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The research for this book was done by DEIRDRE RANDALL

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Foreword

No man knows himself or can describe himself with fidelity. But he can reveal himself. This is especially true of Gandhi. He believed in revealing himself. He regarded secrecy as the enemy of freedom—not only the freedom of India but the freedom of man. He exposed even the innermost personal thoughts which individuals usually regard as private. In nearly a half-century of prolific writing, speaking, and subjecting his ideas to the test of actions, he painted a detailed self-portrait of his mind, heart, and soul.

Gandhi was a unique person, a great person, perhaps the greatest figure of the last nineteen hundred years. And his words have been preserved as they came from his mouth and pen.

Then let the Mahatma speak. What he said has an intimate relevance to many of our problems today.

Louis Fischer

Princeton, New Jersey
March 16, 1961
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Beginnings of a
Great Man

[To the end of his days, Gandhi attempted to master and remake himself. He called his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, an “experiment” being an operation within and upon oneself. The following excerpts are taken from the book.]

[It] is not my purpose to attempt a real autobiography. I simply want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with truth, and as my life consists of nothing but those experiments, it is true that the story will take the shape of an autobiography. But I shall not mind if every page of it speaks only of my experiments. I believe, or at any rate flatter myself with the belief, that a connected account of all these experiments will not be without benefit to the reader. My experiments in the political field are now known, not only in India but to a certain extent to the “civilized” world. For me, they have not much value and the title of Mahatma [Great Soul] that they have won for me, has, therefore, even less. Often the title has deeply
pained me and there is not a moment I can recall when it may be said to have tickled me. But I should certainly like to narrate my experiments in the spiritual field which are known only to myself and from which I have derived such power as I possess for working in the political field. If the experiments are really spiritual, then there can be no room for self-praise. They can only add to my humility. The more I reflect and look back on the past, the more vividly do I feel my limitations.

What I want to achieve—what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years—is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain Moksha [Salvation—oneness with God and freedom from later incarnations]. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field are directed to this same end. . . .

To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics and I can say without the slightest hesitation and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.2

. . . In the march towards Truth anger, selfishness, hatred, etc., naturally give way, for otherwise Truth would be impossible to attain. . . . A successful search for Truth means complete deliverance from the dual throng, such as of love and hate, happiness and misery. . . .3

[As] I have all along believed that what is possible for one is possible for all, my experiments have not been conducted in the closet but in the open. . . .4

2 Ibid., "Farewell," p. 420.
3 Ibid., Part IV, Chapter 37, p. 288.
4 Ibid., Introduction, p. xii.
The Gandhis belong to the Bania [Businessman] caste and seem to have been originally grocers. ["Gandhi" means grocer.] But for three generations, from my grandfather, they have been Prime Ministers in several Kathiawad [Western India] States. Uttamchand Gandhi, alias Ota Gandhi, my grandfather, must have been a man of principle. State intrigues compelled him to leave Porbandar, where he was Diwan [Prime Minister] and to seek refuge in Junagadh [the nearby little state]. There he saluted the Nawab [Ruler] with his left hand. Someone noticing the apparent discourtesy asked for an explanation, which was thus given: "The right hand is already pledged to Porbandar."

Ota Gandhi married a second time, having lost his first wife. He had four sons by his first wife and two by his second wife. I do not think that in my childhood I ever felt or knew that these sons . . . were not all of the same mother. The fifth of these six brothers was Karamchand Gandhi, alias Kaba Gandhi, and the sixth was Tulsidas Gandhi. Both these brothers were Prime Ministers in Porbandar, one after the other. Kaba Gandhi was my father. He was a member of the Rajasthanik Court. It is now extinct but in those days it was a very influential body for settling disputes between the chiefs and their fellow clansmen. He was for some time Prime Minister in Rajkot and then in Vankaner. He was a pensioner of the Rajkot State when he died.

Kaba Gandhi married four times in succession, having lost his wife each time by death. He had two daughters by his first and second marriages. His last wife, Putlibai, bore him a daughter and three sons, I being the youngest.

My father was a lover of his clan, truthful, brave and generous but short-tempered. To a certain extent he might have been given even to carnal pleasures. For he married for the fourth time when he was over forty. But he was incorruptible and had earned a name for strict impartiality in his family as well as outside. His loyalty to the state was well-known. [A British] Assistant Political Agent [once] spoke insultingly of the Rajkot Thakore Sahib, his chief, and he stood up to the insult. The agent
was angry and asked Kaba Gandhi to apologize. This he refused to do and was therefore kept under detention for a few hours. But when the Agent saw that Kaba Gandhi was adamant he ordered him to be released.

My father never had any ambition to accumulate riches and left us very little property.

The outstanding impression my mother has left on my memory is that of saintliness. She was deeply religious. She would not think of taking her meals without her daily prayers. Going to Haveli—the Vaishnava [Orthodox Hindu] temple—was one of her daily duties. As far as my memory can go back I do not remember her having ever missed the Chaturmas [a fasting period similar to Lent]. She would take the hardest vows and keep them without flinching. Illness was no excuse for relaxing them.

