morning.’

Next morning Gandhiji told her, ‘You will be taught spinning. Even the blind can spin beautifully. I shall give you time. After that you will get only what you earn through the spinning wheel. You can stay here on that condition, and you will be looked after.’

She looked sullen and displeased. But she was taught spinning. She learnt the art quickly, in three days. But before the week was out she refused to spin any more. She liked to pick her

way about the Ashram. She was restless and would obey no instructions. She began to quarrel with people in the Ashram and abuse them in choice Tamil or in broken Hindustani. Gandhiji tried to calm her down twice or thrice but with only temporary success. She went from bad to worse, would do no work and became frightfully quarrelsome. Then, on the tenth day, Gandhiji gave her an ultimatum.

He summoned her and said in quiet and firm accents, 'I have decided you must leave tomorrow morning. I shall have a letter ready for the Superintendent of the "Home for the Blind" in the city. You must go there. If you wish I shall send a worker along with you to the home.'

She lost her temper. 'Are you really a Mahatma? Who said you were a Mahatma? You would drive a poor blind woman away—would you?'

Gandhiji was unmoved. Next morning, after prayers, he asked her to leave. She flatly refused. Gandhiji's stenographer, also a Tamilian, was asked to escort her. She stormed at this fellow-Tamilian. She would not allow him to come near her or take her hand to lead her away.

Then came Gandhiji's unruffled voice, 'All right I shall lead her out myself. Explain to her I am going to take her hand and walk with her to the gate.'

When she was told this, she suddenly quietened down. Gandhiji quickly went up to her, took

her by the hand and walked with her to the gates of the Ashram. She walked beside him, meek and subdued.

At the gates he spoke to her gently, 'Be a good woman in the Home. They will take every care of you. God bless you!'

He then asked the Tamilian friend to accompany her. This person returned after a time with a strange story. After proceeding a little distance she had turned upon him, asking him to keep Gandhiji's letter to the Superintendent for himself, adding that she needed nobody's help. She had then walked briskly away. Later on, it became known that she was not stark blind as she had pretended to be, and that she was not a good character.

GANDHIJI AND A SUPERSTITION

Gandhiji is undoubtedly a religious man. He is equally undoubtedly a man of reason. He reconciles faith and reason in some spontaneous manner all his own. Such a reconciliation is possible for him because he realizes with utter clarity that faith and reason have both alike their limitations and possibilities. And these limitations and possibilities he has discovered fully and vitally, not from books, but from the difficult mines of human experience. If you have seen Gandhiji at prayers, and the fascination with which he listens to stories from the Ramayana or the Mahabharata, you are likely to make the mistake of imagining that he cannot be wholly free from religious superstition. No rationalist, however, could be more free than he from any kind of superstition. When it is said, as can be said with absolute justice, that he has never tolerated any superstition about his own person, then it is clear beyond the shadow of a doubt how uncompromising is his rationalism. For there are rationalists who wish to destroy every superstition except the ones that gather round their own persons. They destroy no doubt superstitions they do not like, but they create ones that suit them. This is so particularly among modern political 'rationalists'. But Gandhiji is not one of them.

It was in 1924, during Gandhiji's 21-day fast in Delhi on behalf of Hindu-Muslim unity, that a revealing incident occurred. The late C. F. Andrews was then the gentle but unrelenting 'chowkidar' on guard at the foot of the stairs leading to the room in 'Dilkush' in which Gandhiji lay fasting. Doctors had advised complete rest for Gandhiji, who was fast losing his strength. There was even a day when his life was in danger. It was perhaps on the 13th day of the fast that a man and a woman from a distant village arrived at 'Dilkush' to have darshan of the fasting Mahatma. They were only two among many thousands of people, who besieged the gates of 'Dilkush'. But these two, by judicious but most persistent efforts had broken through the cordon of volunteers at the gates but at the foot of the stairs they were confronted by the smiling but implacable Mr. Andrews.

'Why have you thrust yourselves like this friends?' he asked. 'You cannot go up and disturb Gandhiji. He is weak and needs absolute rest. So please pray for him and go quietly away.'

But the peasant and his wife would not budge an inch. They looked travel-stained and weary. The woman carried in her hands a shining brass pot with sewn leaves covering its mouth. Their story was strange and thrilling. Lying ill in their hut in a far-away village was their only son. He was very ill indeed, and for all the skill of the

village physician, was fast sinking. And then they conceived the idea of fetching a pot of water from the village well to wash 'Mahatmaji's holy feet' with, and of carrying it back as a sovereign medicine for their boy to drink! Eyes shining with faith, and voices tremulous with emotion, they pleaded with Mr. Andrews to allow them to go up to Gandhiji for just one moment that they might 'carry out their design. But the 'chowkidar' had hardened his heart and was bent on obeying the Doctor's instructions to the letter. He told them it was impossible to allow them to see Gandhiji. Both sides were unyielding. The village couple clinched the issue by quietly squatting at the foot of the stairs, declaring they would not leave unless they had seen Gandhiji. A friend saved the situation by suggesting that the matter be referred to Gandhiji and that the couple must go away at once if Gandhiji himself sent word he was too weak and tired to allow anyone to see him.

'Yes,' agreed the couple, but stipulated that Gandhiji must be told about 'our poor ailing son and our mission.'

'That I shall,' said Mr. Andrews as he went up.

He was absolutely sure that Gandhiji would not allow his feet to be washed to make medicine for the sick! He would assuredly disallow such a visit. But Mr. Andrews had reckoned without his host. After hearing the whole story, Gandhiji, who had become very weak indeed that day, made a sign to Mr. Andrews to allow them to come up:

Mr. Andrews remonstrated with Gandhiji, who said to him in a feeble voice that he wanted them to come up, that he might 'cure them of their superstition'.

And so they were taken up and asked to sit beside Gandhiji. Then Gandhiji, in his slow, weak but clear accents, gave them a bit of his mind. Did they believe in God? If they did, how could they insult God by transferring their faith to a mere man? And then, did they not know that it was absolutely degrading to him (as it was to them) to have his feet washed, that the dirtied water might be used as medicine? How could they be so ignorant of the most elementary laws of health and hygiene? He spoke to them for almost quarter of an hour. They were abashed and stricken with shame. He made them empty their pot. His final words were that they should trust in God and fetch a doctor for their son. They went away, happy and smiling; they had got more than they had bargained for—they had learnt an unforgettable lesson. Never again would they mix up religion and the medical science. They would not degrade God by dragging Him down to the level of cheap magic. Mr. Andrews pleasantly chaffed them. They chaffed back like glad-hearted children who now knew better. As they went out the crowd surrounded them, wanting to know what luck they had had. And they held forth on what Gandhiji had said. Who knows but that the little seed of reason thus sown multiplied

a thousand fold by being passed from mouth to mouth endlessly !

