

integrated view of man and the world, an order the strength of which consists in the unexceptionable character of its moral foundations. A plan which ignores the spiritual potentialities of man leaves vital considerations out of account and therefore must fail to supply the final solution, which is to be found only at the stage, as Sir S.

Radhakrishnan points out in his Foreword, "where law and love are one." Gandhism aims exactly at that. The gospel of brotherliness and humanity does not need to be complemented but it must be said that any other solution for our present moral crisis can at best prove only a halting-place, fraught still with immense danger.

V. M. INAMDAR

FAITH IN THE DESTINY OF MAN *

These two volumes are rich in beauty and suggestiveness. They bespeak the mind and spirit of one who has drunk deep at the wells of beauty and learning in both East and West. Though the works are by no means of uniform quality—indeed what poet's are?—they reveal a true poetic spirit, and sometimes ascend to heights of great beauty and power. What will strike the English-speaking reader is the amazing mastery of the English language that the writer has attained. It makes one think of Joseph Conrad, the Polish-born wanderer, who became one of the greatest of "English" novelists.

Whether drama or simple poetry attains the higher place in this collection may be uncertain, but what is clear is that it is the poetry of the dramas which lifts them above the ordinary, though the author's mastery of the Elizabethan types of drama and masque is outstanding. The whole, therefore, is primarily to be estimated as poetry, both simple and dramatic.

Only a handful of the greatest poets that have ever lived have maintained

a uniform quality, or a gradually improving quality in their work; so when dealing with a "good" rather than a "great" poet we must be prepared for tide-like risings and fallings, or a gradual declension in powers, as was also true in the case of great poets like Wordsworth and Tennyson. We are not surprised, therefore, to find a definite chronological pattern in the work of the present writer, starting from a charming but fairly low level with "Songs to Myrtilla," rising to perhaps the greatest height attained in "Urvasie" and "Love and Death"; falling somewhat through "Vidula" and "Perseus the Deliverer" to "Nine Poems"; rising again to a considerable height in "Baji Prabhou"; from which "Vikramorvasie" would seem to show something of a falling off; descending sharply to "Songs of the Sea"; rising again through "The Century of Life" to "Six Poems," which is the last peak; and in the final stage revealing a continual loss of power and originality, ending with the commonplace "Mother India." Such a graph cannot

* *Collected Poems and Plays*. By SRI AUROBINDO. 2 vols. (Sri Aurobindo Asram, Pondicherry. Rs. 15/-)

help but be somewhat crude, but on the whole it would seem fairly to represent the main course of Sri Aurobindo's poetic life.

As one would expect with an author whose fame rests on a number of philosophical and spiritual writings, the fundamental theme throughout these two volumes is man's realization of his spiritual destiny. The last lines of "Perseus the Deliverer" sum it up in these words:—

Yet shall Truth grow and harmony increase:
The day shall come when men feel close
and one.
Meanwhile one forward step is something
gained,
Since little by little earth must open to
heaven
Till her dim soul awakes into the Light.

This idealistic philosophy runs through the entire work; a philosophy which, in spite of its apparent logic, is castigated by Spengler as "the ostrich-philosophy of idealism." Yet whatever one may think of Idealism one must confess that it is richly caparisoned and eloquently expounded in Sri Aurobindo's poetry.

Space forbids a detailed study of each drama and group of poems, though one is much tempted to furnish it; for each stage in this poetic journey is lit up with a number of interesting sights, none of which, one feels, would have escaped the delicate sensibility and exposition of a Hazlitt, for instance. We must content ourselves with those high-lights already mentioned, while leaving to careful scholars the pleasant task of more detailed analysis.

As already suggested, perhaps the highest level of poetic beauty attained is also the first. Two of the earliest poems, "Urvasie" (1896) and "Love and Death" (1899) are pure romantic

idylls with Indian, or rather Hindu, mythological backgrounds, and they reveal the heart and soul of ancient Hindu India with all its glory, spiritual and material,—if indeed one is justified in separating the two, for the spiritual is suffused with the material, and the material is at every stage lighted up by the spiritual. Urvasie herself is a great poetic creation. She possesses the grace, charm and purity of a Shakespearian heroine—as does her counterpart in the poet's translation of Kalidas's "Vikramorvasie"—and the reader loves her as passionately as do her noble King Pururavus's subjects love their idyllic king and queen. The beautiful final scenes in which Pururavus challenges the mysteries of the heavens in order to be reunited with his beloved are reminiscent of the Orphic legend. The blank verse of the poem is masterly and well-suited to its noble theme, which is summarized in the lines:—

O king, O mortal mightier than the Gods!
For Gods change not their strength but are
of old
And as of old, and man, though less than
these,
May yet proceed to greater, self-evolved.
Man, by experience of passion purged,
His myriad faculty perfecting, widens
His nature as it rises till it grows
With God conterminous....