To keep two or three consecutive fasts was nothing to her. Living on one meal a day during Chaturmas was a habit with her. Not content with that she fasted every alternate day during one Chaturmas. During another Chaturmas she vowed not to have food without seeing the sun. We children on those days would stand, staring at the sky, waiting to announce the appearance of the sun to our mother. Everyone knows that at the height of the rainy season the sun often does not condescend to show his face. And I remember days when, at his sudden appearance, we would rush and announce it to her. She would run out to see with her own eyes, but by that time the fugitive sun would be gone, thus depriving her of her meal. "That does not matter," she would say cheerfully, "God did not want me to eat today." And she would return to her round of duties.

Of these parents I was born at Porbandar, otherwise known as Sudamapuri, on the second October, 1869. I passed my childhood in Porbandar. I recollect having been put to school. It was with some difficulty that I got through the multiplication tables. The fact that I recollect nothing more of those days than having learnt, in com-
pany with other boys, to call our teacher all kinds of names would strongly suggest that my intellect must have been sluggish and my memory raw.  

I must have been about seven when my father left Porbandar for Rajkot to become a member of the Rajasthanik Court. There I was put into a primary school . . . I could have been only a mediocre student. From this school I went to the suburban school and thence to the high school, having already reached my twelfth year. I do not remember having ever told a lie during this short period either to my teachers or to my schoolmates. I used to be very shy and avoided all company. My books and my lessons were my sole companions. To be at school at the stroke of the hour and to run back home as soon as the school closed—that was my daily habit. I literally ran back because I could not bear to talk to anybody. I was afraid even lest anyone should poke fun at me.

[When he grew older, however, he found some congenial mates and played in the streets. He also played by the sea.]

[An] incident which occurred at the examination during my first year at the high school . . . is worth recording. Mr. Giles, the [British] Education Inspector, had come on a visit of inspection. He had set us five words to write as a spelling exercise. One of the words was "kettle." I had misspelt it. The teacher tried to prompt me with the point of his boot but I would not be prompted. It was beyond me to see that he wanted me to copy the spelling from my neighbor's slate for I had thought the teacher was there to supervise us against copying. The result was that all the boys except myself were found to have spelt every word correctly. Only I had been stupid. The teacher tried later to bring this stupidity home to me but without effect. I never could learn the art of "copying."

Yet the incident did not in the least diminish my respect for my teacher. I was by nature blind to the faults of elders. Later I came to know many other failings of this

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*Ibid.*, Part I, Chapter 1, pp. 3-5.
teacher but my regard for him remained the same. For I had learnt to carry out the orders of elders, not to scan their actions.  

[But compliance at school did not preclude revolt outside it.]

A [young] relative and I became fond of smoking we began to steal pennies from the servant’s pocket money to purchase Indian cigarettes.

But we were far from satisfied Our want of independence began to smart. It was unbearable that we should be unable to do anything without the elders’ permission. At last, in sheer disgust, we decided to commit suicide!

... But our courage failed us. Supposing we were not instantly killed? And what was the good of killing ourselves?...

I realized it was not as easy to commit suicide as to contemplate it. And since then, whenever I have heard of someone threatening to commit suicide it has little or no effect on me.

The thought of suicide ultimately resulted in both of us bidding goodbye to the habit of smoking and of stealing the servant’s pennies.

[Presently, adult matters claimed the child’s attention.]

... It is my painful duty to have to record here my marriage at the age of thirteen. As I see the youngsters of the same age about me who are under my care, and think of my own marriage, I am inclined to pity myself and to congratulate them on having escaped my lot. I can see no moral argument in support of such a preposterously early marriage.

Let the reader make no mistake. I was married, not betrothed It appears that I was betrothed thrice, though without my knowledge. I was told that two girls chosen for me had died.

Marriage among Hindus is no simple matter. The

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6 Ibid., Part I, Chapter 6, pp. 5-6.
7 Ibid., Part I, Chapter 8, p. 22.
parents of the bride and the bridegroom often bring themselves to ruin over it. They waste their substance, they waste their time. Months are taken up over the preparations—in making clothes and ornaments and in preparing [menus] for dinners. Each tries to outdo the other in the number and variety of courses to be prepared. Women, whether they have a voice or no, sing themselves hoarse, even get ill, and disturb the peace of their neighbors. These in their turn quietly put up with all the turmoil and bustle, all the dirt and filth, representing the remains of the feast, because they know a time will come when they also will be behaving in the same manner.

... I do not think [my marriage] meant to me anything more than the prospect of good clothes to wear, drum beating, marriage processions, rich dinners and a strange girl to play with. The carnal desire came later. ... Everything on that day seemed to me right and proper and pleasing. There was also my own eagerness to get married. And as everything my father did then struck me as beyond reproach, the recollection of those things is fresh in my memory.

[The bride was Kasturbai, the daughter of a Porbandar merchant named Gokuldas Makanji. The marriage lasted sixty-two years.]