GANDHIJI AND AN INNOCENT LIE!

Gandhiji can never tolerate a lie. Unlike intellectual high-brows who will say they can tolerate a scoundrel but not a fool, he will bear with a fool sometimes, but never with a liar. In his Satyagraha Ashram he had set up very exacting standards of rectitude, and even children had to conform to them.

This little event happened in 1926. A certain young man who had just passed out of the University had come to stay at the Ashram. Gandhiji, as a first step in his Ashram course, had prescribed three month's expert scavenging for him. The young fellow was fond of children, and he became a general favourite with them. One day he started having some fun with a little Ashram girl. She was only eight years of age. This little girl was trying to snatch a big round yellow lemon that he held temptingly before her. He led her a perfect dance, and she screamed with laughter as she jumped about in vain attempts to get at the golden fruit. The child, however, suddenly grew tired of the game and burst into tears. The young man who was taking the lemon to a patient in the Ashram had to find a way out; he made as if he were throwing the lemon away into the Sabar-mati River and deftly thrust it into his pocket.

The child quickly brightened up and inquired,

'Now, what will happen to the lemon in the river?' She wanted to run out into the shallow waters and look for it.

But the young man said, 'No, it is drowned.' In a moment they were friends again and walked off together to the patients' room. On the way as the young man pulled out his handkerchief, the lemon rolled out on to the ground. But to his astonishment the little girl, instead of dashing to seize the lemon stood rooted to the spot looking at him with childish indignation.

She said, 'So you told me a lie! You hid the lemon in your pocket and told me that you threw it into the river. All right, I will tell Bapu you are a liar.'

And with that she marched away. She went straight to Gandhiji, who was at work in his room overlooking the river, and unburdened the story of the lie to him. Gandhiji promised her he would look into the matter.

Later in the evening after prayers Gandhiji spoke to the young man. The latter related the story, taking care to justify himself on the score that the whole thing had been pure fun.

Gandhiji too enjoyed the joke, but he said smilingly, 'You had better be warned, young man. Let the children have no lies even in fun. What is begun in fun may continue as an easy habit with children, and once they take lies lightly, then the thing will become serious.'

But the matter did not end there. The young

man like most University graduates, was argumentative. He discussed the ethics of 'lies' uttered in pure fun with a number of members of the Ashram. There was a subdued controversy among the teachers of the Ashram school. Someone asked, if innocent lies were to be taboo, how could one tell children fairy tales or even stories from the Ramayana or the Mahabharata. Kaka Kalelkar got wind of the controversy and clinched the issue in his characteristic way.

He said, 'Do not mix up the question of lies in daily life with mythology and legend. If University graduates will think more and talk less, they will see at once that it is better to tell no lie to a child and to accustom children to speak the truth in everything.'

GANDHIJI AND A COFFEE-DRINKER

Gandhiji is a first-class nurse to the sick. Where he picked up nursing is a mystery. He certainly did not pass through a nursing school. As in many other things, when nursing became necessary to him in life, he learned it the hard way of experience. In the Ashram at Sabarmati all sick persons came directly under his eye and care. Doctors were, of course, consulted, but the care of the sick Gandhiji arranged in person. It was a joke, especially among young people in the Ashram, that if you wanted to see Gandhiji every day and talk to him and hear him crack jokes you had only to be ill and get into bed! For Gandhiji visited the sick every day, spent a few minutes at every bed-side, himself saw to things carefully and never failed to crack a joke or two with the patient. There was no day too busy for this interlude.

There was once a young lad who went down with dysentery. He had done his best to get to terms with the hard Ashram dietary, but failed. He was an inveterate addict to coffee. But in the Ashram there was no coffee for him—coffee was taboo. In good time he got rid of his dysentery, and was convalescing. Gandhiji visited him for a few minutes every day during his usual rounds. Those few minutes were like a tonic to the poor lad.

During his convalescence he pined for a cup of honest coffee. One day he was lying on his back dreaming of that glorious rich-brown beverage to which he was accustomed in his distant South Indian home. Just then he heard the welcome click-click of the wooden sandals of Gandhiji approaching. A minute later, he entered with his never-failing smile and cheering word.

He looked at the lad and said: 'Now you are decidedly better. You must be getting your appetite back. What would you like to eat? Ah! some good *uppuma* or *thosai*?'

Gandhiji evidently knew all about the lad's partiality for these two good old items of the South Indian menu. Gandhiji was laughing. The youngster had a sudden brain-wave.

'Could I have a cup of coffee?' he blurted out.

Gandhiji answered with a peel of laughter—'Oh, you unrepentant sinner, that is what you want!' And then seeing the disturbed look on the lad's face, he added: 'You certainly shall have your cup of coffee. Yes, light coffee will soothe your stomach. And what will you have with the coffee? I don't think we can make *uppuma* or *thosai* but warm toast would go well with coffee. I shall send you a tray.'

With that, and a kind parting word, Gandhiji left the room. The lad lay waiting. He could not believe his good luck. Coffee in Sabarmati Ashram! And Gandhiji himself offering to send it in to him! Well, the 'Old Governor' was no fana-

tic, he was a dear, thought the grateful and expectant lad.

Gandhiji's cottage was at the other end of the Ashram, a good way across the road. The lad could imagine what would happen. Gandhiji would go to Kasturba in her kitchen and ask for coffee and toast. But it was an untimely hour. The kitchen would be closed. Ba herself would be taking her rest. Had he caused Gandhiji too much botheration? Some twenty minutes passed. Hark! What was that sound? The click-click of Gandhiji's wooden sandals again. Why was Gandhiji coming back? Had the coffee been called off as an after-thought? His heart sank within him. But there was Gandhiji carrying a tray covered with a white khadi napkin. The lad was dazed. What had really happened?

Gandhiji was speaking. 'Now, here is your coffee and toast. And, mind you, I made the coffee myself. Now, like a good South Indian, will you certify I can make good coffee?'

'But,' whispered the lad, 'why did you not ask someone else to bring this in to me. I am so very sorry I put you to this trouble.'

'Now, now,' said Gandhiji, 'do not ruin your coffee. Cold coffee is bad coffee. You see Ba was resting, and I did not care to disturb her.' And then brusquely, 'Well I shall leave now. Someone will come for the tray.' With that off he went.

The coffee was light, but excellent. The lad

sipped it as if it were nectar. But he was troubled. His mind's eye saw Gandhiji opening the kitchen, lighting the stove, making the coffee and toast, and carrying it in to him all in order not to disturb others at that untimely hour. He was overwhelmed.