This is a philosophy that exemplifies the extreme of Vedantist teaching, against which Ramanuja and Kabir revolted. Its opposite extreme is found in Judaism and Islam, while probably modern Theosophy and similar creeds would affirm it.

"Love and Death" likewise has great moments, though there is at times some straining after effect and an erotic extravagance which mars its beauty

and so lowers it somewhat below "Urvasie's" great height of achievement.

"Vidula" is a powerful, though somewhat too prosaic and argumentative, poem revealing the courage and determination of a Kshatriya dowager *rani*. A similar spirit of unflinching courage, this time of the Mahrattas, is the central thought of "Baji Prabhou," which is in the best traditions of patriotic poetry, and which within its more limited scope rises to the height of "Urvasie." The vivid picture of a small band of Mahrattas holding the pass leading to Raigarh, in the burning heat of a Deccan summer, against the flower of Moghul chivalry deserves to find its way into every Indian school-book of English poetry. It embodies the finest spirit of Indian self-sacrificing patriotism.

"Nine Poems" includes some very good poetry and interesting philosophical thought, but on the whole the poems are pedestrian and prosaic and sometimes, as in "The Mother of Dreams," there is too much of the Swinburnian use of alliteration, with resultant harm to the beauty of both verse and thought. In general one feels that these poems are too weighted down with philosophical thought. Metaphysics is primarily intellectual, poetry emotional. Poetry cannot therefore carry too great a weight of philosophical disquisition without serious weakening of its poetic power. Sri Aurobindo seems sometimes to have forgotten this, not only in "Nine Poems" but in much of his other poetry as well. Whereas Tagore frequently presents somewhat muddy thought in brilliantly vivid pictures, Aurobindo Ghose is inclined to put forward beautifully clear examples

of ratiocination at the cost of strong imagery and poetic power.

"Songs of the Sea" never quite seem to come to life. This may be because they are translations, but in any case their phrasing and imagery are generally commonplace and not up to the level of most of the poems. On the other hand, the poems included in "The Century of Life," though also translations, have a freshness and a vigour about them that are quite delightful. "Love's Folly" might be straight out of Shakespeare; which is not to say that it is lacking in originality. "On Fools and Folly" and "On Wisdom" contain pithy epigrams, though one would not rank them as great poetry. It is true, moreover, that there is sometimes a trite tone in these poems, and the word Titan is over-used and sometimes loosely used, which unfortunately is also done in some of the best of Ghose's work. And much of this group is to be ranked as verse rather than poetry, even though very delightful verse.

In "Six Poems" we find new life and vigour of thought and form. The poet seems to be experimenting with new forms and new ideas. The poetry has sweep, power and precision, that most essential of poetic qualities. There is considerable use of alliteration, but it is an integral part of the poetry and not mere decoration. In "The Bird of Fire" we feel the flaming brilliance of the bird, as well as see it:—

Gold-white wings athrob in the vastness,
the bird of flame went glimmering over a
sunfire curve to the haze of the west,
Skimming, a messenger sail, the sapphire-
summer waste of a soundless, wayless
burning sea.

Now in the eve of the waning world the
colour and splendour returning drift

through a blue-flicker air back to my
breast,
Flame and shimmer staining the rapture-
white foam-vest of the waters of Eternity.

In this poem and its companions we see the first experiment with "quantitative metre," which has apparently been the chief poetic interest of Sri Aurobindo since that time, and which he has discussed at length in his admirable essay appended at the end of these two volumes; an essay which deserves wide currency and consideration by all those interested in the future of English poetry, and of poetry in general as well. For in it he seems to have struck at the root of the problem which modern poets have been attempting to solve by recourse to free verse and violent variations of traditional verse forms. Both argument and example are convincing, and one wonders whether poets like Eliot, Auden and Spender have reached similar conclusions. At least they should be made aware of this considerable contribution to English prosody by an Indian poet.