... I can picture to myself, even today, how we sat on our wedding dais, how we performed the Seven Steps, how we, the newly wedded husband and wife, put the sweet Wheat Cake into each other’s mouths, and how we began to live together. And oh! That first night! Two innocent children all unwittingly hurled themselves into the ocean of life. My brother’s wife had thoroughly coached me about my behavior on the first night. I do not know who had coached my wife. I have never asked her about it. ... The reader may be sure that we were too nervous to face each other. We were certainly too shy. How was I to talk to her, and what was I to say? The coaching did not carry me far. But no coaching is really necessary in such matters. The impressions of the former birth are potent enough to make all coaching superfluous. We grad-
ually began to know each other and to speak freely together. We were the same age. But I took no time in assuming the authority of a husband.  

... I had absolutely no reason to suspect my wife’s fidelity but jealousy does not wait for reasons. I must needs be forever on the look-out regarding her movements and therefore she could not go anywhere without my permission. This sowed the seeds of a bitter quarrel between us. The restraint was virtually a sort of imprisonment. And Kasturbai was not the girl to brook any such thing. She made it a point to go out whenever and wherever she liked. More restraint on my part resulted in more liberty being taken by her and in my getting more and more cross. Refusal to speak to one another thus became the order of the day with us, married children. I think it was quite innocent of Kasturbai to have taken those liberties with my restrictions. How could a guileless girl brook any restraints on going to the temple or on going on visits to friends? If I had the right to impose restrictions on her, had not she also similar right? All this is clear to me today. But at the time I had to make good my authority as a husband!

... I must say I was passionately fond of her. Even at school I used to think of her and the thought of nightfall and our subsequent meeting was ever haunting me. Separation was unbearable. I used to keep her awake till late in the night with my idle talk...

... Along with the cruel custom of child marriages, Hindu society has another custom which to a certain extent diminishes the evils of the former. Parents do not allow young couples to stay long together. The child-wife spends more than half her time at her father’s place. Such was the case with us. That is to say, during the first five years of our married life (from the age of thirteen to eighteen), we could not have lived together longer than an aggregate period of three years. We would hardly have spent six months together when there would be a call to

\[8 \text{Ibid., Part I, Chapter 3, pp. 7-9.}\]
my wife from her parents. Such calls were very unwelcome in those days but they saved us both. . . .

[Gandhi himself lost a year at high school through getting married.]

. . . I had not any high regard for my ability. I used to be astonished whenever I won prizes and scholarships. But I very jealously guarded my character. The least little blemish drew tears from my eyes. When I merited, or seemed to the teacher to merit, a rebuke, it was unbearable for me. I remember having once received corporal punishment. I did not so much mind the punishment as the fact that it was considered my desert. I wept piteously. . . .

[The] teacher wanted me to make good the [grade] loss by skipping [one]—a privilege usually allowed to industrious boys. . . . English became the medium of instruction in most subjects . . . I found myself completely at sea. Geometry was a new subject in which I was not particularly strong and the English medium made it still more difficult for me. The teacher taught the subject very well but I could not follow him. Often I would lose heart and think of going back. . . . But this would discredit not only me but also the teacher, because, counting on my industry, he had recommended my promotion. So fear of the double discredit kept me at my post. When, however, with much effort I reached the thirteenth proposition of Euclid, the utter simplicity of the subject was suddenly revealed to me. A subject which required only a pure and simple use of one's reasoning powers could not be difficult. Ever since that time geometry has been both easy and interesting for me.

[Gandhi likewise had trouble with Sanskrit but after the teacher, Mr. Krishnashanker, reminded him that it was the language of Hinduism's sacred scriptures, the future Mahatma persevered and succeeded.]

. . . I never took part in any exercise, cricket or football, before they were made compulsory. My shyness was

one of the reasons for this aloofness, which I now see was wrong. I then had the false notion that gymnastics had nothing to do with education. Today I know that physical training should have as much place in the curriculum as mental training.

. . . I was none the worse for abstaining from exercise. . . . I had read in books about the benefits of long walks in the open air, and having liked the advice I had formed a habit of taking walks which has still remained with me. These walks gave me a fairly hardy constitution.12

[Mohandas envied the bigger, stronger boys. He was frail compared with his older brother, and especially compared with a Moslem friend named Sheik Mehtab, who could run great distances with remarkable speed. Sheik Mehtab was spectacular in the long and high jump as well. These exploits dazzled Gandhi.]

. . . This [admiration] was followed by a strong desire to be like him. I could hardly jump or run. Why should not I also be as strong as he?

Moreover, I was a coward. I used to be haunted by the fear of thieves, ghosts and serpents. I did not dare to stir out of doors at night. Darkness was a terror to me. It was almost impossible for me to sleep in the dark . . . How could I disclose my fears to my wife, no child but already at the threshold of youth, sleeping by my side? I knew she had more courage than I and I felt ashamed of myself. . . . My friend knew all these weaknesses of mine. He would tell me that he could hold in his hand live serpents, could defy thieves and did not believe in ghosts. And all this was, of course, the result of eating meat.

[The boys at school used to recite this poem.]