There was always some coffee and tea kept in Kasturba's kitchen for guests, tea specially for Mr. Andrews, and coffee specially for Rajagopalachariar from Madras!

GANDHIJI AND KASTURBA

Gandhiji's iron will is well known. He is gentle but inflexible. The nearer one is to Gandhiji the more ruthless the discipline imposed on one. That is why perhaps Gandhiji is most ruthless with himself. Gandhiji is never intolerant. Not only does he not resent opposition, but he actually encourages it. And yet people shrink from opposing him because they trust him more than they trust themselves. But in the Satyagraha Ashram there was one person who was an exception to this rule. That person was the one nearest to him, his own wife. In the Ashram she was always called Ba, meaning 'mother'. In the Satyagraha Ashram she was a little, imperious old lady with flashing eyes, sharp voice and firm-set lips. When she chose she could be very sweet; she could also be hard and unbending. She ruled her part of the Gandhi cottage, including the kitchen, with an iron hand. But, dear soul, she had a heavy job on her hands. She had to cook for and feed, besides her own great husband and grand-children, some twenty other inmates of the Ashram. These twenty were her burden, allotted out of some two hundred inmates, who were divided among the different kitchens in the Ashram. In her own kitchen she was no mere supervisor. She was the chief cook. There were, of course, others to help her, but the main burden fell on her. In

those days she was vigorous and active, and a dynamic force to be reckoned with. Her energy was prodigious, so was her temper too, sometimes. It was not easy to serve as an assistant in her kitchen. She was a most exacting mistress. She herself was regular to the minute and worked tirelessly. She made her assistants follow her excellent example. If they were one bit lazy or careless, out they went. Once a young lad from Travancore was posted as her assistant in the kitchen. He found it a tough job, but he made good progress and gave Ba great satisfaction. Ba and he got on smoothly together. Gandhiji, who always unobtrusively kept an eye on the kitchen department, did not fail to compliment the young man more than once. Gandhiji knew the 'politics' of his kitchen quite as well as he did the politics of India!

There was one matter on which Ba would sometimes clash with Bapu. Gandhiji used to be somewhat nervous on these occasions. Justice was on Ba's side. There would often be a crowd of unexpected guests at the Ashram, then the 'political capital' of India. These guests would be distributed among the various kitchens. But Ba always got more than her fair share of the guests. It was when she had had several such guests suddenly put on to her without any notice that she would sometimes let her temper fly—though strictly in private. Gandhiji on such occasions would be very humble and tactful. He was

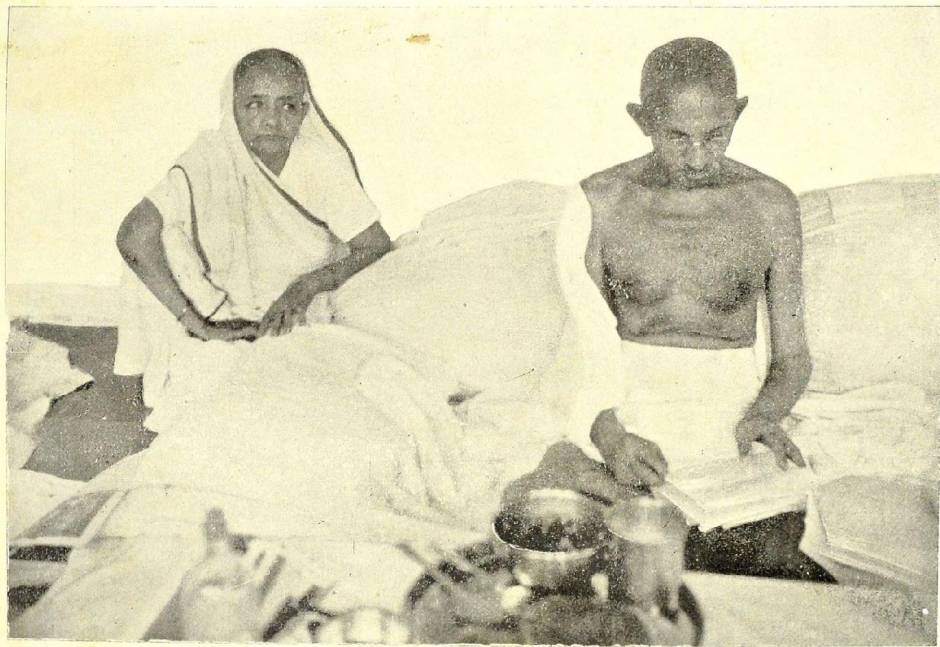
then a little afraid of Ba.

One day this happened again just after Ba and her young assistant had washed up after lunch and closed the kitchen. Ba was very tired—who would not be? Maybe, she was a little indisposed. She went and lay down in her room. Gandhiji quickly approached the kitchen and beckoned to the young man, who was himself about to leave. He spoke in a whisper not to disturb Ba in the adjoining room. A number of guests, he announced, were to arrive in an hour, very distinguished guests, among whom was the late Pandit Motilal Nehru. Gandhiji wanted lunch to be prepared for them.

He put a finger to his lips as he glanced at Ba's room. 'Do not disturb her. Summon Kusum, light the fire, chop the vegetables and knead the flour for the *chapaties*. Send for Ba only when she is needed. And mind you, do not irritate her. You will deserve a prize if Ba does not go for me!'

He had the look of some innocent conspirator. He was a little nervous lest Ba should wake up suddenly and burst upon him.

The young assistant and Kusum opened the kitchen noiselessly. The fires were lit, the vegetables chopped and the flour kneaded. And then, as ill-luck would have it, a brass plate crashed to the floor. The din woke up Ba. She thought the Ashram cat was up to some mischief in the kitchen and rushed in. The sight that greeted her eyes astounded her. She demanded to know what



GANDHIJI AND BA

it was all about. There was a sharp edge to her voice. Kusum and the young man explained gently.

'Why did you not send for me?' she demanded. 'You think I cannot manage this extra work?'

'No, Ba,' explained the young man again, 'we intended to summon you when everything was ready.'

Ba's English was always a little uncertain and the young man knew little Gujarati.

With a sweet smile she answered in her quaint English: 'You also tired much. Why you think you can work more and I can do no extra work?'

It was all smooth sailing thereafter.

But Ba was shrewder than one thought. She knew Gandhiji had arranged the whole thing. At night, after prayers, when all the guests had left, she faced Gandhiji unexpectedly. She stood before him, arms akimbo, and a mischievous light in her eyes.