"Transformation and Other Poems" show a considerable falling off from these delightful innovations. They are generally vague and weak and tend to wander too much in the realms of the abstract. Probably the chief difficulty is that they generalize instead of presenting the general through the particular. The last two poems, which are translations, show a tragic decline from Sri Aurobindo's best poetry. They present commonplace sentiments in commonplace form. One wishes they could be buried somewhere in the middle of one of the volumes, where they would not be so painful to the reader who has tasted nectar in earlier

pages and is now asked to drink plain water.

"Perseus the Deliverer" and "Vikramorvasie" have been left till the end, as, being dramas of considerable length, though both cast in verse form, they deserve separate treatment. In a sense they cannot be compared, as the first is an original work and the second a translation from Kalidas's famous play. But the translator has rendered the original very freely, one suspects, and has in fact made a new play of it. Only the story and characters and general atmosphere remain the same; otherwise the form and expression are those of a five-act Elizabethan play. It may be because he was working with original material that in "Perseus" the dramatist attains greater heights of both drama and poetry, even though this play belongs to a very early period. "Perseus" is largely in blank verse, like "Vikramorvasie," and except for the first scene of Act V, which loses dramatic force because of its masque-like form, it is a straightforward Elizabethan drama, which in parts rises to a level very near to that of the great Elizabethans. Characters like those of Cassiopea, Perissus and Therops are real achievements. On finishing the play one regrets that there is no living Indian stage for such plays to be produced on, for an Indian audience would prefer plays of this kind to the modern "well made" variety.

"Vikramorvasie" starts with great dramatic power, but before it has played half its length all suspense and dramatic interest are gone and one is left with something in the nature of a dramatic poem instead of a poetic drama. No doubt this is Kalidas's fault rather than the translator's,

though it does very much lessen the value of the work from the dramatic point of view. But what is lost in drama is at least partly compensated for by the beauty of the poetry, which, however, does lose some of its flaming beauty towards the end because so much matter-of-fact narrative is necessitated. Had Kalidas known the dramas of Sophocles and Euripides the dramatic power of this play might have matched its poetic splendour. In any case Sri Aurobindo deserves great thanks for his superb Englishing of it.

On reflection, what is chiefly interesting in these two volumes is the chronological picture it gives one of the history of Indo-English poetry in the last sixty years. To some extent one cannot help feeling sad, because he is conscious that there was more true poetic spirit abroad at the beginning of the period than at its end. But that is a charge that can also be levelled at English poetry in general. However, nostalgia does arise when one looks today for young Tagores, Ghoses and Naidus to take the place of their great forebears; for, like Professor Srinivasa Iyengar,* I feel that English poetry has a part to play in the future of Indian cultural and spiritual life. Sad to say, most of the young Indo-English poets are mouthing platitudes, or talking airy nonsense in ugly language.

Fundamentally it must be because they have no faith, either in themselves or their traditions. How different are they from Sri Aurobindo, whose every poem breathes forth the sweet, though sometimes pain-bearing aroma of faith in the destiny of man, of his ability to

overcome all difficulties, and to climb, step by step, to the feet of the gods! Is this an outworn creed for the New India? Are mob-minded socialism and fascism to claim its allegiance instead? Or is it too much to ask a torch-bearer like Aurobindo Ghose to cast the old thought in new forms to suit the world of tomorrow? One feels that the traditional Hindu forms no longer suit the modern mind; a fresh appeal must be made if the present generation is not to make the tragic mistakes that their brothers in the West have made. One wishes that in order to realize in practice such an idea Sri Aurobindo would gather round him a picked group of young people, including poets, prose-writers and public men, whom he would personally instruct in how to rebuild the traditional Indian ideals in a form acceptable to those who have come under the influence of modern thought. However great his poetry or prose writings, he will never be able to influence people,—especially those of India, who are accustomed to personal teaching,—as he wishes to do, except by personal contact. India's great need today is for a truly spiritual university where young men and women can be guided into those realms of thought and activity wherein a New India will become a visible reality instead of a vague possibility, as at present. Probably only Sri Aurobindo could start such a university; for he alone, as is revealed in his poetry, would seem to have that knowledge and understanding of the matter and spirit of both India and the West which must be the foundation of any true teaching for the India of tomorrow.

BANNING RICHARDSON

* In *Indo-Anglian Literature*, published for the P. E. N. All-India Centre by the International Book House, Ltd., Bombay.