Behold the mighty Englishman,
He rules the Indian small,
Because being a meat-eater
He is five cubits tall.

. . . "We are a weak people because we do not eat meat" [argued Sheik Mehtab]. "The English are able to

12 Ibid., p. 13.
rule over us because they are meat-eaters. You know how hardy I am and how great a runner too. It is because I am a meat-eater. Meat-eaters do not have boils or tumors and even if they sometimes happen to have any, these heal quickly. Our teacher and other distinguished people who eat meat are no fools. They know its virtues. You should do likewise. There is nothing like trying. Try, and see what strength it gives."

All these pleas . . . were not advanced at a single sitting. They represent the substance of a long and elaborate argument. . . .

. . . I was beaten. . . .

A day was thereupon fixed for beginning the experiment. It had to be conducted in secret. [The family was strictly vegetarian by religious conviction, and so were almost all inhabitants of the district.] . . . I was extremely devoted to my parents. I knew that the moment they came to know of my having eaten meat they would be shocked to death. Moreover, my love of truth made me extra cautious. . . . And having insured secrecy, I persuaded myself that mere hiding the deed from parents was no departure from truth.¹³

So the day came. . . . We went in search of a lonely spot by the river and there I saw, for the first time in my life—meat. There was baker’s bread [with yeast] also. I relished neither. The goat’s meat was as tough as leather. I simply could not eat it. I was sick and had to leave off eating.

I had a very bad night afterwards. A horrible nightmare haunted me. Every time I dropped off to sleep it would seem as though a live goat were bleating inside me and I would jump up full of remorse. But then I would remind myself that meat-eating was a duty and so become more cheerful.

My friend was not a man to give in easily. He now began to cook various delicacies with meat and dress them neatly. . . .

The bait had its effect. I got over my dislike for bread, forswore my compassion for the goats and became a rel-

isher of meat dishes, if not of meat itself. This went on for about a year.

[I] knew that if my mother and father came to know of my having become a meat-eater they would be deeply shocked. This knowledge was gnawing at my heart.

Therefore I said to myself: “Though it is essential to eat meat . . . yet deceiving and lying to one’s father and mother is worse than not eating meat. In their lifetime, therefore, meat-eating must be out of the question. When they are no more and I have found my freedom, I will eat meat openly but until that moment I will abstain from it.”

[By now Gandhi developed an urge to reform Sheik Mehtab. This prolonged the relationship. But the naïve and younger Gandhi was no match for the shrewd, moneyed wastrel who offered revolt and adventure.]

. . . My zeal for reforming him . . . proved disastrous for me, and all the time I was completely unconscious of the fact.

The same company would have led me into faithlessness to my wife. . . . [He] once took me to a brothel. He sent me in with the necessary instructions. It was all pre-arranged. The bill had already been paid. . . . I was almost struck blind and dumb in this den of vice. I sat near the woman on her bed but I was tongue-tied. She naturally lost patience with me and showed me the door with abuses and insults. I then felt as though my manhood had been injured and wished to sink into the ground for shame. But I have ever since given thanks to God for having saved me. . . .14

[About that time—Mohandas must have been fifteen—he pilfered a bit of gold from his older brother. This produced a moral crisis. He had gnawing pangs of conscience and resolved never to steal again.]

. . . I also made up my mind to confess it to my father. But I did not dare to speak. Not that I was afraid of my father beating me. No, I do not recall his ever having beaten any of us. I was afraid of the pain that I should cause him. But I felt the risk should be taken, that there could not be a cleansing without a confession.

14 Ibid., Part I, Chapter 7, pp. 19-20.
I decided at last to write out the confession, to submit it to my father and ask his forgiveness. I wrote it on a slip of paper and handed it to him myself. In this note not only did I confess my guilt but I asked adequate punishment for it and closed with a request to him not to punish himself for my offense. I also pledged myself never to steal in the future.

I was trembling as I handed the confession to my father. [He sat up in his sick bed to read it.]

He read it through and pearl-drops trickled down his cheeks, wetting the paper. For a moment he closed his eyes in thought and then tore up the note. . . . He again lay down. I also cried. I could see my father’s agony. . . .

Those pearl-drops of love cleansed my heart and washed my sin away. Only he who has experienced such love can know what it is. . . .

This was for me an object lesson in Ahimsa [Love and Non-Violence]. Then I could read in it nothing more than a father’s love but today I know that it was pure Ahimsa. When such Ahimsa becomes all-embracing it transforms everything it touches. There is no limit to its power.

This sort of sublime forgiveness was not natural to my father. I had thought he would be angry, say hard things and strike his forehead. But he was so wonderfully peaceful and I believe this was due to my clean confession. A clean confession, combined with a promise never to commit the sin again, when offered before one who has the right to receive it, is the purest type of repentance. I know my confession made my father feel absolutely safe about me and increased his affection for me beyond measure.15

[Lest he give pain to his father and especially his mother, Mohandas did not tell them that he absented himself from temple.]

[The temple] never appealed to me. I did not like its glitter and pomp. . . .