'Why did you ask them to do the work without me? You think I am such a bag of lazy-bones?'

Gandhiji replied with an answering twinkle: 'Don't you know, Ba, I am afraid of you on such occasions?'

Ba gave out a quiet peal of incredulous laughter, as if to say, 'What! you afraid of me!'

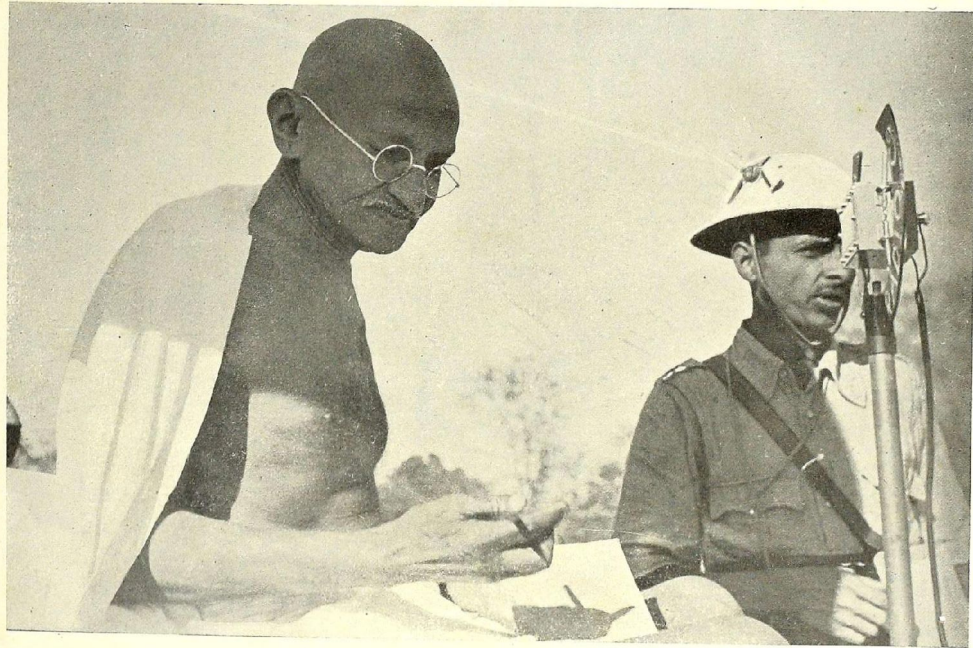
And yet that was the truth. Gandhiji is afraid of none perhaps. But if he was afraid of anyone, maybe, he was a tiny bit afraid of the little indomitable woman who was his wife.

VII

GANDHIJI AND PUNCTUALITY

It was once in Chidambaram that Gandhiji dodged an unruly crowd and made good his escape in order to keep an engagement. In a sense crowds have been the curse of Gandhiji's life. They have never allowed him peace. They follow some remorseless law of motion, of gravitation towards him, the moment they catch sight of him. Gandhiji has had some hair-breadth escape from enthusiastic but frantic crowds who in their eagerness to gaze on him and do him honour would have all but trampled him to death.

It was altogether a bad day at Chidambaram. Gandhiji was driving to the Annamalai University, where he was to address the University Union. Seated by his side in the car was Dr. T. S. S. Rajan. Half a mile or so from the University, a dense crowd had collected in one of the town's narrow streets, awaiting Gandhiji's car. There were two other cars following close behind with other members of the party. The crowd held up Gandhiji's car. Gandhiji asked what the matter was. The spokesman for the crowd came up to explain. He and his friends had planned a feast at which high-caste Brahmins would sit with the Harijans. The feast, arranged in honour of Gandhiji's visit to Chidambaram, was even then in progress in a big pandal built specially for the



GANDHIJI AND HIS INSEPARABLE WATCH

[Photo by Shri Kanu Gandhi.

purpose, just a stone's throw away. They pleaded with Gandhiji to alight for a moment, just to look in at the dinner. Gandhiji turned to Dr. Rajan and asked when they were due at the University. Dr. Rajan answered that they had only another ten minutes left. Gandhiji inquired whether this dinner was included in his programme for the day, and learnt that it was not. Gandhiji requested Dr. Rajan to explain to the crowd that he had an engagement to keep in the next ten minutes and that this interruption was an unauthorized item. But the crowd would accept no excuses, and insisted on Gandhiji's alighting, if only for a minute. Dr. Rajan got into a lively argument with the crowd. Gandhiji who had sized up the temper of the crowd, meanwhile, quietly slipped out of the car by the other door to make a dash for the University building. For a moment the crowd did not realize what was happening. They were having it out with Dr. Rajan, who they thought was the real culprit. That was Gandhiji's chance. He soon managed to get clear of the crowd. One of the cars behind shot forward, picked him up and sped him towards the University. The crowd then saw their bird escaping and surged forward, shouting the accustomed slogan, 'Mahatma Gandhi-ki-Jai'. But the car that had picked up Gandhiji had got clear. Gandhiji looked back and waved his hands like a merry schoolboy who had escaped from some tight corner. But the last he saw of Dr. Rajan

was not a very edifying spectacle from the point of view of non-violence. The crowd was venting its wrath on Dr. Rajan, who had to make vigorous use of his fists to extricate himself from an infuriated mob! Gandhiji had no time to adjudicate between the claims of violence and non-violence. He drove away in a cloud of dust. He was not more than a minute late at the meeting of the University Union. The first words he uttered were of apology for the delay.

Gandhiji and his watch are inseparable companions. Punctuality with him ranks high among the virtues.

VIII

GANDHIJI AND THE ZAMINDAR

It has been Gandhiji's experience to be the guest of a most startling variety of persons. 'The semi-naked Fakir' has often been the guest of Rajas, zamindars, and millionaires; it is only rarely, as in the Harijan Colony at Delhi, that he is fortunate enough to live among the ordinary workers and the poor people. But Gandhiji is unruffled, wherever he might be. He will put up with ostentation and magnificence with a detachment that, curiously enough, goes unnoticed by those who offer him such hospitality. The secret is that Gandhiji hides his detachment under a cloak of the most disarming good humour and charm.

Once during a tour of Bengal, Gandhiji happened to be the guest of a big Zamindar. It was a palatial mansion, with liveried servants running hither and thither at the master's commands, issued in a loud and strident voice.

The evening prayers were held on the terrace. These prayers are like a Durbar to which crowds flock. They come mostly to have *darshan* of Gandhiji; the prayers are often merely an excuse that gives them the chance to gaze on his saintly face. This evening there was a very large gathering of men and women. They squeezed themselves into every nook and corner of the terrace.