. . . I happened about this time to come across Ma-

15 Ibid., Part I, Chapter 8, pp. 23-24.
nusmriti [Laws of Manu—Hindu religious laws] which was amongst my father’s collection. The story of creation and similar things in it did not impress me very much but on the contrary made me incline somewhat towards atheism.

There was a cousin of mine . . . for whose intellect I had great regard. To him I turned with my doubts. But he could not resolve them. . . .

[Contrary to the Hindu precept of non-killing] I also felt it was quite moral to kill serpents, bugs and the like. . . .

But one thing took deep root in me—the conviction that morality is the basis of things and that truth is the substance of all morality. Truth became my sole objective . . . and my definition of it also has been ever widening.


[Gandhi’s anti-religious sentiments quickened his interest in religion and he listened attentively to his father’s frequent discussions with Moslem and Parsi friends on the differences between their faiths and Hinduism.]

[The “shackles of lust” tormented Gandhi. They gave him a feeling of guilt. The feeling grew when sex seemed to clash with the keen sense of duty which developed in him at an early age. One instance of such a conflict impressed itself indelibly.]

The time of which I am now speaking is my sixteenth year. My father . . . was bed-ridden [with a fistula] . . . My mother, an old servant of the house and I were his principal attendants. I had the duties of a nurse, which mainly consisted of dressing the wound, giving my father his medicine and compounding drugs whenever they had to be made up at home. Every night I massaged his legs and retired only when he asked me to do so or after he had fallen asleep. I loved to do this

16 Ibid., Part I, Chapter 10, pp. 27-30.
service. I do not remember ever having neglected it. All the time at my disposal after the performance of the daily duties was divided between school and attending on my father. I would go out only for an evening walk either when he permitted me or when he was feeling well.

This was also the time when my wife was expecting a baby—a circumstance which... meant a double shame for me. For one thing I did not restrain myself, as I should have done, whilst I was yet a student. And secondly, this carnal lust got the better of what I regarded as my duty to study and of what was even a greater duty, my devotion to my parents. Every night whilst my hands were busy massaging my father's legs my mind was hovering about the bedroom—and that too at a time when religion, medical science and common sense alike forbade sexual intercourse. I was always glad to be relieved from my duty and went straight to the bedroom after doing obeisance to my father.

At the same time my father was getting worse every day. He despaired of living any longer. He was getting weaker and weaker until at last he had to be asked to perform the necessary functions in bed. But up to the last he refused to do anything of the kind, always insisting on going through the strain of leaving his bed. The Vaishnavite [Orthodox Hindu] rules about external cleanliness are so inexorable.

The dreadful night came...

It was ten-thirty or eleven p.m. I was giving the massage. My uncle offered to relieve me. I was glad and went straight to the bedroom. My wife, poor thing, was fast asleep. But how could she sleep when I was there? I woke her up. In five or six minutes, however, the servant knocked at the door. I started with alarm. "Get up," he said. "Father is very ill." I knew of course that he was very ill and so I guessed what "very ill" meant at that moment. I sprang out of bed.

"What is the matter? Do tell me!"

"Father is no more."
So all was over! I had but to wring my hands. I felt deeply ashamed and miserable. I ran to my father’s room. I saw that if animal passion had not blinded me I should have been spared the torture of separation from my father during his last moments. I should have been massaging him and he would have died in my arms. But now it was my uncle who had this privilege. . . .

[The] poor mite that was born to my wife scarcely breathed for more than three or four days. Nothing else could be expected. . . .17

[Kasturbai was illiterate. Her husband had every intention of teaching her but she disliked studies and he preferred love-making.]

. . . By nature she was simple, independent, persevering and, with me at least, reticent. . . .

[Kasturbai never learned to read or write anything but elementary Gujarati, her native language.]

. . . I am sure that had my love for her been absolutely untainted with lust she would be a learned lady today, for I could then have conquered her dislike for studies. I know that nothing is impossible for pure love.18

[When his father died in 1885, Mohandas’ mother took advice on family matters from a Jain monk named Becharji Swami. Jainism prohibits the killing of any living creature, even insects. Jain priests wear white masks over their mouths lest they breathe in and thus kill an insect. They are not supposed to walk out at night lest they unwittingly step on a worm.

The Jain monk, Becharji Swami, helped Gandhi go to England.]

I passed the [high school] matriculation examination in 1887. . . .

My elders wanted me to pursue my studies at college after the matriculation. There was a college in Bhavnagar [a town on the inland side of the Kathiawar

17 Ibid., Part I, Chapter 9, pp. 24-26.
18 Ibid., Part I, Chapter 4, p. 11.
peninsula] as well as in Bombay and, as [it] was cheaper, I decided to go there . . . I went but found myself entirely at sea. Everything was difficult . . . I was so raw. At the end of the first term I returned home.

We had, in Mavji Dave, who was a shrewd and learned Brahman, an old friend and adviser of the family. He had kept up his connection with the family even after my father's death. . . . In conversation with my mother and elder brother, he inquired about my studies. . . .