When all were seated, Gandhiji came out on the terrace with his host, and the two sat beside the wall right at the back. It is a custom with Gandhiji to have the lights switched off before prayers.

So, very softly, Gandhiji said: 'Lights off, please.'

The switch happened to be just above the host's head, where he sat on the carpet, heavy and stolid. Would he bestir himself to comply with the Mahatma's behest? Certainly not! He shouted as usual for one of his servants.

Then an amazing thing happened. Gandhiji lightly sprang to his feet and, before the astonished zamindar could realize what was happening, he had quietly switched the lights off and sat down again. Gandhiji then gave the word for the prayers to begin. A number of people noticed the little incident.

The prayers came to an end. Then, as often happens on such occasions, people began to ply Gandhiji with questions on all manner of subjects connected with Congress work. Someone asked a question about spinning. Gandhiji in answer dwelt at length on the disinclination among the educated and the wealthy to perform any sort of manual labour. He referred to the teaching of the Gita that he who ate his food without labouring for it was a thief. There were many more questions and answers.

Then something astonishing occurred. As the

crowd was dispersing someone upset a little table, and a china vase on it crashed to the floor. With an athlete's agility the zamindar jumped up and started clearing up the broken fragments. Had he suddenly forgotten that he had servants at his beck and call? Two of them rushed up, only to witness the bewildering spectacle of their master on his knees! He had taken the gentle unspoken hint of his exalted guest. Gandhiji, who had left the terrace, did not see the miracle! But his example and the few words he had spoken on the dignity of manual labour had gone home.

GANDHIJI AND THE TORN DHOTI

This story belongs to one of Gandhiji's Tamilnad tours. Gandhiji has said that next to the Punjab it is in Tamilnad he draws the biggest crowds. The Tamilians just adore him. The train was steaming into Virudhnagar. The station was already visible in the distance, besieged by a huge multitude. Gandhiji woke up from a little nap in his third class compartment. He has the rare trick of snatching ten-to-fifteen minutes' naps on his journeys, which are very often crowded with public meetings. He jumped to his feet tightening his little loin cloth round his waist.

One of his party caught sight of a fair-sized tear in his loin cloth, and said to Gandhiji: 'We are almost at the station. You have hardly a minute to change.'

'Why change?' queried Gandhiji as he quickly stepped into the bathroom to step out again a moment later. There was no longer a tear in the loin cloth. He had worn his dhoti the other way about. As he swiftly gathered up his spectacles, watch and other personal belongings the train pulled up at the platform. As he was about to alight he turned with a smile to the member of his party who had spoken to him and remarked: 'There was a time when as a student in London I took ten minutes to dress my hair. Now I only

need half a minute for my entire toilet.' Then he stepped out and was ready for the reception.

It was during this tour that Gandhiji perfected his technique of snatching ten-and-fifteen minutes' naps in a speeding motor car. He did the tour in a 'Master Buick' placed at his disposal by a Madras automobile firm. In the seat at the rear there was a contraption like a tiny bed on which he would curl up and go to sleep. He addressed five or six public meetings a day on the question of Harijan emancipation.

As the car drove him from one meeting to the next, he would ask Dr. T. S. S. Rajan, who was in charge of the tour—'Well, Rajan, what is the next item, a ten-minute or fifteen-minute nap?'

Occasionally, Dr. Rajan would answer with a twinkle in his eyes: 'No, Bapu, the next item is a big one, a real good thirty minutes' nap.'

'Oh, what a luxury!' Gandhiji would remark, and the next moment he would be fast asleep as the Buick, to the steady roar of its engine, tore up mile after mile. It was a miracle how Gandhiji would wake up right to the minute as the car pulled up at the next halt. He would arise refreshed and step straight on to the platform at the next place of meeting. Legend has it that Napoleon used to sleep on horseback. The Napoleon of India's non-violent struggle not only slept in a speeding motor car, but to an exact schedule between mammoth public meetings. And make no mistake about it, he did not merely rest himself

during these famous little naps; he slept as they say, like a log of wood!

GANDHIJI AND A THREAT

Gandhiji exhibits a keen sense of realism in his daily dealings with the men and women around him. He does not generally formulate long-range ideas. Except on fundamentals, his ideas formulate themselves in response to events and conditions. Even when he has theories, he continually tests them on the touchstone of daily experience. If a theory does not stand the test of experience, he ponders over it again, readily changing his mind when reason demands it. For him theory and experience must proceed together. They are the two sides of the same coin.

Suicide is generally considered a terrible sin, and rightly so. Human life is a priceless gift, and no one has the right to throw it away, even if it be one's own. But Gandhiji has said that sometimes there might arise occasions when suicide becomes an inescapable moral duty. This saying of Gandhiji once led to a tragi-comedy in the Ashram.

A certain member of the Ashram suddenly seemed to have discovered that he was a great sinner. Once the discovery had been made, his self-condemnation mounted steadily until it reached fever-heat. He was of a somewhat hysterical nature, though normally he was a quiet, timid sort of fellow. Overwhelmed by the thought that he, an inmate of Gandhiji's Ashram, should

be such a sinner, he convinced himself he was unworthy to live in the Ashram, or even to live at all. He decided to commit suicide, to inflict upon himself the final punishment. He wrote a parting letter to his wife, with whom he was constantly quarrelling, left it where it would certainly catch her eye and went to bed. As chance would have it, the unhappy woman saw the letter that very night. She had long known that her 'lord and master' was somewhat of a fool, though like a good Indian wife she had kept this 'disloyal' thought to herself. But now she took fright. She ran to Gandhiji. Gandhiji sent for the man at once. He obeyed the summons and appeared before Gandhiji, a little hysterical and brimming over with repentance. He poured out to Gandhiji a piteous tale of his sin and his conviction that he was unworthy to live. Gandhiji, who knew the man well, his utter weakness and timidity, listened to him with infinite patience and agreed that he had sinned.

'But, why kill yourself?' he asked. 'Live, perform atonement, purify yourself and grow into a better man.'

'No, no,' the wretched man cried out, 'I must punish myself. I have deceived you and many others. There is no hope for me, I must die.'

One or two friends joined in. One of them said Gandhiji should put an end to this folly and ban the suicide. At this, the 'sinner' became inconsolable.

Gandhiji seemed to reflect a moment and then remarked: 'All right. Now go home. Think it over again. I am sure you should not take your life. I can give you an alternative programme of active atonement and correction. But if after deep thought, you should come to me tomorrow and still hold fast to your intention, then I will reconsider the matter.'

'Oh, let me die, allow me to die,' wailed the penitent.

Gandhiji cut him short. 'Well, go now. You know my mind. You are absolutely free to choose for yourself.'

The party broke up. The man walked away in great agitation.

Gandhiji turned to the trembling wife and soothed her fears. 'There is no need for you to worry. He will not kill himself. You had better sleep somewhere here tonight, so that there will be none to fuss over him at home.'

The night passed. Late next morning, the hapless man was ushered into Gandhiji's presence.

Gandhiji raised a mild laugh by saying: 'So you are still with us. Good. Come in and sit down.'

Later, this person submitted to the course of hard work and discipline prescribed by Gandhiji to wash away his sins. He is now prospering and doing excellent work.

Gandhiji was sure the man was too timid to kill himself and much too excited to be persuaded against suicide. To have prohibited it straight-

away would only have sharpened his hysterical determination to kill himself. Of course, Gandhiji took a risk, but he knew his man.

GANDHIJI AND THE SCHOOL-MASTER

Gandhiji is a good school-master. He could have found little time though for that kind of job.

There was a school attached to Sabarmati Ashram, where in deference to Ashram traditions, no caning was ever permitted. The teachers were not even allowed to sport a cane in the classrooms. It was the pride of the school that it was run on the principle of non-violence. But underneath this placidity and self-satisfaction things sometimes went wrong. The teachers, not infrequently, found themselves sorely tempted to give some incorrigible boy or girl a good thrashing. After all, boys will be boys and girls will be girls! There was, not unnaturally fun and mischief and juvenile impertinence. The teacher has yet to be found who can swallow downright impertinence from a defiant scholar. All the usual non-violent dodges that the poor teachers knew were tried in order to put a stop to this. But it just wouldn't be quelled that way. The teachers were unwilling, however, to confess that non-violence had failed. Some of the children, smelt out the joke and enjoyed it immensely. At last one or two of the teachers made up their minds to place all the facts before Gandhiji, for finally all difficulties went to Gandhiji, even simple matters that could be settled by the exercise of ordinary common-

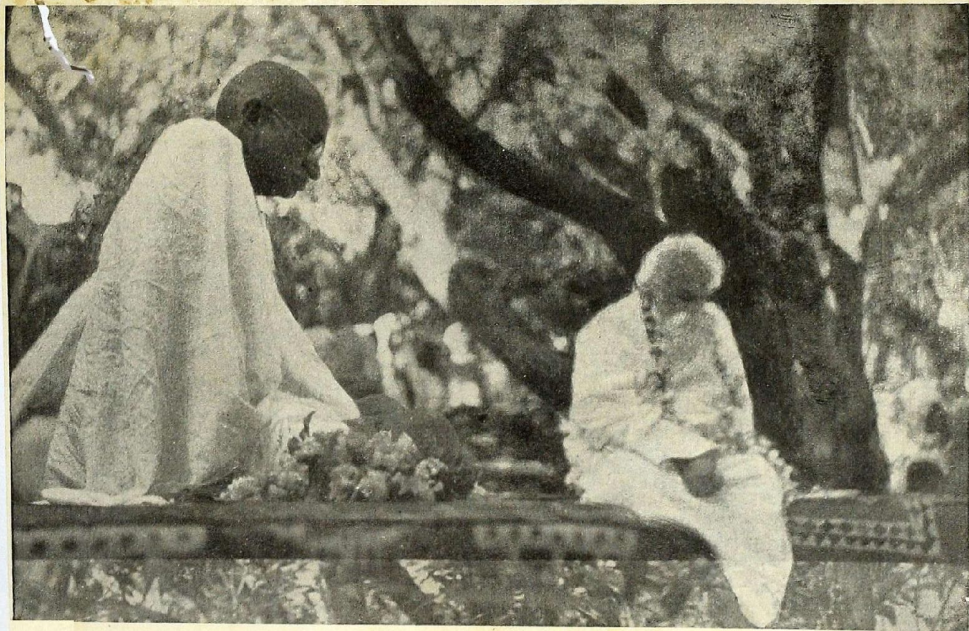
sense. But this was indeed an extraordinary problem. So there was a meeting of the teachers in Gandhiji's room. Well, the whole matter was thrashed out. But the outcome of the deliberations was a surprise for everybody. Gandhiji advised the teachers that there were only two things they could do. If in any specific instance a teacher had done his utmost to effect correction through non-violent methods, but without avail, then, if he honestly believed that violence would succeed, he must employ the cane without being sentimental about it. Otherwise, if the teachers agreed that caning might be only a temporary solution and that ultimately it would do more harm than good, then his duty was to do all he could by non-violent means and, if he failed, resign his post. One teacher stuck to his guns. He said he had exercised endless patience and tried every non-violent artifice possible in the case of one particular boy, but it had been to no purpose. He thought a sound thrashing would do him good. Gandhiji knew the teacher well. He promptly replied he would permit the teacher to go ahead with the experiment. Some of the idealists were shocked. Gandhiji had compromised with non-violence! It was unbelievable. But the teacher did go ahead. He gave a good caning. This was wholly revolutionary in the Satyagraha Ashram! But the particular boy, in the teacher's opinion, improved. Gandhiji said nothing. He kept his thoughts to himself. Some weeks later, the teach-

er confessed to Gandhiji that he had tried caning more than once, but that the temporary improvement had proved illusory, and that he now faced a more hardened boy. But the experiment was not over. The teacher went back to the methods of 'non-violence' with increased conviction. He put more heart into it than before. He bestowed special attention on the boy, without once resorting to the cane. The boy reacted splendidly to this renewed kindness and showed rapid improvement. There were some cynics however who remarked archly that the canings had in truth done more towards reforming the youngster than all the subsequent kindness! But Gandhiji, than whom there is no greater apostle of non-violence, knew better.

GANDHIJI AND THE 'BRIDAL CHAMBER'

Everybody in Santiniketan was on tiptoe of expectancy. Students and teachers, men and women, and even the great poet Rabindranath Tagore (Gurudev) shared in the excitement. Gandhiji, accompanied by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, was arriving on a three-day visit. The guest house was soon set in readiness. Student volunteers were enrolled to maintain order, as the peace and tranquillity of Santiniketan (the very 'abode of peace') would surely be invaded by crowds from the villages around. The reception was to be held at Gurudev's beautiful little cottage. After the reception Gandhiji would be taken to the guest house in procession, with boys and girls chanting the soul-stirring melodies of Santiniketan. One room in the guest house was set apart for Bapu, and the students of Santiniketan's renowned 'Kala Bhavan,' artists all, who learnt at the feet of the great Nandalal Bose set about decorating it. And what a thing of enchanting loveliness they made of it! They used only simple little things—green ferns, flowers, painted mud-vases, hand-printed khadi. But the beauty of it all took one's breath away.