Joshiji—that is how we used to call old Mavji Dave—turned to me with complete assurance and asked: "Would you not rather go to England than study here?" Nothing could have been more welcome to me. I was fighting shy of my difficult studies. So I jumped at the proposal and said that the sooner I was sent the better. It was no easy business to pass examinations quickly. Could I not be sent to qualify for the medical profession?

My brother interrupted me: "Father never liked it. He had you in mind when he said that we Vaishnavas should have nothing to do with the dissection of dead bodies. Father intended you for the bar."

My mother was sorely perplexed. She did not like the idea of parting with me. . . .

. . . She had begun making minute inquiries. Someone had told her young men got lost in England. Someone else had said they took to meat, and yet another that they could not live there without liquor. "How about all this?" she asked me. I said: "Will you not trust me? I shall not lie to you. I swear I shall not touch any of those things. . . ."

"I can trust you," she said. "But how can I trust you in a distant land? I am dazed and know not what to do. I will ask Becharji Swami."

. . . He came to my help and said: "I shall get the boy solemnly to take the three vows and then he can be
allowed to go." He administered the oath and I vowed not to touch wine, women and meat. This done, my mother gave her permission.19

With my mother's permission and blessings, I set off exultantly for Bombay, leaving my wife with a baby of a few months. . . .

Time hung heavily on my hands in Bombay. I dreamt continually of going to England.

Meanwhile my caste-people were agitated over my going abroad. . . . A general meeting of the caste was called and I was summoned to appear before it. I went. How I suddenly managed to muster up courage I do not know. Nothing daunted, and without the slightest hesitation, I came before the meeting. The Sheth—the headman of the community—who was distantly related to me and had been on very good terms with my father, thus accosted me:

"In the opinion of the caste your proposal to go to England is not proper. Our religion forbids voyages abroad. We have also heard that it is not possible to live there without compromising our religion. One is obliged to eat and drink with Europeans!"

To which I replied: "I do not think it is at all against our religion to go to England. I intend going there for further studies. And I have solemnly promised to my mother to abstain from the three things you fear most. I am sure the vow will keep me safe."

"But we tell you," rejoined the Sheth, "that it is not possible to keep our religion there. You know my relations with your father and you ought to listen to my advice."

"I know these relations," said I. "And you are as an elder to me. But I am helpless in this matter. I cannot alter my resolve to go to England. My father's friend and adviser, who is a learned Brahman, sees no objection to my going to England and my mother and brother have also given me their permission."

"But will you disregard the orders of the caste?"

19 Ibid., Part I, Chapter 11, pp. 30-33.
"I am really helpless. I think the caste should not interfere in the matter."

This incensed the Sheth. He swore at me. I sat unmoved. So the Sheth pronounced his order: "This boy shall be treated as an outcaste from today. Whoever helps him or goes to see him off at the dock shall be punishable with a fine of one rupee four annas" [about fifty cents].

The order had no effect on me and I took my leave of the Sheth. But I wondered how my brother would take it. Fortunately he remained firm and wrote to assure me that I had his permission to go, the Sheth's order notwithstanding.20

[Gandhi bought a steamer ticket, a necktie, a short jacket and enough food, chiefly sweets and fruit, for the three weeks to Southampton. On September 4, 1888, he sailed. He was not yet nineteen. Several months earlier, Kasturbai had borne him a male child and they called it Harilal. Now the voyage to England gave Gandhi "a long and healthy separation" from his wife.]

The storm in my caste over my foreign voyage was still brewing [on Gandhi's return three years later]. It had divided the caste into two camps, one of which immediately re-admitted me, while the other was bent on keeping me out. . . .

I never tried to seek admission to the section that had refused it. Nor did I feel even mental resentment against any of the headmen . . . Some of these regarded me with dislike but I scrupulously avoided hurting their feelings. I fully respected the caste regulations about excommunication. According to these, none of my relations, including my father-in-law and mother-in-law and even my sister and brother-in-law, could entertain me and I would not so much as drink water at their houses. They were prepared secretly to evade the prohibition but it went against the grain with me to do a thing in secret that I would not do in public.

20 Ibid., Part I, Chapter 12, pp. 34-35.
The result of my scrupulous conduct was that I never had the occasion to be troubled by the caste. . . . I have experienced nothing but affection and generosity from the general body of the section that still regards me as excommunicated. They have even helped me in my work without ever expecting me to do anything for the caste. It is my conviction that all these good things are due to my non-resistance. Had I agitated for being admitted to the caste, had I attempted to divide it into more camps, had I provoked the castemen, they would surely have retaliated and, instead of steering clear of the storm, I should . . . have found myself in a whirlpool of agitation. . . . 21

21 Ibid., Part II, Chapter 2, pp. 75-76.
[After arrival in London] I was very uneasy . . . I would continually think of my home and country. My mother's love always haunted me. At night the tears would stream down my cheeks and home memories of all sorts made sleep out of the question. It was impossible to share my misery with anyone. And even if I could have done so, where was the use? I knew of nothing that would soothe me. Everything was strange—the people, their ways and even their dwellings. I was a complete novice in the matter of English etiquette and had to be on my guard. There was the additional inconvenience of the vegetarian vow. Even the dishes I could eat were tasteless and insipid. . . .