Gandhiji arrived early one morning. With Bapu were Jawaharlal, Mahadev Desai and Satish Babu of Khadi Pratisthan. The reception at the



GANDHIJI AND GURUDEV

[Photo by Shri Kanyu Gandhi]

Poet's cottage was an impressive ceremony, in the ancient Vedic style, as is the custom at Santiniketan. Gurudev himself smeared Gandhiji's forehead with sandal paste and kum-kum and embraced his guest. The women sounded the *lulu-lulu*. After this ceremony, the Poet himself conducted the party to the guest house, and they were shown into their different apartments. Gurudev led Gandhiji to the room set apart for him. Bapu stepped across the threshold, took one glance at the resplendent decorations and burst into peal on peal of laughter.

'What is all this?' he demanded: 'Why bring me to this bridal chamber?'

Gurudev joined in the joke. 'Please remember you are in the abode of a poet,' he said.

Gandhiji would not give in. 'Well, where then is the bride?' he queried with irrepressible merriment.

There were ladies present; did they blush, one wonders.

But the Poet's answer was prompt: 'Santiniketan, the ever young queen of our hearts, welcomes you.'

'But, surely, she would hardly care to look twice at the old toothless pauper that I am!'

'No,' rejoined Gurudev. 'Our Queen has loved Truth and worshipped it unreservedly all these long years.'

'So,' said Bapu, 'there is hope even for the toothless old man?' With a few more pleasantries

Gurudev left his distinguished guests to settle down to rest.

Early next morning the Poet strolled to the guest house with all a host's anxiety and solicitude for his visitors' comfort. He found they had long been up. Gandhiji and party had performed their accustomed prayers at 4-30 in the morning. The whole camp was now busy. Satish Babu was demonstrating to a group of boys and girls how to card cotton with a hand-bow. The hum of the bow was music to the ears of Gurudev.

'Are you trying to put the Ashram girls and their Sitars to shame?' Gurudev asked Satish Babu.

Shri Mahadev Desai was teaching spinning to another bunch of youngsters.

The Poet passed on to Bapu's room. What a sight, alas, met his eyes! All the adornments thrown helter-skelter. The cot had been dragged out into the open terrace, for Gandhiji always sleeps under the open sky. The vases and ferns had been pushed into a corner to make room for spinning wheels and a heap of files. Now it was Gurudev's turn to laugh.

'Hare Ram—Hare Ram,' he cried in mock horror. 'Where is the bridal chamber gone to? The bridegroom I see is here, but is the poor bride fled?'

Gandhiji, as he stood up to receive Gurudev, said with an answering burst of merriment, 'But, I warned you, the bride would not care to look at an old toothless man!'

It was all such glorious fun, this thrust and counter-thrust; one might imagine the gods themselves evesdropping.

GANDHIJI AND THE ALTERED PROGRAMME

Vast crowds lined the road leading to Subba Raman's house in Madura City, where Gandhiji was expected to arrive from Virudhnagar early that evening. This was during the Mahatma's Harijan tour of the Tamilnad. He was expected to stay in Madura for a day and then go to Devakottah. Gandhiji and his party arrived in the city hours later than scheduled. His car had suffered a breakdown. And when at last he arrived to the sound of the citizens' frantic cheering, he was woefully tired. He wished to retire almost immediately, but, as was the custom with him, he asked to see the programme for the next day. He was looking through it when Shri A. Ranga-swami Iyyengar, President of the Devakottah Harijan Sevak Sangh, was announced. Gandhiji was due to visit Devakottah after a day's stay in Madura. Shri Iyyengar came to acquaint Gandhiji with details of the Devakottah programme and to get back at once. He was immediately taken to Gandhiji. Shri Iyyengar had himself contributed Rs. 1,000 to the Harijan Uplift Fund.

This pleased Gandhiji very much indeed, and he remarked with a grin: 'So your Harijan purse at Devakottah must be a big one to be worthy of your own gift!'

Then, while on the point of retiring, he observed: 'I wish I could get another day's rest here. This tour has been a great strain.'

Thereupon, Shri Iyyengar was moved by a generous impulse. Ranganna, as he was familiarly known, was large-hearted to a fault, and Gandhiji's look of fatigue distressed him.

'Do, please, take an extra day's rest after your Madura engagements. We shall have the Devakottah programme put off for a day.'

Gandhiji was astonished. 'Could you really do that? Would it not upset all your plans for the day? Do not spare me. It is true I am exhausted; but even so, I shall be ready for you immediately after Madura.' And then with a mischievous laugh he added: 'You would do well not to indulge me.'

But Shri Iyyengar assured Gandhiji that a day's delay would be of little consequence, and insisted on his taking the rest he needed so badly. Gandhiji thankfully accepted the offer and retired. Shri Rangaswami hurried back to Devakottah.

Early next morning, as Gandhiji was seated at his breakfast, a small group of excited people were ushered into his presence. They were Devakottah citizens who wished to impress on Gandhiji that the plans drawn up for Devakottah could not be put off save at serious inconvenience to their fellow-citizens. Gandhiji's face registered great amusement.

'But where is your kind President who granted

me a day's holiday?' he asked. 'Have you crucified him?'

This sally provoked great merriment.

'I did not ask to be let off for the day,' said Gandhiji. 'Your President noticed that I looked very tired and offered me a day's holiday. I knew it was wrong to take advantage of his generosity. If you had sent me a less generous and more resolute President this mistake would not have occurred.'

There was more laughter all round.

Gandhiji stuck to the original programme for Devakottah; he arrived at the public meeting punctual to the minute. He received a magnificent purse for the Harijan Fund. Thanking the people in return, he referred to the incident at Madura.

'Your generous gift is matched only by the generosity of your President—remember he gave me a day's holiday! I wonder if included in this purse is compensation for that holiday which your deputation annulled.'

The crowd answered this good-humoured thrust with uproarious laughter, and Gandhiji, to the delight of everyone, joined in.

XIV

GANDHIJI AND THE CHINESE YOUTH

Some time in 1925 a young Chinese student came out to India. He had heard of Tagore and Gandhi. He was himself a poet and writer of considerable promise. He joined Tagore's Visva-Bharati at Santiniketan, and there won very instant popularity. Just when things seemed to prosper, however, great trouble befell him. He was suspected of being a spy. He was watched. This upset him so much that he decided to quit. But whither could he go in a strange country? He wrote to Gandhiji laying bare all his pain and sorrows. Gandhiji was then in Calcutta, collecting funds for the Deshabandhu Chitta Ranjan Das Memorial. He had appealed for ten lakhs of rupees and was getting it too. The young Chinese received a prompt reply from Mahadev Desai, Gandhiji's Secretary, asking him to come up to Calcutta and meet Gandhiji. The youth wasted no time and was soon standing in Gandhiji's presence.