[An English friend] had not ceased to worry about me. His love for me led him to think that if I persisted in my objections to meat-eating I should not only de-

velop a weak constitution but should remain a duffer because I should never feel at home in English society.

... I could see and appreciate the love by which all my friend’s efforts were actuated and my respect for him was all the greater on account of our differences in thought and action.

But I decided that I should ... assure him I would be clumsy no more but try to become polished and [cultivate] other accomplishments which fitted one for polite society. And for this purpose I undertook the all too impossible task of becoming an English gentleman.

The clothes after the Bombay cut that I was wearing were, I thought, unsuitable ... and I got new ones ... I also went in for a chimney-pot hat costing nineteen shillings [three dollars]—an excessive price in those days. ... I wasted ten pounds [about forty dollars] on an evening suit made in Bond Street, the center of fashionable life in London, and got my good and noble-hearted brother to send me a double watch-chain of gold. It was not correct to wear a ready-made tie and I learnt the art of tying one for myself. While in India the mirror had been a luxury permitted on the days when the family barber gave me a shave; here I wasted ten minutes every day before a huge mirror watching myself arranging my tie and parting my hair in the correct fashion. My hair was by no means soft and every day it meant a regular struggle with the brush to keep it in position. ...

[Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha, an Indian then a student in London, recalls meeting Gandhi in February, 1890, in Piccadilly Circus. Gandhi, he says, “was wearing at the time a high silk top hat ‘burnished bright,’ a stiff and starched collar [known as a Gladstonian], a rather flashy tie displaying all the colors of the rainbow, under which there was a fine striped silk shirt. He wore as his outer clothes a morning coat, a double-breasted waistcoat and dark striped trousers to match, and not only patent-leather shoes but spats over them. He also car-

2 Ibid., Part I, Chapter 15, p. 43.
ried leather gloves and a silver-mounted stick but wore no spectacles. His clothes were regarded as the very acme of fashion for young men about town at that time and were largely in vogue among the Indian youth prosecuting their studies in law at one of the four institutions called the Inns of Court.” The Inner Temple, the one in which Gandhi enrolled, was considered by Indians “the most aristocratic,” says Dr. Sinha.3]

... I directed my attention to other details that were supposed to go towards the making of an English gentleman. I was told it was necessary for me to take lessons in dancing, French and elocution. ... I decided to take dancing lessons at a class and paid down three pounds as fees for a term. I must have taken about six lessons in three weeks. But it was beyond me to achieve anything like rhythmic motion. I could not follow the piano and hence found it impossible to keep time. ... I thought I should learn to play the violin in order to cultivate an ear for Western music. So I invested three pounds in a violin and something more in fees. I sought a third teacher to give me lessons in elocution and paid him a preliminary fee. ... He recommended Bell’s Standard Elocutionist as the textbook, which I purchased. ...

But Mr. Bell rang the bell of alarm in my ear and I awoke.

I had not to spend a lifetime in England, I said to myself. What then was the use of learning elocution? And how could dancing make a gentleman of me? The violin I could learn even in India. I was a student and ought to go on with my studies. I should qualify myself to join the Inns of Court. If my character made a gentleman of me, so much the better. Otherwise I should forego the ambition.

...  

This infatuation must have lasted about three months. The punctiliousness in dress persisted for years. ...4

... In India I had never read a newspaper. But here I succeeded in cultivating a liking for them by regular reading. I always glanced over the *Daily News, The Daily Telegraph* and *The Pall Mall Gazette*. This took me hardly an hour. I therefore began to wander about. I launched out in search of a vegetarian restaurant. The landlady had told me there were no such places in the city. I would trot ten or twelve miles each day, go into a cheap restaurant and eat my fill of bread but would never be satisfied. During these wanderings I once hit on a vegetarian restaurant...

The sight of it filled me with the same joy that a child feels on getting a thing after its own heart. . . . I noticed books for sale exhibited under a glass window near the door. I saw among them Salt’s *Plea for Vegetarianism*. This I purchased . . . and went straight to the dining room. This was my first hearty meal since my arrival in England. . . .

I read Salt’s book . . . and was very much impressed by it. . . . I blessed the day on which I had taken the vow before my mother. I had all along abstained from meat in the interests of truth and of the vow I had taken, but had wished at the same time that every Indian should be a meat-eater, and had looked forward to being one myself freely and openly some day and to enlisting others in the cause. The choice was now made in favor of vegetarianism . . .

A convert’s enthusiasm for his new religion is greater than that of a person who is born in it. . . . Full of the neophyte’s zeal for vegetarianism I decided to start a vegetarian club in my locality . . . The club went well for a while but came to an end in the course of a few months. For I left the locality according to my custom of moving from place to place periodically. But this brief and modest experience gave me some little training in organizing and conducting institutions.

I was elected to the Executive Committee of the

Vegetarian Society and made it a point to attend every one of its meetings but I always felt tongue-tied.

This shyness I retained throughout my stay in England. Even when I paid a social call the presence of half a dozen or more people would strike me dumb.

It was only in South Africa that I got over this shyness though I never completely overcame it. It was impossible for me to speak impromptu. I hesitated whenever I had to face strange audiences and avoided making a speech whenever I could. Even today I do not think I could or would even be inclined to keep a meeting of friends engaged in idle talk.

I must say that beyond occasionally exposing me to laughter, my constitutional shyness has been no disadvantage whatever. In fact . . . it has been all to my advantage. My hesitancy in speech, which was once an annoyance, is now a pleasure. Its greatest benefit has been that it has taught me the economy of words. I have naturally formed the habit of restraining my thoughts. And I can now give myself the certificate that a thoughtless word hardly ever escapes my tongue or pen. I do not recollect ever having had to regret anything in my speech or writing. I have thus been spared many a mishap and waste of time. . . . Proneness to exaggerate, to suppress or modify the truth, wittingly or unwittingly, is a natural weakness of man and silence is necessary in order to surmount it. A man of few words will rarely be thoughtless in his speech, he will measure every word. We find so many people impatient to talk. . . . All this talking can hardly be . . . of any benefit to the world. It is so much waste of time. My shyness has been in reality my shield and buckler. It has allowed me to grow. It has helped me in my discernment of truth.⁷

Let no one imagine that my experiments in dancing and the like marked a stage of indulgence in my life . . . even then I had my wits about me. That period

... was ... relieved by a certain amount of self-introspection on my part. I kept account of every farthing I spent and my expenses were carefully calculated. Every little item, such as [bus] fares or postage or a couple of [pennies] spent on newspapers would be entered and the balance struck every evening before going to bed. The habit has stayed with me ever since and I know that as a result, though I have had to handle public funds amounting to thousands I have succeeded in exercising strict economy in their disbursement and instead of outstanding debts have had invariably a surplus balance in respect to all the movements I have led. . . .

As I kept strict watch over my way of living I could see it was necessary to economize. . . .

. . . The thought of my struggling brother who nobly responded to my regular calls for monetary help deeply pained me. . . .

So I decided to take rooms on my own . . . and also to [move] from place to place according to the work I had to do . . . The new arrangement combined walks and economy as it meant a saving of fare and gave me walks of eight or ten miles a day. It was mainly this habit of long walks that kept me practically free from illness throughout my stay in England and gave me a fairly strong body.

. . . This was also a period of intensive study. Plain living saved me plenty of time and I passed my examination.

Let not the reader think this manner of living made my life by any means a dreary affair. . . . The change harmonized with my inward and outer life. It was also more in keeping with the means of my family. My life was certainly more truthful and my soul knew no bounds of joy.

[The purpose for which Gandhi came to England re-

8 Ibid., Part I, Chapter 15, pp. 44-45.
9 Ibid., Part I, Chapter 16, p. 47.
10 Ibid., p. 45.
11 Ibid., p. 47.
ceives only a few lines in his reminiscences, far fewer than his dietetic adventures. He was admitted as a student at the Inner Temple on November 6th, 1888. In addition to law, he learned French and Latin, and physics.]

The curriculum of study was easy . . . Everyone knew the examinations had practically no value. . . . There were regular textbooks prescribed for these examinations . . . but scarcely anyone read them. . . . Question papers were easy and examiners were generous. . . . [The examinations] could not be felt as a difficulty.

But I succeeded in turning them into one. I felt I should read all the textbooks. It was a fraud, I thought, not to read these books. I invested much money in them. I decided to read Roman Law in Latin. . . . And all this reading was not without its value later on in South Africa where Roman Dutch is the common law. The reading of Justinian, therefore, helped me a great deal in understanding the South African law.

It took me nine months of fairly hard labor to read through the Common Law of England. . . .

I passed my examinations, was called to the bar on the 10th of June, 1891, and enrolled in the High Court on the 11th. On the 12th I sailed for home.12

[Gandhi does not seem to have been happy in England. It was a necessary interim period: he had to be there to get professional status. In Young India of September 4, 1924, he said his college days were before the time "when . . . I began life." 13 Gandhi was not the student type, he did not learn essential things by studying. He was the doer, and he grew and gained knowledge through action. The Gita, Hinduism’s holy scripture, therefore became Gandhi’s gospel, for it glorifies action.]

At Bombay] my elder brother had come to meet me at the dock.

I was pining to see my mother. I did not know that she was no more in the flesh to receive me. The sad news was now given me. My brother had kept me ignorant of her death, which took place whilst I was still in England. He wanted to spare me the blow in a foreign land. The news, however, was none the less a severe shock to me. My grief was even greater than over my father's death. But I remember that I did not give myself up to any wild expression of grief. I could even check the tears and took to life just as though nothing had happened.¹

My relations with my wife were still not as I desired. Even my stay in England had not cured me of jealousy.

¹ M. K. Gandhi, The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part II, Chapter 1, p. 73.