Bapu looked him straight in the eye; but there was great kindness in his voice as he asked, 'The people at Santiniketan are my good friends—they always welcome people of other nations. Why did they suspect you? Are you a spy?'

The young Chinese answered with impressive candour: 'They are good people; I like Santini-

ketan. They must have been misled about me. But I am deeply hurt by their suspicions. I am not a spy. I am only a student anxious to study India.'

'I accept your word,' said Bapu. 'Shall I stand guarantee for you and send you back to Santiniketan? They would respect my pledge for your personal integrity.'

He had taken stock of the youth and liked him. The young Chinese was deeply moved, his eyes filled with tears.

'Please let me stay with you,' he begged impulsively. 'Let me enter your Ashram so that I can be with you.'

'But,' said Gandhiji with his never-failing smile, 'my Ashram is a harder place than Santiniketan. You would have to do hard physical work in addition to your studies.'

'The Chinese are accustomed to hard work, and I am not afraid,' was the ready answer.

Gandhiji then assented, and as he could not pronounce the youth's Chinese name, offered him the choice of two Indian names for use in the Ashram. The youth chose 'Shanti', and during all the years of his sojourn in India, he was known as Shanti. Shanti joined Sabarmati Ashram, where, as earlier at Santiniketan he soon became a favourite with everyone. He had the heart of a child and was full of fun. Little children were particularly fond of him for he could make endless toys for them almost out of nothing!

He was allotted the task of fetching water for the kitchen and washing clothes. Of course he picked up spinning in no time; for the Chinese are deft with their fingers. As the months passed a subtle change came over him. He began to work harder and harder. There was no task he would not do—he even joined the scavenging squad. He also studied Gandhiji's writings carefully. Then one day he sat down to write. He wrote page after page and the pile before him mounted steadily. What was he setting on paper, labouring night and day? At long last he had finished; he neatly put the pages in order, pinned them up and marched into Gandhiji's room.

And this is what in effect, he said to Bapu. 'I have set down briefly here the story of my life. Before I came out to India I lived a wild and wicked life in Singapore even as hundreds of other young Chinese. I have felt an irresistible impulse to open my mind to you. Do please read this manuscript. Permit me to fast for ten days that I might purify myself. At the end of the fast I want to take certain vows, with you as my witness.'

Gandhiji was greatly surprised. He knew in a flash that Shanti was passing through a spiritual crisis. 'I see your manuscript is a very long one. But I shall find time to read it. But don't start your fast until I have studied what you have written. A fast is a solemn privilege and one has to be worthy of it. Let me first find out

what you need and what you seek.'

Gandhiji found time to read the manuscript, and was moved by the frank confessions of the young Chinese in whom Ashram life had quickened the impulse of introspection, penitence and self-correction. He sent for Shanti, talked to him kindly and with profound understanding and compassion. He permitted the fast, and Shanti for ten days subsisted only on water. It is a terrible ordeal for a Chinese to undertake, for he is by nature a lover of food. But Shanti held on bravely. Gandhiji visited him every day and spent with him fifteen to twenty minutes in talk with him. What exactly passed between them during these daily conversations one does not know. But Shanti seemed radiantly happy. Gandhiji must, indeed, have impressed upon Shanti the real meaning and value of virtue and the sanctity of vows. Gandhiji has always held that no vow should be taken except when the strain is born of spontaneous and overwhelming conviction. Vows taken lightly in a moment of emotion are worse than useless. At the end of the ten days' fast, Shanti did take certain vows but he did so with his eyes open. The vows were written down in duplicate copies and signed by Shanti. Gandhiji signed as witness. One copy Gandhiji kept for himself and the other Shanti took away with him. Shanti always said afterwards, he left like a man who had left a terrible burden behind.

Later Shanti went back to China. He edited

a newspaper. As editor he always signed himself 'Shanti'. His ambition was to interpret Gandhiji to China.

BAPU AND 'THE REVOLUTIONARY'

He joined us on the verandah of the guest house at Sevagram. There is a corner of that verandah that is a particular favourite with the Ashram inmates. There we often sit in solemn conclave deliberating on more things under the sun than are easily dreamt of. It was on an occasion like this that he came into our midst. He hailed from one of the provinces and was a person of considerable reputation. Hardly was he seated amongst us than with characteristic vigour, he butted into the conversation.

'In our province,' he declaimed, 'we don't worship Gandhiji as God. Oh, no!'

An impressive pause.

'We look upon him as a leader—and just this moment we are discontented with the lead he has given.'

He had plenty of other things to say and say them he did with much show of conviction. What else could we do but look profoundly impressed? He was in the Ashram for a frank talk with Bapu, he asserted, and to discuss important matters with him. We looked more impressed still and he beamed with pleasure.

'In our province, we are all revolutionaries.' There was a challenge in his voice as he delivered himself of this sentiment. 'We are in a hurry to capture power.'

In the context his meaning was plain as a pike-staff. Bapu was not 'revolutionary' enough for him, Bapu was much too slow in this business of winning India's independence.

His interview with Bapu had been fixed for the afternoon. We watched with amusement how he got into a mighty flutter as the hour drew nigh. For the fire-eating revolutionary he claimed to be, he was a shade too timid as he entered Bapu's little mud hut at Sevagram. He remained with Bapu for nearly an hour.

We met him again in our accustomed corner of the verandah late that evening. He had attended Gandhiji's evening prayer and strolled straight across to join us. What a change has been wrought on him! Gone was his swagger and noisy self-assertion. As he sat silent amidst us we sought to draw him out.

'How did you fare with Bapu?' one of us asked. 'Did you tell him how he was losing favour in your province?'

He was now strangely a little apologetic.

'You know what fools we can be,' he said.

We were not a little perplexed. 'What is it?' one of us ventured to query.

He turned to gaze in the direction of Bapu's little hut, where a little lamp burned illuminating the saintly little figure bent over some files.

'Nothing,' he replied, 'but that little man is the only true revolutionary in our country. We spend

ourselves in talking and shouting—and he acts. He compelled me in a few quiet words to come down to the hard earth of realities. He is our supreme realist.'

He looked excited. For all our inward amusement, we put up a brave show of being somewhat excited too.

He spoke little after that. He listened patiently to all that we had to say. It was clear that he was doing some hard thinking. A wholesome sign, indeed, we thought, as we turned in for the night.